



December 2020

Baseball Ireland Newsletter

President's Report Winter 2020



ONE SUMMER TO REMEMBER

Greetings from Baseball Ireland at Christmas time. At the time of writing, the Republic of Ireland has moved to Level 3 in its plan for living with COVID-19, down from the Level 5 lockdown of recent weeks. Much has happened in the world of Irish baseball since our Summer newsletter. I cannot thank enough our National Executive Committee that has supported and delivered baseball activities to our membership during this unprecedented time. Zoom lighting would not have been the same without you.

Our adult leagues completed truncated regular seasons at a very high standard of play. Despite the delayed start, pitching and defence remained steady and both leagues were competitive from start to finish. We safely played games from Belfast to Cork and many places in-between. Congratulations to the Ashbourne U21 team for winning the B league and to Mariners Baseball for earning their second national title in the A League. We plan to convene early in 2021 for our Awards Night, and all the votes are in and silverware ordered. Many thanks to the players, captains and COVID officers that kept our members safe over the summer. While youth activity was significantly curtailed this summer, clubs were still able to hold some training events when local conditions permitted. This was one for the history books.

With the season successfully completed and now behind us, Baseball Ireland can give full attention to the roll out of our highly anticipated indoor training facility. Facilities and infrastructure is a key component of the 10 x 10 strategic plan and I am delighted to announce that despite the pandemic, we have kept to schedule. After conducting a naming and logo contest, *Strike Zone: Irish Baseball Institute* was chosen for the new facility, which

will open in early 2021. Sean Mitchell and a team of Baseball Ireland volunteers have been busy fitting out the venue located in North Dublin. The modern facility will consist of 2 hitting tunnels, 2 pitching lanes, gym equipment, and sufficient space for a regulation baseball infield. This incredibly important project, which will benefit all Baseball Ireland members, could not have been accomplished without the gracious work of Genesis Strategic Advisors, whose fundraising efforts largely funded this facility. Soon our high performance team can train and develop players and build community year round.

Our national teams continue to train and prepare for 2021. Baseball Ireland would like to announce that Jay Murphy, General Manager for Ireland's 18U national team, will now take the lead for all Irish National Team operations, including the senior team. Jay will be based in Cleveland, Ohio and will be supported by a national team leadership team in Ireland. I would like to thank Chris St Amand for delivering thoughtful leadership as Senior National Team GM for the last two years. Chris has set up a solid management structure and network that will serve us well in future international play. Both national teams are scheduled to compete in Europe this summer as well as in our international tournament at Ashbourne.

Big ticket items for 2021 include our continued merger with Softball Ireland, building out a merchandising operation in Ireland and North America, expanding the Baseball Ireland youth academy, growing our after-school baseball programme, and of course building out our indoor facility, *Strike Zone*, for all of our members to enjoy.

Baseball Ireland is growing – good things are happening. Our dedicated volunteers transform ideas into reality. Thank you to everyone in the Irish baseball community for sharing this unprecedented time with us. Your inspiring words of support and encouragement have been heard and keep us going.

Go raibh maith agat!

Tom Kelley
President
Baseball Ireland

Passing of Neal Corbett – Baseball Coach



Neal Corbett discovered baseball when his son, Finn, attended a school programme run by Frank Andrews a few years ago. Neal initially got involved in the Red Rox club on a limited basis. He started joining his son and daughter, Finn and Kate, at training, helping to carry a

bag or retrieve balls. As his experience, knowledge and confidence grew, he quickly transitioned to 3rd base coach and all the split second decision making skills it required - 'know the outs, balls, strikes, send or hold the runner, give the signs'. Or, as is often the case with new Little League players - ensure they stand 'on' the base, ensure they 'touch' the base when running past it, ensure they 'stop' running into an obvious out! Finn is one such player, whose enthusiasm led to some exciting plays at home! Neal was more than a coach. He was a wonderful member of the club's baseball community, enjoying summer afternoons of baseball with his and other families, creating memories for years to come.

Neal represented the new wave of coaches being attracted to the sport across Ireland. Learning the game for the first time, as a coach, because a son or daughter has caught the baseball bug. Neal was a dedicated coach to his club and had a calm and supportive influence on everyone, not just the players! Sadly, Neal passed away suddenly in September. Covid-19 restrictions limited funeral attendance, however the entire Red Rox club of kids, parents, and coaches formed a guard of honour to show their respects outside the church. Wearing the club jerseys, the club community said farewell to a great supporter of baseball in Ireland and all-round nice guy.

Slán agus beannacht.



Indoor Facility

We are delighted to announce that we have recently signed a 10 year lease on a new indoor facility in Dublin. This represents a significant milestone for Baseball Ireland and we're now working very hard to get it kitted out and ready for use as we come into the New Year!

We've taken an ambitious approach to the project, with a property that's of a sufficient size to be able to support a world class baseball training and community experience and we're kitting it out to a high quality level. Below are some design illustrations/concepts of the new facility, located in the Finglas neighbourhood of North Dublin.



Facility in January 2021

The plan for the facility is for 4 lanes of batting and pitching, as well as a separate warmup area, and gym. The facility will be kitted out with mats, screens, pitching mounds, pitching machines, etc. The roof netting will be 18ft high, and large enough for full infield training, including live pitching/batting from regulation distance with full length throwing from shortstop/3rd base over to 1st base. The corner to corner distance is also sufficient for a catcher's throw from home plate to 2nd base.

This Irish Baseball Academy will offer members as well as non-member / public access to the facility. We expect access to the facility to be in high demand and will provide a convenient online booking system via the Baseball Ireland website.

Mariners A League Champions 2020



In a year when uncertainty has gripped the world, a year where normality has taken on new meaning, a year when finishing anything, let alone an Irish baseball season, seemed a step too far, Irish baseball did just that. With the perseverance of its members, coaches, umpires, organisers and most importantly its players, the 2020 season would be one to remember, and would be completed. The 2020 A final took place in Ashbourne, Co Meath. The Giants were competing in their first Championship, and were eager to win on home soil. For the Mariners, this represented their 7th final in a row, although 5 straight defeats had left them with only 1 medal to show for their efforts.

In Game 1 Daniel Woodburne and Eduardo Hernandez would take the hill for their respective teams. The Giants knew they had to win or go home, and some early hitting put them 2 runs up in the first. The Mariners had been here before, and they lent on that experience, tagging on a run of their own in the first, and adding 5 more in the second, sending 8 men to the plate. The Giants though, have a knack of not lying down, and by the 5th they had pulled it back to 6-5. Again though, the Mariners experience told, and they did not panic, as they put together another 5-run inning, highlighted by a 2-run triple, from the returning to form, Leo Farrell. A trend was emerging though, that these Giants never give up, and in the 7th they put together a truly remarkable inning, as they sent double digit batters to the plate, and scored a whopping 9 runs. All of a sudden, they were in the driving seat. A 2-run double from Jack Fairbairn in the 8th gave the Mariners a glimmer of hope, but Jaime Cuevas came in to stifle any more uprisings, and sent both teams to a winner take all matchup in game 2.

Game 2 started with the Mariners coming to the plate as the away team, and they came out swinging. Base hits from Leo, Danny Barclay, Tommy Hernandez, Alex

Capraru, Woody and Dan Sykes had the Mariners 5-0 up before the Giants had even lifted a bat. By the third, the Shanganagh outfit had 10 runs. But just like in Game 1, it is very hard to keep this Giants team at bay, and they chipped away at the Mariners lead, reducing the deficit to 10-4. Chipping was all it was though and by the end of the 7th, Jack Fairbairn and Leo Farrell combined to pitch the Mariners to a 14-5 lead. The Giants did try and come again in the 8th, and did score 2 runs, but Leo would not be denied as he induced 2 weak pop ups to end the comeback. Alex Capraru, collecting his 6th hit of the day, drove in 1 more run in the 9th, before Doc came in to close things out, and when he induced a ground ball to Chuck Adams, for the last out of the season, the resident of Greystones duly obliged.

And finally, a strange year came to a close, with a marathon 9-hour day, a massive 50 runs scored, 2 ejections, and a plethora of sore bodies. The Giants made it a final to remember, their never say die attitude has a way of draining the opposition, and time surely is all that stands between them and their first title. For the Mariners, this would mark the end of a 5-year journey. Half of this year's team had been on the Corkagh Park field when they had won the title in 2014, but they were a group that had always felt they should've won more than just 1. For the other half, they had never experienced that winning feeling, and after 5 straight final losses, they craved it so badly. Finally, it all came together. A full year from Woody and Dan Sykes, the return of Tommy Hernandez, and the addition to the pitching group of Doc Kelly were all contributing parts, but the belief this group have in each other was the ultimate factor. They were just not going to be made wait another year for that second title.

Gareth Donnelly – Mariners Baseball

Ashbourne Giants U21 B League Champions 2020



2020 was definitely a thoroughly remarkable year in the history of Irish Baseball. Faced with a global pandemic and complete uncertainty a fixture list was drafted that many of us thought was unlikely to be completed. With the addition of a new team from Cork and the amalgamation of the 2 Belfast outfits the B division was always going to be fiercely contested and to its credit it provided "when allowed" spectators with some fantastic games of baseball played in fields all around the country. The league saw plenty of familiar faces return and a few new players take up the sport which was very encouraging for all clubs concerned. Competition was fierce as always with the finalists only being decided on the last day of the season.

Ashbourne Giants were crowned B Division champions after a brilliant final held on a gloriously sunny day in the International Baseball Centre in Ashbourne. They beat a Mariners team that had lost only one other game all season and had only beaten them the previous week in their league fixture.

The youth development team attached to the Giants A team made history by becoming champions with a squad of the youngest players ever to play senior baseball in Ireland.

With several Irish internationals who've come up through the ranks the team is a mix of experienced players such as Kevin & Seán Mitchell and several players who've transitioned up from Little League over the last year or two who are still learning the game.

SEAN MCCORMACK
CLUB PRO
ASHBOURNE BASEBALL

Under the watchful eye of Jason Wiebe the group played some outstanding baseball this season with each and every member of the squad getting game time in nearly all of the fixtures. Overcoming such a seasoned Mariners B team in the final finished off a remarkable year for the group which included trips to Monaghan and Cork and several voyages down the M50 to Corkagh Park.

The young guys all stood up to the plate when called upon with some outstanding results on the way to the final. This unassuming bunch definitely put in the hours during the summer months training hard with Casper Coffee and Frank Andrews out in the IBC in Ashbourne. It clearly paid off proving the benefits that tailored training can bring to a team.

Youngsters like Corbin Cronin, Sean O'Toole & Bartek Bialek have all come on monumentally this season and the core group of Ryan Wiebe, Fionn Gallahar-Hall, Patrick Mitchell, Fedhlim Deering, David Linn & David Casey continue to develop at a pace that may see some challenge for starting spots on the senior International team in 2021.

With the opening of the Strike Zone training facility in the New Year you can be sure this bunch will be putting in the work over the break so they're in a good position to defend their title in 2021.

In the meantime they, like everyone else in the league are just itching to get back playing and 2021 promises to be the most competitive championship ever in the history of the B division.

Newest Addition to League Play: Cork Cosmos



Seasons Greeting to you all from the Cork Cosmos! We just wanted to keep you informed about a few exciting things happening in the team as we approach the end of the year. We have appointed a new committee with five members to take over the day to day running of the club. One of them is Michael O Callaghan as club secretary, he's also the team catcher, so being a committee member is the only real running he does – just kidding, he's a great asset to the club!

We also have Ryan Schmidt, who is our PR Manager and keeps the social media and marketing cog turning. He has secured a sponsorship deal for the Cosmos with innovative digital media company 'Images in Motion' www.iimplus.com and we're very excited to represent them on our 2021 kits

when we play both at home and away. Brett Sutherland is our club captain whose focus is on the development of homefield facilities including a new batting cage and pitching machines for training sessions along with keeping each player motivated with his enthusiasm for the sport.

Baseball veteran Jörg Töpfer is the second of the club captains and also one of our starting pitchers. He brings years of experience and invaluable knowledge to the team. Finally we have club chairman Bryan Curtis, who keeps everything together and ensures that we're making the best decisions for the club as we keep growing and moving forward. With an ever-increasing roster of 30 plus members, we couldn't be more excited to play baseball next year and see you all on the diamond!

So from everyone on the team, we wish you a Very Merry Cosmos!

Ryan Schmidt
Public Relations Officer
Cork Cosmos



Baseball Development Coach Report – First 100 days!

On June 8th of this year, Baseball Ireland took the big step of hiring our first full-time employee, Frank Andrews, as our resident Baseball Development Coach. While the country was just emerging from its first Covid-19 lockdown, there were many restrictions still being applied to sporting events and training. But that didn't stop Frank from getting stuck in straight away and staying busy. Key activities for Frank's first 100 days:

- Conducted a total of 170 discrete training events, 90% focused on youth players.
- 29 training sessions with youth club teams, 27 academy trainings and 37 strength & conditioning academy trainings, 24 youth camp sessions, 24 school sessions, and 16 adult team training sessions.
- Visited 11 different properties as candidates for Baseball Ireland's planned indoor training facility and he worked on the requirements and design concepts for the facility.
- Composed and conducted two important surveys of our membership – one regarding the indoor facility and one regarding our planned coach education programme.
- Began work on putting together the curriculum for the coach education programme and design of the first modules for the certification training which will commence in the off-season.

All in all, a very busy and productive first season especially considering the Covid-19 circumstances. Frank has just welcomed his new daughter to the world also! So he'll be taking a couple of weeks off from baseball before getting back at it for the pre-season for next year!

Frank Andrews
Develop Coach
Baseball Ireland

Public Awareness

Baseball Ireland continues to focus on promoting the game in Ireland. Below are some highlights of recent public engagement activities around Baseball Ireland.

“The 2 Johnnies Do America” is a series on RTE, the national TV broadcaster. In one of their September episodes they spent some time with TJ O’Leary, a former Irish National Team player. TJ spoke fondly of his hopes for game growing in Ireland.



RTÉ RADIO 1

“Drive-time” is an RTE radio programme with one of the highest listenership’s in Ireland. In August, Tom Kelley and Adrian Kelly, President and PRO of Baseball Ireland, spoke about the growing game in Ireland. <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radioplayer/html5/#/radio1/11227857> (The Baseball Ireland segment starts at 1hr47mins into the programme).



“Mo Shaol, Do Shaol” (“My life, your life”) is a popular Irish language kids programme which recently filmed the Red Rox Baseball club. Sairse, the picture below (on the left), was brand new to the sport and she spent the day with some of our ‘veteran’ girl players. It’s all captured on camera and will be aired nationally in the New Year.