

# Christian Baseball League Aims to Offer `Godly' Way of Doing Sports\_82503

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**By Bruce Nolan**

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NEW ORLEANS-Jarvis Martin, a Witness, started off wobbly, walking the Prophets' lead-off man, Dustin Rigsby, then letting Rigsby take second on a wild pitch.

A drizzle pattered on a few umbrellas as darkness began to creep over Lafreniere Park in Metairie, La., on a summer evening.

Parents shouted encouragement to their 10- and 11-year-olds. So did the coaches, each wearing an identical yellow shirt, no matter his team affiliation, to signal his allegiance to all the kids equally-to the Prophets and Witnesses, the Disciples, Believers, Overcomers and other teams in the Good Sports Christian Baseball League, a private baseball organization of more than 100 evangelical Christian families just ending its first season.



Craig Tafaro  
and 5-year-old  
Jonah Weber  
confer. The  
league requires  
all its coaches to  
produce a letter  
of  
recommendation  
from their  
pastors before  
they can  
participate.  
(RNS Photo)

Born of a low-grade dissatisfaction with competitiveness, rough language and the occasional beer-in-hand of some parents, the Good Sports Christian League offers a godly alternative, its members say.

It is baseball with its competitive fires well tamped, lots of cross-dugout encouragement, pre- and post-game prayer and baseball skills taught by dads who have passed muster by securing letters of recommendation from their pastors.

That's a credential that counts in this group. The league is made up exclusively of parents who have signed a statement of faith professing belief in the infallibility of the Bible, the lordship of Jesus Christ, salvation by faith alone and a few other basic tenets familiar to any evangelical Christian.

For some charter members of the league, it is a haven of sorts.

Many are home-schoolers, deeply devout parents who opted out of public

education to teach their children in home environments tailored to their religious beliefs.

"The parents, the coaches, the environment, it's all God-based. The coaches pray with the kids before and after the game. I'm very happy with it," said Rebecca Cotton, who hauls three children from Westwego, La., three times a week.

Good Sports is nothing if not supportive. Praise is lavish, awards frequent and pressure forbidden.

Indeed, during some of the youngest children's games, it's not even clear if score is being kept.

Because of its non-competitive nature, Good Sports has attracted a whole league of relatively inexperienced players whose parents had held them out of public playgrounds.

Teaching the strike zone often comes with little Christian homilies that coaches offer off little blue cards distributed to the kids. "The word of God, the Bible, is as necessary to life as bats are to baseball," said one. "We should read it often and live it by faith."

Good Sports was born last fall, when Chris and Lisa Arceri became increasingly concerned about their eldest son's football experience at a local playground.

A handful of parents—no more—seemed a little over the top at the playground, a little too fiery in their bleacher exhortations for Lisa Arceri's taste. Then there was the beer. It wasn't sold at playgrounds, but some families tailgated nearby and would bring a can into the stands, and that made the Arceris uncomfortable.

But what tore it for the Arceris was the coaches' language—just one coach,

really, they said.

It wasn't blistering, Lisa Arceri said. But it contained a solid dose of middle- and lower-level profanity uttered not in anger, but as ordinary locker room discourse he told them felt as appropriate to football as helmets.

As a result, the idea of an alternative league began to form, especially with Chris Arceri, a long-time coach and self-professed baseball nut.

The Arceris reached out first to other families in their network of home-school acquaintances. Those people began telling other people, particularly at local churches. By spring, they had a league with 14 teams, 30 coaches and 150 players ready to be formed in Christian character and the art of the bunt.

Now, with the first baseball season ending, there is talk of trying basketball in the fall. Another season of baseball next year seems definite.

With the evening's play done, parents folded up their chairs and shepherded uniformed kids back toward their vans.

"I like this," said Doug Greengard, father of two Good Sports and a former television sportcaster who has just made a leap into full-time Christian ministry. "They learn to play, there's no pressure, and when the game's over, the coaches gather them around to pray.

"That comforts me."