

## Ingomar/Franklin Park Athletic Association first in region affiliated with Babe Ruth League

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**By Natalie Beneviat**

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The Ingomar/Franklin Park Athletic Association now is affiliated with the Babe Ruth League, making it the first in the region to be part of the national organization.

With that designation the athletic association, often known as the IFPAA, also can call itself founder of the Western Pennsylvania Region for Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken Baseball. An official announcement will be made at the IFPAA board meeting today, Thursday, said Chuck Mazur, IFPAA executive director and president.

“We’ve got overwhelming positive feedback. It will help expand our capabilities for our coaches and training for our kids,” Mazur said.

After researching the national league last fall, the IFPAA 45-member board decided the Babe Ruth League would fit the needs of baseball players, coaches and the community.

The IFPAA also will utilize the national organization's Cal Ripken Baseball, a division of the Babe Ruth League that focuses on younger players ages 4 to 12, Mazur said.

Along with more coaching-development programs, the Babe Ruth League also allows for more flexibility in play, IFPAA Vice President Jeff Frey said.

The IFPAA had a previous affiliation with the Little League until 2010, Frey said. However, IFPAA officials thought the rules did not fit the desires of the teams, especially for 11- and 12-year-old players who wanted more advanced play.

For instance, the players in that age group wanted to use longer pitching distances, as well as longer distances between bases. The Little League rules for those ages had much shorter distances and did not allow for adjustments, said Frey, of Franklin Park.

He said the players of those ages thought the play wasn't challenging enough for them.

With the Babe Ruth League, rules can be adjusted to better fit players' wishes and put them at the same level of other teams in the area that already might use those distances, Frey said.

“We can basically adjust to what the kids want and what is consistent with what is going on with the world around us,” said Frey, 64. “You’re here to service the kids. If you don’t, you lose them.”

The Babe Ruth League will provide opportunities for state, regional and national tournaments, said Mazur, of McCandless.

The IFPAA will represent western Pennsylvania in state championships, and those winners will be entered into Mid-Atlantic play and then to the World Series for various age groups, according to the IFPAA website.

Tom Watson, vice president of baseball for the IFPAA, said people like to be associated with a brand name.

“It’s a new level of confidence to be part of a national organization and more resources that we can tap into,” said Watson, of McCandless.

The IFPAA has baseball and softballs for children and teenagers ages 4 to 19 and covers the entire North Allegheny School District with a lot of the players coming from McCandless and Franklin Park, said Watson, 57. It also has softball teams for older players.

Watson said that before last year, registration was falling. But last year, it increased.

“That was nice to see,” Watson said.

He said he expects other youth sports programs in western Pennsylvania to join the Western Region for Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken Baseball over the next few years.

Mazur said the IFPAA program has greatly expanded over the years on its own, including winter-season training for players.

Registration is open online until the end of February, Frey said. The regular season runs from April to end of June. After that, there is a tournament season through July. Mazur said there also is a fall ball season.

Mazur said the IFPAA usually has about 1,000 players overall in the spring season, and he hopes that number grows to 1,200 this year.

The IFPAA has sports opportunities for players with special needs, said Mazur, a veteran of the association for 28 years.

Natalie Beneviat is a freelance writer for Trib Total Media.