



Americanism Conference September 22-24, 2017

American Legion Baseball Chairman's Conference

I viewed this conference as a great learning experience as to the inner workings of this long-standing program of the American Legion. Nothing exemplifies American life for our youth as baseball does and the American Legion Baseball program is instrumental in getting so many youths off to a great start in learning so many fundamental values as they begin their journey into adulthood.

Friday night's opening session was filled with warm welcome statements including our Conference Chairman Gary Stone, National Commander Denise Rohan, Americanism Chairman Richard Anderson and several others. Jake Raile, ALB Committee member briefed us on his 19-year military career, the majority of which he was in service as a recruiter; he noted that some of those same recruiting principles he learned should be applied to Legion ball players. He pointed out that to join any group or organization and be successful, one should first have a desire to join, then get as much knowledge as possible, and with that desire and knowledge, form a belief in the organization, and with the desire, knowledge, and belief, take ownership. Those attributes can apply in a great many applications in so many aspects of our lives, including baseball.

The meat-and-potatoes of this conference of Department Chairman however was not related to fundamentals of the game, but addressed rules and procedures in place that can vary from Department to Department. The MLB has one rule book that all franchises must adhere to and while the ALB also has a single rule book for their World Series play in Shelby, NC, there are regional concerns that may vary from Department to Department. Some examples of variances are geographic, population, and the question of residency with a student playing for a team nearest to his school as opposed to a team nearest to his home when the student attends a private school in a different district; this is not at all uncommon, particularly in the east where there are a greater number of private schools.

There were two most informative breakout sessions, one by region, of which there are eight, and one by program size, also in eight groups; each of these sessions were led by a Regional Caucus Leader. There was a 19-page list of proposed changes previously submitted by various Departments and distributed to all attendees in advance; most were in a standard format, and one was submitted as resolution. Those proposals were sent out in advance for discussion in the breakout sessions, and that is where the true debates began. Each region discussed the merits of the proposed rule changes one by one, and how they could affect their regular games, and as well, tournament play. I learned that what makes regular seasons games operate smoothly, would have to have teams adapt to changes for regional tournament rules, and what was good in regular season play could be totally changed in Shelby, NC. All proposals were voted upon for adoption, rejection, or further clarification, some with minor word changing.

When the caucuses were completed, all reconvened in the NEC room on the 4th floor at National Headquarters where each Caucus Leader gave the group's voting results. Once that was completed, all in attendance had opportunity to openly discuss their considerations, but the votes registered were the telling tale. I had never given consideration to this previously, but what works well in Connecticut, may be detrimental in Montana and vice versa.

The closing session on Sunday morning opened with all Americanism Conference segments gathered to hear an inspirational speech from Colonel Sean McKenna, USAF Air Force Recruiting Command. That was followed by the reconvening of Legion Baseball with a memorial service for all who have had an impact on ALB and transferred to Post Everlasting since the last conference. After the service, final comments were made, best-practices were offered, and after some brief closing remarks, adjournment of another successful conference.

- Jim Borgman, Vice Chairman Americanism Commission, Sons of the American Legion