

# RECREATION MANAGEMENT

THE MAGAZINE WITH IDEAS & SOLUTIONS FOR RECREATION, SPORTS & FITNESS FACILITIES MANAGERS

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## Before You Go...

### Let Them Play Ball

#### *Batters Up USA Brings Diamond Sports to Kids*

By Emily Tipping

With Spring Training in full swing and the baseball season set to begin on April 4 at Fenway Park, where the Boston Red Sox will host their rivals and 2009 World Series champions the New York Yankees, your mind might be turning to the ball field, too. And while baseball and softball might be American as grandma and apple pie, popping up on sports fields across the country throughout the spring and summer, there are still many children who never get a chance to swing a bat.

But Batters Up USA aims to change that. This nonprofit organization aims to help introduce boys and girls to baseball and softball who otherwise would not get the chance. And with the nation's attention increasingly focused on such health and community issues as childhood obesity, fitness, community deterioration and juvenile delinquency, the programs offered by Batters Up USA provide an inexpensive, practical way to employ team-based sports to reach deep into the community and address these problems.

How does Batters Up USA tackle its mission? By contributing free equipment to help start up fun, recreational ball programs at parks and recreation facilities, community centers, after-school programs and more.

The organization, originally called Play Ball, has seen an increasing interest in its programs. In 2009, Jess Heald, executive director of the organization, said, "Our program of equipment grants to local organizations is a winning and cost-effective combination," adding that an incredibly rewarding result was seeing the programs the organization helped to start up continue and even grow their number of participants.

Heald added that the organization's secret to success is taking the game to places where kids are already gathered in an organized environment, but where baseball and softball aren't part of the program lineup.

"We focus on the summer community center programs run by local parks and rec departments, Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCAs," Heald said. "Many no longer offer a baseball/softball activity, but most have a usable ball field. Additionally, we are focused on the millions of kids in after-school programs run by these same organizations."

Paul Seiler, executive director and CEO of USA Baseball, called organizations and initiatives like Batters Up USA a "valuable tool we rely on to achieve such goals" as growing the health and proliferation of the sport at the grassroots level. "We strongly support any and all efforts which share our collective mission," he added, "providing opportunities for kids to play our national pastime, baseball."

Designed for boys and girls of all ages, the Batters Up USA program works well anywhere a ball field is available, in urban areas as well as suburban communities. It contributes equipment—everything from bats and balls to gloves, helmets and catcher's gear—to help local organizations like parks departments, school systems, YMCAs and civic clubs that want to add baseball and softball to their youth activities programs. Quantities of equipment are based on the size of the program and are subject to availability. All of the equipment is contributed by Batters Up USA's member companies.

The most popular type of program to which equipment is given are Summer Recreation Center Programs, where

many thousands of children are already participating in programs supported by organizations of all kinds. Through Batters Up USA, these local organizations can get the support they need to add baseball and softball to their roster of summertime activities. Batters Up USA also has supported after-school programs, and has even partnered with the American Baseball Foundation to develop a curriculum that combines reading instruction with baseball.

This program is made up of five two-hour sessions. In each session, children spend an hour working on reading skills using age-appropriate books that feature baseball-related subjects. During the other hour, they learn basic skills of the game and play recreational-level ball games. In this program, Batters Up USA contributes the ball equipment, while organizations may have expenses associated with purchasing reading materials and curriculum.

To date, Batters Up USA has helped start up programs in 25 states involving around 11,500 boys and girls.

If you're interested in finding out more about Batters Up USA's equipment grants, you can visit the Web site at [www.battersupusa.org](http://www.battersupusa.org).

Got a positive story to tell? A success to talk about? We'd love to hear from you! E-mail [editor@recmanagement.com](mailto:editor@recmanagement.com) and let us know how you're making a difference.

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