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Rye Little League embraces Opening Day festivities

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A truckload of Cardinals players arrive for Rye Little League's Opening Day festivities on Saturday morning. Players were paraded from Rye Junior High School to Flash Jenness Field in trucks and cars, escorted by fire engines.

Ralph Morang photo

By **Mike O'Neil**
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May 10, 2009 6:00 AM

RYE — There is nothing like Opening Day.

Players rummaging through a brand new box of uniforms, sacrificing the proper size for the lucky number, only to have their new jerseys soiled minutes later in a test of speed up a rain-soaked hill.

Meanwhile, proud parents huddle teammates and friends together for that perfect shot that will someday soon end up in the family album, or maybe on an outfield Jumbotron.

All of this happening while coaches run down their roster one last time, trying to rhyme names together in an effort to remember them faster.

"There is nothing like this," said Rye Little League president Bob Monahan. "The Patriots, the Red Sox, the Bruins, the Celtics — they have their opening day, but it's nothing compared to this. There's nothing like a Little League opening day. For me, it's my favorite day. It's right up there with Thanksgiving, there's nothing like it."

The 171 players in the 14-team league shared Monahan's excitement as Rye Little League opened its 53rd season at Flash Jenness Field on Saturday.

"We have a lot of fun with this," said Monahan. "There's that excitement. The kids want to get going, they want to play, and then you have the volunteers, the umpires. I think they have just as much fun as the players do."

"This is the best day," said Carter Madden, 12, of Rye Beach. "To have the ceremony, then to watch the games and see the younger kids, the future of the league playing. It's really cool."

The festivities began as Recreation Road was temporarily turned into the Canyon of Champions, as the league's 12-year-olds arrived in fire trucks while the 9- to 11-year-olds of the Major League division arrived together in team vehicles that ranged from festively painted pick-ups to top-downed convertibles.

"It's great to be part of the parade," said Madden. "To be able to sit in the fire truck with your friends and tell them when to pull off the sirens and see all the gear to see what it's like. It was fun."

"The police chief (Kevin Walsh) and fire chief (William Sullivan) really help us out," said Monahan. "They're great to Little League. They brought in guys today to drive the trucks and ambulance in. During All-Stars we have about 400 people down here and they are here helping us out. We owe them an awful lot."

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Just after 10-year-old Amelia Griffith sang the national anthem so well, the league said it plans to record it to be played before every game. Players from the past were also honored as league alum Curran Sullivan was honored as last season's Irving "Flash" Jenness Award winner.

Jenness coached at Rye Little League for 27 years and was also a member of the Rye Seahawks hockey club.

"I've seen the other players that have won the award and it's great to be mentioned with them," said Sullivan. "I never thought I'd be on the same list as some of those players. It's really unbelievable."

The award is presented to the Major League player who has consistently demonstrated by his or her actions the highest standards of leadership, sportsmanship, and athletic ability.

"I've know Curran since kindergarten," said Monahan. "He's a great, great kid. He's one of those kids that you just love having around. He's got a phenomenal attitude. Not just Little League or lacrosse or football, it's everything. It's what the Flash Jenness Award is all about."

Monahan pointed to the parents' participation in the league as the reason for its success. At one point, all the family members were asked on to the field to share the Opening Day experience with their sons or daughters.

"I've been the president for two seasons, and having them come on to the field is something we started a couple years ago during our 50th anniversary," said Monahan. "This isn't our league, we just help run it. This is their league, this is their field. Why not have them come out and enjoy it too?"

The dedication of the parents and volunteers can been seen along the first-base line as the finishing touches of the league's new batting cage were being added.

"During the winter, Christin Keebler came to me and asked for a new batting cage," said Monahan. "She took it and ran with it. She solicited everyone from Rye, Hampton, North Hampton and Portsmouth. She raised the funds and everyone pitched in and you can see all the families' names and all the businesses that contributed to this on the plaque."

As players get older, Opening Day fades away. It simply becomes the first game of the season. But the memories always seem to be there. After all, there's nothing like Opening Day.



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