

2023-2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The report will cover the period November 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024 and will highlight initiatives and activities approved by the Board and completed by the staff of St. John's Minor Baseball Association (SJ MBA) that are above and beyond the normal day to day scope of work.

ADMINISTRATION

This was my first year in the role of Executive Director, beginning in March 2024.

Grant Workers

SJ MBA had a decrease in grant student numbers compared to 2023:

Canada Summer Jobs 10 (3 less than 2023 and 6 less than 2022)

NL Provincial Grants Post-Secondary / High School 9 (8 less than 2023)

In 2023 and years prior, these NL Provincial Grants were split into Post-Secondary and High School

We received word in May 2024 that our NL Provincial Grants were being cut by a factor of 90% due to lack of funding. This proved to be extremely challenging as this would affect the organization greatly, losing approximately \$45,000 in funding. In July of 2024, The provincial government did come back to us with the appropriate funding after we had drafted a letter and sent to our appropriate MHAs, and although it did help, we did not avail of every grant available to us and could only fill 9 positions. There were grant eligible staff but they had taken on other jobs to supplement their income after the season had started.

Total 19

It is important to note that these jobs are becoming increasingly difficult to fill. Students are not wanting to work 20 plus hours each week and that has become a strain on the association during hiring time. Through umpiring alone, a staff member would have to work a double header each night, Monday through Thursday, to achieve approximately 18 hours.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In February we held our Annual General Meeting and elected a new Board. Ken Curtis was automatically nominated by virtue of his previous term as per the Articles of Incorporation. Ken accepted this nomination. Danny Penton was automatically nominated by virtue of his previous term as per the Articles of Incorporation. Danny accepted this nomination. Ken then declared the floor open for nominations for the four positions of Directors-at-Large and it proceeded as follows:

Dave Lee – nominated by Michelle Healy. Charlie Kelly seconded the nomination.

Dave accepted the nomination.

Mike Kirkland – nominated by Danny Penton. Todd Pardy seconded the nomination.

Mike accepted the nomination.

Charlie Kelly – nominated by Paul Currie. Paul Dillon seconded the nomination.

Charlie accepted the nomination.

Tina Maloney – nominated by Danny Penton. Krista Rice seconded the nomination.

Tina accepted the nomination.

Ken then asked three times if there were any other nominations. Since we had 4 candidates nominated for 4 positions, no vote occurred and all four candidates were elected.

PROGRAMS

2023-2024 was another busy year. Our registration numbers held steady upon opening registration however we saw a number of refunds due to injuries, and the dissolving of the 18U Female team which also resulted in full refunds.

Winter Ball

On December 5th, we opened On-line registration which was consistent with the previous year. This was our 11th year under the current structure. In short, Mark Healy plans, staffs and executes the program. We are responsible for all administrative requirements, rent the facility and provide the equipment.

Winter Ball was well attended given the multitude of training opportunities that exist in the Metro region, with an increase across the board for Session 1, and Session 2 holding steady from 2023. Comparative numbers to 2018-2024 are shown below:

Session 1				Session 2		
	House League	All Star	Female	House League	All Star	Female
2016	119	74	0	121	90	0
2017	124	82	0	123	93	0
2018	121	101	0	132	110	38
2019	113	100	36	113	122	42
2020	92	69	47	95	90	40
2021	67	50	40	68	53	46
2022	91	20	26	115	42	33
2023	73	46	25	115	79	42
2024	101	60	39	119	70	37

The program consisted of two 7-week segments with two 90 minute sessions (one for House and one for all-star players). We charged \$225 per player per session (\$400 for two sessions). Attendance was open to players from all baseball associations in the region. The female program consisted of two 7-week segments. We charged the same amount per player as the Friday session. Winter Ball was a success in all aspects given the increased stress put on the association to conduct the programs, as well as an increase in competition for training programs throughout the region. We have not increased registration for Winterball since 2013.

In 2024, we continued doing specialty camps under the name "Spring Training". The goal of these camps is to provide specialized small group training in response to our membership asking for such programming. These camps were designed as short term sessions to target either offensive, pitching or defensive skills. In 2024 these were offered in the form of 2x Offensive Camps, 1x Pitching and 1x Defensive camps, so the numbers will look different than 2023 by nature of design of the program. Registration numbers were as follows:

	Offense #1 (2023)	Offense #1 (2024)	Offense #2 (2023)	Offense #2 (2024)	Pitching #1 (2023)	Pitching #1 (2024)	Pitching #2 (2023)	Pitching #2 (2024)	Defense (2023)	Defense (2024)
Early Session	10	53	N/A	57	12	54	9	N/A	10	60
Late Session	4	41	N/A	42	10	36	19	N/A	3	39

This program was due for evaluation after the 2022/2023 season as numbers were not strong due to the time of the year these were offered. The 2024 Spring Training Sessions were offered closer to the start of the season with no fall programming and the numbers show they were much more successful

School Tournaments

In partnership with the NL English School Board and our colleagues from the other minor baseball associations on the Avalon Peninsula, SJMBA has assumed the lead role in conducting invitational school tournaments throughout late May and early June. Simply put, without SJMBA these events would not happen. These tournaments are an incredible amount of work, especially for a newly appointed Executive Director, and equates to over a full season of programming slotted in to approximately one month. While it is a financial generator at this point due to the sheer size of the tournaments, and it does allow our umpires to get rid of the off-season rust, it is a massive undertaking of SJMBA that does take attention away from the core SJMBA membership and season startup duties.

In 2024, SJMBA implemented a cap on the number of teams a school could enter per tournament as we were finding that bigger schools outside of the St. John's area were entering as many teams as possible. According to the School Board, in elementary schools, players are not allowed to be "cut" from teams, which should not be a problem of SJMBA but ultimately, it does fall back on us with the schools then contacting us looking for a solution outside of their own rules. Even with this cap implemented, the Steve Phillips memorial tournament almost doubled in size, and the Sgt. Geoff Walsh Memorial Tournament still managed to grow by 1 team. There are some St. John's area schools that max out their cap but with the exception of Juniper Ridge, two of these schools experienced defaults outside of their first time, and should not be pushing to reach the cap in the future.

SJMBA also declined to host the Male High School tournament in 2024. This was a labour of love that combined the usage of Wishingwell and St. Pat's, and ultimately put too much strain on

St. John's Amateur Baseball, especially with the early shutdown of the Canada Games maintenance and the hosting of 18U Nationals in 2024. It is highly unlikely that SJMBA will host this tournament in the spring again, however a "Fall Ball" tournament remains on the radar.

Tournaments and Teams:

Tournament	Date	Number of Teams
Steve Phillips Classic	May 22-26	32 (+15 from 2023)
Junior High	May 22-26	13 (No change from 2023)
Senior High	May 29-June 2	Hosted by Paradise Minor Baseball in 2024
Junior High Girls	June 12-16	8 (-1 from 2023)
Sgt Geoff Walsh	June 5-9	48 (+1 from 2023)
Senior High Girls	June 12-18	4 (-1 from 2023)

Registration

Our House League registration opened on Saturday, April 13/24 with full on-line registration and payment. We continued with the RAMP Registration software. In most divisions, we had teams with 14-15 players. We lowered the number of players per team in Rally Cap to align with the Rally Cap roster guidelines presented by Baseball Canada

	2024	2023
Rally Cap (5-7)	98	141
9U (8-9)	234	229
11U (10-11)	212	177
13U (12-13)	189	177
15U (14-15)	96	111
18U (16-18)	63	61
12U Female (10-12)	59	46
14U Female (13-14)	45	45
16U Female (15-17)	15	15
TOTAL	1011	1002

Note that the 16U female team played in the 15U House League in 2024, and the 14U AA Female team did not play in the 14U LOTO league in 2024.

ALL STAR PROGRAM

In April, the All-star Committee chaired by Danny Penton sent out an Expression of Interest (EOI) re: coaching one of our all-star teams. Although it was a lengthy process with some delays to naming coaches on certain teams, we staffed all teams with experienced coaches. We continued our policy that if a parent was selected to coach, his/her coaching role was confirmed only after all players including his/her son/daughter were selected, not vice-versa. This process helps us to further demonstrate transparency and equity in the selection process.

SJMBA fielded 19 all-star teams in 2024 in the following divisions:

11U A RED - Did not qualify	11U A BLACK - Provincial Silver	11U AA - Provincial Silver	11U AAA - Provincial Gold
12U A - Provincial Silver	12U AA - Provincial Silver	13U A RED - Provincial T2 Gold	13U A BLACK - Provincial T1 Gold
13U AA - Did not qualify	13U AAA - Provincial Gold	14U A - Did not qualify	14U AA - Did Not qualify
15U A RED - Did not qualify	15U A BLACK - Provincial Gold	15U AA - Did not qualify	15U AAA - Did not qualify
16U AA - Did not qualify	18U A - Did not qualify	18U AA - Provincial Silver	

As Baseball NL introduced a new ranking system in 2023, this affected the placements of our teams at Provincial events which in some instances increased the overall competitiveness. I have already submitted my end of season review to BNL on the status of the current ranking system and how it is perceived from our organization. In short, the ranking system is a huge positive to baseball as a whole in the province, however it still needs tweaking which is to be expected with a new system.

In May, we conducted our all-star selection process. Once again, we engaged Mark Healy, as well as the All-Star committee to develop an evaluation matrix so that each player could be assessed in a transparent, equitable manner. We also continued the use of skill shark software to allow for better player tracking and monitoring. We asked the all-star coaching candidates to attend the try-out sessions for their age division. The all-star committee, in coordination with Ken, Mark Healy, select evaluators and myself went through the data to ensure we felt comfortable with results. After 2021, we deemed it prudent to make some changes to the selection meeting. We invited coaches whose kids were safely on a team to be a part of the conversation so as to not influence decision making. We also reached out to all coaches with

their comments regarding what they saw at tryouts, as well as referencing numbers/comments from coaches in the past season. While we always try to keep our approach current, our number one goal is to ensure all players have a fair chance regardless of their background and we are extremely proud of our commitment to this.

Caps High Performance Program

In 2020, we started our Caps High Performance Program with Premier Sports Academy. We continued this program in 2023 and did not resign the contract with PSA in 2024, nor did we put the contract out to tender.

The 2024 Caps High Performance Program was designed in-house by all star committee chair Danny Penton, and executed through guidance by Danny, as well as the lead instructor Nick Evans. I oversaw and assisted the program when necessary but the overall feedback from the 2024 HP program was that it was a massive success. Players and coaches alike preferred this new approach, they thought it was in-line with their own practice sessions, and aside from two teams, it was well attended. We do see attendance struggles in the 16U/15U bracket (particularly 15U AAA and somewhat 15U AA at times), and this is due to the nature of players on provincial teams as well as older players not having as much time for weekday practices, but that should not be a red flag for the 2025 season.

Metro League

In 2023 the Metro area associations decided to hire a scheduler to help decrease the workload on SJMBA. Previously, the metro league was a SJMBA run endeavor which was too much work and time spent by the previous executive director. Some metro leagues ran without any issues, however this was not consistent across the board. Field times were improperly utilized not only in St. John's, but the surrounding associations, and the same issues from previous years keep arising - Due to the lack of available field slots and the overabundance of invitational tournaments in a short baseball season, teams are still cancelling games as the only times they are available to play clash with their tournament play. While metro league is a fantastic opportunity to develop players at different positions, especially pitching, it cannot be ignored that our 13U AA team played 10 tournament games in 9 days, and rightfully so had to cancel a metro league game in between these 10 games. There is no perfect solution to this, but SJMBA will be going to the other metro associations looking for change in 2025. One issue that is consistently brought up by our membership regarding the Metro League is extending this to A and female teams. While this could be beneficial, there are several impacts on other leagues that need to be worked out first. Other associations are not interested in including A teams since they would not be able to run their house leagues without those players, and that sentiment is echoed by SJMBA. The field time is simply not there to expand, and especially from the A perspective, the competition does not prove to be there either. It would be more beneficial to have the SJMBA A teams play each other consistently if higher competition is the desire. Our 14U AA Female Team did play in the 13U AA metro league in 2024 and had a wonderful experience, winning the metro league play downs, however when one window opens, another one closes, and the lack of 14U AA players in the LOTO league was not well received by the parents of these LOTO players as it had a knock on effect in that league.

Female Teams

As outlined by Mark Healy at the BNL AGM in November 2024, this was the first year that the Caps did not win a provincial gold at any level of female baseball. This should not be a red flag and could have been predicted years ago, as numbers are going up for the other associations and they are producing great players, a lot of which are being trained by former Caps female program staff and volunteers, and at the BNL provincial level as well.

House League

House league did not undergo any major changes from 2023 to 2024 as there was no time from the Executive Director changeover and not enough information from 2023 to accurately identify the need for change. We continued with tiered championships in 11U and 13U to give more kids a chance to play for a medal. While not perfect, it is still well received and the buzz around the park during playoff season still retains that magic of fall baseball that the kids and parents all love.

Rally Cap Program – Rally Cap was offered on Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we operated with 10 total teams and an average roster size of 9.8 per team. Previously, we were going outside the Baseball Canada recommended roster size for Rally Cap and had rosters of 12-14 players per team. By keeping the roster sizes under 10, we managed to have a great year for Rally Cap that was well received by parents and players. Our staff did an amazing job this year and kept a tight ship running throughout the summer. The Rally Cap Under the Lights night was held at Airport Heights Field in 2024 due to the lack of availability of St. Pat's, and the kids had a blast. Rally Cap can constantly be improved and we will continue to try and improve the experience for all in 2025.

9U – We continued with the Minor and Major 9U divisions in 2024 and continued to play 4 nights a week at Virginia Park and Kelly's Brook under the guidance of various grant staff and casual staff. One continued issue with 9U is the separation of Minor and Major as it is impossible to accurately place all of these kids based on parental input. 9U also needs to see more standardization across the board for 2025 - we have found that there is an imbalance between experiences of the kids, and this is partially due to the lack of concrete leadership in the program. One of our grant staff members is above and beyond the shining star of the 9U program, but if this staff member is unavailable or we have casual staff filling in, despite being provided the proper materials, the execution falters. Standardization and Consistency will be the main themes of 9U in 2025 as we strive to provide an excellent experience for both competition and skill development.

11U – We continued with 12 teams similar to 2023. Our goal for house league is for players to have fun and play with their friends. This is something that all coaches and parents should support as well. We struggled to fill coaching positions at the beginning of the year due to lack of people stepping forward, but ultimately we did manage to fill these slots. Unfortunately, volunteering is down in every sector in the province and we cannot control this, but we can

continue to forge ahead and fix these issues in 2025. Defaults were an issue in 11U with some teams not being affected at all, and others having defaults every other game. Roster size was not the issue here and we need to be stronger in our messaging in 2025 of what is to be expected from House League parents and players.

13U – We had 10 teams again in 2024 for 13U, with the roster sizes being slightly larger as this was done in previous years to prevent defaults. This has worked well for us as defaults are consistently down for this age group, however players are getting less At Bats when the full team is showing up, and coaches are struggling to manage these innings. To compare 11U to 13U which has a large difference in the number of defaults, 11U average roster size was 13.33 and 13U average roster size was 16.3.

15U – We had 6 teams (one of which was the Girls 16U team) which was the same as 2023. In 2023, the league was very competitive but did suffer from some defaults, although less than 2022. In 2024, this league had the most issues by far in SJMBA. We had a number of kids who signed up for baseball who consistently did not attend, A all-star players were brought to my attention by the House League coaches for poor attendance, and despite intervening, sending some high energy emails, we could not string 3 games in a row without a default. We ended up combining teams, albeit far too late, and as luck would have it, when the playoffs rolled around, attendance went up, which is not always a positive given that these rosters had an average size of 14, and now combined rosters could be as high as 28. Simply put, 14 players on a roster is more than enough to ensure equity and playing time throughout the summer, but we cannot have players registering with no intentions of actually showing up. We ended the season with a very successful John Wickham Memorial Championship tournament and the competition level was high throughout.

18U – We had 3 core 18U House League teams this year that had the A players evenly spread out throughout the division with the help of Mike Kirkland assessing these teams to ensure parity. These teams played in a regional league with Mount Pearl and Paradise, with the hopes that CBS will join down the road. The quality of the league was great in 2024, however the execution needs to be improved. SJMBA started about 5.5 days late this year, and 18U is the division that gets hit the most. Due to the availability of proper field time and qualified umpires for this division, while they are playing competitive baseball, there were issues with the field slots being used. While St. Pat's was available almost every Sunday evening for a double header (shared with 18U all star metro league), Smallwood, Wishingwell and Peter Barry Duff could be utilized better. St. Pat's is the busiest senior sized field in the province which is troublesome when hosting events such as 18U Nationals, Senior provincials, and on top of that the field was closed on labour day weekend for renovations. This league needs to be the first one to start as soon as St. Pat's is available, and utilize every slot available from the other associations. As said above, qualified umpires are few and far between and is a large red flag on this division.

Female Divisions - Our League of their Own Female Regional program had 2 divisions in 2024 - 12U and 14U. The regional model continues to work and the scheduling was put in the hands of the same scheduler for the Metro Leagues, however we did see issues throughout. We were proud to have the use of Gerry Veitch field for our 12U teams, and we thank the City of St. John's for allowing that. I see Gerry Veitch being a mainstay in that division for years to come as it is a beautiful field and the perfect size for this age group. Our 14U teams seemed to have played the majority of their games outside of the City of St. John's limits, partially due to limited field time and slots.

Drills & Skills Clinics

We did a limited Drills and Skills Clinic in 2024, limiting it to just two weeks of programming. This was divided into an open division and female division. Unfortunately the female division was cut due to lack of participation and the open division had great feedback from the parents. We are looking to get back on the right track for Drills and Skills in 2025 and will be trying to perfect this as it should be focused on development first and foremost and we want to adhere to our history of gold standard product delivery that is synonymous with the Caps brand.

Special Events

We did not have as many special events as in 2023, however all events went flawlessly on our end. Events included the following:

Mike Buist Classic	July 12th - 14th
Baseball day in Newfoundland	July 27th - St. Pat's Ballpark in support of the Senior Provincial FInals
15U A Provincials (Tier 1 and Tier 2)	August 16th to 18th APH/WW 8 teams
13U A Provincials (Tier 1 and Tier 2)	Aug 30th to Sept 1st LSP/TN/KG 10 teams
Night Under the Lights	Sept 6th Airport Heights

SURVEYS

At the conclusion of the 2024 season, we sent our multiple surveys to solicit feedback from key groups - All Star coaches, House League coaches, and House League Parents. Regarding the House League parents survey, we received 167 responses which covered 188 registrants as some survey responders have multiple children in our program. The majority of the responses were from 9U and 11U, with only 2.4% of respondees stating they will not be registering for baseball next year. Some key takeaways from the parents survey is as follows:

- i. Rally Cap feedback is mostly positive to neutral with focus on the coaching staff. No issues with schedule, team sizes, jerseys, etc
- ii. 9u Major and Minor is mostly positive to neutral with focus on team sizes, umpire engagement, skill development and end of year tournament structure. Need to better define and communicate the difference between 9U Minor and 9U Major.
- iii. 11U ranges from very negative to very positive, with the negative feedback coming from the same two teams and the positive feedback from the other teams. Focus on defaults, umpires, skill range, "A" all star players
- iv. 13U is mostly positive to slightly negative. No clear focus besides attendance and practices / skill development. 3 responses in particular were outliers compared to the rest of the responses but are still factored in to our season review.
- v. As mentioned above for 15U, the entire league needs to be reviewed. Commitment level for 15U house league was lacking and was not fair to the dedicated players.
- vi. 18U has been attempted to be overhauled for almost 10 years now. Late start due to weather this year and other schedule clashes. Some parents are not happy about the involvement of other associations. Need to make sure jersey order is kept on top of for the 2025 season.
- vii. 12U was seen as mostly positive to exceeding expectations although there were concerns of all star player attendance.
- viii. 14U had issues with one team in particular, game locations, and overall game experience (games too long, too many walks, issues with pitching, not a good baseball experience)
- ix. A sense that house league is an after thought with SJMBA focused on all-star was a thread to the responses
- x. The need for better catchers and umpire equipment was a frequent comment
- xi. The need to start the season earlier and get house league teams selected and distributed earlier was another common response. Having year-end tournament schedules sent out earlier was another common suggestion.
- xii. Team size, either not enough or too many players (depending on division), was identified as an issue
- xiii. 1 umpire at games and umpires not being engaged were flagged as concerns

FINANCE

As you will note in our financial statements, we had a slight operating surplus in 2024. We managed to finally install our scoreboard at Edgar Hartery Field and it has been a massive improvement to the field, making its debut during the 13U A provincials. We will also look to build upon the continual improvements done to the fields around the City of St. John's prioritizing those that are used most frequently, especially for special events. It is positive to see a strong financial position and we will continue to be financially conscious in our decisions while promoting growth of our program.

MARKETING-PR-CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Given the uncertainty in our economy, sponsorships will continue to be a challenge. We are thankful for our continued support from Kirkland, Balsom & Associates, ScotiaMcLeod Wealth Management, Sportscraft Source for Sports, and our newest sponsor, DWI services who are the official First Aid sponsor for SJMBA going forward. We would also like to thank the City of St. John's for continuing to be a great partner of SJMBA and providing us with everything we need to successfully run our organization.

THANK YOU AND CONCLUSIONS

Taking on this role in 2024 was a true test for myself and I couldn't be happier with the decision I made to take on this role. I cannot even begin to thank every single person that supported me in this role and helped me along the way, as there is far too many to name, but these people are all in the Baseball NL and Caps Family - Parents, Players, Coaches, Volunteers ; I've seen nothing but support from all sides and I look forward to working with all of you in the future.

To our all-star and house league coaches, team managers and volunteers – Thank You! We could not offer our program without you.

To our student workers on grant and those who are casual – your efforts are noticed and appreciated. We hope to have you all back in 2025 as you are the gears that turn in the machine that is SJMBA!

To all our sponsors mentioned above – thank you for your continued support. Your contributions to our program are immeasurable.

To the City of St. John's, especially the Parks staff – Carla Squires, Neil McKenzie, Mike Adam, Leon Organ and all the staff who work on our fields – a sincere thank you.

Finally, to the board members who served in 2024 and past board members who are still around to help at a moment's notice, thanks again for all your help in 2024. A special thanks to Ken Curtis, Nikki Musseau, and Danny Penton for all of your hard work and efforts, going beyond the call of duty and helping my transition into this role.

David Lahey

Executive Director

SJMBA

