



Royal Oak Sandlot League

Royal Oak Parks and Recreation Advisory Board - Community Engagement and Vision

Thursday, April 4, 2025

The Royal Oak Sandlot League, established in 1959, is a non-profit local tee-ball, softball and baseball organization that is committed to providing girls and boys from ages 4-18 the opportunity to play in a fun and structured environment. The organization has over 900 active participants managed by an all volunteer board and volunteer coaches. The season is primarily mid-April thru the end of July. Tournament teams compete throughout the year and league clinics taking place December-March.

A key guiding principle of the league is that “Every Kid Plays”. This means at any skill level, physical ability, financial means or engagement with other sports. While our focus is to create an environment where everyone can enjoy fun on the diamond, it does create challenges. Thankfully the Board and its partnership with the City of Royal Oak have taken a number of steps to limit any challenges that comes with growth may have on our players, coaches and families.

Recently the Sandlot underwent major changes in the way it operates, the opportunities it provides and adjustments to play on the field. Key areas included: Branding, Financial Stability, Rules of Play, Softball, Skill Development, Tournament Teams/Events, Game Experience and Community Engagement.


Branding - From a new logo design, custom uniforms for the players to take home to increasing awareness to players, parents and coaches of our offerings, we are positioning ourselves to not only be a destination for the rec diamond sports player but also a home for skills development and higher level competition.

Financial Stability - Critical for all non-profits is to have a sound financial base that allows for the ability to provide resources to coaches and players, account for unexpected costs, maintain a fair registration rate and support players that may need financial assistance. A major benefit to our partnership with the City of Royal Oak is the free field use and field preparation. This directly benefits all participants with our ability to keep registration fees as low as possible.

Rules of Play - In 2024, all divisions were adjusted for 2-year age gaps (then High School) to closer align with National Governing Bodies and local communities. This has resulted in better play on the field, increased confidence among players and standardized rules of play.

Softball - This continues to be a challenge for us and many communities around metro Detroit. But this is an area we are taking head on and are committed to helping provide a high level, fun, engaging place for our girls to play. Support from the High School, City and local coaches have helped us stop a decline, but growth is now a priority.

Skill Development - The opportunities we provide coaches and players to improve their knowledge and skills on the field have changed over the last two years. We now offer multiple coaching clinics, 4x as many off-season training sessions, all new in-season skills lessons and invested in a new Director of Training and Development.



Tournament Teams/Events - While we pride ourselves in maximizing the rec sports experience, we are growing a hybrid model for our most competitive players. The uniqueness to the 7 teams we have is that they still participate in the rec league while also competing at high level tournaments around the State. We have also reimaged our Stars Tournament that brings in over 50 teams to Royal Oak for a 3-day competition.

Game Experience - “Between the Lines” is ultimately what we program. We are continually making improvements to the experience of our game action from rules changes, elevation of the umpires we hire, incorporating more “travel” level players to the game, increasing games played vs. neighboring cities and great fields to play on. The city of Royal Oak has done a tremendous job supporting us by preparing fields for games each and every day from May - July

Community Engagement - We realize to maximize the impact and experience we can provide our players/coaches/families, we need a full commitment from our entire Royal Oak community to see our visions a reality. Key steps have happened in the last 18 months including:

- ROHS/ROMS - Partnerships with the High School and Middle School softball and baseball staff and players to help with our clinics and overall player development
- Royal Oak Leprechauns - Collaboration with our “Big Brothers” at Memorial Park to allow our families to enjoy the games all season long. This includes free clinics, teams of the game and free tickets to each and every ROSL player.
- Neighboring Communities - Continuing to expand the games we play in neighboring communities and assisting these groups in funding, training, umpiring and finding a home for all players.
- City of Royal Oak - Aligning with our vision, addressing challenges and celebrating wins with the entire team has also been a focus over the past 18 months. Clarity on games, schedules, field needs and more has allowed for us to maximize the use of the diamonds throughout the city.

So far, the changes have resulted in higher registrations and engagement. Last year our registration numbers were up 20% and on pace for another increase this year. Training registration numbers have increased 50% with softball clinics up over 90%.

While we are excited about the growth of our league, it does create challenges where partnering with the City isn't just an option but a necessity. Playing diamond sports requires us to be on a specific field that requires continued maintenance, linings and care. We will do all we can as an organization to partner with the city to maximize space available for tee-ball, softball and baseball play.

The future is bright! Neighboring leagues have asked us to incorporate them into our model, families love the rec side of sports while also providing skills development and we have many ideas to expand programming not only in the summer but year-round as well.

While we are excited about the growth, changes and path we are on, we know there is much more that can be done. The Sandlot family is excited to be a positive experience for all we impact in our community.