

NLLL Board Decision to Switch to Draft Option B (annual re-draft) in 2010

NLLL has employed for many years a “keeper” system for its Majors division. Under this system, once players are placed on a Majors team, they remain on the team for the duration of their Little League eligibility. This is known as Little League International’s Option A (“keeper draft”) system. Little League International also approves of an “annual-redraft” system, where the managers redraft players each year.

On December 4, 2008, the board of NLLL voted unanimously to switch from our current system to the re-draft system, beginning in the 2010 season. The 2009 draft will take place under our existing local variant of the Option A (keeper) rules. The 2010 draft and beyond will take place under the Option B (redraft) rules.

The change only affects our Majors division, as all other divisions are already “redrafted” every year.

This document is intended to provide some clarity about the process and rationale behind this change that NLLL is making.

This has been a carefully considered decision, with many pros and cons reviewed for both options. In addition to reviewing NLLL’s history with the current draft method, we also got extensive feedback from other leagues within our district that have made the same switch, from leagues in other regions of the country, and from district and regional Little League officials as part of this process.

The following were among the major factors impacting our decision.

Points against making the change included:

1. **It’s been working, why change it?** NLLL is considered an excellent league and it has been using the current method for a long time.
2. **Camaraderie develops among the players on a team as well as the coaches and managers**, and that is increased with years together.
3. **Some managers strongly prefer the current method:** It is rewarding to develop a team over many years and that’s part of the fun for the manager.
4. **The current method balances out over time:** Even if you have a losing team one season, within a few years the teams tend to see-saw back and forth with the current draft method so everyone has their shot at being a winner over time.
5. **Skill development:** A child might learn a skill from one manager and then get confused when taught differently from another the next year.

Points in favor of changing to Option B (re-draft):

- **Team parity and competitiveness:** Redrafting annually increases the chances that every player will be drafted onto a team that is balanced and has the opportunity to be competitive. Leagues that use a re-draft have experienced much more equitable teams distribution and far fewer extreme outcomes. Lopsided

teams are less developmentally valuable for players on either end of the lopsided outcome than balanced teams.

- **Learning and skill building:** Players will have the opportunity to learn from more managers and coaches over their NLLL career, each with different skill sets and strengths.
- **Avoiding multi-year incompatible situations:** In the occasional situation where a player and manager do not “click” for whatever reason, that player will only be in that situation for one year.
- **Social benefits to the players:** Developing bonds with more children as teammates over their careers in NLLL.
- **Community benefit to the families in the league:** Developing relationships with more families in the league.
- **Fresh start each year for players:** Giving them the shot, for instance, to make a new position with a new manager.
- **Eliminate the “11 year old problem”:** A byproduct of the keeper system is that managers will often prefer to draft a younger player of equal or even lesser ability in the draft over an older player, since the younger player may mature within that manager’s system over several years to be stronger in the long run. This creates the so-called 11 year old problem, where players who were not selected as 10s into the majors are highly likely to be “stuck” in the Jr Majors again the following year even if they are equally or more qualified than an incoming 10 year old. In a redraft, the managers are motivated to assemble the best team for the current season instead, which treats all incoming players equally.
- **Improve the quality of the tournament teams:** With players getting coached by more managers over their LL careers, leagues report the redraft system is improving the quality of their all-star teams.
- **Upper-middle players:** Other leagues have found that the redraft has allowed, for instance, the #4 and 5 players on what would have been the unbalanced top team to emerge as the #1 or 2 player on a more balanced team instead. This gives those players an opportunity to shine as stars instead of being a bottom of the rotation player.
- **Makes it easier to expand/contract the number of Majors teams:** We have been at six Majors teams for some time, but the league is growing and there are “bubbles” of players in different age groups coming through (for instance, the group that will be 9 in 2009 is a very large group). It may be desirable to expand or contract the number of teams in Majors any given year (as we have with Jr Majors for instance in 2008, going to 7 teams). That is almost impossible to achieve in a keeper league.
- **Little League International is moving this direction anyway:** The expectation is that Little League International will make the re-draft the only method within a few years either way. Momentum for that change has been growing at the International Congress, with 53% favoring a motion to eliminate the Option A keeper method in 2007. The next vote will be in 2010, when it is expected that a super-majority of 66% will eliminate Option A entirely.
- **Our district has been moving this direction:** Of the 12 leagues in attendance at the annual district meeting, 7 have moved to some form of redraft. These league

presidents, some of whom were strongly opposed to the change at the time, all reported strong satisfaction with the redraft and now consider it to be the clearly better system. Our district administrator also strongly suggests this change.

While we consider there to be merit to the points in favor of keeping things as is, we felt the benefits of making a change far outweigh the benefits of the existing system, *particularly* from the players' perspective, even if less so from the managers'. For that reason, we have voted unanimously to change systems.

Regarding the points for keeping things as-is, we felt they were outweighed as follows:

- Regarding point 1, although the current system has been “working,” the redraft has been working even better when we look outside at what’s happening elsewhere. Even within our own league, every player is familiar with the redraft from the lower divisions, and those divisions on average have reported higher levels of satisfaction in our survey than the majors.
- Regarding point 2, the benefits of making more friends from multiple teams was regarded as being equally if not more beneficial than bonding with a small number on ones own team.
- Regarding point 3, we are sensitive to this issue for managers, but ultimately felt that our duty is first and foremost to provide the best possible experience for the players.
- Regarding point 4, we felt the benefit of having parity every season outweighed the fact that the current system can correct over multiple seasons.
- Regarding point 5, we felt the skill development benefits of having one manager were outweighed by the benefits of experiencing multiple managers over time.

So for these reasons, after much research and deliberation, the board has decided to make the change to draft option B. However, for a few reasons, we have decided to wait one year to implement the change:

- Give the manager a chance to adjust to the new system.
- Give the league some time to digest the change.
- Allow this year’s 12 year olds, who were expecting to be on the same teams, to finish that way.

Note that this decision has no effect on:

- Lower divisions – they already redraft.
- 2009 – the draft method will be the same (although we expect managers will select the best incoming players regardless of age rather than preferring the younger players)
- 12 year olds trying out for the majors – all incoming 12 year olds must be drafted into the majors by LL-I rule.
- Any current majors players being on the majors – all returning majors players get drafted first in a redraft; all are guaranteed a spot on a majors team.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Keith Camhi, [NLLL President](#).