

Little League® International Finds Jackie Robinson West Little League Violated Rules and Regulations

 littleleague.org/media/llnewsarchive/2015/January-April/little-league-jrw-ruling.htm

After an extensive review of the operations of Jackie Robinson West Little League and Illinois District 4, the Little League International Charter/Tournament Committee has determined that the Jackie Robinson West Little League and Illinois District 4 Administrator knowingly violated Little League International Rules and Regulations by placing players on their team who did not qualify to play because they lived outside the team's boundaries.



The Charter/Tournament Committee has decided to vacate the league's wins from the 2014 Little League Baseball® International Tournament, including its Great Lakes Regional and United States Championships, and suspend team manager, Darold Butler, from Little League activity. Illinois District 4 Administrator, Michael Kelly, has also been removed from his position. Jackie Robinson West Little League has been placed on probation with its tournament privileges suspended until such a time that new leadership in the positions of President, Anne Haley, and Treasurer, Bill Haley, have been elected or appointed, and that the league is fully compliant with all Little League International Regulations.

Little League International found that Jackie Robinson West Little League used a falsified boundary map for their 2014 tournament, and that Jackie Robinson West Little League officials met with other leagues in Illinois District 4 to try to get the territory they wrongfully claimed was theirs for their 2014 tournament.

"For more than 75 years, Little League has been an organization where fair play is valued over the importance of wins and losses," said Mr. Stephen D. Keener, Little League International President and CEO. "This is a heartbreaking decision. What these players accomplished on the field and the memories and lessons they have learned during the Little League World Series tournament is something the kids can be proud of, but it is unfortunate that the actions of adults have led to this outcome. As our Little League operations staff learned of the many issues and actions that occurred over the course of 2014 and prior, as painful as this is, we feel it a necessary decision to maintain the integrity of the Little League program. No team can be allowed to attempt to strengthen its team by putting players on their roster that live outside their boundaries."

TIMELINE

In September 2014, following the conclusion of the Little League Baseball World Series, a league official from a neighboring district in Illinois first expressed concerns pertaining to players' residencies to the attention of the Little League Central Region staff in Indianapolis, Ind. At the end of October, that local league official then provided additional documentation to support his allegations. Little League International operations staff fully reviewed the allegation and information. Using age and residency/school attendance and boundary documentation provided to Little League International by Jackie Robinson West Little League and verified by the District Administrator, Little League International determined the players' eligibility based on all of the information that had been provided at that time. In mid-December, during this process, however, Little League began to learn of multiple issues with boundary maps and operational process with multiple leagues in Illinois District 4. In an effort to be fair to all the leagues in Illinois District 4, Little League International began organizing one-on-one, private meetings with leagues in the district where they could discuss their concerns and work on preparing for the 2015 season. In early January,

through a media report, Little League first learned of a league within Illinois District 4 alleging misconduct by Jackie Robinson West Little League.

On January 31, Little League International officials held meetings with Illinois District 4 officials and the leagues in the district. During these meetings, Little League International learned of several operational issues within the entire District that have occurred over the course of many years under different leadership at the District level. These issues are spread amongst leagues throughout the district and include a breakdown in communication of roles and responsibilities among District and league leadership and misunderstandings in multiple league boundaries. Various local league officials confirmed that the boundary issues stem from a boundary map redrafting process that started prior to the 2013 season and includes maps that were agreed upon amongst all the leagues, but had never been properly submitted to Little League International through the official process. Little League International also learned that Jackie Robinson West Little League knowingly expanded its boundaries to include territory that belonged to other leagues in the district without approval from the other leagues or the Little League International Charter Committee, as stated in Little League's Official Regulations and Playing Rules. Little League International also found that Jackie Robinson West Little League used a falsified boundary map for their 2014 tournament, and that Jackie Robinson West Little League officials met with other leagues in Illinois District 4 to try to get the territory they wrongfully claimed was theirs for their 2014 tournament. The decision is based on falsifying documents and illegally expanding boundaries to include residences that would verify the players' eligibility.

"Little League takes these matters very seriously and has spent countless hours gathering information about the many issues facing Jackie Robinson West Little League and Illinois District 4," said Mr. Keener. "During our review, it became clear that both Jackie Robinson West officials and District Administrator, Mike Kelly signed documents to make players eligible who should not have been."

Within Little League's operational structure, it is the District Administrator's responsibility to verify player eligibility based on documents supporting participation, age, and residency/school enrollment that are signed by the League President, League Player Agent, and Team Manager. Those signatures and documents are then reviewed at every level of the tournament, based on the District Administrator's initial verification. During tournament play, if any league has a question about player eligibility on an opposing team, they are encouraged to file an official protest, which is reviewed by the Little League International Tournament Committee. At no point during the 2014 regular season, tournament season, or since allegations of misconduct began to be reported, has Little League International been contacted by a league in Illinois District 4 about the use of illegal players within the Jackie Robinson West Little League. It wasn't until the meetings in January, 2015 that local league officials confirmed that they had direct knowledge of this rule violation, but never reported it to Little League International, as is common with local league operations.

"Little League relies heavily on the commitment of principled volunteers to serve as a system of checks and balances in preparation of and throughout Little League International Tournament Play," said Mr. Keener. "Unfortunately, no allegations against Jackie Robinson West Little League were made until well after the tournament ended, contributing to the difficulty of resolving these many complex issues. As an organization, Little League has faced issues similar to this in the past, and we felt that we must take the appropriate action set by that precedent."

This is the third time in the 68-year history of the Little League Baseball World Series that punitive actions have led to vacating wins from a league – first in 1992 with the disqualification of Zamboanga (Philippines) City Little League and again in 2001 with Rolando Paulino Little League from Bronx, N.Y.

By default, the 2014 championships vacated by Jackie Robinson West Little League will be given to the other finalists in those games, with Mountain Ridge Little League (Las Vegas, Nev.) handed the 2014

United States Little League Baseball World Series Championship; New Albany (Ind.) Little League handed the 2014 Great Lakes Regional Little League Baseball Championship; Tri-Cities Little League (West Dundee, Ill.) given the 2014 Illinois State Little League Baseball Championship; Lansing (Ill.) Little League handed the 2014 Illinois Section 3 Little League Baseball Championship; and Rosemoor Little League (Chicago) given the 2014 Illinois District 4 Little League Baseball Championship.

“Little League is committed to helping all of our volunteers in more than 80 countries provide positive baseball and softball experiences for children in more than 7,000 communities,” said Mr. Keener. “As there are many issues to resolve within Illinois District 4, our operations staff is committed to working with local volunteers to ensure that all the leagues in the district are operated fairly and under full compliance of Little League International’s rules and regulations and that the children in the Chicago area have a meaningful Little League experience in 2015 and beyond.”

Little League operations staff will be appointing a special advisor to Illinois District 4. The advisor will be veteran District Administrator with knowledge of the Chicago area. The Little League operations staff and the special advisor will work with Illinois District 4 Officials and league leadership to ensure all operations and boundary issues fully comply with Little League International rules and regulations and properly communicated through the appropriate channels with the Little League Charter Committee, at which point, Jackie Robinson West Little League’s probation will be lifted.

Little League International is committed to providing the best youth baseball and softball experience in the world, and will continue to work with its volunteers, parents, and players to ensure that Little League remains the premier youth sports organization in the world.