

ABKA elite team program won't run in 2021

It was supposed to be a historic year for Aurora-King Baseball Association.

The AKBA organization was set to field their very first 15U elite baseball team set to be held in the Elite Baseball League of Ontario (EBLO). Higher than select. Higher than rep.

This year, the club was supposed to travel to Cincinnati. Designed to expose young, talented Canadian baseball players to prolific players in the United States rated at the same level or potentially even higher, it would have given kids here an incredible opportunity to play in front of scouts.

Elite baseball fields players between the ages of 15 and 18, and most of these highly-talented athletes had to endure what we have all had to endure: COVID-19. Shutdown. Uncertainty. The whole nine-yards.

From March until July, crickets were the only presence on a baseball diamond.

Sadly, AKBA will have to wait to properly field their Elite team.

Elite baseball head coach Jordan Keon tells The Aurora that under EBLO rules teams moving up an age group to 16U must have a second team at the 15U level.

AKBA had plans to build a 15U program for 2021, but COVID-19 put all those plans on hold. So, AKBA, won't field an elite team in 2021, but the association has plans to start up the elite program in 2022 and beyond.

Just like other local leagues, luckily the kids had the weight lifted off their shoulders when the time came to play baseball again. Limited of course, but it didn't matter.

Starting in late-July, AKBA teams were able to start practicing with stage two restrictions which meant only 10 on the field at a time, Keon said.

In early August with stage three, teams were able to resume full team practices. All of the leagues were cancelled, but teams were able to start playing exhibition games in a three-four team 'bubbles' with modified playing rules to limit contact.

The 15U elite team specifically competed in 10 exhibition games against Newmarket and Vaughan. Keon said it was great to get out on the diamond and put on display the results of all the hard work these children have put in.

Some teams continued to play fall ball exhibition games in September as long as the weather permitted. And how could you blame them? If Major League Baseball salvaged their fall-baseball postseason it's good the kids can do the same.

But the battle is far from over. Indoor training restrictions could be the next impediment should public health deem indoor meetings unsafe.

All school gym permits have been cancelled until at least February.

AKBA will recover in 2022 and hopefully, the future potential careers from the Elite baseball program will not be in jeopardy. Sadly, nobody has the answer to that right now.

By Robert Belardi