

Local diamonds are packed for AKBA's second season

By Jake Courtepatte

It has been no secret that the resurgence of the Toronto Blue Jays has made a lasting impact on minor league ball. Jose Bautista's epic bat flip and the Jays' thrilling 2015 season has inspired a new generation of players across the country, with local organizations feeling the pressure to provide for such large numbers.

A desire by kids country-wide to get on the diamond has been felt at home by the Aurora King Baseball Association (AKBA), now in its second season after completing a merger between the Aurora Baseball Association and King Township Baseball Association in early 2015.

According to organization president Allen Wilson, the merger has so far been a success. With waiting lists in all four house league divisions, the program has seen a sharp rise in registration just from its inaugural year, fielding 520 players in 2015 and now looking to get close to one thousand in the game.

Wilson and his team came into the season expecting growth, but not many would have predicted such a staggering increase in interested youth.

Even with 22 parks across Aurora, King City, Nobleton, and Kettleby, the organization has been hard-pressed to find park time for the high number of players, including the 100-or-so involved in the rep programs.

The ABA and KTBA formed the umbrella organization with the main goal of increasing registration and access to facilities, while decreasing overhead costs.

Howard Birnie, the President of the Leaside Baseball Club in Toronto, told CBC earlier this month it's a baseball boom strikingly similar to the one experienced in the early 1990s, when the Blue Jays won back-to-back World Series championships.

Though the AKBA's houseleague program is not set to kick off until just after the Victoria Day long weekend, the rep programs are already taking to the field. The Mosquito team took to the field for their opening game Monday, besting the Stouffville Yankees by a score of 12 ? 6. Eleven rep teams will be fielded this year by the AKBA.

A number of tournaments are also on the schedule for the AKBA, first hosting a Minor PeeWee tournament in mid-May. Five more tournaments will follow in Aurora throughout the summer season