

Youth baseball in Lebanon will undergo a dramatic change this spring as sponsors of the local Little League and Dixie Youth organizations have agreed to a merger of sorts.

For years, boys wishing to play baseball in Lebanon were forced to choose between participating in Little League, sponsored locally by the Kiwanis Club or playing Dixie Youth Baseball under the direction of the Lebanon Rotary.

While both operations offered baseball for boys between the ages of 9-12, there were marked differences in the style of play, postseason tournament paths and volunteer involvement.

Factoring in the increasing popularity of travel teams which pulled players away from both leagues, conversations to combine have been ongoing since the conclusion of the 2012 season.

"We were depleting the talent pool in our 9 to 12 year old baseball leagues," said M. F. Donnell, a Rotary member and Dixie Youth league official. "Running two separate operations was the way to go years ago, but with today's youth baseball choices, it makes complete sense to combine our efforts to offer the kids in Lebanon one super league for baseball."

The merged league will operate two divisions under the name Lebanon Youth Baseball League.

Players ages 9-10 will compete in a traditional Little League format while all 11-12's will play the Dixie Youth's "OZone" format with a larger field and base-running rules identical to middle school and high school ball.

An advisory board was formed Tuesday, Jan. 14 comprised of Rotary Club and Kiwanis Club members as well as a neutral member from the baseball community. Those elected to serve include: Donnell, Rick Smith, Mac Griffin, Richard Whitener, John McDearman and Eddie Pawlawski.

Fred Dawson, longtime local youth baseball coach and advocate, was selected as the “at-large” member of the seven-member panel and was voted chairman of the board.

“This year we are running two websites because of timing issues,” said Sean Patrick, 9-10 year old Little League division president. “We want this season to run as smoothly as possible so having two sites up for registration was the least confusing option for our players and parents.”

“We are thrilled to come together with the Kiwanis Club to offer the best options for our young people. We are looking forward to tryouts in February and will continue to offer local youth baseball with no cost to play,” added Rotarian John Pope, 11-12 year old Dixie Youth division president.”

Signups set Jan. 26 -- Both divisions of Lebanon Youth Baseball sponsored by Kiwanis & Rotary will hold in-person signups between the hours of 9-11 a.m Saturday, Jan. 26 at the Coles Ferry Elementary cafeteria.

Tryouts planned Feb. 16 -- Tryouts for both the 9-10 and 11-12 divisions are set for Saturday, Feb. 16 at the youth baseball fields in the Baird Park Complex. Check online for times and field assignments at www.lebanonrotarybaseball.com or www.kiwanislittleleague.pointstreaksites.com

Local history lesson -- Many years ago, there were two baseball leagues, Kiwanis and Optimist, in Lebanon -- both operating as Little League franchises. To cut down on recruiting, boys with birthdays in the even months were assigned to Kiwanis teams while boys born in odd months played Optimist.