



## FROM THE DESK OF ED SKOVRON

with Ed Skovron, AAU Baseball National Chairperson



# Year in Review

**T**he 2010 season has set the pace for the rebirth of AAU Baseball and has been a very busy, productive, and exciting year.

I became the National Chair for AAU Baseball in 2009 and I believe in listening and planning. 2009 was spent studying the status of AAU Baseball and, through constant communication, determining what our membership liked, disliked, and wanted to see implemented. Those studies helped chart the direction for 2010.

AAU Baseball has redefined and reorganized itself in the eyes of all who participate in the youth baseball world. New leaders have been implemented in ten states across the country. These new leaders are competent and innovative. They are respected in their areas as baseball operators and administrators with integrity who run top-quality events.

A new and unique tournament format was introduced for our National Championships in 2010. Teams enjoyed a 7-game guarantee for only \$695! Teams were not pigeonholed into divisions upon registration for the tournament. Who is to say if a top-rated team from one state is better than a team who is considered more middle-of-the-pack team from another state at the outset? Instead, all teams in the tournament were placed into pools of four. After the first round of pool play (3 games), skill levels become more apparent. The first- and second-place teams in the pool are placed in the Diamond Division, the remaining teams move to the Gold Division. The Gold Division is not a Classic or a consolation round. It is its own National Tournament as is the Diamond Division Tournament. The awards are identical for the two. This grouping just allows teams with similar skill sets to play together. All the teams loved it.

It wasn't just the tournament format that was enhanced. AAU Baseball's 9U through 13U National Championships were held at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at Walt Disney World Resort® in Orlando, Florida. Formerly Disney's Wide World of Sports, the complex was re-imagined this year. From the time the AAU Baseball athletes arrived in the parking lot to the time they walked off the field for the last time and through the exit turnstiles, they felt like superstars. Opening Ceremonies could not be matched for their rousing, heart-pumping, stand-stomping, breathtaking show that ended in an athlete lighting the torch to kick off the games, followed by fireworks.

Throughout the event, players and coaches were interviewed – ESPN style – and then they saw themselves the following day on the super screen monitors throughout the complex. No other baseball venue can offer this kind of experience.

There were so many teams registered for the tournament that several off-site facilities had to be used. In 2011, registration will be capped so that every game will be played at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. That means teams will need to register early to assure themselves of a spot in Nationals.

I want to congratulate the AAU 12U National Champions, who represented AAU Baseball at the New Era National Youth Championships (NYBC) in Memphis, TN this past August. The Lamorinda Monarchs defeated the USSSA representative –

Tomateros de California – in the championship game to win the 2010 New Era NYBC Championship and confirm once again that AAU has the very top talent in baseball.

The AAU 10U National Champions, Team Florida, also performed very well, making it all the way to the semi-finals before being eliminated.

The New Era National Youth Championships have been in existence for three years. AAU has won either the 10U or the 12U division in each of those years. No other organization has done that. AAU Baseball continues to prove to the world that we have the best athletes in the country in our program.

In addition to the AAU National Championships, ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex also hosted the AAU 14U and 15U Super Showcases. The Showcases featured 12 of the top teams in the country in each the 14U and 15U age groups. Teams played four pool-play games then all advanced to a single-elimination championship round. Between pool play and single-elimination, each of them participated in a combine hosted by a professional national scouting bureau. The results of the combine are posted on the scouting bureau's website for college and pro recruiters to view.

In 2010, the AAU league concept was embraced by clubs all over the country. There are travel ball leagues, middle school leagues, high school leagues, and recreational leagues in AAU. League play offers teams an alternative to playing in tournaments every weekend, yet they still play top-quality competition when they participate in an AAU league. School systems are eliminating interscholastic sports because of budget cuts, but forming AAU school leagues lets them continue to play other schools at a very affordable price.

AAU introduced Player Evaluation Days in cities across the country to record and gauge players' skills. Player Evaluation Days are conducted by Global Scouting Bureau based in Louisiana and Florida. Evaluations were scheduled in twenty cities across the United States.

What's in store for 2011? Watch for even more new AAU programming and tournaments, including Power Rankings. You can look forward to at least one Super Regional a quarter in many states. Even more District Directors and tournament operators are coming on board. It is already stacking up to be one of the best seasons ever in AAU Baseball.

AAU Baseball will continue on this path of growth and creativity to make sure we offer the best national program available in the United States. Communication, quality National Championships, Super Regionals, and local tournaments, competitive regional leagues as a product of the AAU National Baseball League, and the highest quality of play are the keys to our success. Listening to what our membership is telling us and then working together, we are achieving our goals.

I'd like to thank all our current membership for their input and support of AAU Baseball and invite everyone else to join us and see for themselves why everyone is buzzing about AAU.