



North Kansas City Area Baseball League

2026 Program Updates

As we head toward the 2026 season, we want to share several important updates and improvements we have made across the NKCA Baseball program. These changes are rooted in one simple goal:

To create the best possible baseball experience for young athletes – focused on development, competition, fun and long-term love for the game.

For more than 80 years, NKCA prioritized the development of baseball in the Northland for all levels, introduction through competitive. The industry has grown and transformed over the past 80 years, and we have listened to coaches, parents, and families demanding more affordable services near our home. I sat down with my board, and we developed or made available three pathways to continue developing the youth in our league. Everything we do is built around providing families with a high-quality, age-appropriate baseball environment where kids can grow on and off the field.

Below are the key updates we're excited to roll out for 2026:

- Tournament Play; a Smarter healthier Model
- TBall; built for fun and learning
- Road to Williamsport; NKCA All-Stars

Tournament Play at NKCA: A Smarter, Healthier Model

We are adding two cost-effective tournaments to our Spring Schedule. We recognize that some teams want tournament experiences. After extensive analysis that included considerations for things such as tournament entry fees, gate fees, travel, on-road-meals, we believe **there is a better way**.

Our New NKCA Tournament Model

We're introducing limited, well-structured tournaments for both Machine Pitch and Kid Pitch age groups designed to:

- Control costs
- Structure weekend scheduling to consider family's time and commitment
- Protect young arms
- Maintain competitive integrity
- Keep baseball fun

Tournament Highlights

- \$200 team registration fee (with a \$100 credit issued after the event)
- Gate fee: \$7.50 (ages 13+, otherwise free)
- Games spread across Thursday–Sunday
- Minimal Saturday and Sunday games

Tournament Dates

- May 14–17 (Sponsored by B&B Theatres)
- June 11–14 (Sponsored by Whataburger)

Each age group will be limited to **8 teams**, with priority given to NKCA league teams — creating opportunities for players who may not normally experience tournament play. This Spring is a test - if there is a higher demand, we will look for additional, similarly-structured tournaments and build toward that goal.

View the full 2026 tournament schedule [HERE](#).

T-Ball (Ages 4–6): Built for Learning & Fun

What's Changing – Why It Matters

We have completely re-imagined our T-Ball program to better serve our youngest players. Teams will begin weekly practices on 3/31 through the end of the 6 games season. We have hired a T-Ball Program Manager that will be present to help all the coaches at practice and games. T-Ball teams now have reduced rosters, from 12-14 down to 8. Since batted balls rarely make it to the outfield, our goal is to keep kids engaged in the field, learning the positions, and developing skills that progress to more competitive levels of baseball. During the game, each player will bat every inning. In addition to these changes, our program manager will have in-game drills for each team to work on.

Benefits to smaller rosters sizes...

- More swings
- More throws
- More attention from coaches
- More confidence from each child

Benefits to adding a new T-Ball Program Manager

A dedicated Program Manager whose sole focus is:

- Organizing age-appropriate practices
- Teaching core fundamentals
- Supporting coaches and parents
- Ensuring consistent player development across teams

Benefits to structured practices with parent involvement

Development is best when parents are engaged. Structured practices:

- Improve skill progression
- Increase player confidence
- Help parents understand the game
- Create a pathway for future coaches

Lower cost

Thanks to these improvements, T-Ball registration has been reduced from over \$100 to \$75 for 2026 – making the program more accessible.

Our goal is simple: maximize FUNdamentals, development, and lifelong memories.

Full T-Ball details available [HERE](#).

Road to Williamsport: A Once-In-a-Lifetime Opportunity for NKCA All-Stars

Through our partnership with the KC Royals Amateur Development System (R.A.D.S.) and for the first time ever. More details to come but at its core:

- 12U players now have a legitimate pathway to the LLWS through the development of an NKCA All-Star Program
- NKCA will identify a 'Legacy' coach, with no ties to a 12U team to take 12 players from our league to the KC Royals Youth Tournament to compete for a Missouri/Regional spot in the LLWS
- The KC Royals and the LLWS have agreed to pay expenses for teams that progress.

Why this matters

- A chance to pursue a childhood dream
- National exposure and elite competition
- Unforgettable experiences for players and their families
- Community pride and inspiration for future athletes

We are incredibly proud to be part of the Royals Amateur Development System and excited about the opportunities this creates for NKCA families.

Learn more about the Road to Williamsport initiative [HERE](#).

Looking Ahead

These changes reflect who we are as a league:

- Community-driven
- Player-focused
- Development-first
- Family-friendly

We believe there's a service gap between recreational teams and tournament-travel teams, but that the quality/cost of bridging that gap doesn't exist in the baseball market today. As a league, we will do our best to help players, teams, and clubs create a cost-effective tournament schedule while providing an opportunity for families that don't intend to play travel-tournament ball to have opportunities for additional development.

This is a first swing at addressing those issues, so please let us know any feedback you have as we develop feedback for what we are working toward.

Thanks to our players, families, coaches, and supporters. NKCA Baseball proudly **celebrates more than 80 years of serving youth in Clay and Platte counties**. We're excited to continue growing, innovating, and investing in the next generation of Northland baseball players.

Thank you for being part of the NKCA family.

Michael Cantwell
Executive Director
NKCA Baseball League