

PONY History 101



PONY Baseball/Softball, Inc., began with organization of the Pony League in Washington, Pennsylvania, in the summer of 1951. This was a transition league for 13- and 14-year-old players designed to take graduates of Little League baseball from that diamond to the regulation-size diamond used by adult-aged players. Pony bases were set at 80 feet apart; the regulation diamond has 90 feet between the bags.



Rich Comfort takes a cut in the first ever Pony game. He hit two homers for the Redwings, June 18, 1951.



Growth of Pony League, primarily by word of mouth, was rapid. By the end of the second season, the original six teams in Washington were joined by 505 others in 106 leagues around the country. A national tournament was a logical step, and the first Pony League World Series was held in 1952. The first World Series, played at Washington High School Stadium, was an eight team tournament. San Antonio, Texas, was the first national champ, led by future Major Leaguers Joe Horlen and Mike White. Pony Field, now a registered landmark, was not quite ready for the inaugural World Series. The first national championship tournament held at Pony Field was in 1953. Jim Woods of Chicago played in that World Series, along with the 1954 tournament. Three years later, he became the first Pony grad to reach the Major Leagues.



Lew Hays, among the founders of the Pony League, was named Commissioner of the new league when it was incorporated for national organization in early 1953. Mr. Hays held that post until 1964, when he was named president. Upon his death in 1998, the original Pony League Field in Washington, PA, was renamed Lew Hays Pony Field.

World Series Timeline

1952 ————— 2005

1952

first World Series, only one year after Pony's founding

1953

first World Series played at new Pony Field

1959

first participant from outside U.S. (Monterrey, Mexico)

1964

World Series leaves Washington for four-year stint



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Actor and comedian Joe E. Brown combined his love of baseball with his love of kids to make Pony a respected entity in youth sports. The president from 1953 to 1964 provided the credo, "Teach them to play by the rules and they will learn to live by the rules."



The ball used for the first Pony pitch, June 18, 1951

Roy Gillespie, a sportswriter from Illinois, was talked into joining Hays in Washington to help promote the Pony program. Another tireless worker for boys baseball, Gillespie became president when Mr. Hays retired. He is now honored posthumously, as the Pony championship trophy is now known as the Roy Gillespie Trophy. Upon his retirement, Abe Key became Pony's fourth president.

With Pony baseball expanding from coast to coast in the United States, it was inevitable that the program would go international. Pony moved into Mexico and Canada

early on, and then expanded to the Far East. The more recent effort to include Europe is gaining strength each year. In 1959, Monterrey, Mexico, was the first city to send a non-American team to the Pony League World Series. The 1968 World Series was touted as the first international series, as teams from Venezuela and Canada competed with teams from the U.S., including Hawaii.



Action from the first World Series at Pony Field, 1953

The 1972 Monterrey team was the first foreign Pony champion. Teams from Puerto Rico, Korea, and Taiwan have since won the title. Puerto Rico has also won titles in Mustang, Bronco, and Colt. Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines have won the Bronco World Series.

Children don't do what you tell them to, children will do what you do!



Lew Hays

PONY Baseball is more than just Pony League. In 1953, John Laslo, long-time mayor of Martins Ferry, Ohio, visited with Hays and discussed organization of a league similar to Pony League for 15- and 16-year-old players.

1968

Canada and Venezuela play in the World Series

1971

Puerto Rico's first time in World Series

1972

Monterrey, Mexico is first non-U.S. champ

1984

Caguas wins Puerto Rico's first title

1969

first winner from outside Continental U.S. (Honolulu, HI)

1981

World Series returns to Washington after being on the "road" 6 of 7 years



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The purpose was to permit players in this age bracket to compete with players of like experience in their first years on the regulation diamond. Starting with the 1960 season, Pony League and Colt League were merged into a single organization.

Bronco League, for 11- and 12-year-old players, was organized in 1961. Pony Baseball officials continued to apply the concept of the graduated diamond to Bronco, setting base paths at 70 feet. In 1970, the Mustang League was developed in Fort Worth, Texas, using a diamond with 60-foot base paths for players nine and ten years old.



In 2004, Greenbrier, VA, coach Patti Hilton became the first female on-field World Series participant

For communities using players of seven and eight years of age, rules were developed for Pinto League, a very elementary form of baseball.



Joe E. Brown

Teach them to play by the rules and they will learn to live by the rules.

Thorbred League was organized in the Tampa, Florida, area and became a part of PONY Baseball in 1973. It provided playing opportunity for those players from 17 through 20 years of age who have not entered professional play and who retain a desire to participate in a community baseball program.

In 1977, Thorbred League age limits were expanded to include 21 year old players, and Palomino League was organized for players 17 and 18. The Thorbred League was discontinued as a PONY program in 1984.

Shetland League, an instructional program for five- and six-year-olds, was formally adopted by PONY for the 1990 season, with rules based on the experiences of a number of league organizations which had conducted play in this age group for several years.

While girls are permitted to play in any of the PONY Baseball leagues, most preferred to compete in leagues with other girls. PONY Baseball provided Softball for Girls leagues in 1976. As the softball program grew, leagues were organized in the same age-based formula as baseball. Pony Softball celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2001, the same year Pony Baseball marked 50 years of excellence.

When I ask them to give 100%, Lord, I ask you to help me give 150%.



Roy Gillespie

This year marks the 54th Pony League World Series and the 43rd championship tournament to be held in Pony's home of Washington, Pennsylvania.

1988

Seoul, Korea wins the first of 3-straight titles for Far East



1994

Tai Tong wins first Chinese-Taipei title in televised World Series



1998

Pony Field renamed Lew Hays Pony Field following the founder's death

1997

World Series goes online to the world with launch of ponyworldseries.com

2001

Pony Baseball marks 50th anniversary with special World Series

