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Fundamentals, Fitness, and Fun at Baseball Boot Camp

More than 200 baseball players and coaches came to Perris Aug. 25 to take part in a boot camp that focused on the fundamentals of the sport—batting, running, throwing, fielding, base-running and most importantly—teamwork.

The camp, held at the Big League Dreams sports complex in the City, marked the latest success in the ongoing Live Well Perris healthy-eating active-living initiative. Baseball players from the Perris Valley and beyond took part in the camp, undiminished by the nearly triple-digit temperatures. Participants ranged from 5 to 18 years of age. Some were just learning the game; others had years of experience. Girls as well as boys came out to learn.

Veronica Arana, the City staff member who coordinated the camp, said the event drew 187 participants and 25 coaches from the Perris Valley and beyond. She said the camp emphasized teamwork and physical fitness, which makes it an ideal Live Well Perris event.

"It brings the community together," she said. "It gets the kids exercising and teaches them the fundamentals of baseball. We are very pleased with the turnout."



A baseball-skills participant takes aim at the ball during batting practice Sunday at the Big League Dreams sports complex in Perris.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilmembers Al Landers and Mark Yarbrough came out to wish the youngsters well and thank the coaches and parents for bringing out their children for a day of fun and learning.

Landers used a baseball analogy to sum up the day.

"Looks like we've hit a grand slam!" he said. "The atmosphere is great and people are excited to be here despite the heat."

Landers said the Perris City Council first conceived of a sports complex like Big League Dreams 12 years ago. The complex features replicas of Yankee Stadium, Fenway Park, Dodgers Stadium and the Big A, home to the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, as well as batting cages, soccer fields, a pro-shop and snack bar. Perris representatives visited other locations in their search for the perfect complex. It took a decade, but the City has achieved its goal.

"We had a dream to bring it here, and we succeeded," he said.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, City Councilman Al Landers and City Councilman Mark Yarbrough attended the baseball clinic, part of the City's ongoing Live Well Perris health initiative.

Mayor Busch said the City is committed to improving sports opportunities for its youth. Perris hosted a boxing clinic in May, an aquatics clinic in July and his hosting a skateboard clinic Sept. 20 and its signature Tour De Perris bicycle rides on Oct. 4. In addition, the City will break ground on a new soccer complex Oct. 18.

"These kids are learning the skills of baseball and I think that is wonderful," Busch said. "This is what we want to do. And it's great that they get to play at such a world-class site."

Yarbrough said that, years ago when he took his children to participate in youth sports, the facilities were not nearly as good as they are today. The City is in the process of adding additional park sites and is refurbishing existing facilities. He thanked "parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and all family members who came today to support the players and this program."

"With our community, City Council and staff working together as a team, we can achieve great things," he said. "We have achieved great things."



Stretching is an important pre-game ritual, as these participants found out during the baseball camp in Perris.

Players and coaches raved about the Big League Dreams complex.

Coach Dan Gonzalez took part in the skills-camp with members of his travel team, which takes on competitors throughout the West. He coaches 9-year-olds who come from Perris and surrounding communities.

"This facility inspires youth," he said. "It is great the kids get a chance to come out here and see this place. The City of Perris has put on a great event."

His son, Daniel, said that players with experience on the diamond can learn to improve their fielding and batting techniques. Rookies can learn the basics and gain experience by playing in organized leagues.

"You want to keep learning more and more and keep having fun," said Daniel, 9. "This is really a nice place for this type of event."

Junior Duran, 11, said he enjoyed the event because several of his friends also took part in the camp. He picked up several pointers, including the importance to stretching before games.

"It will make me a better player," he said.



A coach tosses a ball to a 5-year-old player taking batting practice at the baseball skills camp which drew more than 200 participants.

Coaches put the players through a series of agility and running drills, watches as their charges hit balls off tees, tossed batting practice and conducted ground-ball and pop-up fielding exercises. The older players took part in situational-baseball skills. At the end of the camp, everyone got dinner provided by the City. Then City Manager Richard Belmudez and Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin presented bicycles, baseball apparel and training gear to more than 20 raffle winners.

Marty Nava and Abel Ventura, Perris coaches who helped organized the skills camp, said the event met and exceeded expectations. After the final drills were completed, they called all the participants together and had them set in a semi-circle.

"Did you learn something?" Ventura asked.

"Yes," came the response from the campers.

"Did you have fun?"

"Yes!"



Fielding ground balls was part of the skills on display at the Live Well Perris baseball camp.

Ventura praised the City of Perris for sponsoring and funding the boot camp.

"It gets the parents involved and it gets the kids involved," he said. "It is good for the City to be involved in the lives of kids in such a positive manner." Nava said the camp shows the City appreciates its youth—and that means a lot to both parents and baseball players. He summed up his reaction to the day's event in nine words: "I love it, I love it, I love it!"

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, a Perris resident who worked with the City to make the Big League Dreams sports complex a reality, said Perris is taking the lead in sponsoring activities that benefit its community.

"Wellness programs are big in Riverside County," Ashley said. "But no one has come close to matching what this City has done through its Live Well Perris program. No one has embraced it like the City of Perris."

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