THOROLD MINOR BASEBALL

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# President's Report

*2026 Annual General Meeting*

## Season Overview

The 2026 season was a good year for Thorold Minor Baseball, marked by continued registration growth, championship success and meaningful progress across our programs. It was also a season that tested our volunteers and reinforced the importance of reliable facilities and a strong organizational structure.

Thorold celebrated its 36th OBA championship when our 9U Rep team captured the "D" title—our first provincial championship at that age level in 26 years. Our 15U Rep team won its second consecutive Niagara District Baseball Championship and finished as the runner-up at the "C" OBA Championships hosted here in Thorold.

Weather presented some of our greatest challenges. Two tournament cancellations and another tournament that could not be completed reduced anticipated revenue and placed considerable pressure on our Tournament Director, scheduler and me. Despite these setbacks, our coaches, volunteers and families helped deliver a successful season for our players.

## Registration and Participation

Thorold Minor Baseball registered 385 players in 2026, an increase of 17 players, or approximately 4.6%, over the 368 reported in 2025.

| Division | House League / Introductory Programs | Rep |
|---|---|---|
| 5U | 69 | — |
| 7U | 73 | — |
| 9U | 51 | 13 |
| 10U | — | 12 |
| 11U | 38 | 11 |
| 12U | — | 13 |
| 13U | 23 | 11 |
| 15U | 28 | 12 |
| 18U | 19 | 12 |
| **Total** | **301** | **84** |

We also fielded an 11U House League Select team with 11 players. These players are included in the House League registration figures above.

The strength of our youngest divisions is encouraging. With 142 players across 5U and 7U, we have a strong foundation for the future, alongside continued participation through our older House League and Rep programs.

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## House League and Introductory Programs

Our 5U and 7U programs continued to receive very positive feedback. Players had fun, developed their skills and gained confidence on the diamond. At 7U, the introduction of more traditional baseball rules and the pitching machine helped prepare players for their next stage of development.

Several of our House League teams competed in championship finals. Although they fell short in those final games, their efforts reflected well on their players, coaches and the organization.

Recruiting coaches for 5U and 7U took longer than we would have liked, but volunteers stepped forward and ensured those programs were supported. Our other teams were well supported by committed coaching groups throughout the season.

## Rep Baseball

Our seven Rep teams provided a combination of competitive success and important development opportunities.

- **9U:** Won two tournaments, finished second in the Niagara District and captured the “D” OBA Championship.
- **10U:** Reached the final of their August tournament. The team did not attend the OBA Championships.
- **11U:** Focused on development, competed well in tournaments appropriate to their level and achieved their goal of winning a game at the OBA Championships.
- **12U:** Earned a tournament runner-up finish and advanced to Sunday play twice.
- **13U:** Reached the final of the Toronto CNE tournament and the semifinals at the OBA Championships.
- **15U:** Won the Thorold tournament, went 3–0 at the Simcoe “A” tournament before rain ended the event, captured a second consecutive Niagara District Championship and finished second at the “C” OBA Championships in Thorold.
- **18U:** Returned as a developing team with a majority of minor-aged players, providing valuable experience and an opportunity to build for the future.

Championships are worth celebrating, but so are the improvements, confidence and commitment developed throughout a season. Our coaches deserve credit for supporting both.

## Player and Coach Development

Our partnership with the Thorold Senior Anchors continued to benefit our players. Together, we offered six free House League development sessions between January and March. The Anchors also supported team practices during the season where assistance was needed. We appreciate their willingness to share their time and baseball knowledge.

We also ran a six-week pitching and catching clinic that was well received. Building on that response, we will look to offer more skill-specific programs in 2027.

The Select development program offered in 2025 did not return in 2026 because of space and scheduling limitations. Restoring a meaningful development offering is a priority for 2027.

We also need a more structured approach to coaching development. Our goal is to build a program that includes NCCP support, practical training on how to teach baseball skills, baseball IQ development and methods for tracking player progression. Investing in our coaches will improve the experience of players throughout the organization. Our goal is to offer this support across all three levels: House League, Select and Rep.

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## Fred Matheson “Play Ball” Fund Program

Through the Fred Matheson “Play Ball” Fund Program, we supported six players in 2026 with a total of $1,430 in bursary funding. This important program helps reduce financial barriers to participation and gives more players the opportunity to play baseball.

We thank NDBA for its continued annual contribution of $500 in support of the program.

## Tournaments and Community Impact

Our tournament schedule included events at 9U, 10U, 11U, 12U, 13U, 15U and 18U, along with the 15U “C” OBA Championships.

Weather significantly disrupted the schedule, particularly at 9U, 10U and 12U. Cancellations and changes affected revenue, created additional scheduling work and required difficult decisions under considerable time pressure.

Even with those disruptions, our tournament economic impact study estimated approximately $261,000 in economic activity across Niagara, including approximately $77,300 in direct, non-accommodation spending at Thorold businesses. The study estimated that cancellations reduced potential regional economic activity by approximately $72,000.

These estimates demonstrate that our tournaments contribute beyond the baseball diamond. Visiting families support restaurants, hotels, retailers and other businesses throughout Thorold and Niagara. That contribution strengthens the case for continued investment in our facilities and tournament program.

Introducing a Tournament Director position with an honorarium made the workload more manageable. It was a valuable investment that could be accommodated within our tournament budgets. We should consider a similar approach to better support scheduling responsibilities.

## Registration and Website

RAMP has moved to a new website format, which Thorold Minor Baseball has adopted. Early feedback on the updated website has been positive.

We have also moved from Global Merchant Services to SportsPayNow for registration payment processing. The new system is more streamlined and should provide minor savings on credit card processing fees.

One of the most useful improvements is the weekly summary report of registration payments received. Previously, this work was handled manually through Global Merchant Services. The new reporting reduces administrative work and makes it easier to track registration payments.

## Financial Management and Sponsorship

Thorold Minor Baseball remains in a strong financial position. Our financial tracking continues to improve through the use of FreshBooks for invoicing, payment tracking and budget monitoring.

Our Treasurer and I identified Rep coach expense tracking as an area requiring improvement. We have now introduced an expense submission form and tracking process to strengthen recordkeeping and accountability. We will continue to use automation where it improves accuracy and reduces administrative work.

Our sponsorship program remained strong. However, we need additional support to engage sponsors, maintain those relationships and thank them consistently. Their contributions are important to our ability to deliver affordable, quality baseball programming.

Some equipment upgrades will be needed, and a plan will be developed for 2027.

## Proposed Umpire Rate Increases for 2027

A significant issue to watch for 2027 is the substantial increase in umpire rates proposed by NBUA. Some proposed rates would rise by approximately 30%, without commitments to increased training or stronger accountability.

NDBA and I will work with NBUA to understand the reasons for these increases and push back on the proposed rates. There is no new funding coming in to cover these additional costs, and increases of this size would place further pressure on our budgets and the affordability of baseball for our families.

## Municipal Partnership and Facilities

Our relationship with the City was challenging early in the season. Inconsistent field standards and conditions led to a meeting with the people involved to clarify expectations and address concerns.

Once Taylor was put in place as the City supervisor, communication, consistency and field quality improved dramatically. We would characterize the second half of the season as one of the best working relationships we have had with the City.

We have met to discuss outstanding needs, including the infield and drainage at McMillan, lighting across our parks, tarp coverage standards during rain and broader facility upgrades. Improvements at McMillan, Sullivan and the addition of lights at Port Robinson remain important priorities.

We are encouraged by the direction of this partnership and confident that we are working toward shared goals. Following the municipal election, we intend to meet with the incoming mayor and councillors to discuss the needs of baseball and the value our programs bring to Thorold.

## Volunteers and Organizational Capacity

Our organization benefits from committed coaches, board members, convenors, umpires, team volunteers and families. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and energy this year.

We made progress in filling key roles. Along with introducing the Tournament Director position, we filled the Select Director role mid-season and have begun putting a stronger plan in place for 2027. Tryouts for our 11U Dedicated Select team have already been completed and the team has been selected.

We still need help with social media, photography, sponsorship, registration and volunteer management. Too many responsibilities continue to sit with a small number of people, particularly the President.

I also recognize my responsibility to delegate more effectively. Doing that successfully requires clear roles, reliable follow-through and people who can take ownership of their responsibilities. We are moving in the right direction, with additional volunteers expressing a willingness to step forward. If we aren’t able to achieve this, I am not certain that the already overstrained role I hold as President will be sustainable much longer. I assure you that I am and have been “all-in,” but meaningful support needs to come.

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## Priorities for 2027

Our priorities for the coming year are to:

- **Advance park improvements with the City:** particularly at McMillan and through lighting improvements, including Port Robinson.
- **Build and deliver a coaching development program:** that supports certification, skill instruction, baseball IQ and player progression.
- **Establish a clear, sustainable Select program:** supported by meaningful development opportunities and a defined place within Thorold Baseball.
- **Explore an end-of-season celebration of Thorold Baseball:** bringing our community together to recognize the season, thank those involved and potentially introduce awards.

Supporting these priorities will require us to continue strengthening our volunteer structure and sharing responsibilities more effectively.

Thorold Baseball has much to be proud of. We continue to grow, our players are developing, and our teams represent our community with pride. Thank you to our players, families, coaches, umpires, volunteers, sponsors, community partners and City staff for helping make the 2026 season possible.

Lastly, I want to thank Robb Norris for being our VP for so many years. Together we navigated COVID, Bucket-Ball, rebuilt the Rep program, retooled our programs, delivered incredible experiences to our players and families and have put Thorold Baseball in an incredibly strong position both financially and in the Niagara Baseball landscape. Thank you for your time, efforts, sweat and passion. Your work will live on for years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

**Chris Green**
President
Thorold Minor Baseball