

Rock-It Baseball Academy Gets Kids Playing, Learning Life Skills*

By Maren Sorensen, Editor, The Woodmen and Cheyenne Editions

Kids and sports aren't always a perfect fit, despite dreams of super-stardom for thousands of youngsters and cultural glorification of sports stars.

Mr. Kris Sparks, "Coach Sparky," developed a program in the Springs entitled the "Rock-It Baseball Academy" based on teaching little league baseball with the principles of "Sports Life Integration Curriculum." He plans to help kids (both boys and girls) of ages of all ages the very basics of baseball in order to prep them for actual team experience. The program welcomes kids with no experience. But for Sparks, the teaching goes far beyond sports. He will combine life skills and development skills for kids in similar age groups. His primary desire is to drive the ideas of sportsmanship, teamwork, attitude and respect into the lives of the kids, along with the skills they pick up through baseball. "Confidence is not one life skill," he said. Rock-It Baseball Academy is the culmination of Coach Sparky's dream to create a fun, safe, and exciting baseball school for kids who simply love the game and want to learn.

Sparks said that today's youth baseball programs don't offer the help that weaker players need, both on and off the field. His program is committed to the right type of excellence, he said. "It's not about physical mistakes and mental errors; it's about character and perspective," he said.

Sparks hand picks coaches that become consultants and advisors, along with actually playing the game. The RIBA will also offer coaching classes to adults that want to get involved. He wants the coaches to teach strength of character by example, allowing the kids to try and fail, but to continue trying in a safe environment. Sparks began coaching Little

League 10 years ago, coaching the last four through Academy Little League. He's been a Board Member for Academy Little League since 2006 and leads a Boy Scout Troop.

This non-profit organization also gets parents involved, as they watch their kids grow in character and skills. Sparks also emphasized his desire to pull parents and their kids closer through sports. "What better way to get a family together?" he said.

This upcoming spring will be the first year of the RIBA, with two divisions (one for older kids and one for younger). Sparks hopes for about 40 kids to register in each division. Parents will be able to provide an assessment and give feedback to coaches. There will also be summer and specialty clinics. Registration for the program started a couple weeks ago and the season starts April 11. Kids can register until the divisions fill.

Sparks said he's been a "student of baseball" since age 23 and has always felt a passion to help weaker players develop. With his Master's degree in Counseling Psychology, Sparks knows the potential for kids to learn through repetition and solid role models. After a year under Sparks' leadership, he said many kids moved on to the AAA division. He also said he's had the dream of starting a program like this one for about six years and eventually left his job and started what he's wanted to do for years. Sparks said his entire family's pulling for the idea and that they all want to help.

To get involved or register, visit their website at www.RockItBaseball.org.