

# QuickPitch

## Little League World Series: Why Players Should Be Compensated

In August, I tuned in to watch the talented and sporadically entertaining players in the Little League World Series (LLWS) held in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. There were some exciting and intense moments for viewers, from an acrobatic diving catch on the warning track by Alex Barker to Pierce Jones' three home-run game and the dominant and historic performances of star pitcher Mo'ne Davis who threw two consecutive complete game shutouts.

Just another day at the ballpark for these gifted youngsters, right? Not quite.

With clutch hits, blazing fastballs, dazzling defense, pre and post-game coaches' speeches capturing the attention of casual fans and onlookers, and media coverage that attempted to portray baseball in its purest form, it's

There are numerous athletic stakeholders who have capitalized on the innocence, and youthful fervor and energy of LLWS players.

According to an article published by Josh Peters in *USA Today*, Little League, Inc. generated roughly \$25 million in revenue in 2012 and will be paid nearly \$80 million by ESPN over the next eight years to broadcast the LLWS, and regional tournaments. In 2012, the CEO of Little League, Steve Keener, made \$430,000 annually, and the 100-person staff made nearly \$7.5 million in salary, according to Peters.

The networks and CEO appear to benefit quite handsomely from this commercial enterprise. With some games drawing more than 30,000 fans, even other LLWS stakeholders have been able to profit

from the sale of team and player merchandise.

And yet, LLWS players, who are the product that attract viewers, are not compensated for their name and likeness.

Ironically, the 2014 LLWS was played during the O'Bannon v. NCAA (2009) decision—a case in which former football and men's basketball challenged the NCAA's use of names, images,

and likenesses in television and other media products. More than four years after the case was filed, District Judge Claudia Wilken ruled the NCAA's restrictions violated antitrust laws. The NCAA is appealing the decision, though.

Wilken's ruling may have a significant effect on how Little League and other sport organizations that profit from the use of players' images, likenesses and



by Eddie Comeaux

names must compensate them.

I reached out to CEO Keener and Little League regional directors—in California,

Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, Indiana—about their future plans for compensating LLWS participants. Keener and the regional directors did not reply to requests for comments.

Without a doubt, an athletics enterprise that actively promotes and recognizes principles of fairness and inclusion will be largely driven by the vision, knowledge, and competencies of those providing leadership. It is imperative that the Little League, Inc. embark on a self-examination and assessment of their own landscape.

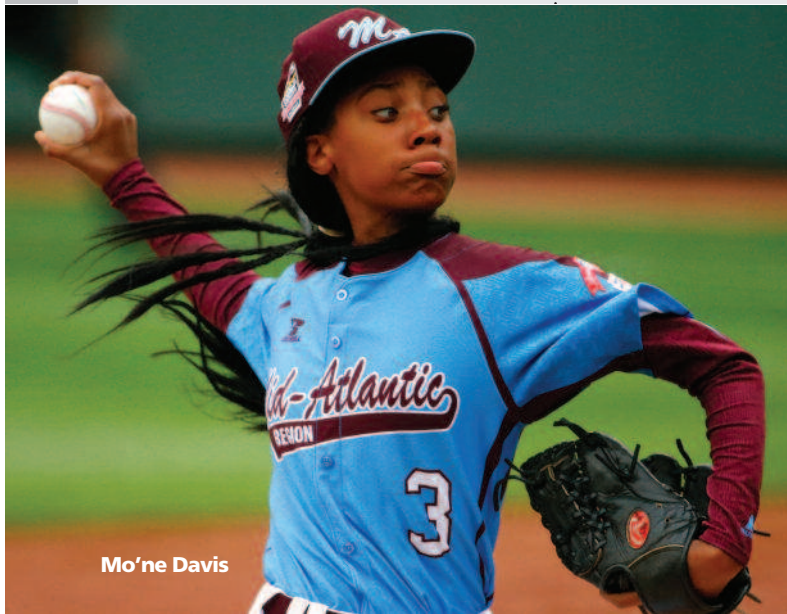
Rather than exploiting the next Mo'ne Davis, Little League should keenly consider protecting LLWS players and likewise providing them with television revenue that can be placed in a trust fund and accessed when they reach a specified age.

In this way, we can ensure LLWS players receive the quality experience and financial compensation they rightfully deserve. **IP**

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Mo'ne Davis

easy to lose sight of the increasing commercial exploitation of amateur LLWS players.

Bill Plaschke, *Los Angeles Times* columnist, contends: "televising the Little League World Series exploits the raw, innocent emotions of children who have no business—aside from being good business for ABC and ESPN—being reality TV subjects."