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MAYOR CARSTARPHEN AND CAMDEN HEALTH & ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION LAUNCH CAMDEN 12U BASEBALL LEAGUE TO EXPAND ACCESS FOR LOCAL YOUTH

CAMDEN, N.J. – Mayor Victor G. Carstarphen, joined by Cooper University Health Care Chairman and CHAA founder George E. Norcross, III, Camden Community Partnership President and CEO Dana L. Redd, and the Camden Health and Athletic Association, yesterday proudly announced the formation of the Camden 12U Baseball League, a new citywide youth sports initiative designed to expand opportunities for young people while strengthening the broader youth sports landscape across Camden.

Set to begin this summer, the Camden 12U Baseball League will serve young athletes ages 9 to 12 through a structured, development-focused program that emphasizes skill-building, teamwork, sportsmanship, and overall well-being.

“We are proud to support initiatives that create meaningful opportunities for our young people,” said Mayor Victor G. Carstarphen. “The Camden 12U Baseball League reflects our city’s commitment to investing in youth development, health, and community. By expanding access to quality programs, we are helping ensure that more children across Camden have the chance to grow, learn, and succeed both on and off the field.”

The league is designed to complement and support existing neighborhood-based programs, helping to expand overall capacity. By creating additional opportunities for participation and development, CHAA aims to help strengthen Camden’s youth baseball ecosystem and ensure more young people have access to a positive, high-quality sports experience.

More than a competitive league, this initiative is guided by a vision that prioritizes character development, community connection, and lifelong health. Built on four core principles centered on improving the quality of youth sports, promoting health and wellness, investing in strong coaching, and ensuring equitable access, the league seeks to create an environment where every child can thrive.

“The Camden Health & Athletic Association was founded on the belief that every child in Camden should have access to quality sports and health programs, regardless of neighborhood or family income,” said George E. Norcross, III, founder of the Camden Health and Athletic Association and Chairman of Cooper University Health Care. “The launch of this new citywide baseball league reflects that mission in action. By creating a stronger league structure that supports existing teams and expands opportunity for more young people, we are continuing to build the kind of youth sports system Camden deserves.”

Participants will benefit from a development-focused approach that prioritizes skill progression, motor learning, and age-appropriate training. The goal is to create a positive and engaging experience where young athletes can build a strong foundation in the fundamentals of baseball while developing confidence, teamwork, and a lasting appreciation for the sport.

Health and wellness are also central to the league's design. CHAA is committed to implementing player safety best practices, including appropriate workload management and pitching guidelines while also promoting resilience, discipline, and sportsmanship. That focus reflects a broader understanding that quality youth sports programming can support not only athletic development, but also the physical, social, and emotional well-being of young people.

"The value of a program like this is not simply that it gives children a chance to play baseball, but that it does so in a setting intentionally designed around their development," said Michael Goodman, M.D., Chair of Pediatrics at Cooper University Health Care and Chairman of the Camden Health and Athletic Association. "When young athletes are supported by age-appropriate instruction, sound coaching, clear safety standards, and a positive team environment, the benefits extend well beyond sport. That kind of structure can help children build confidence, resilience, healthy habits, and a stronger sense of connection to their peers and community."

The league also recognizes the critical role coaches and local programs play in shaping the youth sports experience. Coaches will be selected and supported not only for their knowledge of the game, but for their ability to mentor, inspire, and create a positive and inclusive atmosphere. Through intentional coach development, CHAA aims to ensure that every player is guided by individuals who prioritize growth, respect, and personal development.

"This initiative is about more than expanding access to baseball, it is about strengthening the sense of community that surrounds the game," said Redd. "Youth sports have always been most impactful when families, neighbors, and local leaders step onto the field together, whether as coaches, mentors, or supporters. We believe this league will deepen that level of engagement across Camden and bring people together in a way that builds pride, connection, and opportunity for our youth."

"Baseball built some of my strongest personality traits for me as a youth growing up in Philadelphia. The game that I instantly fell in love with and coached in Lindenwold helped to develop some of the strongest assets I possess and lessons that could never be taught anywhere else but that special diamond in the dirt," Camden County Commissioner Jonathan Young said. "When you talk about things like teamwork, endurance, perseverance and follow-through, all of those things were learned at the sandlot playing the game I love. I want to applaud CHAA for this next initiative and look forward to seeing the city's youth learn the same things that were so important to me in my journey."

A key priority of the Camden 12U Baseball League is accessibility. CHAA is committed to reducing barriers to participation and ensuring that children from all backgrounds have the opportunity to play. By working alongside community partners and existing organizations, the league will help expand capacity across the city and foster a stronger, more connected youth sports community. By focusing on access, health, quality coaching, and collaboration with existing programs, CHAA aims to create a lasting and positive impact that extends well beyond the field.

“As someone who serves this city and also spends time on the field as a coach, I see every day how much our young people benefit from opportunities like this,” said Councilman Fatio Leyba-Martinez. “This league has the potential to bring a renewed sense of unity to Camden, where families, coaches, and neighborhoods come together to support our kids. In addition, it will open the door for more children to step onto the field, stay engaged, and continue playing as they grow and develop a lasting connection to the game.”

“As a coach, you see firsthand how powerful this game can be in shaping young lives,” said Centerville Youth Athletic Association President & Baseball Coach, Courtland “Bud” Smith. “We welcome this kind of collaboration because it helps create more opportunities for kids to step onto the field and be part of a team. At the end of the day, we all want the same thing, to see more young people playing baseball, learning the game, and feeling supported.”

Registration details, program information, and opportunities to get involved will be announced in the coming weeks.

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About Camden Health and Athletic Association:

The Camden Health and Athletic Association, CHAA, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for Camden youth through sports, health initiatives, and community-based programming. The organization is committed to creating inclusive opportunities that promote physical wellness, personal growth, and a strong sense of community. For more information, visit <https://chaacamden.org>