

A MIRACLE IN PHOENIX

At Maryvale Family YMCA every player wins



Miracle League Brewers

Story by Jane Muñoz Photos by Jose Muñoz

A new ball field opened in Phoenix this Spring, but this one at the Maryvale Family YMCA, is not a place where young girls hurl fast pitches or adult slowpitch players launch home run bombs. Instead, it is a place where **every** player wins. The Miracle League baseball field in West Phoenix is the first in Arizona where special needs children and adults can play ball. Over 60,000 kids in Maricopa County are disabled to some degree that keeps them from participating in team sports. The rubberized Miracle League field is specially-designed to accommodate wheelchairs and other walking devices. Each child is partnered with an "Angels in the Outfield" buddy that assists them around the field during each game.

The Grand Opening of the field was March 14th with former MLB players, team owners, local VIPs and YMCA leaders in attendance along with volunteers, coaches (including a couple of former softball players), families and members of the teams for the opening season: the Trevor Browne White Sox, Maryvale High School Diamondbacks, Maryvale High School Giants, Brewers, Youth Diamondbacks, Youth Giants, Youth Brewers and the Youth White Sox. The Star Spangled Banner was played by the Trevor Browne High School band with the Trevor Browne High School Junior ROTC presenting the colors. Ceremonial "first pitches" were thrown out by a player and buddy from each team as well as former MLB players and other VIPs.

After the ceremonies, the real fun started when the games began. The Miracle League has some special rules. Every player bats once each inning, base runners are always safe, every player scores a run before the inning is over (the last player up gets a home run), each player as a "buddy" to assist them and most importantly, each team and each player wins every game. All the players enjoyed their day on the field, with plenty of cheering from the crowd...The only thing missing was...a scoreboard.

The Miracle League started in Georgia in 1998 with 35



Miracle League Maryvale High School Diamondbacks Pitcher & Batter William Adams.



Pablo Muñoz, Maryvale YMCA Executive Director.

this program to be offered.

The Maryvale Family YMCA Miracle League field was made possible by Valley philanthropist and major contributor, Chuck Dubroff and friends. "The Miracle League is a wonderful opportunity that gives disabled children the opportunity to enjoy the magic of baseball just like their peers," said Dubroff. "I'm happy to have been able to partner with the YMCA and City of Phoenix to bring this opportunity to these kids."

"We're incredibly happy to have been able to offer this to the community," said Pablo Muñoz, Maryvale YMCA Executive Director. "We're still registering kids, so call us to sign up."

Players & Volunteers Needed!! For more info please contact: Jenna Schaefer, Maryvale YMCA Miracle League Coordinator, at (602) 212-6148 or Maryvale YMCA on the web: <http://www.valleymca.org/maryvale/news.cfm>

For more information on the Miracle League visit their website at www.miracleleague.com.

Above: The Miracle League Field. Right: Miracle League Trevor Browne High School White Sox Batter Ramon Ramos.

players and four teams as part of the Rockdale Youth Baseball Association to further its mission of providing opportunities for all children to play baseball regardless of their ability. RYBA Coach Eddie Bagwell's effort to give the disabled brother of one of his players the chance to get on the field was the inspiration for the League. The number of players grew and the founders realized the magnitude of the need for such a program with over 50,000 children with some degree of disability in Metro Atlanta. A state-of-the-art Miracle League complex opened in Conyers, Georgia in April, 2000. By 2002, fields opened in South Carolina, Alabama, West Virginia, Chicago and California.

There are currently 175+ Miracle League Organizations nationwide, including Puerto Rico, with 70 completed rubberized fields and 100+ under construction. The Miracle League's immediate goal is to reach 500+ fields including several international locations that will serve approximately 1.3 million children. The work of communities, volunteers, parents, donors, individual sponsors and corporate sponsors enable

