

African Academy - MLB

The first ever African Baseball Academy was held at the Athlone Baseball Complex in Cape Town. The Academy was run under the auspices of Major League Baseball.

Twenty-one players from South Africa and nineteen players from other African countries viz. Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe attended. Their ages ranged from fifteen to twenty years old.

The coaches appointed by Major League Baseball to be instructors at the Academy were Rick Magnante (USA/head/program and camp organizer), German Geigel (Puerto Rica/outfield play), Bill Holmberg (MLB Italy/catching), Tom Gillespie (MLB Europe/throwing mechanics), Lee Smith (USA/pitching), Tim Garland (USA/batting and base running), Jason Holowaty (MLB Baseball Operations), Mike Randall (MLB South Africa/infield play), Charles Petersen (Scouting Bureau-USA) and Rob Helmick (USA/strength and conditioning). Lee Smith did not attend and the pitching function was taken over by Bill Holmberg and was assisted by Tom Gillespie. Coaches from the African countries that had players attending the academy as well as coaches from South Africa also attended to observe and assist when required.

The academy started on Wednesday 7 December and finished on Thursday 15 December.

The Athlone Complex was built and funded by the MLB Tomorrow Fund, Athlone Baseball Club, City of Cape Town and another local Community Organization. The Athlone facility has two playing fields. The building/indoor complex was recently completed with four batting tunnels, two bullpens and an upstairs gym area. The complex is a magnificent facility and the first of it's kind in the country.

The day-to-day organization of the activities of the academy was well structured and for the full period everything ran very smoothly. The coaching staff complimented each other well and they were all well equipped to teach the various disciplines of baseball.

All the players were well disciplined and a credit to their respective countries.

The skill levels of the players, their knowledge and overall standard of play however was below par. As a result the baseball knowledge of the coaching staff and their ability to teach the various disciplines was tested to the limit. The way the player skills improved by the end of the academy however showed that the coaches were successful with the execution of their tasks.

Overall the Academy, I believe, was a huge success and the feedback received from all was extremely positive.

Due to the success of the camp I am positive that another Academy will be held next year. This augurs well for the future growth and development of baseball on the African continent.

As a South African and as a coach I feel extremely honoured to have been part of the first ever Academy.

The Athlone Baseball Club and their whole Executive should be complimented for their vision, hard work and endeavour in setting up and establishing a facility of this nature. All the members of the club that helped at the Academy should also be complimented and thanked for their hard work in ensuring that the Academy was a success.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank SABU and MLB for ensuring that an Academy of this nature took place in South Africa, that it was such a huge success and also for allowing me to be a part of it. I am really blessed. It is sincerely appreciated.

Mike Randall

26 December 2011