

Brand new dawn: ABL opens doors for expansion

GOLD COAST, 13. Nov -- Baseball Australia is changing the Australian Baseball League (ABL) to stay ahead of the game, as baseball continues to grow.

Ahead of the launch of its eighth season, the Australian Baseball League (ABL) is embarking on an ambitious and innovative growth strategy to capitalise on continuous increases in participation; and the excitement of baseball returning to the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020.

Buoyed by record levels of interest from players, leagues and businesses across Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, the ABL today announces the next phase of its long-term strategy for the future of the national league.

KEY POINTS

- The ABL is set to expand from a six-team competition to an eight-team competition in 2018/19, in the first phase of expansion.
- Independent Licenses will be offered to operate and control the six foundation ABL Clubs under a low-cost model; designed to engage diverse interest and investment.
- The ABL will increase focus on new markets in Regional Australia and Asia as primary targets for expansion teams.
- The league will continue to embrace best practice digital content and broadcast solutions to increase Australasian exposure.
- The ABL will maintain and grow its unparalleled partnerships with the World's most prestigious professional leagues in the USA (MLB), Japan (NPB), Korea (KBO) and Taiwan (CPBL).
- Building on the unprecedented investment by Major League Baseball to help relaunch the ABL in 2010, and together with strong interest from NPB (Nippon Professional Baseball - Japan), KBO (Korea Baseball Organisation) and CPBL (Chinese Professional Baseball League - Taiwan)

Baseball Australia is pleased to confirm the following strategic initiatives being announced today;

Expanding the ABL

Baseball Australia is excited to announce plans to expand the number of teams in the Australian Baseball League (ABL) for the 2018/19 ABL season.

Entering its eighth season, and second under full ownership of Baseball Australia, the league has seen more than 840 players from 20 different countries represented on ABL rosters; and helped young Australians chase their dreams of playing at the highest level internationally.

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This includes over 500 players with professional experience for international teams and 53 who have played at the sports highest level - the Major Leagues. In addition, the ABL's relationship with Asia's premier baseball leagues continue to thrive, with another 56 players having experience in the CPBL, KBO and NPB.

The primary aim of expanding the ABL is to benefit baseball in Australia through increased playing opportunities, more exposure, and greater commercial opportunity to reinvest back into grassroots.

Baseball Australia CEO, Cam Vale, said today's announcement is the next phase in a long-term strategy for the ABL that has always included additional teams from Australia, and the surrounding region.

"Expanding the league has always been a part of the plan," Cam Vale said.

"However, with so much interest shown over these last six months; we have re-set the strategy to meet the continually increasing demand in the market for the expansion of the league."

"Particularly in new markets, there is a strong focus on regional Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan; where we are gaining a lot of interest to include new teams and sponsors." Vale said.

Licensing the six foundation ABL teams

The ABL's plans to add two new teams for the 2018/2019 season are only part of the story however; as the league will adopt a licensing model for its six foundation teams - in line with the business practices of the majority of professional sports leagues around the World.

This will provide a rare opportunity to own a team in a league which has significant relationships with Major League Baseball (MLB), and numerous international partners; including Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB - Japan), Japan Amateur Baseball Association (JABA), the Industrial Leagues of Japan, Korean Baseball Organisation (KBO), and the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL - Taiwan).

By adopting a low-cost and high exposure license model for the six foundation teams, the ABL is opening its doors to a variety of potential investors. Beyond traditional ownership models, the league will solicit qualified investors that could be as diverse as private companies, universities, conglomerated industries, international baseball teams or other Australian professional sporting clubs seeking a footprint into Asia.

License terms and conditions will be announced in December, and will initially offer zero capital payment. Instead, Baseball Australia is prioritising franchise owners that can show strong business plans and acumen that capitalise on a largely decentralised revenue model; with the majority of the income generating opportunities given to the ABL teams.

Asian Focus

Baseball Australia CEO Cam Vale sees these opportunities as a groundbreaking step for Baseball in Australia.

"There has never been an opportunity of this magnitude in Australian sport before, as baseball has the potential to reach millions of consumers across Asia." said Vale.

"Baseball is the number one sport in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, when it comes to attendance, participation and broadcast ratings."

"While we are playing between November and February these baseball rich countries are seeking out more baseball games to watch; and further opportunities to develop their players."

"We share a time zone and natural broadcast footprint with our northern neighbours, and as such the ABL is perfectly positioned to be the premier Winter league in Asia."

Vale said Australia has always had significant ties to Asian baseball, consolidated when in March 2017 Chinese Taipei's World Baseball Classic (WBC) team participated in a series of exhibition games here in Australia which were viewed by millions.

"Broadcast delivery will be all important in the expansion process," Vale said.

"We will design a schedule which encourages local and international broadcast opportunities; and we have already had significant interest following the announcement of the six highly regarded Asian marquee players to play this season."

Regional Australia

In addition to a strong international flavour, Vale also said a parallel focus of the ABL's expansion is bringing more baseball to regional Australia.

"Regional centres are often overlooked by major sporting codes," Vale said.

The ABL's low-cost license model encourages regional cities and communities to state their case for inclusion as one of the highly valued opportunities for expansion by offering a significant return on investment through high-exposure both nationally and internationally.

"Australian national teams thrive on having talent drawn from as many areas around the country as possible, and we are keen to ensure that regional Australia has a major presence in the ABL."

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"The development and continual success of the ABL is critical for the success of baseball in Australia. We will take all interest seriously as we look to solidify the ABL as one of Australia's most engaged national sports leagues."

Next Steps

Baseball Australia will announce the license and expansion terms in the coming weeks with a full roll-out of the strategy to be realised over the coming months;

December 2017 - Public Release of basic License Terms
Jan/Feb 2018 - Stakeholder and Community consultation
April 2018 - Public Release of 2018/19 ABL Schedule and Teams

Both internal and external expressions of interest are welcomed and expected to come from both established and non-established stakeholder groups.

Media queries

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