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## League City turning pro (ball)

By: CHUCK HLAVA Citizen Sports Editor



Play ball!

Those words rang Tuesday from the Continental Baseball League that it is bringing grass roots baseball to League City.

The Bay Area Toros officially became a team on Tuesday as Ron Baron, president and chief executive officer of the league, along with League City Mayor Jerry Shults, announced that at a news conference held in the Johnnie Arolofo Civic Center Ballroom of the City Hall Complex in League City.

League City actually got the franchise more than a month ago but Baron chose not to run the bases home at that time, but wait for the formal unveiling following Monday's Clear Creek Independent School District board meeting. During the meeting the board put a stamp of approval on the new team's use of the Clear Creek High School baseball field as its practice facility and to play home games. It's a win-win situation for both parties as Shults and Baron spoke before an audience sprinkled with CBL and Toro staff, along with officials from League City and surrounding communities.

"We are confident the Toros will be a success on and off the field, and will provide positive economic benefits to both the City of League City and the entire Bay Area," touted Shults.

"It's one more arrow in the quiver of League City.....development," Shults added.

The city apparently made a fan of Baron, who said it's the perfect spot for the team after visiting more than 40 other cities for several months.

"Our vision is affordable, family-

*Safe! League City Mayor Jerry Shults, left, and Judge Jim Yarbrough, right, get their League City Toros uniforms from Continental Baseball League CEO Ron Baron. Citizen photo by Chuck Hlava*

oriented baseball and we see League City as a friendly community for (baseball).

"We feel the local team will spur on great community pride," Baron added, "and easily put a big league stamp on the city. When a community can say they have a pro baseball team, in turn that catches the eyes of other local businesses and brings more economic

development into that market."

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With the words "The bull is loose in League City," still ringing in the air, Baron introduced the Toros office lineup, starting with general manager and chief operating officer Mike Pedé. Pedé unveiled the formal logo/poster for the Toros. Also introduced to the gathering was team manager Jim Bolt.

The Toros are ready to start selling tickets and already have set up a Web site, [www.bayareatoros.com](http://www.bayareatoros.com). Tickets can be purchased at the team's offices at 3027 Marine Bay Drive in League City.

As part of the first-year independent professional baseball league, the Bay Area Toros will open the 12-week, 60-game season on Sunday, May 27.

In a slightly different format, CBL will begin its inaugural season with four teams, but only three will have a home base. The Bay Area Toros join the Lewisville Lizards in Denton County, Keller/Tarrant County Blue Thunder and the Dallas-based Texas Heat. The fourth team will be an all-traveling team based in Lewisville and operated by CBL.

League City, Lewisville and Keller each have individual owners and investors. The investors of the Bay Area Toros were not disclosed.

The price tag for a CBL franchise is reportedly \$50,000 each season. Additionally, the owner or investors have to pencil in another \$250,000 for operating expenses. Offsetting that will be revenue in the form of various advertising on ballpark signs, programs, tickets, pocket schedules and scorecards and, hopefully, radio, television and internet broadcasts.

First things first, however, and the entire league will hold tryouts for all its teams on March 30-31 at The MAC in Lewisville.

Tryouts will be 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. each day. Those hoping for a chance to make the 25-man League City roster will have to ante up \$25 in cash, check or money order. In addition, each team will have a manager and two coaches.

The Toros plan to hold their own tryouts April 15, 22 and 29 at locations still to be announced.

Baron, an attorney who has been involved in sports law for more than 20 years, views the CBL as an opportunity for America's pastime to make inroads into small towns that have a large surrounding drawing power. He expects the team to pull in fans from a 20-mile radius with a population of over 400,000. Baron has counseled clients in MLB and NFL, in addition to collegiate athletic programs, on sports law and team-related operational strategies.

Nobody will get rich playing in this league, as each team will have a salary cap of \$25,000 per player for the season. But it's the chance for the talented players to catch the eyes of big league scouts.

Batter up.

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