

Hundreds of Dallas youth find new favorite pastime through baseball program

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Eufemia De La Cruz watches with pride as her 11-year-old son catches a baseball amid the hot red sand and gleaming bases at Dave Andres Ballpark in Old [East Dallas](#).

Thanks to Major League Baseball's Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities program, Jason Solorzano and his brother Mark have grown to love America's pastime.

"I see his eyes, and he looks very excited," Jason's mother says.

Each week, Jason and 8-year-old Mark learn the values of teamwork and sportsmanship as part of Dallas ISD's Junior RBI League, a program that has doubled in size since it began a year ago.

This season, almost 400 boys and girls from central and southwest Dallas will compete in more than 250 games, culminating in a championship game in late May.

"We are giving parents a reason to tie back with their kids," said Karin Morris, executive director for the [Texas Rangers](#) Foundation, which sponsors the program along with the city and school district. "We just try to give the kids a chance to play."

Rangers players have also shown their support, and participants received tickets to home games last summer, giving many children and their families their first experience at a big league ballpark.

Grants and scholarships have allowed the program to expand in Dallas, and funding provides each team with full uniforms, hats and equipment.

For two years, [Carlos Hernandez](#) has been volunteering as a coach for the program and teaches Jason on one of the two teams at Kennedy Learning Center. He said the program brings out their competitive spirits.

"They enjoy the game, even though most have never played before," Hernandez said. "My goal in this is to teach them baseball and discipline at the same time."

Meanwhile, Jason and Mark Solorzano and their parents have found their new favorite pastime. When the boys' father isn't working long hours at a Chinese restaurant in [Mesquite](#), he's playing ball with them.

"When he has time on his day off, he takes the time with my children and we play with them," said their mother, who volunteers with the team and tries to attend games every Saturday.

The RBI program has also given the brothers plenty of quality time together playing ball. Both dream of someday making it to the majors, and Jason loves to give his little brother pointers.

"Before he started, sometimes he missed the catch and batting," Jason said, "but now he is really getting great."