



## **Jim LeFebvre, keynote speaker, wants to bring the “fun back to baseball”**

By Casie Vogel

This year’s keynote speaker was Jim LeFebvre. No stranger to the baseball community, Jim’s reputation precedes himself. Being Rookie of the Year in 1965 for the LA Dodgers, Manager for the Seattle Mariners, Chicago Cubs, and Milwaukee Brewers, and the official baseball coach for the People’s Republic of China in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, it is clear that Jim knows a thing or two about baseball.

But it isn’t just professional baseball that Jim is passionate about. When he spoke to a packed ballroom of high school coaches from around the country, he wanted to talk about the culture of high school coaching.

According to LeFebvre, today the “fun is being taken out of baseball” and it is primarily due to the “showcase” and “travel” teams that pressure high school students to play baseball year round without many breaks and cost their parents a lot of money.

“This is important,” LeFebvre says. “The average retirement age of the average baseball player is 12 years old. 12 years!”

After LeFebvre’s speech he headed to the green room to continue speaking. Coaches had the chance to air their grievances about how the travel teams were affecting their programs. Many found their kids were being taken away from high school programs and focusing on travel teams alone or that college recruiters were only going to travel teams looking for new recruits.

“Parents don’t have to spend all that money and they don’t have to put all that pressure on the kids,” LeFebvre says. “Being on a travel team? It means nothing. To be able to catch a ball, field it, to backhand, it takes time.”

LeFebvre would like to see young talent work on their skills in development camps instead of travel teams.

“They need reps, not just four at bats that the showcase teams offer,” he said. “They need reps, they need to hit, they need to run, they need to catch 1,000 ground balls, I would rather see them put that money and put them into skill development camps.”

LeFebvre uses one of his players, Omar Vizquel infielder from the Seattle Mariners, as an example of the virtues of skill development. Instead of going back to Venezuela, he stayed stateside and worked on swinging, running, and getting stronger.

“No pressure, having fun. And it accelerated his career,” LeFebvre said.

LeFebvre wants to help coaches in any way he can. He plans to use his Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jim-Lefebvre/205924846144892>) as a place for coaches to contact him and get information. He wants to have a place to share information and documentation for parents and coaches about the statistics and failures of travel teams.

“It is really clear to me after listening to coaches here that there is a problem,” he said. “And it is important that we find out what the problem is and do what we can.”