**One Mom’s Tips for Cooperstown…..**

My son’s team went to Cooperstown in week one of 2018. Leading up to the trip, other parents and I planned, planned to plan, made lists, had meetings, and researched as much as we could. It ended up being a wonderful experience for the boys as well as the families. I hope my notes can help make your trip a success.

The first week in June, upstate NY has the potential to be very cold. Not only did we experience cold temperatures, it rained the entire time. However, this did not ruin the experience, and we only had one rain delay (they will play through rain as long as they can). Everyone just dealt with the weather, and made the most of an amazing experience! From what the locals said, rain is very common at this time of year, and everything is damp all the time. Grab an umbrella, throw on a hat, and be prepared to get wet.

In no particular order, my thoughts on all aspects of the trip…..

**Dreams Park Info**

**Checking In On Friday night**

* We did Friday night, not Saturday, so I can only comment on Friday.
* The process is a well-oiled machine. Be patient if you are waiting in a car line, it will move pretty fast. Someone will come to your car and give you a letter for the line you should be in, and number for your barracks.
* Once you get to the barracks, you will have five minutes to unload, then you have to move your car to the parking lot, but you can come back to help your son unpack and get organized.
* A few moms stayed until about 10:30 to get everything organized – beds made, pins distributed, made sure the boys ate, distributed uniforms and labeled them.
* The coaches will do all of the paper work for registration.

**Barracks**

* The team accommodations look like a military bunk house, with several sets of bunk beds, and a foot locker for each player at the bottom of the bed.
* There is no heat or air conditioning in the barracks, so depending on the week, it could be very hot or very cold.
* Box fans are helpful to circulate air, not only for temperature control, but for odor control. ☺ Some kids also had individual clip on fans for their bed.
* Bring Febreeze!
* Thirty six inch bungee cords can be hung on the bed frames to be used as clothes lines to dry towels and any wet clothing (things are always damp!).
* Each boy will need a lock for their footlocker.
* Using a duffle bag is a better option than a suitcase, as it is easier to store.
* A fitted sheet is provided for each bed, but boys will need a pillow and blankets. Most of our boys had a sleeping bag and a blanket.
* There is a large locker outside the barracks for equipment. It may or may not be waterproof.
* Bring a few power strips and lots of chargers.
* When packing, keep in mind that when the boys move out of the barracks, you will not be there to help them repack. Make it easy for them.
* Ear plugs or noise cancelling headphones may be helpful for light sleepers.

**Showers**

* Boys must wear swim trunks in the shower.
* There may or may not be hot water.
* There is a separate bathhouse for coaches.
* Bring shower shoes.
* Bring at least two towels. Because it is so damp, it takes a long time for things to dry.
* In addition to normal toiletries, Gold Bond powder is helpful to prevent and treat chafing.

**Pin Trading**

* We ordered enough pins so each player had 50 to trade.
* Some teams buy pins to give to their umpire to trade. Ours did not want any. Some umps get their own.
* Our boys kept their pins in a Tupperware container while trading. (I ordered drawstring bags for this, but they did not arrive before we left for Cooperstown. A parent who was arriving on Monday brought them then.)
* We gave each player a pin towel with their name, our team name, and Cooperstown embroidered on it. At night, they would sit on their bunks and put the pins on their towels. It was really cool!
* Trading is a huge deal on Friday night and still on Saturday and Sunday. After that it dies down a little bit.
* If you go into Cooperstown, take a pin or two to trade with the merchants. My son traded one at the Baseballism store with the guys who worked there.
* If you have younger siblings along, they can trade pins as well, so maybe get a few extra for them. They can trade with players and umpires. They can also get pins from the gift shop by retrieving foul balls. For every foul ball they turn into a Dreams Park worker (in a blue shirt I believe), they get a token. Once they get 5 tokens, they can get a pin. Just remind them to NOT turn in homerun balls. Those should be given to the player who hit the HR. This unfortunately happened to us. My son’s second HR ball was taken by an eager younger sibling from the other team who wanted a token. LOL.

**What to do during downtime**

* Many teams played wiffle ball.
* Spike Ball
* Our boys played water pong. They ended up putting poker chips in the bottom of the cups to weigh them down because the water was too messy.
* Played cards and did card tricks.
* Played on their devices until the coaches took them away at night.

**Uniforms**

* Coaches will get the uniforms on Friday night.
* You do not get to request numbers in advance. They just give you the sizes you need and the players get whatever number is on the jersey that fits them.
* If you have things that don’t fit, it is very easy to swap them out on Saturday morning. Another mom and I did this and it was super easy.
* A few moms and I took over the uniform distribution and labeling, while the coaches had meetings. We had the boys try everything on, and once we identified who needed new sizes, we had them pile everything on their foot locker, and we went through with sharpies and labeled it all. Silver sharpies worked best for labeling the darker colored clothes/hats.
* Pants and belts were ordered in advance, so each player brought those along. If you are ordering pants from Cooperstown, size up!
* Each player gets a pair of red socks and a pair of blue socks. We did not label socks. When they come back from the laundry, the coaches can just pass them out. Community socks. ☺
* The laundry service washes uniforms each night.
* They are very strict on uniforms and hats. They want shirts tucked in, pants worn at the knee, and hats on straight (never backwards or crooked). If they see violations of these rules, they will suspend players for 1-2 games.

**Food for Players**

* They do serve meals for the players. Our boys didn’t love the “cafeteria” food.
* There is concession stand food available all the time, and it’s great! They have a variety of options (some healthy ones too), and it’s not super pricey.
* Snacks – they tell you not to bring food into the barracks. A lot of boys do bring snacks. We told kids to make sure everything was individually wrapped so that nothing was ever left open. This is important because they are in the country, and there are mice! More on this later…..
* You can sign your son out if the coach allows. We had one team meal at the hotel where many of the parents stayed. We also did a team breakfast at the Doubleday Cafe on the first morning of tournament play.
* On Saturday, I pre-ordered 8 pizzas for the boys to eat after opening ceremonies. It goes late, and they eat dinner at 3:30, so they will be hungry. You can pre-order and pay at the concession stand in the park, then the coaches can pick it up after opening ceremonies over by the barracks (where they get ice). The pre-ordering is important. Many teams did not do it and had to wait or didn’t get anything. My husband said he could have sold those pizzas for a huge profit. LOL.
* Drinks – We had every player bring a case of Gatorade and a case of water. That was way too much, however, it was not hot when we were there. While the kids still needed to be hydrated, they did not need that much because they really didn’t sweat. If you don’t bring enough, there is a grocery store right by the park where a parent could buy more.

**Souvenirs**

* There is a gift shop with everything you could need….t-shirts, sweatshirts, backpacks, pin towels, umbrellas, etc.
* They make a special t-shirt for each week. It has a list of all the players for that week on the back. We were told to buy this the first day because they sell out fast, but they never sold out while we were there.
* Bats – You can get a personalized bat with your son’s name and team member’s names. Very cool. It takes 24-48 hour to make, so do this the first day. You can have it shipped to your home if you want.
* Balls – You can have your home run balls engraved. I only did this for the first home run, but some people did it for all of them or for grand slams.
* Pictures – On day one, go to the photo building and create an account on one of the kiosks. Each day you can go in and see the pictures that have been taken of your games. These pictures can be purchased as prints (various sizes) or can be made into souvenirs. I purchased pictures on the last day. You have to buy them there, and they are not available digitally. Be prepared…..they are pricey! They are totally worth it though! I have heard that the pictures will be available for online purchase in October of the year you go. TBD.
* Videos – Videos will be available one week after you leave. I believe your coach will get a video of one game that they can share with you.
* You can find a lot of souvenirs in Cooperstown too.

**Opening Ceremonies**

* Parents need to get there early to get a seat (1-1.5 hours early).
* We sat in the outfield, which was great! Choose a high row, as kids will sit on the wall in front of you.
* Some team parents wore all the same shirts or team colors. I saw a couple teams with Fatheads of each player, which the parents held up on sticks. Some also had cowbells and other noise makers.
* They ask for parent volunteers to go onto the field. Do it! It’s super fun. I missed the opportunity to do this because I was waiting in line to pre-order pizzas. LOL.
* Teams will be announced alphabetically and enter on the third base side.
* Teams carry banners as they walk in. Our banner was 4x6, which is a little big, but readable. Banners are not mandatory.
* Some teams throw candy or small souvenirs into the crowd. It is not necessary but can be fun.
* There are some long speeches.
* The skills competitions are after opening ceremonies on a few different fields. The HR hitters go down the hill. Golden arm competitors go to an adjacent field. The fast feet kids stay where the opening ceremony is held. Once the “prelims” are done, they bring the finalists back to the main stadium for everyone to watch.
* Teams cannot go back to the barracks until the HR derby is over.

**Games**

* Pool play games are Sunday-Tuesday, then the tournament starts on Wednesday. If you lose on Wednesday, you are done.
* Some fields have cameras that stream live. Each team gets three live streamed games.
* There are no bleachers for parents. There are parent “dugouts.” These dugouts are partially covered and have lots of plastic chairs if you want to sit. They run along either the first base side or the third base side. You sit on the side that your team is on. They are actually great seats! Be sure to NOT drop food on the ground. We had a fat mouse in our parent’s dugout. YUCK!
* The fences are all 200 feet, so there will be a lot of home runs!
* The umpires are awesome! They talk to the boys, the coaches, the parents, and they love telling stories of their Cooperstown experiences. Definitely take the time to chat with them.
* You can keep up-to-date with the rankings at [www.cooperstowndreamspark.com](http://www.cooperstowndreamspark.com).

**Parking**

* When you enter the park, the gate attendant will point you towards the closest parking lot for where you are playing. Make sure you know the field number.
* There is the potential to do a lot of walking. They do offer golf cart rides if you need it.
* Parking is free.

**Signing Kids Out**

* There are blue sign out forms at the gate and at various locations throughout the park. You need to fill it out and have it signed by the coach. Once you get your son, they can leave with you in your car. Give the blue sheet to the gate attendant when you leave the parking lot.
* Our coach told us times that would be good for signing kids out. A couple kids were a little homesick and wanted to be with their parents, but not all. My son and another boy were sick most of the week, but still wanted to stay and be with their teammates.
* If you are staying close by, you son may want to go with you for a hot shower then come right back.

**Closing Ceremonies**

* We did not stay for this (it’s not mandatory). Our team lost on Wednesday, so we moved out of the barracks that evening. Some families got on the road right away but a couple of us stayed and enjoyed one last night in Cooperstown.
* If you do not stay, your coach can get the rings for everyone before he leaves.

**Cooperstown and Lodging Info**

**Lodging** – Book your hotel as soon as you find out your week! They sell out fast!

* Holiday Inn – I stayed here, along with five other sets of parents and grandparents. It is very close to the park. Newest hotel in the area. Super clean! Indoor pool and fitness center, free breakfast, laundry, and a nice great room area for parents and teams to hang out. We had a team dinner here one night (ordered takeout from a local restaurant). This hotel is pricey!
* Best Western – Even closer to the park. Dated, but was fine for one of our families.
* Comfort Inn – Close to park. Dated, but was fine for another family.
* Courtyard Oneonta – This was nice, but about 15 minutes away. We had one family stay here.
* There were a couple of hotels in Cooperstown – Cooperstown Inn and the Otesaga Resort. None of us stayed at either of these, but they looked amazing. The Otesaga Resort is expensive, but it’s right on the lake.
* There are other hotels, but these are the only ones I have knowledge about.
* Rental properties are all over the area. Use [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com) or search Cooperstown house rentals.
* There is a little group of cabins right next to the park, called, Chalet Village. I wish I would have know about this place when booking. I would have definitely considered it. There are several small, two bedroom cabins together, along with a pool, basketball court, and game room. <http://www.cooperstownchalet.com/>
* While you can find great places to stay within a large area around Cooperstown, I would suggest finding something as close to the park as possible OR right in Cooperstown. Being close to the park is nice for between games or during rain delays. Some people like being right in town to be able to walk to shops and restaurants. The country rental houses can be nice, but not always easily accessible to the park or shops and restaurants. Keep in mind you are traveling on country roads, so if something is 5 miles away, that is 5 country miles.

**Restaurants**

There are so many good places to eat in and around Cooperstown!!! Don’t get stuck eating at the same place each day!

* Redneck Barbque –We ordered takeout for a team dinner one night.
* Upstate Bar and Grill – We did eat here a few times. They are able to accommodate big groups and the food is amazing! It’s also a fun place for adults to hang out at night.
* Bocca – Italian. Smaller restaurant, but so delicious!
* Council Rock Brewery – This looks like a barn or shed, but it’s actually an amazing restaurant and brewery. The best food I had all week!!! Actually the best French fries I’ve ever had in my life! Great burgers too! I also loved the grilled chicken Caesar salad and the beer!
* Alex’s – I did not eat here but several of our parents did (multiple times), and loved it.
* Back Alley Bar and Grill – Had an awesome lunch here! Fun bar on the top floor.
* Maskots – Just outside the park entrance. Great for pizza, wings, salads, beer, and sandwiches. Fun place to hang out after the last games of the night. All of the umpires end up here. Their stories are awesome!
* Doubleday Café – So good!!! We had a team breakfast here on Wednesday. We got there around 8:30, before the rush. Amazing food for lunch as well.
* Blue Mingo – This one is a little drive, but well worth it! It sits right on Lake Otesaga. When you drive in, it looks like you are going into a warehouse, but just follow the signs for the restaurant.
* Hardball Café – Great for lunch and drinks.
* Dunnies – I did not eat here, but heard it was really good!
* Pizza Hut, McDonalds and Subway are very close to the park.

**Other cool places to go:**

* Fly Creek Cider Mill – We sampled a bunch of dips and sauces, wines, cider, moonshine and whiskey. They also have cheese and fudge, and a counter service restaurant. You can feed the real ducks and do rubber duckie races. Fun for the whole family!
* The Baseball Hall of Fame – The teams get tickets for the HOF. Many of our parents went as well. We did this on a day where we had a big break between games. You don’t need a ton of time. The kids get a little bored.
* Main Street Cooperstown – Tons of shops! Spend some time in the Baseballism store. You can even call ahead (weeks) and schedule a tour.
* Doubleday Stadium (just off Main St in Cooperstown) – It was fun for the boys to learn about Abney Doubleday and how he brought baseball to Cooperstown.
* There are several wineries and breweries around the area. You can do a tasting at most of them. The Ommengang Winery looked awesome, but we never made it there.
* Farmer’s Market on Saturday morning in downtown Cooperstown.
* Farmer’s Museum – We did not get there, but we drove past on our way to the Blue Mingo for lunch, and it looked awesome! Not just for farmers! ☺
* Glimmerglass boat ride.
* Paddleboard and kayak rentals on Lake Otesaga.

**Other random tips and facts:**

* There is a grocery store and a Family Dollar right next to the park. If you forget anything, you can probably find it there – chargers, pillows, blankets, clothes, toiletries, etc.
* There is absolutely NO alcohol allowed in the park. If parents are caught with alcohol, the team could be penalized.
* Join the Cooperstown Dreams Park Facebook group. It’s a great resource and fun place to connect with other teams who will be there when you are.
* Search for Cooperstown videos on youtube. It’s fun to familiarize yourself with the park before you go.
* If you are a parent on the fence about going to Cooperstown, GO! It is the experience of a lifetime for everyone! However, don’t expect to spend every minute with your son. They will be busy.
* You will miss your son throughout the week, but he is fine! Don’t take it personally if he doesn’t want to hang out with you. He is with his teammates and making new friends. He is in his element. Let him have some independence and grow from this experience. Don’t hound him about brushing his teeth or changing his underwear. He will figure it out (or not).
* Cooperstown Dreams Park is magical! It’s the Disneyworld of baseball. Soak it all in! Take a million pictures and share your experience with others who may be considering the trip down the road.
* While winning is fun, this trip is about so much more. Focus on the experience. If you win, that’s the icing on the cake.
* Be prepared for your team to be even better when you return home. The experience changes them and they are able to work better as a team. Like I said, it’s magical!