

Little League[®] magazine

www.LittleLeague.org



PRESENTED BY



2012



GENTLE GIANT

Adrian Gonzalez lets his bat do most of the talking.

Plus:

Mike Mussina returns to his Little League roots

Young players are helping long-struggling teams rise

INTRODUCING THE UNDER ARMOUR[®] YARD III MID TPU
(ALSO AVAILABLE IN METAL)





MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Executive Vice President, Business Timothy J. Brosnan

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PROPERTIES

Senior Vice President, Consumer Products Howard Smith

Vice President, Publishing Donald S. Hintze

Editorial Director Mike McCormick

Publications Art Director Faith M. Rittenberg

Senior Production Manager Claire Walsh

Managing Editor Jon Schwartz

Account Executive, Publishing Chris Rodday

Associate Art Director Mark Calimbas

Senior Publishing Coordinator Anamika Panchoo

Project Editor Jake Schwartzstein

Project Assistant Editor Allison Duffy

Editorial Intern Gerald Schifman

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PHOTOS

Manager Jessica Foster

Assistant Photo Editor Andy Jacobsohn

A special thank you to Major League Baseball Corporate Sales and Marketing and Major League Baseball Licensing for advertising sales support.

For Major League Baseball info, visit: MLB.com



LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL

539 U.S. Route 15 Highway

P.O. Box 3485

Williamsport, PA 17701-0485

(570) 326-1921

Chairman Dennis Lewin

President & CEO Stephen D. Keener

Senior VP of Administration & CFO David B. Houseknecht

Corporate Secretary Joseph W. Losch

Senior VP of Operations and Program Development

Patrick W. Wilson

VP and Treasurer Melissa L. Singer

VP of Communications Lance Van Auken

VP of Marketing and Strategic Partnerships Elizabeth

DiLullo Brown

Director of Public Relations Scott Rosenberg

Director of Publicity Chris Downs

For Little League info, visit: www.LittleLeague.org

If you have any questions or comments regarding material in this publication, please send letters to: Attention: Editor, MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL, 245 Park Avenue, 29th Floor, New York, NY 10167

© 2012 Major League Baseball Properties, Inc. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Printed in the USA.

Little League magazine

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEY TERRILL

6 Around the Horn

News from Little League to the Major Leagues.



10 Eye of the Storm

Despite the chaos of baseball-crazed Boston, Adrian Gonzalez remains grounded, productive and, most impressively, calm under all circumstances.

By Mike McCormick

16 Playing the Game: Evan Longoria

Tips on third base defense.

18 Against All Odds

Once faced with letting go of their Big League dreams, these players transformed and rejuvenated their careers.

By Jeff Fletcher

22 Out with the Old

Clawing their way back into contention, some teams look to young players to lift them to glory. By Zack Meisel

26 Playing the Game: Matt Wieters

Tips on plate approach.

28 Athletes by Profession

Ballplayers reveal how they would be spending their days if they hadn't made it big.

By Troy E. Renck

32 Sky High

The 2011 Little League World Series team from Montana represented the state in a big way.

34 A Series of Fortunate Events

After some hard-fought and exciting contests, eight U.S. teams prevailed and were crowned champions of the Little League Baseball and Softball World Series.

40 Sunrise, Sunset

Little League grad Krista Donnenwirth won her first NCAA Softball title as a freshman before clinching her second as a senior.

43 Challenging the Odds

In a country where baseball is relatively foreign, Kuwait Little League chartered the first Challenger Division for children with disabilities in the Middle East.

44 New Frontier

Baseball in the Outback continues to grow as Australia charts hundreds of Little League teams for 2012.

47 Back to Basics

Returning to the place where his playing days began, retired Major League pitcher Mike Mussina is relishing his time as a Little League coach.

By Chris Downs

49 Playing the Game: Dallas Escobedo

Tips on pitching.

50 Boys of Summer

Diamond stars look back.

53 Fun and Games

Test your baseball knowledge with these challenging puzzles.

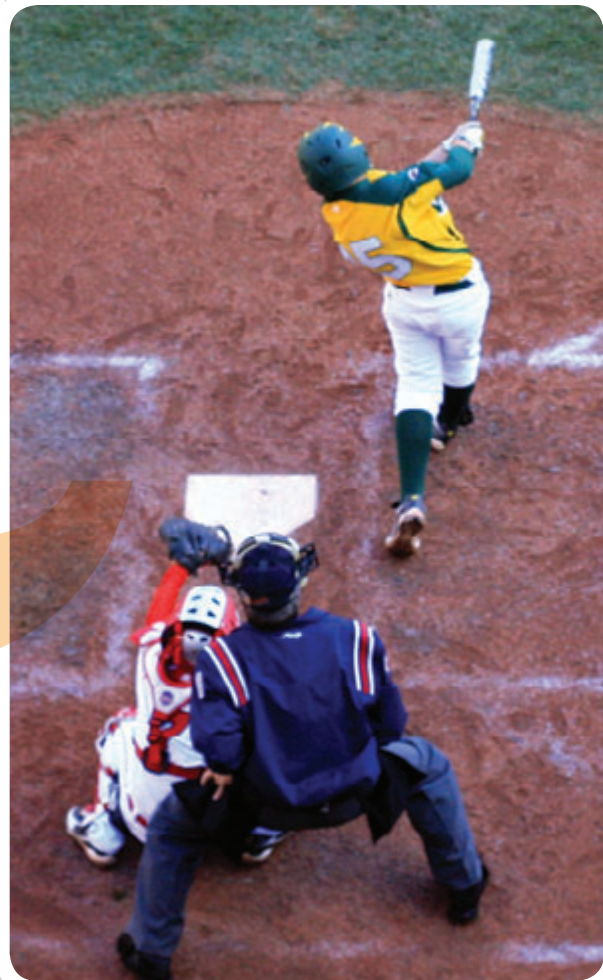
56 Field of Dreams

A snapshot from the 2011 Little League Baseball World Series.

Follow Little League

Little League Baseball and Softball is connected with thousands of Little League fans from all over the world. Away from the field, the organization has supporters on the Internet through several pages on Facebook, and it continues to distribute news and information to the public through its Twitter feed. More than 55,000 people are now able to receive immediate, up-to-date information from Little League on Facebook, and another 3,000 people follow it on Twitter.

Check out our Twitter feed at: [@LittleLeague](https://twitter.com/LittleLeague), or friend us on Facebook at: facebook.com/LittleLeagueBaseballandSoftball.



2012 LITTLE LEAGUE WORLD SERIES

The dates and sites are set for the eight 2012 Little League World Series tournaments.

Easley, S.C., will serve as the home for the Big League Baseball World Series for the 12th year, as the oldest age division in baseball conducts its 45th championship July 25 to Aug. 1.

The four softball World Series tournaments then take center stage beginning with the Big League tournament in Kalamazoo, Mich., from Aug. 2–8. The Senior League (Lower Sussex, Del.) plays its championship from Aug. 5–11 and is followed by the Little League (Portland, Ore.) division on Aug. 9–15. The Junior League (Kirkland, Wash.) will play its tournament from Aug. 12–18.

Junior League (Taylor, Mich.) and Senior League (Bangor, Maine) Baseball tournaments also will be contested during the week of Aug. 12–18. The Little League Baseball World Series then begins its 11-day run on Thursday, Aug. 16, in South Williamsport, Pa.

The annual showcase of the top 11- and 12-year-old teams in the world will play the U.S. and International championship games on Saturday, Aug. 25, with the title game scheduled for the following day. Ocean View Little League from Huntington Beach, Calif., captured the 2011 title with a 2-1 victory over the International champions from Japan's Hamamatsu Minami Little League.

The Little League International Tournament is open to any chartered league in the United States and more than 80 other countries. Tournament play in all eight divisions begins in July.

More than 7,000 teams, approximately 6,500 of those from the U.S., begin the tournament in the Little League Baseball division. Nearly 45,000 games are played in eight divisions leading up to the various World Series tournaments. More than 16,000 of those games — the equivalent of more than six Major League Baseball seasons — are played in the Little League division.

CORBIS/IMAGES (2)



ENTER THE CAVE

Watch baseball for a living? Seems like a dream come true. For two fans last season, that dream was a reality. And it will be for another group of MLB fanatics in 2012.

Since the beginning of the 2011 MLB campaign, the corner of West Fourth Street and Broadway in New York City has been the center of the baseball universe — a virtual museum where every single game was broadcast, relished and scrutinized from a wall of 15 television monitors, affectionately known as the Cave Monster.

Another slate of 2,430 contests is on the docket beginning in March, and another set of fans will be there to take them in. And it's not just about the games. There have been visitors — David Ortiz hunted for hugs on the streets of New York City while pitcher Jeremy Guthrie took a bike for a spin — and videos — LoMoing started there — to keep the mood light and encourage fan interaction. Log on to MLBFanCave.com throughout the season to keep up with each and every event.

THE LATEST BASEBALL BAT INFO

Little League International has developed the Baseball Bat Resource Page, a section of the organization's website that is designed to provide current information on the 2012 Little League Baseball rules and regulations governing bats, the moratorium on the use of composite bats, a definition of terms and a series of frequently asked questions, along with answers and licensed bat lists. Information can be found at: www.littleleague.org/learn/equipment/baseballbatinfo.htm.

Little League placed a moratorium on all composite-barreled baseball bats for several divisions, which took effect on Dec. 30, 2010. A list of composite-barreled bats that have received a waiver of that moratorium is available at: www.littleleague.org/batinfo.

This list contains just licensed bats and does not detail all of those acceptable for use. Provided a bat meets the specification of Rule 1.10 for the division of play and is not subject to the moratorium, it may be used.

FOSTERVILLE PHOTOS

SUBWAY

By Design

Subway Restaurants has been a proud sponsor of Little League Baseball and Softball since 2005 and encourages Little Leaguers and their families to live active lifestyles and eat healthy meals. Through its partnership with Little League, Subway has created the Subway Baseball DeSIGNS Tour.

This traveling tour features baseballs that are signed by celebrities and designed by kids. The traveling baseballs are auctioned off, and over the years have raised thousands of dollars to benefit the Little League Urban Initiative, which helps fund start-ups, equipment and field maintenance for inner-city Little Leagues. To find out more about the sponsorship and about the 2012 SUBWAY Little League program visit www.subwaykids.com.



HONDA

Auto-Pilot

Hit a home run during Honda's 2012 Little League Sweepstakes! Instant-win prizes will be awarded every day. Plus, four first place winners will be sent to the 2012 Little League Baseball World Series in South Williamsport, where one of those lucky finalists will be awarded a new 2012 Honda Pilot on the field before a game.

To really bring the excitement home, Honda will keep track of the Sweepstakes entries received from every league, and the program that submits the greatest number will be awarded \$5,000 in cash.

Visit www.LittleLeague.honda.com beginning in May 2012 to enter for your chance to win.



HONORABLE MENTION

Last year, Hilton HHonors celebrated memorable moments enjoyed by Little League® Baseball and Softball players and crowned a Play of the Week Grand Prize Winner. This spring, Hilton HHonors is changing it up a bit. Keep checking Little League communications and [facebook.com/HiltonHHonors](https://www.facebook.com/HiltonHHonors) for more details on any upcoming promotions.



HILTON HHONORS



LEGENDARY

After years of involvement with Little League International — one as a player and the other a volunteer — two of MLB's greats will enter the hallowed halls of Cooperstown. Chicago Cubs great Ron Santo, himself a Little League graduate, was elected posthumously to the Hall of Fame by the Golden Era Committee in December 2011. One month later, longtime Cincinnati Reds shortstop Barry Larkin got the call that he had been voted into the Hall by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Larkin has served as a mentor to Little Leaguers since his retirement. In addition to giving speeches to young ballplayers and coaching clinics in the U.S. and abroad, the 12-time All-Star was the honorary commissioner for a Tee Ball game at the White House.

Both Larkin and Santo will be inducted into Cooperstown on July 22.

Snapshots

Little Leaguers move through the program so fast. When you finally snap a picture that captures the essence of a game, don't you just want to share it?

The annual Little League Baseball and Softball Photo Contest gathers entries and awards recognition to three photographers for their images depicting Little Leaguers.

Adults can visit www.LittleLeague.org for details on the 2012 contest. The deadline for entry is July 13. Winners will have their photographs displayed in the Peter J. McGovern Little League Museum and are recognized on the Little League website.

Any local league or district volunteer is eligible to enter. A required entry form that includes details on the contest and a model release (also required) are available by going to the Little League website. ♦



McSAC/GETTY IMAGES (COACH AND TEAM); REID (MLB PHOTOS (LARKIN)); COURTESY LITTLE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL

By Mike McCormick

EYE OF THE STORM

DESPITE THE CHAOS OF BASEBALL-CRAZED BOSTON, **ADRIAN GONZALEZ** REMAINS GROUNDED, PRODUCTIVE AND, MOST IMPRESSIVELY, CALM UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

WHEN PEOPLE MENTION A LAID BACK attitude, Adrian Gonzalez is what they have in mind. At 6 foot 2, 225 pounds, he brutalized AL pitching in 2011. Yet it's the warm smile that people notice first. How can anyone of such an intimidating stature be *this nice*? As the Boston first baseman discusses his past and newfound home, that question is answered loud and clear.

YOU HAVE A REPUTATION FOR BEING A SOFT-SPOKEN, NICE-GUY SLUGGER. HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN?
Well, I've always been soft-spoken. I won't say I've always been a nice guy. I was very selfish when I was a teenager.

GROWING UP ON THE WEST COAST, HOW HAVE YOU ADAPTED TO BEING AN EAST COAST GUY?
I played rookie ball on the East Coast, played a Double-A season on the East Coast, played A-ball in the Midwest. Going up through the Minor Leagues, you really play all over the U.S., so adapting isn't really an issue.

HOW HAVE THE FANS IN BOSTON BEEN? WERE YOU READY FOR SUCH AN INTENSE FAN BASE?
I knew that they were going to be really passionate and very devoted and live and die by the team. But what I was most impressed with last year was how they didn't leave. They stay from the first pitch until the last pitch of every game.

YOU DON'T SEEM FAZED BY THE PRESSURE THAT IT TAKES TO PLAY IN A CITY LIKE BOSTON. CAN YOU SEE, THOUGH, HOW IT CAN BE TOO MUCH?

Yeah, if you're a person who wants to satisfy what other people think, then the spotlight can wear on you. But I'm not here to satisfy anybody.

THE RED SOX WERE AGAIN AMONG THE MAJOR LEAGUE LEADERS IN ROAD ATTENDANCE IN 2011. HOW WAS THAT FOR YOU, AS A PLAYER, TO LOOK OUT FROM VARIOUS VISITORS' DUGOUTS AND SEE FANS IN RED SOX GEAR PACKING STADIUMS AND CHEERING YOU ON?

The more energy you have, the better you feel. It's great being able to play with a full house everywhere because it just gives you that energy, especially when you have fans rooting for you wherever you go.

BEING PART OF THE YANKEES-RED SOX RIVALRY NOW, HOW HAS THAT COMPARED TO EXPECTATIONS?
I guess it was as I expected it. I think it's overdone from a media sense. They make it more of a big deal than it really is to the players during a game.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF FENWAY PARK?
It's very unique, a great place to play. I walked around it, saw it, and that's what I expected it to be — awesome.

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN KNOWN, EVEN AT CAVERNOUS PETCO PARK, FOR OPPOSITE-FIELD POWER. DOES IT FEEL BETTER GOING THE OPPOSITE WAY AND SEEING IT GO OVER THE GREEN MONSTER NOW?
Well, I haven't seen many go over the Green Monster, but I have seen a lot go off the Green Monster.



STROMBERG/MLB PHOTOS

O&A EYE OF THE STORM

HOW'S THAT FEEL, WHEN YOU HEAR THE "TINK"?

It's great knowing you'll get rewarded for hitting a ball you stayed behind and were able to take the other way.

HAVE YOU BEEN INSIDE THE MONSTER TO SIGN YOUR NAME YET? YOU KNOW IT'S A TRADITION.

I haven't signed my name there yet, but I have gone inside.

OTHER THAN THE GREEN MONSTER, THERE ARE QUITE A FEW UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THAT BALLPARK. DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE QUIRK YET?

I enjoy the Pesky Pole. I think it's a unique part — hitting a ball 200 feet and having it be a home run [laughs].

A LITTLE LEAGUE HOME RUN, RIGHT?

Yeah. In the field, I get a lot of looks from players on opposing teams who are at first base and trying to see if the ball will go fair or foul. The way the ball bounces off that wall, that's a really unique feature.

SPEAKING OF LONGBALLS, WHAT WAS IT LIKE SUITING UP FOR THE AMERICAN LEAGUE FOR THE HOME RUN DERBY AND ALL-STAR GAME LAST YEAR AFTER YOUR THREE APPEARANCES FOR THE NL?

It was different. Playing for the National League was all

about breaking the losing streak. In 2010, we finally won the game, and last year I found myself on the other side, and it's, "Get that losing streak back!" So now I'm like, "Wait a minute, I've got to switch gears here." [laughs]

OBVIOUSLY YOU'RE FROM A TALENTED FAMILY. YOUR FATHER PLAYED ON THE MEXICO NATIONAL TEAM AND YOUR BROTHER, EDGAR, IS A PRO BALLPLAYER, TOO. WHAT WAS IT LIKE GROWING UP AROUND THAT?

We just lived baseball every day. If we weren't on the baseball field at practice, my brothers and I were playing with each other. My dad built a batting cage in the backyard that we used a lot. And it was just our entire family, you know?

DID YOU HAVE ANY FUN, COMPETITIVE MOMENTS WITH YOUR BROTHERS?

Yeah, we'd play a lot of Wiffle Ball games, a whole lot of games in the batting cage, and they were a lot of fun.

ANY SCUFFLES?

No, it was just us trying to beat each other.

WHAT TEAM DID YOU ROOT FOR GROWING UP IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA? WERE YOU A PADRES FAN?

Oh yeah, big Padres fan.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE CHILDHOOD BASEBALL MOMENTS?

I enjoyed watching the Padres go to the World Series in '98. I also enjoyed their sweep of the Dodgers in '96 to win the division. I really liked seeing Tony Gwynn, Trevor Hoffman, and going to watch Fernando Valenzuela pitch.

COMMON ROOTS

A NATIVE OF CHULA VISTA, CALIF., ADRIAN GONZALEZ knows what life is like for the players in Park View Little League. In fact, he grew up in the very same house — the one with a custom batting cage in the backyard — as Andy Rios, one of the members of the team that won the 2009 Little League World Series.

Nearly three years ago, the Park View All-Stars weaved their way through the tournament before defeating Taiwan, 6-3, in the Finals to become the first Little League World Series champs from the San Diego area in nearly half a century. Bradley Roberto (in photo, far left), then a stout 12-year-old outfielder and first baseman — with a left-handed stroke and a penchant for bopping homers like Gonzalez — was on that team. He and his teammates have since graduated from Little League, but Roberto returned donning his LLWS jersey for this issue's cover photo shoot with the big star who continues to support kids in his hometown.

"They're from Chula Vista, so we're all behind them," Gonzalez told ESPN. "That's pretty cool that they used the same cage that we did growing up. It's a nice touch."

TERRILL/ALB PHOTOS



The Red Sox hope that Gonzalez will have plenty of chances to show off his home run trot in 2012.



State Farm HOME RUN DERBY

Q&A EYE OF THE STORM

Known for opposite-field power, Gonzalez put on a show for the American League during the 2011 Home Run Derby. The Red Sox slugger faced a rival in the final round, going against the Yankees' Robinson Cano.

DID YOU HAVE ONE COACH WHO YOU LOOKED UP TO OR A PLAYER THAT YOU TRIED TO EMULATE?

I always looked up to Tony Gwynn.

TONY GWYNN WITH A LOT MORE POWER, RIGHT?

Well, I never tried to model my swing after his. I happened to be an opposite-field hitter, too, but I always admired him, being that he was with San Diego and the great things he was able to do with the bat.

I MENTIONED YOUR DAD AND HOW PROUD HE MUST BE THAT YOU AND YOUR BROTHER REACHED THE MAJORS. WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN HIS PROUDEST MOMENT SO FAR FROM YOUR CAREER?

He always says the thing he's most proud of is that all three of us are good people. He loves the fact that we play the game he loved and that we have the opportunity he gave up for us. But his No. 1 thing is that we care about others.

DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD SHOW KIDS HOW TO BE A GOOD PERSON OR TELL THEM? WHAT DO YOU THINK WORKED SO WELL FOR YOU AND YOUR BROTHERS?

Showing, definitely showing. My dad, he'd give anything

for us. Everything he does is for us, and not just us, but our cousins; he's just a really giving person. He'd never hesitate to say yes to someone. We watched that growing up. To be there for others, to help others, in any aspect of life, is something all three of us pay attention to and try to do every day.

YOU MENTIONED THAT HE GAVE UP BASEBALL. WOULD YOU SAY THAT'S THE BIGGEST SACRIFICE YOU SAW HIM MAKE FOR FAMILY?

Yeah, I mean he gave up on professional baseball. I don't know if that was the biggest sacrifice — you'd have to ask him. If he made other sacrifices, he didn't tell us about it. But I know he gave up pro ball in Mexico for us.

IT WORKED OUT PRETTY WELL, THOUGH. NOW TELL ME — WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU DON'T THINK BASEBALL FANS KNOW ABOUT YOU YET?

I guess the only thing I can say is that I like really spicy food. I love Mexican food. I like out-of-control spicy stuff that I know will hurt my stomach later. ♦

Mike McCormick is editorial director for Major League Baseball Properties.

EVAN LONGORIA ON DEFENSE AT THE HOT CORNER



Two-time Gold Glover Evan Longoria knows a thing or two about holding it down at the hot corner. In 2009, just his second full Big League campaign, the Rays' cornerstone and the 2008 AL Rookie of the Year ranked among the top Junior Circuit third basemen in defense. Seemingly at ease as soon as he steps between the lines, Longoria has been known to flash the leather, and he gave *Little League Magazine* some tips for defensive success:



Location, Location, Location

The first step is to know the hitter and position yourself accordingly. If it's a guy who we're playing the full shift on, I'm going to be way over in the shortstop hole. If it's a guy who sprays the ball around and he's been hitting it between third and short, I might just move over a couple of steps to defend that hole. It all depends on the hitter. I try to change how I'm positioned pitch by pitch.

Do the Shuffle

I always try to create rhythm with my prep steps into the ready position. I usually go right-left, and I try to have my left foot land just before the pitch is entering the hitting zone. That gives me a good base, and I'm ready to move either way if the ball is hit and have some spring out of that position.

The Situation

With a runner on second, if the ball is hit to the right side, I usually just drift over to third base. If there's one out, that runner is going to come in real hard, and, if it's hit to the second basemen and he's a fast runner, he might try to score. I have to keep an eye on him and make sure that he's not going home or that, if he gets too far, we could try to run him back to third.

If the ball is hit to me at third, I just try to bust it to the base. If it's a fast runner and it's hit in the hole to short, the shortstop may not have a shot at first but he might have one at the runner going from second to third. We communicate to know whether it's a force play or a tag play. ♦

By Jeff Fletcher Against All Odds

Once faced with letting go of their Big League dreams, these players transformed and rejuvenated their careers.



FOR KIDS WATCHING BASEBALL AT HOME WITH THEIR parents, players in the spotlight can quickly become idols. Their lives as pro athletes seem glamorous and effortless. Perfect even. But that's not always the case.

No matter how far they can hit the ball or how much their sliders move, Big League ballplayers face many of the same struggles as accountants, salesmen and even middle school students. Their glories may be in the limelight, but their pains can often be very private. Sometimes it's the struggle to recover from a serious injury, something that fans see only in terms of games missed but that a player experiences as a threat to his livelihood. Or maybe it's the strain of failing to outplay the competition, fighting through the boos that critics throw around as if the targets weren't humans with real emotions. It's silly to pretend that something that would hurt if directed toward you will just bounce off someone else.

So even though most people think about what Major Leaguers *can* do rather than what they can't, it's a good lesson that even the very best had to fight through some tough patches. Zack Greinke and Andres Torres had to find medication for disorders that went undiagnosed for years.

Jon Lester overcame cancer. R.A. Dickey had to discover a new way to pitch because he was born with a physical defect and didn't know it. Colby Lewis and Ryan Vogelsong temporarily abandoned their Big League dreams, playing for a time in Japan. Each of these players hit discouraging low points before making a comeback. And their stories have plenty of lessons.

The Best Medicine

Zack Greinke was a highly touted prospect in high school. He had the talent to be a top pitcher, but he was uneasy around his teammates, fans and the media when he joined the Kansas City Royals in 2004. In the spring of '06, the Royals allowed Greinke to leave the team so he could get help for what they later learned was social anxiety disorder. Greinke underwent therapy and got medication to help him better handle social interactions. He returned to the Royals a few months later and went on to win the 2009 AL Cy Young Award.

"You talk about mental toughness. There isn't a game that he'll pitch in his life that'll put him on the spot more than what he's already gone through," former Royals General Manager Allard Baird told MLB.com. "What he's achieved speaks volumes."

Andres Torres was an unheralded Minor Leaguer dealing with other issues. A superb athlete growing up in Puerto Rico, the outfielder played in the Detroit Tigers' farm system for years without getting anywhere. One day a coach recognized that Torres was showing some of the same symptoms as his own daughter, who had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Like a child who couldn't concentrate at school, Torres couldn't focus on baseball. Once he was diagnosed and got the right medication, he reached the Majors. In 2010, he was a key member of the Giants team that won the World Series.

"I was almost out of the game," Torres told *Giants Magazine*. "I had a lot of struggles. But, thank God, with hard work, therapy, medication, I'm here now."

Survivor

In 2006, Jon Lester felt back pain, which he thought was the result of a minor car accident. Turns out it was caused by anaplastic large cell lymphoma, a rare but highly treatable



Vogelsong (opposite) encountered a rough road on the way to Big League success, traveling all the way to Japan. Dickey (above, from left), Lester and Lewis also faced hardships early on, but were able to rebound.

cancer. Lester went home to Washington and underwent chemotherapy. By Spring Training 2007, he was again pitching for the Red Sox. He started the World Series-clinching game that year, and the next season he threw a no-hitter.

Early in his recovery, Lester discussed his illness reluctantly, but now he embraces it: "It helps people," he told WEEI.com. "I want to do that, and I'm proud of what I've come from."

A New Twist

Just before R.A. Dickey was about to finalize an \$810,000 deal with the Rangers out of college, a physical revealed he had been born without a ligament in his elbow, which made his arm too unstable for pitching in the Majors. Texas still signed him — for less than 10 percent of the original bonus he'd been offered — but few expected him to reach the Bigs.

Dickey did get there, but he didn't perform well at first. Then he returned to the Minors to learn the knuckleball, a trick pitch that wouldn't strain his arm. He established himself as a quality starter and posted a 3.08 ERA with the Mets from 2010–11.

"I always thought I would be here. I think everybody else thought I wouldn't," Dickey told *The Record* of Bergen County, N.J. "That probably played into the motivation wanting to not just get here, but stay here."

The journey took Dickey — along with Mets bullpen catcher Dave Racaniello and Rockies pitcher Kevin Slowey — to a more literal height this past offseason, when he climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa. The group, which reached the summit in January, was seeking to raise awareness about difficulties facing teens in parts of India. The 19,000-plus feet they climbed to the summit were more steps along an uplifting road.

Adversity definitely helps you grow. It helps you develop character.
—Colby Lewis

Around the World

Colby Lewis and Ryan Vogelsong also took long journeys — across the Pacific Ocean — before finding their niches.

Lewis had toiled with four teams in a career derailed by shoulder problems when he left to pitch in Japan. In two years, he gained perspective, along with pop on his fastball and improved control. Texas signed him before the 2010 campaign, and Lewis has since won 26 games and twice helped his team reach the World Series.

"Adversity definitely helps you grow," he told MLB.com. "It helps you develop character, and I wouldn't change anything for the world."

Vogelsong had a similar history — two teams, one surgery, little success — before he went to Japan for a three-year stay. He came back to the Majors with the Giants in 2011, won 13 games and was an All-Star. "People can look to my story and what has happened as a little pick-me-up," he told MLB.com. "When you think things are bad, they can always be worse. And when you think things can't be worse, they can get better." ♦

Jeff Fletcher is a freelance writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area.



OUT WITH THE OLD

Clawing their way back into contention, some teams look to young players to lift them to glory.

By Zack Meisel

OUTFIELDER BILL VIRDON RECALLS THE STRUGGLES. Day after day of defeat. Year after year of frustration.

"The losing always wears on whoever is there," he says. In each season from 1950–57, Pittsburgh finished with either the worst or second-worst record in the National League. But after nine straight losing campaigns, things came together for the club, whose young players matured and prospered under the tutelage of Manager Danny Murtaugh. Then, in the blink of an eye, Virdon's Pirates were slipping on World Series rings after an upset of the vaunted New York Yankees in 1960.

Perhaps Pittsburgh created a blueprint for the way young teams attack the rebuilding process today. Struggling clubs such as the current Pirates, Royals and Indians have recently been banking on premier, young talent to supply the lightning in a bottle that more than 50 years ago catapulted Pittsburgh to the top of the baseball world.

"Last year was a start," says Virdon, who now serves as a special instructor for the club in Spring Training. "The team just wasn't quite deep enough to hold out for all 162 games. This year, maybe it'll carry on and end up being much better."

That hope begins with center fielder Andrew McCutchen. Since the turn of the millennium, the Pirates have finished no

WILLIAMSON/MLB PHOTOS

Despite their youth, the Royals' Hosmer (opposite) and Moustakas (above, left) anchor the batting order — and the corner infield spots — in Kansas City, while McCutchen, already an All-Star at 24, can turn the tides in Pittsburgh.

better than fourth of the six NL Central teams, with a 75-87 record in 2003 ranking as its top mark.

McCutchen is one of the primary pieces tasked with reversing the club's recent struggles. The 25-year-old, as close to a franchise cornerstone as the Pirates can claim, socked 23 homers as the team contended for the NL Central title late into July last season. "He's got a chance to be a really good player," Virdon says. "I think he's capable of being an All-Star again and being on a winner and setting an example."

WHEN PITTSBURGH earned a ticket to the Fall Classic in 1960, it was the first league pennant for the Steel City since 1927. Unfortunately, it was also the only one for a decade.

"Guys on the '60 team, they say how bad they were before they won that World Series and how they went through a struggle," McCutchen says. "People don't see the teams in the other years of what they went through. We've been able to talk to those guys, and they said how they lost well over 100 games (112 in 1952), but they got better every year."

The praise from alumni has given McCutchen — one of three Pirates All-Stars in 2011 — extra incentive. But General Manager Neal Huntington does not want all of that pressure resting on the shoulders of his young outfielder.

"There's no question he's one of the most exciting young players in the game," Huntington says, "but to put him in that franchise player category — it's still early. He does have all the attributes to *become* that type of player."

McCUTCHEN IS FAR FROM THE ONLY BUDDING STAR tasked with reviving a scuffling franchise. The Royals have also floundered, as the team has not seen the postseason since its World Series title in 1985. Kansas City finished last or second-to-last in the AL Central for 14 of the last 16 years.

To expedite the latest rebuilding process, the Royals relied heavily last season on rookies Eric Hosmer and Mike Moustakas, who immediately leapt into everyday roles during their initiation to the Bigs.

"It's very difficult as hitters," says Royals hitting coach Kevin Seitzer, "to establish timing and recognition and all the things that they need to be an everyday guy if they're only getting a chance to play once a week."

Seitzer would know. He spent much of 1996

and '97 as a part-time player with the Indians, a championship contender with a mix of seasoned vets and emerging stars. Back then, youngsters Manny Ramirez and Jim Thome had just embarked on their pursuit of 500 and 600 homers, respectively. Despite hitting near the bottom of Cleveland's order, they played integral roles on some very strong teams.

Moustakas and Hosmer have not been afforded a lineup of established stars, like the Indians had with Eddie Murray, Julio Franco and Albert Belle. Instead, Royals skipper Ned Yost plugged his two burgeoning sluggers into the middle of his order and let them fight through the ups and downs of a typical rookie campaign. Hosmer finished third in AL Rookie of the Year voting, hitting .293 with 19 homers in 128 games.

"Because we're so young and new to the Major Leagues, you just see that excitement day in and day out. It goes a long way." —Jason Kipnis

LEITER/MLB PHOTOS (MOUSTAKAS); GRIESHOP/MLB PHOTOS



Kipnis was called up in mid-July last year and immediately made an impact in Cleveland's lineup during the pennant race, displaying plenty of upside for the future.

"There's such a huge jump between Triple-A and Major League pitching," Seitzer says. "That transition period is really difficult for young hitters. It was pretty special to see Hosmer make the adjustments that he had to make last season and make them fairly quickly."

SINCE CLEVELAND'S LAST POSTSEASON ADVENTURE — WHEN it was one game away from a World Series trip in 2007 — Grady Sizemore, Shin-Soo Choo and Travis Hafner have anchored the lineup. But after a blazing start to the 2011 campaign — the Tribe went 18-8 in April — the club moved up the Big League arrival dates for its top hitting prospects, second baseman Jason Kipnis and third baseman Lonnie Chisenhall. Manager Manny Acta inserted the rookies into the batting order in the thick of a pennant race.

"This guy is not going to be intimidated," Acta said of Kipnis, who collected a walk-off hit in just his second Big League game. "We're not expecting any of them to come up here and carry the ballclub, but just contribute here and there."

The duo certainly did that, pumping new life into the ballclub until a late-summer fade removed the Tribe from contention. Still, it gave Cleveland a refreshing sense of hope for 2012.

"You can see it in the locker room and out on the field," Kipnis says. "Because we're so young and new to the Major Leagues, you just see that excitement day in and day out. It goes a long way."

Hope and excitement are what bind together the young, up-and-coming teams. Aside from their own results, there might be no better source of inspiration than from those who were in their shoes before.

"When we were talking to the '60 World Series team," McCutchen says, "they said, 'We see a change in you guys. We see that you guys can be better and do better.' They were in the same boat as us, and they just said, 'Don't give up.' It lets us know that we aren't the only ones that have gone through what we're going through. Others have been there and they've flourished." ♦

Zack Meisel is an associate reporter for MLB.com.

GRIT AND DETERMINATION

JASON KIPNIS CAN RELATE TO HIS FANS.

Born, raised and still residing in the Chicago area during the offseason, he identified with both Windy City teams — although when pressed to offer his allegiance to just one club, he says the Cubs, without a championship since 1908, needed his fandom more.

Now the Indians need their young infielder to help end baseball's second-longest World Series drought.

"Cleveland is a great sports town with very die-hard fans," Kipnis says. "They will cling on to a winner as soon as one comes here."

The Indians last won the Fall Classic in 1948, nearly four decades before Kipnis was born. They have come close in recent memory but failed to go all the way, falling in the World Series in 1995 and '97, then finishing one game shy of a trip in 2007.

After a few subpar seasons, the team re-entered the AL Central race early in 2011, and Kipnis — Cleveland's second-round choice in the 2009 First-Year Player Draft — was thrown into the fire.

"We saw him in Spring Training," Indians skipper Manny Acta said during the season. "Guys like him are going to contribute."

Just one week after promoting Kipnis, Cleveland parted ways with veteran infielder Orlando Cabrera and handed the rookie the second base job.

"When the team is doing well like that when you get called up," Kipnis says, "you pretty much put everything aside and say, 'Okay, I don't need to hit .300 with a ton of home runs; all I need to do is help this team win right now because we're in a division race and that's what matters most.' It almost takes pressure off."

Acta sees plenty of potential in his young second baseman, whom he has supplied with a peculiar nickname.

"He's a dirtbag," Acta said after Kipnis amassed five hits in an Aug. 10 victory. "A dirtbag is one of those guys that runs through a wall to win every single day. He throws himself around, is always dirty, runs every ball out, does whatever it takes to win."

Says Kipnis: "To be part of the group that brings a championship back to Cleveland could be something truly special and something you remember for a long time. There are pieces in place where I can see it happening, so I'm excited." —ZM

MATT WIETERS ON **PLATE APPROACH**



Orioles catcher Matt Wieters may have recently received praise for his glove work behind the plate during the 2011 season, but his game is about more than just Gold Glove defense. The backstop also got his first All-Star bid — representing the American League — on his way to posting career highs in slugging percentage, home runs, RBI and hits, among other offensive categories. Wieters is certainly in command with a bat in his hands, and he gave *Little League Magazine* some of his tips:



Ducks on the Pond

When you're at the plate with one or more runners in scoring position, you want to get a good pitch to hit. You don't want to be too antsy up there or swing at a pitcher's toughest pitches. Make the pitcher work through the at-bat. Once you get a good pitch to hit, that's where it all starts — just put a good swing on it like you do whenever you practice in the cage.

Right on Target

When you're facing some of the top pitchers in the game, you're not always going to be able to cover the whole plate with your swing. I usually just split the plate in half in my mind and look for something away, then try to shoot it through the four-hole at second or get it through the six-hole at short. Don't try and do too much with a pitch, but have a plan when you want to hit it to a particular spot.

Red Light

After you take a pitch, it's over. Then it's just a matter of clearing your mind and refocusing on what you're trying to do once you get back in the box. ♦



Athletes by Profession

BALLPLAYERS REVEAL HOW THEY WOULD BE SPENDING THEIR DAYS IF THEY HADN'T MADE IT BIG.

By Troy E. Renck

HALLOWEEN IS A WINDOW INTO DREAMS. Firemen, cowboys and superheroes go from one door to the next. But usually the costume comes off by the next day.

And then there are Big Leaguers. They are the rare ones who have become poster children for dream jobs.

Matt Holliday was raised in Stillwater, Okla., surrounded by sports. He had pictures of Cal Ripken Jr. plastered in his room. His father was a baseball coach at Oklahoma State. At one point, future Big Leaguer Jeromy Burnitz was his babysitter.

There was no doubt which way the arrow was pointing him. Even though he was an elite high school quarterback — considered the nation's top recruit in a class that included Southern Cal-bound Carson Palmer — Holliday didn't waver.

"It was always baseball for me," says Holliday, a five-time All-Star left fielder, who enters this season as the anchor of the defending-champion Cardinals' lineup. "It was my dream."

IT'S A DREAM shared by many kids. And yet it's one that has odds stacked squarely against it. Talent gaps, injuries and bad luck can all conspire to keep kids from reaching The Show.

What is striking about many who *have* made their careers in baseball, then, is their passion, evident even at a young age.

Tampa Bay Manager Joe Maddon grew up in Hazelton, Pa., with an unhealthy love for baseball. He couldn't wait for games to start even as snow covered the ground. "I would get my glove and put gobs of oil on it even though I knew it probably wasn't good for it. I would think about kids that

VESELVILB PHOTOS

lived in warm-weather states and how they were the luckiest in the world that they got to play 12 months out of the year."

Maddon would walk to the local sporting goods store almost daily, dreams in tow. It was there that they sold his favorite Rawlings baseball glove.

"I can still smell the leather," he recalls. "I saved my pennies until I could buy that glove."

NOT EVERY PATH is so predictable. Chris Iannetta grew up near Providence, R.I. — not exactly a baseball hotbed. A loyal Red Sox fan, Iannetta had the fire hydrant body type that made him an ideal catcher.

"But you have to understand, I never thought it would amount to this. It wasn't like I dreamed that I would ever play in the pros," says Iannetta, who was acquired by the Angels this offseason to help guide one of baseball's best rotations.

Iannetta was good, recognizing by high school that he would likely play in college. But he figured the journey would eventually end, so he long had his eye on another career. "I always loved airplanes, and if baseball hadn't worked out, I would have tried to work at Boeing to help design airplanes. It's something that still really interests me," he says.

Indians starter Ubaldo Jimenez also was a special kid. And despite how it might look now, baseball wasn't his sole focus; Jimenez treated school just as seriously. The reason he signed with the Colorado Rockies was because it allowed him to keep a promise to his parents to continue his academics.

"If I wasn't playing baseball, I definitely would have tried to become a doctor and gone to Santo Domingo University,"

Jimenez says. "My mom was a nurse and my sister went to medical school, so that's what I grew up knowing about."

GEORGE FRAZIER, a longtime reliever with the Cardinals and Yankees, among other clubs, had a bittersweet relationship with baseball. His journey to the Bigs had something in common with NBA star Michael Jordan.

"I wanted to be a basketball player. I grew up in the country, so a lot of times all I had was an orange ball and a hoop to keep me company," Frazier says. "And plus, I got cut from my high school baseball team the first three years I tried."

Jordan famously was axed from his high school team until his junior year, too. Frazier pursued a hoops career and planned on going to Drury University in his hometown of Springfield, Mo., to play forward. But something eventually changed.

"I finally made my high school team and went 7-0 as a pitcher. Then I was headed to the University of Oklahoma to play baseball," Frazier says. "It's funny because I didn't always like baseball because I

thought it was slow. But it turned out well for me."

And before Buck Showalter took to managing, he, too, could play. The Orioles' skipper grew up in Century, Fla., with a field practically in his backyard, so his dad would place a lawn chair behind the center-field fence to watch his son. With this setting as a backdrop, an at-bat transpired that explains Showalter's passion.

"He caught my first home run," Showalter says. "I still have that ball on my desk." It's a reminder to never stop dreaming. ♦

Troy E. Renck covers the Rockies for The Denver Post.



St. Louis's Holliday (opposite) and Rays skipper Maddon may have had their sights set on the Bigs from a young age, but some players had other plans for the future.

JEFF BAKER Chicago Cubs

JEFF BAKER GREW UP A military kid, bouncing from country to country and army base to army base. He morphed from a high school star into a Clemson standout and now calls the Cubs' infield home. Baseball is a love, but when your dad is a colonel in the U.S. Army, it's easy to see

yourself with something besides a glove and bat in your hands.

"I had two dreams; one was to be a Big Leaguer, and the other was to be a Navy Seal," Baker says. "My father influenced that one. Being on military posts my whole life, it was something I wanted to do."



SKY HIGH

THE 2011 LITTLE LEAGUE WORLD SERIES TEAM FROM MONTANA REPRESENTED THE STATE IN A BIG WAY.

IN JUNE 2011, MANAGERS, COACHES AND PLAYERS IN the Billings (Mont.) Big Sky Little League were deciding, like thousands of others around the world, who would represent their league in the International Tournament.

Manager Gene Carlson and coaches Tom Zimmer and Mark Kieckbusch hoped to hold their own in the Montana District 1 Tournament. No one envisioned the six-week odyssey that would take the team from coast to coast and within one win of becoming the best Little League team in the country.

“We had a good talent pool to draw from and selected a team of 12 well-rounded individuals who were good kids,” says Carlson, a volunteer in the league for 10 years and a manager for eight. “In my mind, there wasn’t anything missing.”

The numbers may have been few — with just four Major division teams in the league to draw from — but the talent was there. Patrick Zimmer, Cole McKenzie and Ben Askelson, especially, were lynchpins for the club.

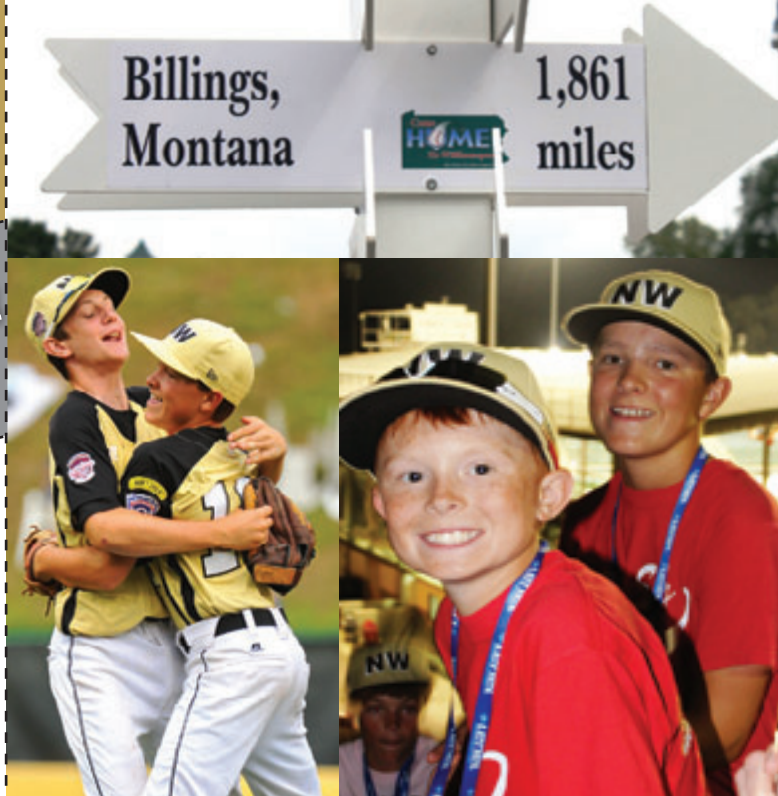
LOCATED IN SOUTH-CENTRAL Montana, Billings is nicknamed the “Magic City.” And at the 2011 Little League World Series, the Big Sky Little League held true to the moniker.

The boys from Billings had been making history since the district tournament. They opened district play with a 9-7 win over Central Giants Little League, also from Billings. Four victories later, the team faced rival Boulder-Arrowhead Little League, a tough hurdle for the eventual Montana champs.

Once crowned, Big Sky entered the Northwest Regional tournament and promptly lost, 10-6, to Oregon’s state champs in their second game. The loss was a wake-up call, and Montana got the message, defeating Wyoming, Alaska and Idaho twice to earn a rematch with Bend South (Ore.) Little League for the right to play in Williamsport.

In the championship game, Montana broke open a 1-0 game with six runs in the fourth for a 7-1 victory that earned the state its first trip to the Little League World Series in the 65th season of the tournament.

“When we won the regional championship, the kids realized that was something special,” says Carlson. “Their goal after winning the state was to be on TV. Going to the World Series was not what they set out to do, and now they were going to be treated like rock stars. It was hard for them to get used to.”



“When we won the regional championship, the kids realized that was something special. Their goal was to be on TV. Going to the World Series was not what they set out to do, and now they were going to be treated like rock stars. It was hard for them to get used to.”

— Manager Gene Carlson

With just 28 Little Leagues in Montana, Big Sky’s success generated exposure and some unexpected civic pride. One of Carlson’s fondest non-game memories was meeting play-by-play commentator Brent Musberger, a Billings native. Musberger, who called the U.S. championship game on ABC, arrived in Williamsport early to see the Northwest champs.

AFTER ONE WIN against Ocean View Little League from Huntington Beach, Calif. — the eventual LLWS champions — Billings saw its magical run snuffed out by an 11-2 loss in their second meeting. Still, it would not undo the memories made.

“Our win against California was a feather in the cap,” says Carlson of his team, which finished 20-2 overall in the 2011 Little League International Tournament. “To beat the West once was great, but to beat them again was going to be a lot tougher. Even though we lost, being the first team from Montana and having success was special.”

And having to settle for being the second-best Little League team in America isn’t too tough an ordeal. ♦

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

AFTER SOME HARD-FOUGHT AND EXCITING CONTESTS, EIGHT U.S. TEAMS PREVAILED AND WERE CROWNED CHAMPIONS OF THE LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL WORLD SERIES.



AS THE LAST OUT OF THE 2011 Little League Baseball World Series was recorded at Howard J. Lamade Stadium in South Williamsport, Pa., the chant of “U-S-A! U-S-A!” was loud and proud. It was the same across the Little League landscape, as each of the program’s eight World Series tournaments was won by a team representing the United States.

How the West Won

Little League Baseball — South Williamsport, Pa.
Before Japan’s national champion and the U.S. West Region champion faced off in the Finals for the second time in as many years, the tournament featured an earthquake, a tropical storm and the first team from the state of Montana. The Little League Baseball World Series title game took place on Aug. 28, 2011, a rain-soaked Sunday afternoon. To reach the penultimate contest, the two perennial powerhouses had to avenge earlier World Series tournament losses.

In the game that would ultimately give them the championship, Ocean View Little League from Huntington Beach, Calif., scored the winning run in the bottom of the sixth inning, as Nick Pratto’s bases-loaded single plated special pinch-runner Eric Anderson. Anderson had entered the game after Dylan Palmer reached base with a single to center field.

A record 414,905 fans attended the 2011 Series. There were plenty of unique moments, including the story of Keystone Little League from nearby Clinton County, Pa. — (just 20 miles from Williamsport) which represented the Mid-Atlantic Region and advanced to the U.S. Semifinal — and

Canada’s first Little League Baseball World Series victory over Chinese Taipei.

It was quite the tournament. But it had to be if it was going to keep pace with its seven cousins.

A ‘Sterling’ Performance

Little League Softball — Portland, Ore.
In a closely contested matchup, Sterling, Ill., took home the title in the 2011 Little League Softball World Series, 7-5, over Waco, Texas.

The Central Region’s monster third inning was just enough to win the tournament, which took place in mid-August, as Sterling added seven hits to a pair of Southwest errors to put seven runs on the board. Starter Alexis Staples nearly threw a complete game, ending her day with 5.1 innings pitched while allowing five earned runs and fanning two.

Winning Margin

Junior League Baseball — Taylor, Mich.
The Southeast Region champions took home the 2011 Junior League Baseball World Series title in a 2-1 thriller over Chinese Taipei in mid-August.

Palma Ceia Little League of Tampa, Fla., received all the offense it needed on Patrick Kiszla’s two-run homer in the second inning and staved off the Asia-Pacific champs despite letting up a run in the top of the fourth inning.

Starter Jake Woodford held Chinese Taipei to just a single run through five innings before Kiszla took over on the hill to finish what he started. Kiszla did not allow a single runner in his two innings of work to secure the victory.

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS



For the second straight year, it was Japan and the U.S. West Region champs in the Little League Baseball finals. Japan pitcher Yoshiki Suzuki (above) celebrated after beating team Mexico to reach the title game, and even though Ryota Matsushita (left) was able to avoid Nick Pratto's tag, the West triumphed.



“Every team we brought here was very, very good,” says Chadwick. “On any given day, any team could have beaten any other team.”

A Perfect '10'

Senior League Baseball — Bangor, Maine

The Senior League Baseball World Series celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2011 as a team from Hilo, Hawaii, took home the title with an impressive 11-1 defeat of the club representing Tyler, Texas, on Aug. 20 in Bangor, Maine.

The victory capped off a 15-game winning streak for Hilo, which was the first team in Senior League Baseball World Series history to win the championship game by the 10-run rule.

Sweet Home Delaware

Senior League Softball — Lower Sussex, Del.

In the only 2011 championship tournament won by a team from the host district, Laurel Little League from Laurel, Del., triumphed in the Senior League Softball World Series, topping the Latin America champs from Manaubo, Puerto Rico, 2-0, on Aug. 13, 2011.

The host team defeated Latin America in an unconventional way, scoring the first run on a hit batsman with the bases loaded in the first and the second on a sixth-inning wild pitch.

Climbing to the Top

Junior League Softball — Kirkland, Wash.

Croswell (Mich.) Lexington Little League took home the 2011 Junior League Softball World Series crown with a 10-0 win over Palma Ceia/West Tampa (Fla.) Little League.

The weeklong tournament, played Aug. 14–20, featured 10 teams (six U.S. and four international), as squads from the Netherlands, Philippines, Canada and Curacao joined Michigan, Washington, Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas and Alaska in Kirkland.

The championship game was a rout, as Michigan plated nine runs in the first two innings en route to a five-inning, 10-run rule victory.

But despite the lopsided finale, tournament director John Chadwick still felt that this year's series was one of the best and most competitive ever.

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

Patrick Zimmer was a member of the first-ever team from Montana to reach the Little League Baseball World Series, in 2011.



Jorge Jacobo and Team Mexico fared well in the International side of the tournament.



Martin was a leader in multiple ways. The game's winning pitcher, he allowed just two earned runs on five hits, striking out six in as many innings of work. He helped himself out at the plate, going 3 for 4 with a home run and three RBI. For the tournament, Martin hit .381 with four home runs.

Two Times the Title

Big League Softball — Kalamazoo, Mich.

For the second year in a row, a team from Grand Rapids, Mich., defeated the Asia-Pacific Region champion from the Philippines to capture the Big League Softball World Series title on Aug. 10, 2011, in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Ironically, the game was not just a replay pitting the same two regions, either; it was one featuring the same exact leagues. Grand Rapids won by a score of 9-2.

The 10-team tournament featured six squads from the United States and four from across the globe — Puerto Rico, Canada, the Philippines and Italy. Unlike any of the other World Series tournaments, the participants at the Big League Softball World Series stay in private homes, providing a unique opportunity for true international camaraderie.

"The main thing about this tournament," director Bud Vanderberg says, "is that these people come here from all over the world and always leave as friends." ♦

Stories compiled by Little League World Series special correspondents Alex Duke, Ryan Lewis and Allie Weinberger.

Alyssa Givens scored the winning run, while her teammates, sisters Logan and Regan Green, combined to pitch a four-hitter. Laurel went a perfect 5-0 in the tournament, winning just the second title for any team from the state of Delaware.

"I was very happy with the tournament," says director Martin Donovan. "It's the best one we've ever run. These teams were the best group of kids we've ever had."

Recipe for Success

Big League Baseball — Easley, S.C.

Kyle Martin almost single-handedly won the 2011 Big League Baseball World Series for his Southeast team, as South Carolina District 7 defeated Latin America, 9-7, in the championship game played on Aug. 3, 2011, in Easley, S.C.

SUNRISE, SUNSET

LITTLE LEAGUE GRAD KRISTA DONNENWIRTH WON HER FIRST NCAA SOFTBALL TITLE AS A FRESHMAN BEFORE CLINCHING HER SECOND AS A SENIOR.

WHAT MAKES A CHAMPION? ACCORDING TO KRISTA Donnenwirth, a two-time NCAA Women's College World Series winner at Arizona State University (ASU), it's a balance of personal discipline and team chemistry.

Today, the ASU senior is focused on completing her double major in Nutrition and Psychology by the summer of 2012. Last spring, she and the Sun Devils burned through the NCAA's elite to win their second national title in four years.

Growing up in Mission Viejo, Calif., Krista played Little League baseball in Rancho Mission Viejo Little League. She and her older brother, Dana, were coached by their father, Bill, whom she called a "sports fanatic."

Little League was part of the family dynamic, and the infielder admits it helped to shape her commitment. "Playing baseball pushed me. From a young age, it was expected that I do my schoolwork and go to practice. It was instilled in me to have the discipline that it takes to get better every day."

Transitioning to softball at age 10, Krista says, came with humbling moments. Stamped in her memory is her first softball at-bat — in which she struck out on three pitches. "I've always been hard on myself. I expect to do well all of the time, so it's been a challenge to learn to let go of failure and not take it onto the field or into the next at-bat."

KRISTA HAD A clear vision of where her efforts and talent would take her. She set her sights on becoming a scholarship athlete in the Pac-10 (now Pac-12) Conference. Following her 2007 graduation from Capistrano Valley High School, Krista accepted a scholarship to Arizona State in Tempe.

"Going into college, my coaches wanted me to make a major contribution to the team," she says. "I had a good freshman year, but there definitely was a transition period for me. The 6 a.m. workouts put me into shock."

Krista had a phenomenal debut campaign in 2008, for which she was named a Third Team All-American, First-Team All Pac-10 and Pac-10 Newcomer of the Year. She played brilliantly at the hot corner, and her offensive prowess made her a feared slugger. Hitting .354, Krista tallied 15 home runs and 14 doubles, scored 37 runs and collected 75 hits for a .632 slugging percentage. That year, ASU went on to defeat Texas A&M, 11-0, in the second game of a best-of-three



"There were a lot of similarities between the two championship teams, but winning as a senior was definitely sweeter. It was our last game together."

— Krista Donnenwirth

set — the largest margin of victory in a title game in NCAA history — to win the Women's College World Series.

"As a freshman, it was really exciting to do well. We had a good pitcher and the team started clicking. We knew halfway through the season that we had a chance to win, and we did."

The next two seasons were rebuilding years for the Sun Devils, but that allowed Krista to find her place and expand her leadership role as the program retooled. In her senior season, riding the strength of freshman pitcher Dallas Escobedo, who won 37 games, the team dominated the competition in the 2011 Women's College World Series, winning 10 straight games en route to the program's second national championship.

"There were a lot of similarities between the two championship teams, but winning as a senior was definitely sweeter," says Krista, who completed her career ranking among the top 10 in school history in home runs (36), doubles (36), hits (232) and runs batted in (200). "When we won, there was jubilation and sadness knowing we came out on top but that it was also our last game together." ♦

CHALLENGING THE ODDS

IN A COUNTRY WHERE BASEBALL IS RELATIVELY FOREIGN, KUWAIT LITTLE LEAGUE CHARTERED THE FIRST CHALLENGER DIVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

IF SPORTS CAN BE AN INTERNATIONAL OLIVE BRANCH of peace, then Kuwait Little League and its Challenger Division may represent the blossoming of hope.

Bordering the Persian Gulf between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait held the world's attention as the battlefield for the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s. But even in the wake of the war's chaos and destruction, Kuwait Little League, located in the capital of Kuwait City, has played an integral role in fostering recovery, community trust and a sense of worth for more than 350 children, including those with disabilities.

Formally chartered in 1987, Kuwait Little League has always been affiliated with Little League International, with the exception of the 1991 season, when league operations were suspended due to the Iraqi occupation. After coalition forces liberated the small country, its children returned to the playing field. Participation has expanded ever since.

"When our fields were taken away by war, children would write to us saying, 'I can't live without baseball,'" says Mercy Boujarwah, Kuwait Little League's safety officer. "We have the only Challenger Division program in the Middle East, and every day we are breaking new ground here."

A unique program, Little League's Challenger Division enables children with disabilities to participate in the game. Mercy's husband, Dr. Abdulazeez Saleh Boujarwah — Kuwait's district administrator and a longtime Little League volunteer — had the idea for his country's program, which took root in 2011.

Two Challenger Division teams have been assembled for the 2012 season. Each of the players, who range in age from 7 to 13, has been diagnosed with either autism spectrum disorder or Down syndrome. Many of the "buddies" who assist these players are participants in Kuwait Little League's Junior and Senior divisions.

"What is really amazing is the progress in the skill level and abilities of all of our returning players, who had never played baseball before last year," says Mariam Noor, the coordinator of the Kuwait Little League Challenger Division, whose 9-year-old son, Zane, is autistic and participates in the program. "The majority of our players that played off a tee last year are now able to hit soft-toss pitches."

Baseball and softball are as foreign to many Kuwaiti children as the sport of cricket is to kids in the United States.



"These kids don't grow up around baseball and don't see Major League games, so we bring the love of baseball to them. We consider ourselves the poster children for international goodwill through baseball."

— Mercy Boujarwah, *Kuwait Little League's safety officer*

While music, art, literature and dance form an important part of Kuwaiti lifestyle, participation in organized sports is typically not common. But the country's increasingly diverse population — which numbers more than 2.8 million — has influenced the local culture.

"In the early years of Kuwait Little League, there were some parents, primarily expatriate women who were married to Kuwaitis, who wanted their children playing baseball," says Mercy. "Now we're up to 25 teams and have a lot more local players. We have a following of children who love being at the field and playing baseball. These kids don't grow up around baseball and they don't see Major League Baseball games, so we bring the love of baseball to them. We consider ourselves the poster children for international goodwill — goodwill through baseball." ♦

NEW FRONTIER

BASEBALL IN THE OUTBACK CONTINUES TO GROW AS AUSTRALIA CHARTERS HUNDREDS OF LITTLE LEAGUE TEAMS FOR 2012.

BASEBALL HAS BEEN PLAYED DOWN UNDER FOR decades. But recently it's Little League, not the pros, that has generated a buzz for thousands of Australian children.

In a country that claims cricket and rugby as its most popular sports, the Australian Baseball Federation (ABF), the governing body of baseball for the island continent, and Little League International have developed a structure of more than 50 chartered leagues throughout the country.

Mark Priestley is the national development manager for the ABF. As the public face of the program, he oversees Little League operations throughout the country.

Priestley and adult volunteers have embraced the role that Little League can play in the lives of local children, and the response has resulted in more than 5,000 players entering the Little League program.

"Australia may be the strongest market today for the growth of the game of baseball with the establishment of their professional league and the ABF's efforts," says Dan Velte, director of league development for Little League International.

PRIESTLEY IS FOCUSED on education and marketing as the country's Little League program explores the possibility of expanding its offerings to younger children and teenagers.

"I am promoting Little League against other sports like cricket, soccer and rugby," he says, "which in Australia is a tough sell. We are creating promotional materials, which cater specifically to Australian Little Leaguers. We want the children to feel that Little League is *their* game."

For the past several seasons, the Little League (Major division), which caters to children ages 9–12, has been the focus of Australian development. In Queensland, where Priestley lives, there are seven charter leagues, totaling more than 600 teams. The leagues play regular-season games, followed by postseason tournaments.

In light of the growth and popularity of Little League in Australia, the ABF has considered adding Tee Ball, as well as Minor and Teenage divisions, under the Little League banner.

"Baseball has been played in Australia for quite a while, so I am not surprised by the excitement," Priestley says. "Our volunteer base is good, and we are lucky to have that. The challenge comes with providing a process to educate



"Australia may be the strongest market today for the growth of baseball."

— *Dan Velte*, director of league development for Little League International

the volunteers, but the educational resources that Little League has are incredible."

Little League International's development department has provided the clubs that operate the Australian programs with ways to encourage participation. Priestley says that, among other things, he is pushing for more professionally built fields dedicated solely to Little League. Although there are facilities available, the number of fields for young players is limited.

"The leagues are embracing the concept and are receptive," he says. "Being with Little League has made it easier to draw in players because the kids are hyped to possibly make a trip to Williamsport for the Little League Baseball World Series.

"Playing in Little League stays with a child for a lifetime. It is my responsibility to show what Little League brings to our country and how good a fit it is for Australia." ♦

BACK TO BASICS

RETURNING TO THE PLACE WHERE HIS PLAYING DAYS BEGAN, RETIRED MAJOR LEAGUE PITCHER **MIKE MUSSINA** IS RELISHING HIS TIME AS A LITTLE LEAGUE COACH.

By Chris Downs



“I remind my players to always play hard. I tell my team, ‘Anyone can do it when it’s easy.’”

— *Mike Mussina*

“Lots of things happen in Little League games that coaches didn’t have to contend with years ago,” he says. “When the first generation of pitch-count pitchers goes to college with healthy arms is when we’ll know if we affected positive change.”

Consistency, tenacity and durability were staples of Mussina’s 18-year career. Despite being a tough competitor, he was fortunate not to have required any type of arm surgery. For his career, he won at least 11 games in 17 consecutive seasons — an AL record. Among pitchers, he ranks 33rd in all-time wins (270) and games started (536), and 19th in K’s (2,813).

Nowadays, “Moose” admits he doesn’t think he could reach the plate from 60-feet, 6 inches, but coyly admits to being “locked in” when tossing batting practice to his Little League team. And he has some important lessons to teach.

“I remind my players to always play hard,” he says. “I tell my team all the time, ‘Anyone can do it when it’s easy.’”

“There are little competitions inside every game. I remind each player that it’s one little competition at a time. Every contribution can be big even if it’s small, because if that contribution isn’t made, it can change a game.” ♦

Chris Downs is the director of publicity for Little League Baseball and Softball.

SINCE STANDING ATOP A MAJOR LEAGUE MOUND FOR the last time, Mike Mussina has been nurturing players in the same Little League where he threw his first pitch.

A native of Montoursville, Pa., the MLB veteran owns a home 15 minutes from Williamsport, Little League’s birthplace.

“I’m from small-town America,” says Mussina, who was twice drafted by the Orioles — in 1987 and again in ’90. “I had no idea how I compared to other players. When I was a sophomore in high school and the interest from scouts started, I realized I had a chance to go places to play baseball.”

Entering Little League at the age of 8, Mussina pitched his first game for the Johnny Z’s Restaurant team in Montoursville Little League at age 10. From that fateful day, he embarked on a career that took him from the blue and gold of the Montoursville High School Warriors to the cardinal red of Stanford University and eventually, after 10 years in Baltimore, to the famed pinstripes of the New York Yankees.

During Mussina’s three-and-a-half years in Palo Alto, Calif. — he graduated early with an economics degree — he was named an All-American and guided Stanford to two College World Series while compiling a 31–16 record and a 3.89 ERA.

But if baseball had not worked out for Mussina, or if he chose not to pursue economics, he had a backup: art. In Little League, he designed his own baseball card, which is now on display in Williamsport’s Peter J. McGovern Little League Museum, along with his Johnny Z’s jersey and team picture.

TODAY, MUSSINA IS a member of the Little League International Board of Directors. Among the changes made during his tenure were new rules for pitcher eligibility, like pitch count limits, which were implemented partly due to his input.

Playing the Game

DALLAS ESCOBEDO ON THROWING YOUR PITCH



As a sophomore at Arizona State University, Dallas Escobedo is no stranger to pressure situations. In her freshman campaign, the hurler helped carry her team to a Women's College World Series title before going on to win a gold medal in the world championships with the USA Softball Women's Junior Team. Standing 6 foot 1, Escobedo is an imposing force in the circle, but she has plenty of other secrets for pitching success that she shared with *Little League Magazine*:



Warm-up Session

I make sure to long toss before every workout. It helps me to loosen up the muscles in my back and my arm and makes me see the spin on the ball.

Start off slowly when you're warming up; not gunning it right away is important. When you try to work on a different pitch, slow down your pace if it's not moving or breaking as you want. Feel the finish in your motion.

Work the Lineup

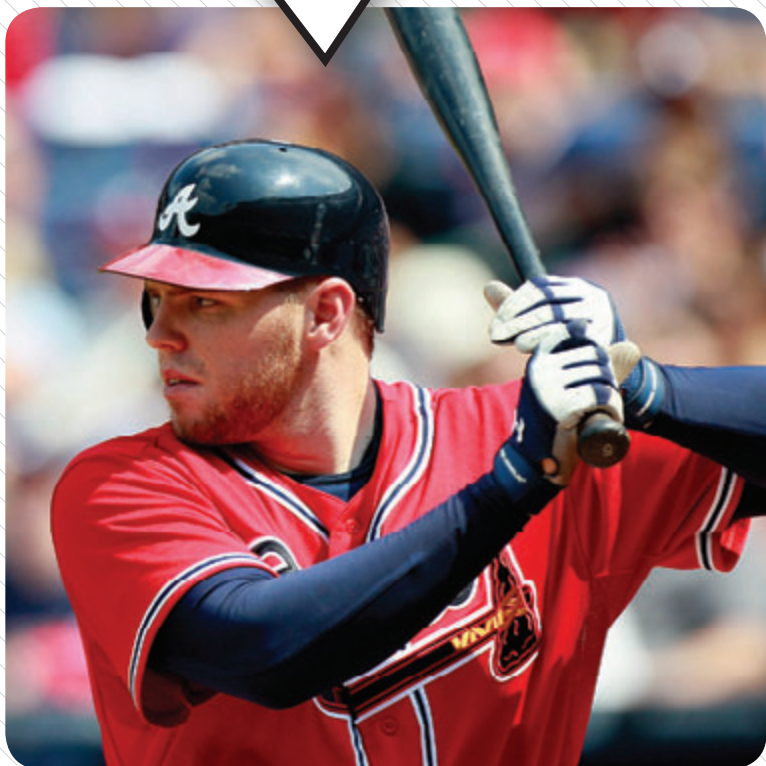
I approach every batter like she's the best hitter on that team. You have to respect everyone. Once I go through the lineup, I can tell which batter struggled and which one got a good hit and try to pitch them accordingly. But I'm going to make sure that if she beats me, it'll be on my best pitch.

Get the Sure Out

With runners on base, I take a different mental approach because I don't want them to advance. I make sure to get the out with the batter before I worry about what's going on with the runner and whether or not she's going to steal. It's important to focus on where you need to pitch every pitch.

If it's a bunt situation, you want to throw it high or throw a rise ball to make the batter pop it up. Throw it lower in the strike zone when you're trying to get a ground ball. ♦

When I was a kid ...



FREDDIE FREEMAN
First Base
Atlanta Braves

“When I was about eight years old, I hit my first home run in Little League on the bigger majors field, and my mom was at the game to see it. It landed right near her. Because my mom passed away two years later, when I was just 10, that’s the best memory with her that I hold on to.

My Little League team in Southern California made it to the third round of the playoffs one year. We lost to the team from our division that eventually went to Williamsport. I’ll never forget that team.”

TYLER CLIPPARD
Pitcher
Washington Nationals

“As a kid, you fantasize about making a Major League All-Star team. You have things in your mind that you want to do and you see guys on TV and think, ‘Hey, I’d love to be part of that one day.’ I think a lot of kids do that, but not many get to experience it like I did. Growing up, I never wavered from wanting to become a baseball player, and it gradually snowballed to the point where I am today.

My dad definitely encouraged me every step of the way, but in the right ways. He didn’t want me taking anything for granted as far as my abilities and made sure that I had a level head on my shoulders by putting me around a lot of very talented baseball players. I was never really the best player on my team as a kid. I played on all different kinds of teams since I was 13 years old, and they were all very competitive and had a lot of talent. Several guys from those teams have since been drafted, so to be around that caliber of baseball in my youth career — players like Ryan Harvey, Casey Kotchman, James Houser and numerous other guys who went on to play Minor League ball — forced me to work for what I wanted.”



COX/GETTY IMAGES (FREEMAN); MARTIN/GETTY IMAGES

PABLO SANDOVAL
Third Base
San Francisco Giants

“I was about 4 years old when I started playing baseball. Especially when I was that young, I just wanted to hit; I didn’t want to play defense at all. But thankfully I’ve grown out of that.

My Little League in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, did a lot of things together. The players and their families would have little parties almost every Sunday, especially after my team had won a game. We had a picnic for everybody, and you would bring a little bit of everything that you wanted to have fun. The goal was to make the day a happy one with your family.

In addition to Little League, I played tape ball with my older brother every day in the backyard of my house. We would come right home from school, throw our books down and start playing. It took us about two minutes to make a ball. We made a lot — like 10 a day — because we would hit them out of the yard. I can’t say that I was better, because he’s my brother. But he was 13 when I was 8, and I beat him every time.”



JASON HEYWARD
Outfield
Atlanta Braves

“I just remember the fun I had with my teammates and with my friends as a kid — the fact that we’d play two or three games in a day and then go home and play more baseball in the backyard. We’d stay at the park all day long and watch the other games in whatever tournament we were playing in. And then, of course, I loved going to Big League stadiums with my friends and watching games in other ballparks.

Even in Little League, you compete with yourself, you compete with your teammates and your friends, and you compete against other teams. Baseball was competitive at an early age for me, and the friends I made are ones I’m going to have for the rest of my life.” ♦



FRESCO/GETTY IMAGES (SANDOVAL); VISHWANATH/GETTY IMAGES

WORD SEARCH

Big-time players littered the Hot Stove landscape this year. Below are just some of the Major Leaguers who tested free agency during the offseason. Their names can be found in all directions: up, down, backward, forward and diagonally. See how many you can spot!



- (Heath) BELL
- (Carlos) BELTRAN
- (Jonathan) BROXTON
- (Michael) CUDDYER
- (Prince) FIELDER
- (Jonathan) PAPELBON
- (Albert) PUJOLS
- (Jose) REYES
- (Jimmy) ROLLINS
- (C.J.) WILSON

PUJOLS

UNSCRAMBLE

Can you unscramble the names of these players who participated in the 2011 postseason?

1. **IKEM ANLIOP**
Had a .350/.464/.700 line for Texas in his first career World Series appearance.

2. **TAMT OEOMR**
At age 22, posted a 1-0 record and 0.90 ERA with eight K's in the 2011 ALDS.

3. **LONSNE ZCUR**
Hit the first walk-off grand slam in postseason history in Game 2 of the 2011 ALCS.

4. **ADDIV SEFERE**
Took home the World Series MVP Award after knocking the tying and winning hits in Game 6 of the Fall Classic.

5. **SNUJTI AEEDLNRRV**
Threw 133 pitches — the highest total in a postseason contest since 2000 — in Game 5 of the ALCS.

6. **RHSIC UOYGN**
The career D-backs outfielder got on base at a .450 clip in the 2011 NLDS.

7. **HANSE NIOCVTORI**
Comically threw a ball back toward the outfield wall in the NLDS.

8. **ICKREI EWKSE**
Four of his six postseason hits last year went for extra bases.

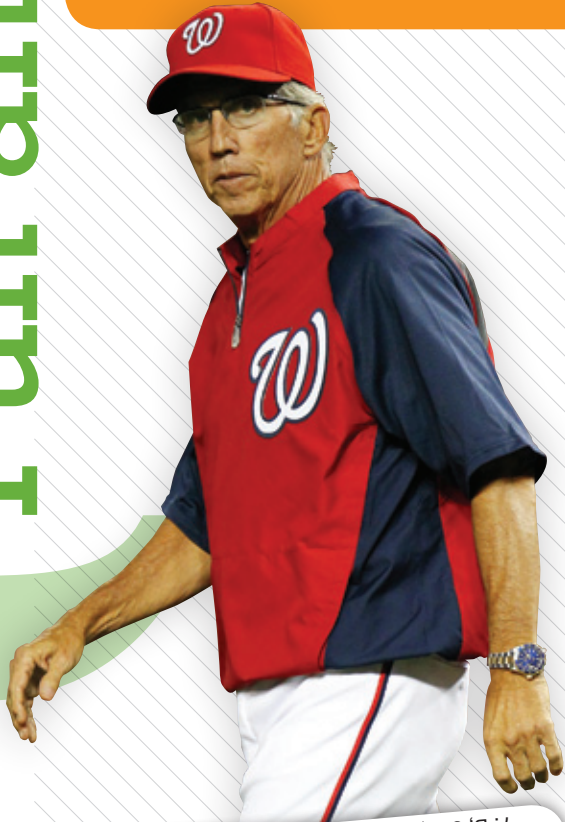


DUNNGETTY IMAGES

MIX 'N' MATCH

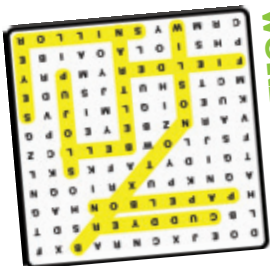
Many managers also have been on the move recently. Match the recent hires with their current teams.

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Dale Sveum | A. Miami Marlins |
| 2. Bobby Valentine | B. Oakland Athletics |
| 3. Mike Matheny | C. Chicago Cubs |
| 4. Ozzie Guillen | D. St. Louis Cardinals |
| 5. Robin Ventura | E. Washington Nationals |
| 6. Davey Johnson | F. Boston Red Sox |
| 7. Bob Melvin | G. Chicago White Sox |



POP QUIZ

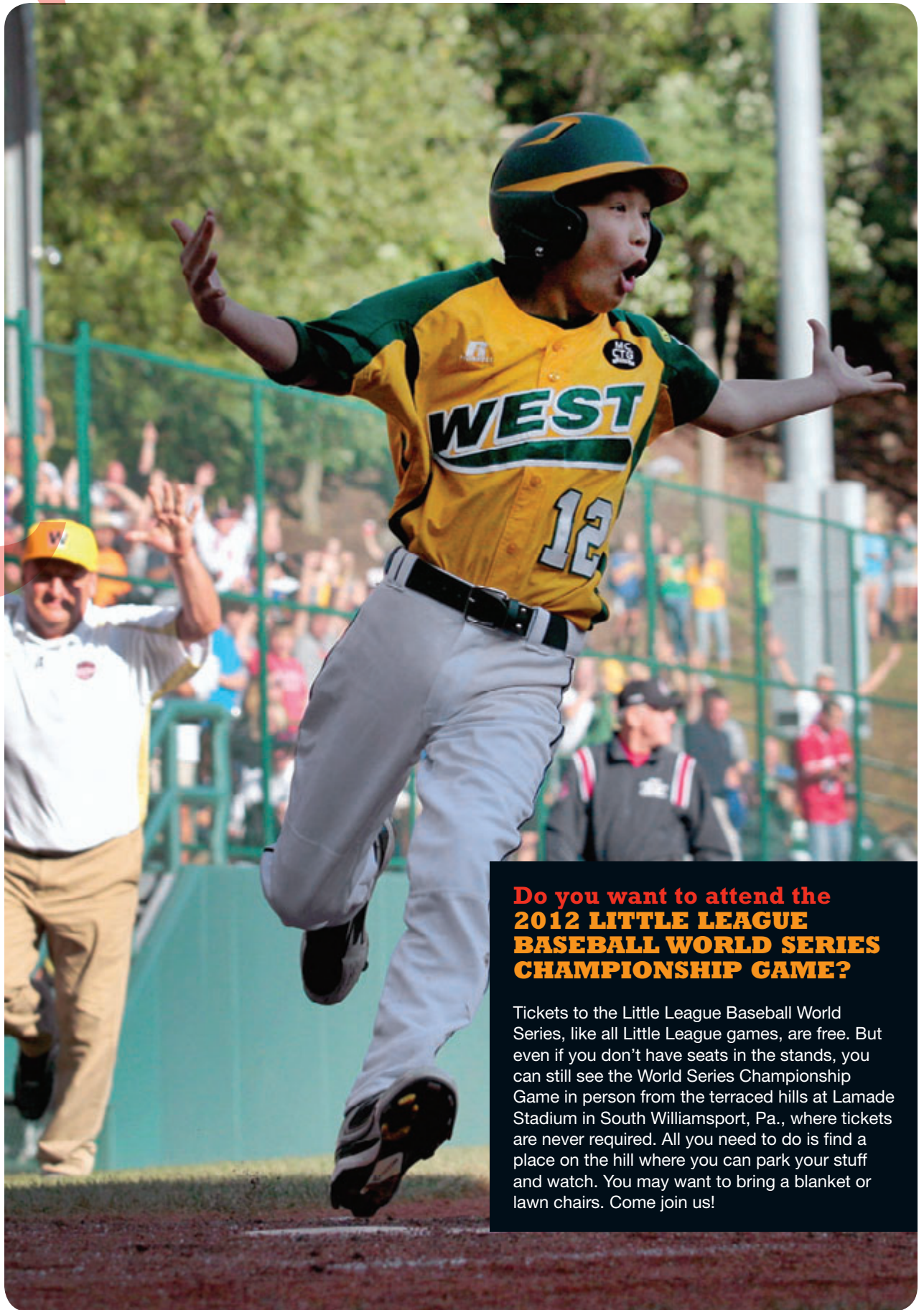
- Which Major League ballpark opened in 1912?**
 a. Wrigley Field c. Fenway Park
 b. Dodger Stadium d. Oakland Coliseum
- Which club won the World Series that year?**
 a. Chicago Cubs c. Philadelphia Athletics
 b. Boston Red Sox d. New York Giants
- Which stadium hosts the Little League World Series Championship Game?**
 a. Yankee Stadium c. Howard J. Lamade Stadium
 b. Williamsport Stadium d. Dugout Park
- Which MLB franchise was added for the 1977 season?**
 a. Houston Colt .45s c. Montreal Expos
 b. Seattle Pilots d. Seattle Mariners
- Which member of the Mets was MVP of the 1986 World Series?**
 a. Ray Knight c. Keith Hernandez
 b. Gary Carter d. Dwight Gooden
- Who is known as the founder of Little League in Williamsport, Pa.?**
 a. Carl Stotz c. Pop Warner
 b. Amos Alonzo Stagg d. Abner Doubleday
- Which current member of the Braves was named the 2002 AL Rookie of the Year?**
 a. Tim Hudson c. Dan Uggla
 b. Eric Hinske d. Brian McCann
- The 2007 season was the first in which three players reached which career milestone?**
 a. 300 wins c. 3,000 hits
 b. 100 home runs d. 500 home runs
- Which franchise has not yet hosted an All-Star Game?**
 a. Royals c. Marlins
 b. Twins d. Padres
- 2012 marks the last year in the National League for which club?**
 a. Colorado Rockies c. Los Angeles Dodgers
 b. New York Mets d. Houston Astros



WORD SEARCH

- UNSCRAMBLE**
 1. Mike Napoli; 2. Matt Moore;
 3. Nelson Cruz; 4. David
 Freese; 5. Justin Verlander;
 6. Chris Young; 7. Shane
 Victorino; 8. Rickie Weeks
- MIX 'N' MATCH**
 1. C; 2. F; 3. D; 4. A; 5. G;
 6. E; 7. B
- POP QUIZ**
 1. C; 2. B; 3. C; 4. D; 5. A; 6. A;
 7. B; 8. D; 9. C; 10. D

ANSWERS



**Do you want to attend the
2012 LITTLE LEAGUE
BASEBALL WORLD SERIES
CHAMPIONSHIP GAME?**

Tickets to the Little League Baseball World Series, like all Little League games, are free. But even if you don't have seats in the stands, you can still see the World Series Championship Game in person from the terraced hills at Lamade Stadium in South Williamsport, Pa., where tickets are never required. All you need to do is find a place on the hill where you can park your stuff and watch. You may want to bring a blanket or lawn chairs. Come join us!