

Little League[®] magazine 2016

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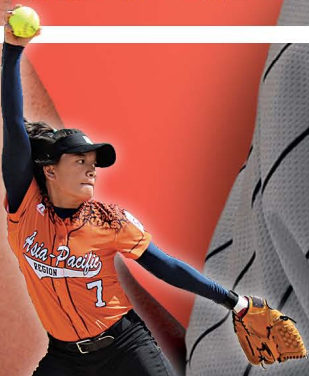


PRESENTED BY



THE KRIS BRYANT EFFECT

THE REIGNING NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR AND LITTLE LEAGUE GRAD BRINGS POWER AND ADVENTURE TO THE GAME



**FULL LITTLE LEAGUE
WORLD SERIES COVERAGE**

TIPS FROM MLB STARS

CONFORTO'S HISTORIC THREE-PEAT





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A final snapshot from the 2015 Little League World Series.

COVER PHOTOS: RICH PILLING/GETTY IMAGES (BRYANT); LITTLE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL

Around the Horn



PICTURE PERFECT SEASON

Amazing Little League moments lead to amazing photos: the diving catch; the perfect swing; the big celebration. Last year, the Canon Little League Picture Perfect Season, a photo contest anchored by actor and spokesperson Mario Lopez, selected the three individuals who best captured these scenes. During the Little League Baseball World Series, the winners visited Williamsport, where their images were enshrined into the World of Little League Museum during a private ceremony.

Starting in May, visit LittleLeague.org/CanonPhotoContest to submit photos for this year's contest.

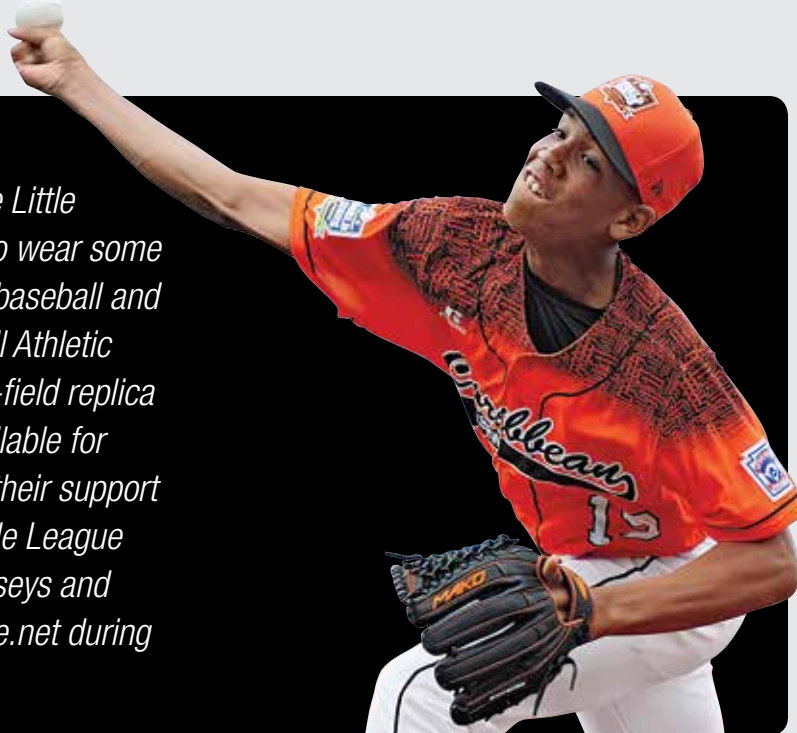


SNOOPY TAKES THE MOUND

Lamade Stadium has hosted some dazzling performances on the mound during the Little League Baseball World Series, but one pitch from 2015 stands out as particularly unique. Little League sponsors all Laundry Detergent and Snuggle Fabric Softener, also sponsors of The Peanuts Movie, brought beloved Peanuts character Snoopy to Williamsport to throw out the ceremonial first pitch. And since he only fired one pitch, he remained eligible to throw the next day!

GET THE LOOK

The teams that participate in the nine Little League World Series tournaments get to wear some of the coolest jerseys and hats in all of baseball and softball, thanks to the support of Russell Athletic and New Era. For the first time ever, on-field replica jerseys and fitted replica hats were available for purchase in 2015, so fans could show their support and sport the on-field look from the Little League World Series. Limited edition replica jerseys and caps will be on sale at LittleLeagueStore.net during the 2016 World Series.



MARINERS CHALLENGER DIVISION DONATION

Little League graduate Felix Hernandez and the Seattle Mariners recently demonstrated their commitment to making baseball an all-inclusive sport by presenting a \$30,000 donation to two local Little League Challenger Division programs through the MLBPA Players Going Home Series.

For 30 years, the Mariners and Little League have had a strong relationship, and both believe that all children should have the opportunity to have fun on the diamond. Seattle-area District 8 and District 9, which each received \$15,000 to commemorate 25 years of Washington State Little League Challenger Baseball, will use the funding for fields, new uniforms and annual Jamborees.

King Felix also donated \$10,000 to the Seattle Central Little League.

“So many people helped me become a Major League player,” said Hernandez, who played at Flor Amarillo Little League in Venezuela before becoming a six-time MLB All-Star. “I want to return the favor by helping to give kids today the chance to play baseball.”

Little League’s Challenger Division was established in 1989 to make the game accessible and fun for boys and girls with physical and mental challenges ages 4–18 (or up to age 22 if still enrolled in high school). Today, more than 30,000 children participate in upwards of 900 Challenger Divisions worldwide.



POWER PLAYER

Ready to win the World Series as your favorite Major League Baseball team? R.B.I. Baseball 16 is back, and this year, Red Sox breakout star Mookie Betts is on the cover of the beloved MLB franchise.

Check out the fun, fast-paced classic baseball gameplay and new fielding moves like dives, wall catches, fake throws and more! Take control of your season: play the entire schedule or sim to the crucial games. Modify your lineup with complete MLB rosters, including more than 1,100 players, and use substitution strategies like double switches.

Have a blast and challenge your friends online or in your living room on the console and PC version! Get R.B.I. Baseball 16 for Xbox One, PlayStation 4, iPhone, iPad and supported Android smartphones and tablets.

ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS (TOP); BEN VANHOUTEN/SEATTLE MARINERS

PITCH, HIT & RUN

Josh Nielsen is a shortstop and pitcher in the Tulpehocken Little League in Womelsdorf, Pa., and at just 13 years old, he already knows what it's like to compete on the national stage. For the past two seasons, Josh has participated in Major League Baseball's Pitch, Hit & Run — the official skills competition of MLB — and last year he made it all the way to the national finals of the baseball division during MLB All-Star Week in Cincinnati.

Pitch, Hit & Run offers boys and girls ages 7–14 the opportunity to compete against the best amateur baseball and softball talent across the country. Any league, civic group or batch of local volunteers can organize a free, day-long PHR event.

Recently, Josh filled us in on some of the moments from his experience at the 2015 Pitch, Hit & Run Nationals:

WHAT INTERESTED YOU ABOUT MLB'S PITCH, HIT & RUN COMPETITION?

I love the competition, and last year I wanted to try to beat my score from 2014.

HOW DID PLAYING ON A LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM HELP YOU GET READY FOR PHR?

It helped me to get the confidence I needed to perform under high-pressure situations.

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE ALL-STAR GAME MOMENTS?

Watching Mike Trout hit a home run in the first at-bat of the game was awesome. So was getting to shag two of Todd Frazier's Home Run Derby hits and making new friends from all over the U.S. and Canada.

If you're interested in entering MLB's Pitch, Hit & Run competition, visit PitchHitRun.com to find out more.



SUNDAYS AT THE BALLPARK

Sunday nights have become extra special for some lucky Little Leaguers, who beginning last season got to experience Major League treatment at their local MLB stadiums. Thanks to a partnership with Major League Baseball and ESPN, which continues this season, more than 15 Little League teams in 2015 appeared on a live segment of ESPN's "Baseball Tonight Sunday Night Countdown" before taking in ESPN's "Sunday Night Baseball" game of the week.

Each team selected to participate has the chance to watch batting practice and score autographs from Major League stars. Clubs such as the Yankees, Red Sox, Pirates, Tigers, Cardinals, Cubs, Angels and Dodgers have given local Little Leaguers memories and lessons to last a lifetime. As Dodgers outfielder Andre Ethier told the South Pasadena Little League team, it's important to "always have each other's backs, no matter what."

The last stop on the 2015 "Baseball Tonight" Little League tour was the Little League Baseball World Series in South Williamsport, Pa. Tune in again this season for the chance to see more Little Leaguers at a stadium near you.



ONCE IN A **LIFETIME**



Superstars like Kris Bryant don't come around often.

By Allison Duffy-Davis

>>> *The past year has been a whirlwind ride for Cubs superstar Kris Bryant. He's just 24 years old, but since last April, he has made his Major League debut, played in an All-Star Game, carried Chicago to the NLCS and won the NL Rookie of the Year Award. Oh, and did we mention that after all this he got engaged to his high school sweetheart and went swimming with sharks?*

Now, with a full season ahead of him, Bryant is out to one-up his thoroughly impressive list of 2015 accomplishments. That may only be possible with a trip to the World Series. "I don't know if this season can top it," he admits, "but I'm certainly going to try."

THE CUBS ARE A VERY YOUNG TEAM, AND IT SEEMS LIKE YOU GUYS HAVE A LOT OF FUN TOGETHER. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DYNAMIC?

It's fun every day here. A lot of us are pretty close in age and we relate to each other on that level. We bring DJs and animals to the field, and really get to experience the fun of baseball being on the Chicago Cubs.

WHAT'S IT LIKE PLAYING FOR A QUIRKY MANAGER LIKE JOE MADDON?

Everybody should do it. I think the game is shifting a little bit to having more fun and not taking things so seriously during times like [Spring Training]. Obviously on the field, you take it very seriously. But Joe is just a trip. He's so much fun to play for and he keeps it light in the clubhouse. I've enjoyed my time with him so far.

HOW DID IT FEEL TO WIN THE NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR AWARD?

Winning that award was a huge honor. There are a lot of guys, even in this clubhouse, who were very deserving. You only get one year to win it, and I had a lot of good competition. It was definitely one of my favorite things so far in my baseball career.

AFTER THAT YOU HAD QUITE AN EXCITING OFFSEASON, TOO.

I couldn't have written it better myself. Having an unbelievable year, both individually and as a team, and then in the offseason getting engaged and swimming with sharks, I just really enjoyed it.

ROB TRINGALI/MLB PHOTOS



BRYANT'S DAD, MIKE, SUPPORTED HIM FROM LITTLE LEAGUE THROUGH THE MAJORS. HE PITCHED TO HIS SON DURING THE 2015 HOME RUN DERBY AT GREAT AMERICAN BALL PARK.

“I was competing against Albert Pujols in the Home Run Derby. Four years ago, I never would have thought I would do that. It was an unbelievable experience.”

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GO SWIMMING WITH SHARKS?

We were like, “Why not do it? We’re in Hawaii.” I guess like “when in Rome, do as the Romans.” I get terribly seasick when I’m on a boat, but I just thought, “I have to do this and say I swam with sharks.” It’s once-in-a-lifetime.

I was underwater in the cage for 20 minutes — just enough time to get sick. I’m never going to do it again, but it was fun.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF SHARKS THEY WERE?

They were Galapagos sharks and sand sharks. No Great Whites or tiger sharks. They said those are the scary ones.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU’RE AN ADVENTUROUS GUY IN GENERAL?

I don’t know if I’d say I am. I’m slowly getting to that point. A couple years ago, you couldn’t have gotten me in the water with sharks. But I’m realizing that there are a lot of opportunities coming my way to do cool things like that, and you’ve got to be crazy not to take advantage of them.

AFTER SUCH A HUGE YEAR IN 2015, WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS SEASON?

I’m just really looking at this year as a continuation of last year, with a little break in the middle for the offseason. Just trying to build upon

things from last year, both as a team and individually. I think there are some things that I can work on and get better at, and as a team that we can get better at, too. It’s going to be exciting to see the changes and how much better we can become.

The vibe that I’m getting from everybody is that our expectations are bigger than anybody else’s out there. We expect a lot out of ourselves, and we’re holding each other accountable. We hear a lot of the speculation, but as professionals, our own expectations are through the roof.

HOW DID IT FEEL TO BE NAMED TO THE NL ALL-STAR TEAM DURING YOUR ROOKIE SEASON?

That was so much fun, especially having my whole family there and having my dad throw to me during the Home Run Derby. To do it in my first year, too, was a once-in-a-lifetime thing. I’ll definitely remember it for a very long time.

At the time, I was just in awe. Ken Griffey Jr. was there. I was competing

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

against Albert Pujols in the Home Run Derby. Four years ago, I never would have thought I would do that. It was an unbelievable experience.

ARE THERE ANY CURRENT PLAYERS WHO YOU TRY TO EMULATE ON THE FIELD?

Most recently, Evan Longoria. He's a very underrated player, but he's one of the best third basemen in the game. I can learn a lot from watching him, defensively and at the plate.

YOU PLAYED WITH BRYCE HARPER AS A KID. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER FROM THOSE DAYS?

I played with him when I was around 8 or 9 years old and then again when we were 13 and 14. All I really remember was just how much better he was than anybody on the field. He was leaps above everybody. He would get up to the plate and hit bombs. At that time, I knew the type of player he would be, and now he's the National League MVP. I kind of expected that.

COULD AN MVP AWARD BE IN THE CARDS FOR YOU NEXT?

It would certainly be awesome. Typically I don't set goals around awards, but I think if I do things the right way and focus on the team and helping us win — I've always done it that way — things will turn out for the better. So I'll just continue doing that and see where things go.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR GREATEST YOUTH BASEBALL MEMORIES?

My favorite one was hitting my first home run. It was during coach-pitch practice for my team at Peccole Little League in Las Vegas. My dad had told me that if I hit a home run, he'd give me \$100. And at the time, I was like, "\$100? I can get so much with that."

So, I hit my first home run and was running around the bases, and my dad was waiting for me at third base. He picked me up and gave me the biggest hug. I don't even think I made it to home plate. But that still sticks out as one of my greatest baseball memories.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR KIDS WHO ARE PLAYING THE GAME NOW OR WANT TO PLAY?

Enjoy it and do it because you truly love it, not because anyone is telling you to do it. My parents never told me to get out there and practice. It was always me wanting to. I just loved the game.

I used to go out in the cul-de-sac with my friends and play 3-on-3 Wiffle Ball. Just getting out in the street and playing helps you develop hand-eye coordination. It's nothing serious, but all of that practice translates into real games.

DO YOU PAY ATTENTION TO STATS?

I try not to look at stats. I did that so much in high school, and it can really cloud your vision. You can't focus on the numbers; they're always changing. My dad has always said, "You are who you are as a player, and you're going to end up where you're meant to at the end of the year." And he's always right. ♦

Allison Duffy-Davis is an associate editor for Major League Baseball.



"The vibe that I'm getting from everybody is that our expectations are bigger than anybody else's out there. They're through the roof."

SHE'S GOT GAME

These softball sluggers and fastpitch fireballers battle with their Big League brothers for family bragging rights.

>>> Despite their fame, some Major Leaguers have to share the spotlight, even within their own families. In fact, many Little League grads-turned-MLB stars have grown up alongside some seriously talented sisters, making the sport a true family affair. But for now, forget about the boys; let's focus on these softballers' amazing accomplishments.



LENA AND NICOLE SPRINGER

The Springer family boasts quite the sporting pedigree. Dad George played in the Little League Baseball World Series back in 1976, and has since raised a trio of talented kids. The oldest, also George, is now an Astros outfielder, and he led the team in OBP in 2015. Younger sisters Nicole (above, right) and Lena have dazzled on the diamond, too, since they learned to play at Walicki Little

League in New Britain, Conn. "On Friday nights, the place to go was the Little League field, [whether] you had a game or not," says Nicole, a pitcher. "Families would bring food and hang out. There was no better place to play."

Nicole went on to play two years each at the University of Hartford and Central Connecticut State University, and during her junior season, she joined the Puerto

Rico National Team. She now works as the assistant softball coach at Southern Connecticut State University.

Lena, also a pitcher, was a four-time MVP of her high school varsity team and currently plays for Ohio State. "To say my sister, brother and me were competitive is an understatement," says Lena. "We wanted to compete on the field, but also at home in the backyard."

OHIO STATE ATHLETICS; L. SPRINGER; BRAD MANGIN/MLB PHOTOS (G. SPRINGER); STEVE MCCLAUGHLIN

DANIELLE LAWRIE

In the Lawrie family, it was Danielle who set the tone on the ballfield at Langley Little League in British Columbia. Nearly three years older than her brother Brett, who's now an infielder with the White Sox, Danielle became the first Canadian athlete ever to play softball at the University of Washington. A standout on the mound, she led the team to its first-ever national championship and was the first player in program history to have her uniform number (15) retired.

In 2008, Danielle represented Canada in the Summer Olympics in Beijing, China. When she returned to campus the next season, she won the first of back-to-back national player of the year awards. After college, she spent four seasons starring in the National Pro Fastpitch League with the USSSA Pride.



LITTLE BROTHER BRETT



BIG BROTHER BRANDON

AMY CRAWFORD

UCLA baseball and softball uniforms are a staple in the Crawford family. Brandon, a graduate of Pleasanton (Calif.) Little League, played for the Bruins for three seasons before the Giants selected him in the fourth round of the 2008 Draft. His younger sister Amy, who also happens to be the fiancée of Pirates ace Gerrit Cole, followed Brandon to UCLA, where she appeared in 142 games over four seasons with the heralded softball program. "She is tremendously athletic, like Brandon," Cole says. "She was a utility-type [player]. She was always in games late as a pinch-runner, pinch-hitter or defensive substitute."

In 2010, her junior season, Amy helped the team win the national championship. And now her younger sister Jenna, who is committed to play at UCLA beginning in 2017, hopes to do the same. After all, in sports, nothing beats a family tradition.



ALL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

>>> Few clubs in all of sports are as exclusive as the “World Series Slam,” but Mets outfielder Michael Conforto is lucky enough to be one of its elite members. When New York took the field against Kansas City in October 2015, Conforto became just the *third player in history* to compete in the Little League, College and Major League World Series. Check out the details below.

WORLD SERIES	AGE	TEAM	AVG
2004 LLWS	11	Redmond (Wash.) North LL	.600
2013 CWS	20	Oregon State University	.438
2015 WS	22	New York Mets	.333

FACT:

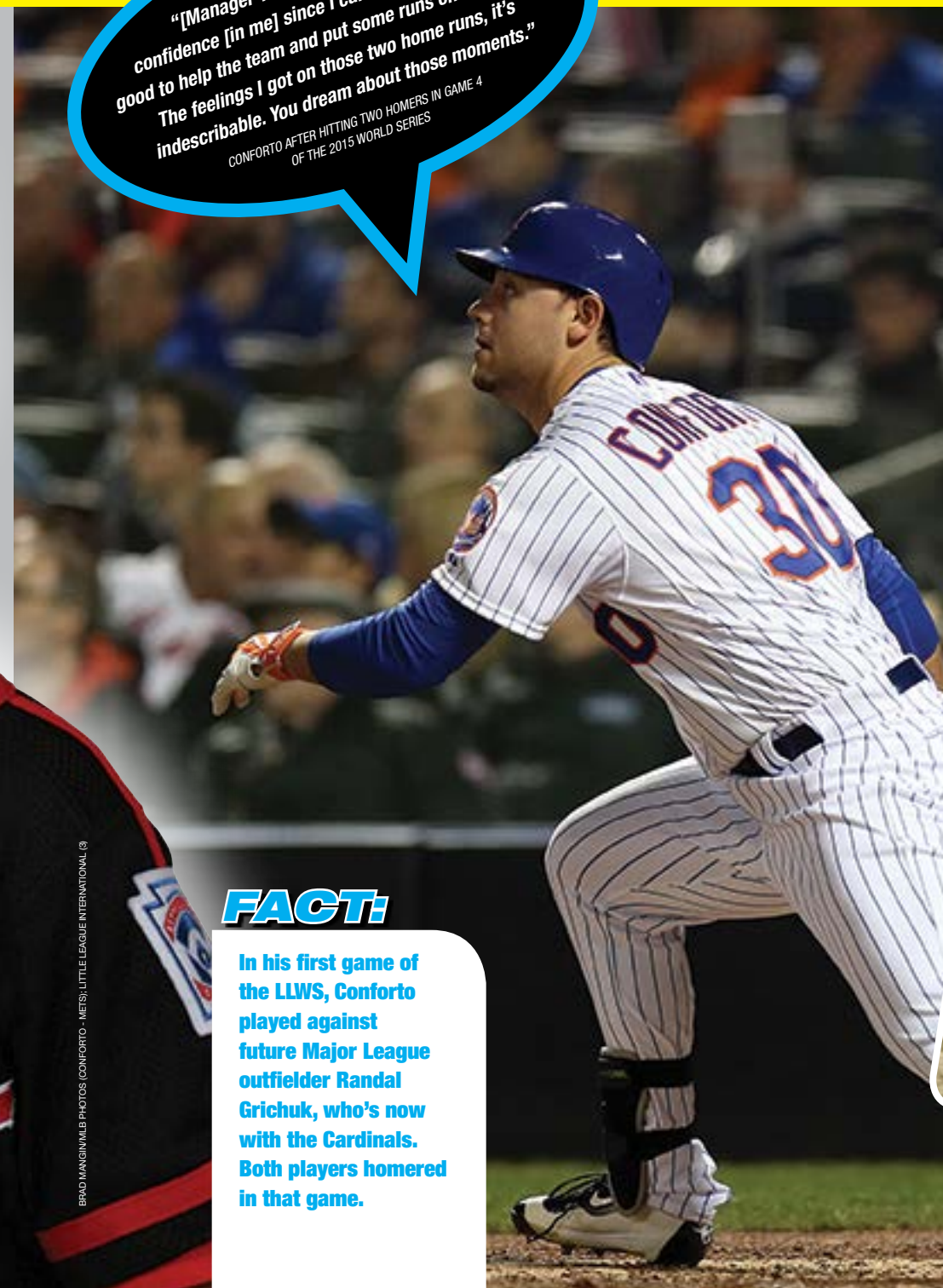
Pitcher Ed Vosberg (1973 LLWS, 1980 CWS, 1997 WS) and catcher Jason Varitek (1984 LLWS, 1994 CWS, 2004 & '07 WS) are the only other players to appear in all three World Series. But Conforto, who made his Major League debut on July 24, 2015, is the only rookie and the youngest to do so.



Little League grad and Mets outfielder Michael Conforto has made World Series appearances a trend.

“[Manager Terry Collins] has shown confidence [in me] since I came up. Today it felt good to help the team and put some runs on the board. The feelings I got on those two home runs, it’s indescribable. You dream about those moments.”

CONFORTO AFTER HITTING TWO HOMERS IN GAME 4 OF THE 2015 WORLD SERIES



FACT:

In his first game of the LLWS, Conforto played against future Major League outfielder Randal Grichuk, who’s now with the Cardinals. Both players homered in that game.

SMALL BALL

Conforto wasn’t the only player on the Mets’ postseason roster to have gotten his start playing youth baseball. Five of his teammates in New York also honed their skills in the Little League ranks, and two played in youth world series tournaments at various levels.

TYLER CLIPPARD
Palm Harbor (Fla.) LL
2001 Senior League Baseball World Series*

CURTIS GRANDERSON
Lynwood (Ill.) LL

MATT HARVEY
Mystic (Conn.) LL

RUBEN TEJADA
Activo 20-30 LL, Santiago, Panama
2001 Little League World Series; 2005 Senior League Baseball World Series

DAVID WRIGHT
Green Run LL, Chesapeake, Va.

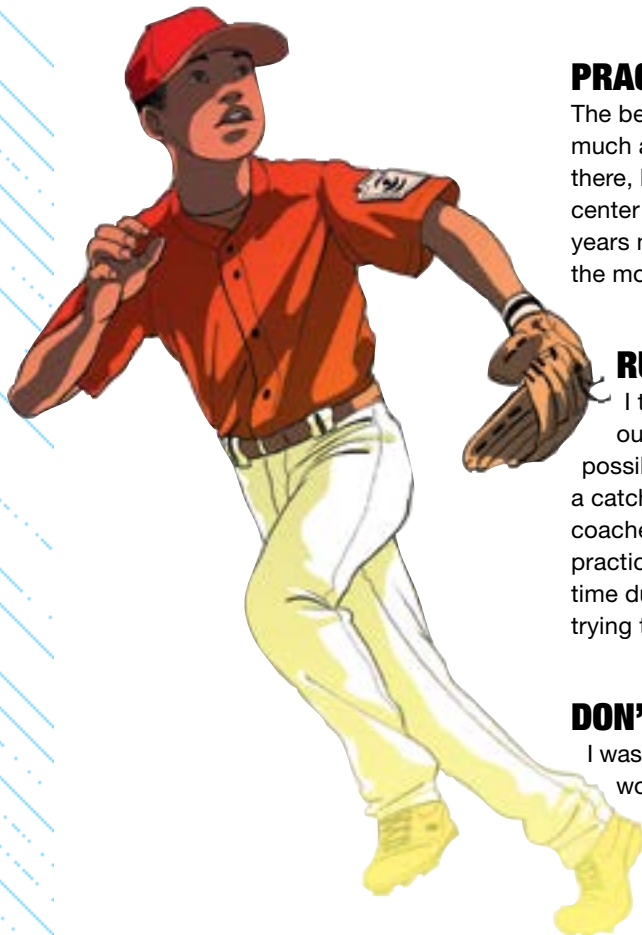


*Played on the championship-winning team

Lorenzo Cain on Playing the Outfield



Royals center fielder Lorenzo Cain, the speedy anchor of one of the best outfields in baseball, has both an ALCS MVP Award (2014) and a World Series trophy ('15) under his belt. His penchant for making diving catches and robbing home runs has made him incredibly valuable in Kansas City, where he and his teammates have contended for the crown in each of the past two seasons. The dynamic young star recently shared with Little League Magazine some secrets about how you, too, can dazzle in the field.



PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

The best way to learn to play the outfield is to practice as much as you can. Some guys make it look pretty easy out there, but it's not; I'm still learning things about how to play center field, and I've been in the Major Leagues for a few years now. The more balls you can track down and catch, the more you'll help your team.

RUN YOUR ROUTES

I think the most important thing to learn as an outfielder is to take the best, most accurate routes possible to fly balls. You increase your chances of making a catch if you take good routes. In Spring Training, my coaches hit extra fly balls to me every day so that I can practice my routes. During the season, I'll spend a lot of time during batting practice simulating game situations and trying to catch fly balls wherever they're hit.

DON'T GET DISCOURAGED

I was cut from my high school basketball team. Everything works out for a reason, though. If I had made the team, I never would've tried out for baseball. But I had to learn fast or I wouldn't be here right now. I had a great support system that motivated me to the fullest.

A KID AT HEART

This ESPN veteran slid headfirst into his first Williamsport experience.

By Tim Kurkjian



>>> I've covered Major League games in 55 ballparks, including the historic Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, but last summer, I found a new favorite: the Little League complex in Williamsport, Pa. Everything there is bigger and better than I had imagined, including the players, who were dazzling with their soft hands, quick feet, strong arms and, most importantly, captivating smiles.

Williamsport hosts baseball at its purest level. A bunch of kids, some over 6 feet tall, others under 90 pounds, of all shapes, sizes and nationalities, flock there annually, unified in their love of the game. When a player hits a home run, opponents shake his hand as he rounds the bases. The kids play, compete and really want to win, but even if they lose, they go somewhere to eat pizza, laugh and bond as a team.

Everyone is happy in Williamsport. Admission is free and concessions include scrumptious kettle corn and fried dough. The games are great, but no matter your age, grab some cardboard and slide down the hill beyond the outfield fences.

I'll remember my first trip to Williamsport most for my interaction with the kids. I threw BP to Cole Wagner, the best 12-year-old hitter I've ever seen, who played for the Pennsylvania team. The day I threw to Cole, I promised his dad, Bret, who once played in the Minor Leagues, that I wouldn't hit Cole with a pitch. "I'm not worried about *him* getting hurt," his dad said with a smile. No, he was worried that this 58-year-old baseball writer might be injured by his kid if I didn't duck behind the L-screen.

Cole proceeded to hit each ball as hard as someone his age possibly

could. But as hard as he hit, no one hit a ball farther than Terrence Gist from South Carolina. As ESPN interviewed his mom and sister, the 5-foot-10, 185-pound Gist launched a pitch 380 feet, a stunning blast even for someone his size.

"How old were you when you were this size?" I asked him. (For perspective, I'm 5 foot 5 and 145 pounds.)

"The third grade," he said.

I have so many fond memories of Williamsport, but nothing is more enduring than the joyful faces of the kids, the fathers and sons, the mothers and daughters, Nana and Pop. "I don't know anyone," one 65-year-old man told me, "but I come here every year for the baseball."

I hope they let me do the same.

Tim Kurkjian is a senior baseball analyst and writer for ESPN.

ALLEN KEES/ESPNN IMAGES (KURKJIAN); ALEX TRAUTMAN/MLB PHOTOS



BIG LEAGUE SUPERSTAR



KRIS BRYANT

THIRD BASE

CHICAGO CUBS

**2015 NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR
PECCOLE LITTLE LEAGUE, LAS VEGAS**

ON TOP

OF THE WORLD

Last summer, Little League Baseball and Softball welcomed nine new champions from around the globe.



1. Rowan Little League's batters knocked in four runs in the first inning of the championship game to give the Southeast team the Little League Softball World Series crown.

2. Pitcher Marcos Santa helped Latin America edge California, 3-1, in the title matchup of the Big League Baseball World Series in South Carolina.

3. Red Land Little Leaguers celebrated Dylan Rodenhaver's first-inning grand slam in the Little League Baseball World Series championship game.

4. The Southeast representatives from Tampa Bay, Fla., went a perfect 7-0 to win the Junior League Softball World Series title. They defeated Asia-Pacific, 9-2, in the championship.

5. Tokyo Kitasuna Little League capped a dramatic summer with a Little League Baseball World Series victory in Williamsport. Nobuyuki Kawashima and Raito Sugimoto reveled in their 18-11 triumph in the International final over the Mid-Atlantic team.

6. Uganda's AVRS Little League sent a team to both the Little League Baseball and Softball World Series. The girls secured two wins during their tournament.

LITTLE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL (1,2,4,6)/ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS



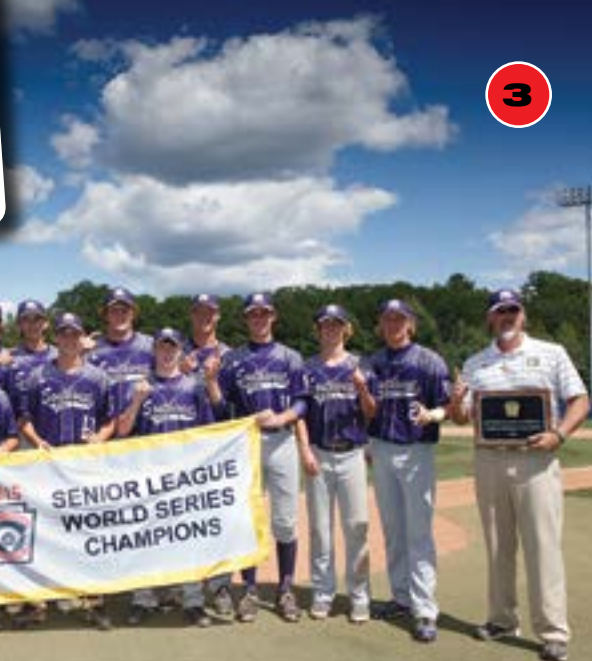
1

1. West Seoul Little League of the Asia-Pacific region tossed one of its coaches in the air while celebrating its undefeated finish in the Intermediate 50/70 Baseball World Series.



2

2. These Little League Baseball World Series competitors from Chinese Taipei and Uganda proved that the event is about teamwork and camaraderie.



3

3. The 2015 Senior League Baseball World Series champs traveled from Texas to the host site in Maine to claim their title. They beat the Central team from Ohio, 8-1, in the finals.

4. Southern California's Conejo Valley Little League lined the field before taking on Latin America in the Big League Baseball World Series championship game. The team ultimately came up just short, losing 3-1.

5. Southwest pitcher Miranda Smart and the rest of her teammates powered through the Big League Softball World Series competition, taking the title contest by a score of 9-1.

6. Montana's Garden City Softball Little League dominated throughout the Senior League Softball World Series and won the championship game by a 10-0 margin.



4



5



6



1

1. Chinese Taipei slugged its way to a 12-0 victory in the Junior League Baseball World Series championship against the Southeast team.

2. Manila South Little League's Mary Ann Antolihao helped her Phillipines-based team reach the semi-finals of the Big League Softball World Series in Delaware.

3. Australia's Cronulla Little League was just the third team from the country, and the first from the Sydney area, to reach the Little League Baseball World Series.

4. The Southeast representatives gave Asia-Pacific a run for its money in the Intermediate 50/70 division championship, plating five. But South Korea's 10 runs proved to be too much to top.



2



3



4

GAME ON!

Hone your baseball and softball skills virtually anywhere. **By Joe Sparacio**



THREE-ERROR GAME

Grab some friends, a glove and a ball. Take turns tossing a baseball or softball to each other — either in the air or on the ground — and attempt to catch the ball no matter how tough the throw. Keep playing until you've made three fielding errors. The last player remaining is the winner!

JUAN OCAMPO/MLB PHOTOS

>>> The grass is cut, the sun is shining, and the baseball season is back in full swing. MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred wants you to get out to a ballpark, field some grounders and take some cuts.

MLB launched the Play Ball campaign with USA Baseball in June 2015, encouraging participation in all kinds of baseball and softball activities. At www.playball.org, you'll find tons of info about youth events and leagues, plus guidelines on topics like how to pitch safely. There are also suggestions for fun games to try with a couple friends, even if you don't have a baseball diamond nearby. Check some out here and find more at www.playball.org. Play ball!

OFF THE WALL

For this game, you need a tennis ball, a glove, some buddies and a wall. Throw the tennis ball off the wall. If you don't catch it in your glove, you must run and touch the wall before one of your friends is able to field it and throw it to the wall. If the throw beats you to the wall, it counts as a strike against you. After three strikes, a player is out. The last remaining player wins the game.

ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS (TOP); SAM MALLER/MLB PHOTOS

RUNNING BASES

If you don't have actual bases for this game, that's okay — you can draw them or use placeholders instead. Set up your bases anywhere from 30 to 90 feet apart. Two players should stand at each base, like fielders, and throw a ball back and forth. All other participants should stand at either base as runners. Each base runner must attempt to run to the opposite base at least once every four throws.

The fielders must try to tag out the players as they're running from one base to the other; the last runner to be tagged out wins. Keep rotating the fielders and the runners each time someone wins, so that everyone gets a turn at each task.



RALLY ANIMALS

Major League and Little League teams alike turn to monkey business for luck and motivation.

By Joe Sparacio



THE ORIGINAL 2002 RALLY MONKEY



**RALLY MONKEY, 2.0
2015 SWEETWATER VALLEY
(CALIF.) LITTLE LEAGUE**

In the spirit of the 2002 Angels, the Sweetwater Valley Little Leaguers brought a star-spangled stuffed monkey to their all-star squad's first game, and the chimp worked like a charm. The California team never looked back, making it all the way to the Little League World Series (LLWS).

"Our record was 16-0 [through the first 16 games] with the monkey," Manager Ward Lannom said. "We hit 71 home runs with the monkey. We had a batting average over .500 with the monkey."

The stuffed mascot continued its magic in the LLWS: Sweetwater won its opener, 14-2, and nearly made it to the United States championship game. That's what we call one lucky monkey.

WATCH THE VIDEO!
LittleLeague.org/LuckyMonkey

>>> Baseball players are often incredibly superstitious. And they're willing to do some funny things — from slapping the same spot on the dugout before every at-bat to listening to the same song on game day — to keep luck on their side.

Way back in the middle of the 2002 season, the Angels' in-stadium video board operators employed some animal antics to entertain the crowd, playing a clip of a jumping monkey from the comedic film *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*. In doing so, they helped the team spark a ninth-inning comeback, so the Angels adopted a live version of the monkey as a good luck charm down the stretch. Popular among players and fans, the "Rally Monkey" served as an unofficial mascot into the postseason, and the white-haired capuchin's crowning moment came in Game 6 of the 2002 World Series. With the team trailing the Giants, 5-0, in the seventh inning and on the brink of elimination, the lucky monkey appeared and the Halos scored six unanswered runs to win it. They would clinch the World Series the next night.

Since 2002, both Little League and MLB have had their fair share of lucky unofficial mascots. Let's take a look at some of the most recent rally animals that have sparked success.

ALEX TRAUTWISER/MLB PHOTOS (STAR-SPANGLED MONKEY); BRAD MANGINI/MLB PHOTOS

Topps celebrated the Cardinals' rally squirrel by producing its own baseball card after the team's 2011 championship.

RALLY SQUIRREL **2011 ST. LOUIS CARDINALS**

Once the 2011 Cardinals snuck into the playoffs, the Phillies and Brewers still stood between them and their World Series hopes. With the help of a charmed squirrel, though, the Cards defeated both squads and then toppled the Rangers in the Fall Classic.

In Game 3 of the NLDS against Philadelphia, a squirrel ran into the outfield, interrupting play. In Game 4, another one bolted across home plate. So during Game 5, Phillies fans threw a stuffed squirrel into the St. Louis bullpen in jest. The team held onto it as a good luck keepsake, and it became a sensation with its own theme song, Twitter account and custom T-shirt. It was even part of the celebrations after the Cards won the World Series and was immortalized on that year's rings.

RALLY PARAKEET **2015 NEW YORK METS**

The Mets are no strangers to lucky animals, as it's rumored that a black cat inspired the team's miracle championship in 1969. Just last season, it was a parakeet that motivated the Mets and their newest slugger, Yoenis Cespedes.

During an August game, the bright yellow bird perched behind home plate. Cespedes came to bat wearing a matching canary-colored sleeve, and later that day hit his first homer with the team. He then helped New York to its first World Series since 2000, proving that some animals truly are enchanted.



CESPEDES'S NEON SLEEVE



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP/POOL/MLB PHOTOS (PLUJOLS); BRAD MANGIN/MLB PHOTOS

Mark Melancon on

Honing a Pitching Delivery



When it comes to staying in control on the mound, it's important to remember that this means harnessing your stuff and your composure. Pirates closer Mark Melancon knows plenty about both. The hard-throwing right-hander led the Major Leagues with 51 saves last season, walking just 14 batters and striking out 62. He says pitchers need to find balance between maximum effort and remaining under control. Here's what else he has to say about how your pitching delivery can keep you in command:



GET A LEG UP

The key to developing a sound delivery is establishing your balance point. That's when your front leg is lifted and you bring your hands together in your glove. Allow your body to reach that point, and don't start to move prematurely toward home plate. You don't want to rush, even though it feels like your body needs that energy and momentum to go forward. This part of the windup is your syncing device, your timing method. It's the most important part of your delivery.

From there, make sure your hands are set and ready at the proper time, which is a millisecond before your leg starts to go down as you move toward home plate. Your hands should break before you stride toward home, allowing your arm to get on top of the ball by the time you deliver the pitch.

ZERO IN

You have to be focused on the catcher's mitt. When you're locked in, you have complete tunnel vision. You're almost piercing the glove with your eyes.

MUSCLE MEMORY

Pitching is all about consistency, and quality over quantity. Once you become comfortable with your delivery, the game becomes more mental than physical. When you've repeated your delivery enough times, your brain can take control through muscle memory. You have to put in the reps and the time, though, and your mechanics have to be clean. But be sure rest your arm after each time you throw.

ARCHER, WHO WAS CUT FROM HIS MIDDLE SCHOOL BASEBALL TEAM, WENT ON TO BECOME A FIFTH-ROUND DRAFT PICK. WHEN HE'S NOT ON THE MOUND, HE TEACHES LOCAL KIDS THE GAME.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

»»» Millions of kids learn to love the game on Little League fields, but not every future Major Leaguer has a smooth path to stardom. In fact, many have overcome limited playing time, being cut from their high school teams, or never picking up a bat or glove as a kid.

Royals outfielder Lorenzo Cain, the 2014 ALCS MVP, never even tried out for a baseball team until he was a sophomore in high school. Cy Young Award winner Orel Hershiser was cut not only from his high school JV and varsity squads, but also from his college team in his first two years. And outfielder Daniel Nava, who knocked the first pitch he saw in the Majors for a grand slam, quit the game briefly after failing to make the team at Santa Clara University.

Dealing with rejection isn't easy, especially when it comes in one's most beloved activity, but it's something that most young players will face at some point. Rays ace Chris Archer still remembers the fateful day coaches handed out letters to the kids trying out for his Clayton, N.C., middle school baseball team.

"I waited to look until I got home and when I saw I didn't make the team, I started bawling," Archer says. "It was so demoralizing. You just don't feel like playing again."

But their love of the game kept them going. Bill Bavasi, the director of the MLB Scouting Bureau, has judged

plenty of talent over the years and says that ability is the only thing that matters.

"In the office next door to me is a guy who drafted two pitchers: one with one eye and one with one hand," he says. "Scouts don't care what happened before they laid eyes on you. That's why any young person who likes the game should keep at it. Find some place that'll give you a try."

Archer took such advice to heart, utilizing failure in middle school to fuel his efforts. His fortitude paid off, as he translated his experience into an opportunity with the Cleveland Indians organization out of high school.

"What helped me wasn't how many innings I got to pitch in high school," says Archer. "It was just the experience of being on the team."

When Nava missed the cut in his first two years at Santa Clara, he served as the team equipment manager, instead. Just when he thought about giving up the game, he got an opportunity to hone his skills at a junior college also in the San Francisco area, and eventually worked his way onto the Santa Clara squad.

Nava credits his hard times with teaching him how to cope with doubters, and Hershiser delivers a similar message in his motivational speeches to young athletes. "Look at [the rejection] as a test of how much you love

In the face of on-field adversity, these Major Leaguers refused to give up.

By Craig Tomashoff

the game," he says. "I tried to always have a goal: make the team, prove you're one of the hardest workers, and fall in love with practice."

"That doesn't mean not playing or getting cut doesn't hurt. But everything you learn is transferable to the next thing you do, like getting along with others or dealing with major disappointment."

After all, the game is not just about learning the best pitch to throw in a 3-2 count with runners on; it's also about learning to handle whatever life throws at you.

Cain, for instance, turned to baseball when he was cut from his high school basketball team.

"It hurt when I didn't see my name on the list," he says. "When I made the [baseball] team, I had to borrow everything: bat, glove, batting gloves, cleats. It was difficult at first, but I had a lot of great friends on the team. A lot of people helped me along the way."

"I'm glad I got the chance to make the most out of it and win the World Series. It has definitely been a thrill ride for me." ♦

HERSHISER, WHO PLAYED LITTLE LEAGUE IN SOUTHFIELD, MICH., MISSED THE CUT AS A TEENAGER, BUT LATER WON AN MLB WORLD SERIES MVP AWARD.

MIKE STOBIE/GETTY IMAGES (ARCHER); MLB PHOTOS

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Heather Tarr on

Hitting Off a Tee



Heather Tarr lives and breathes softball. As a player, she manned the diamond for the University of Washington's team, and later for the Tampa Bay Fire Stix of the Women's Professional Fastpitch League. Since 2005, she has served as head coach at her alma mater, and guided the team to a Women's College World Series title in 2009. Coach Tarr recently took the time to discuss how you can hone your hitting skills using a tee, just like her college players still do.



ATTACK THE INSIDE PITCH

When approaching an inside pitch, you need to make sure that your feet stay straight. Position the tee on the inside corner of the plate. Some hitters cheat and open their hips when they know that an inside pitch is coming. You want to get your hands and your hips to the proper point of contact.

Hit the ball near the end of the barrel of the bat. Imagine it having backspin and traveling over the shortstop's head for a double.

GATHER MOMENTUM

A great way to perfect your rhythm, timing and tempo is by using a tee for a walk-through drill. Stand back from the tee toward the imaginary catcher or umpire, and then walk into the batter's box until you reach the spot where your feet should be when you step into the box for an at-bat.

When you step in after standing still, your momentum builds. Work on driving the ball while maintaining the proper batting stance.

FIND YOUR FOOTING

Whenever you step into a swing, you need to be sure that your feet are parallel to the front and back lines of the batter's box so that your hips are square to the ball. You can then naturally open up through the swing as your hips and bat come through the zone.

Boys of Summer

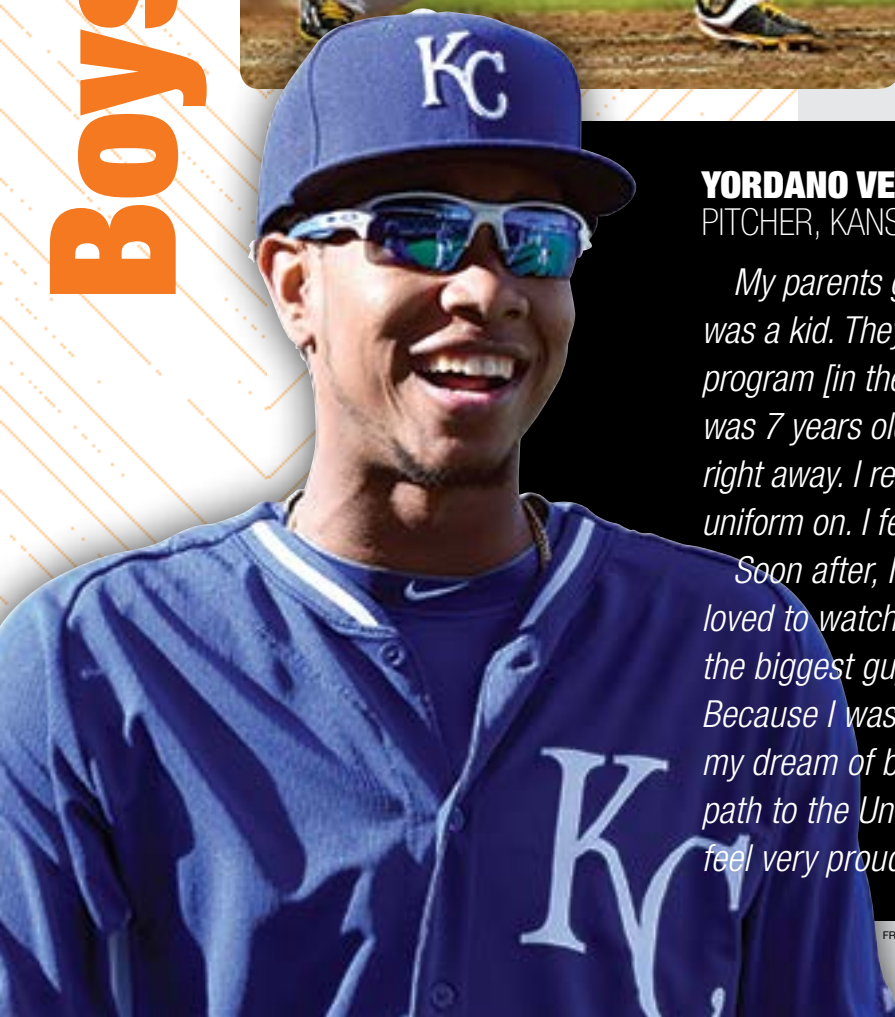
When I was a kid ...



JOSH HARRISON
UTILITY, PITTSBURGH PIRATES

I can't remember exactly when I first picked up a bat and a glove, but I know I was really young. I do remember playing Tee Ball at age 3. My mom was my coach. I was also fortunate to have an uncle, John Shelby, who played 11 years in the Big Leagues. Through him, I gained knowledge that helped me in baseball, and a lot of that isn't necessarily physical; it's mental, and it's about the way you prepare.

Little League goes by fast. And it's a small world because along the line, some of us [Major Leaguers] have played against each other. I played with a few who are still my friends to this day.



YORDANO VENTURA
PITCHER, KANSAS CITY ROYALS

My parents got me interested in baseball when I was a kid. They signed me up for the local baseball program [in the Dominican Republic] when I was 7 years old, and I fell in love with the sport right away. I remember being so proud to put my uniform on. I felt like a Big Leaguer.

Soon after, I started watching games on TV. I loved to watch Pedro Martinez pitch. He wasn't the biggest guy, but he was still a great pitcher. Because I wasn't a very big kid, he really inspired my dream of being a pitcher and set me on a path to the United States and the Big Leagues. I feel very proud to have reached that goal.



JAMES SHIELDS

PITCHER, SAN DIEGO PADRES

My very first baseball memories are of playing in the backyard with my two older brothers when I was about 3 years old. I thought baseball was the greatest thing in the world. I wanted to play all the time.

I started playing Tee Ball when I was 4, and I'm lucky enough to still be playing the game I love now that I'm a grown up. I've had so many good memories, from Little League to high school ball all the way through a pair of World Series. I'll often think back to when I was little and smile because I've never lost that childlike love of the game.

I thought baseball was the greatest thing in the world. I wanted to play all the time.

GERRIT COLE

PITCHER, PITTSBURGH PIRATES

I remember the first ball that I ever hit hard. I used a bat that belonged to my teammate Thomas Rose. He had the new Easton Redline. I literally hit the ball off the pitching machine, and I thought I broke it. I remember telling my dad, "We need to go get that bat."

I played with the same group of guys since I was 5 all the way through Little League until we got to high school. I remember dying my hair with them for all-star tournaments.

I always had a pretty good arm, so I played positions based on my team's biggest need for a strong arm. Catcher was my main position until high school. I could throw out runners, and I liked to block the plate. In high school, I played all three outfield positions, but mostly right. I've also pitched for as long as I can remember, but it didn't become a priority until about sophomore year; that's when I started to excel.



WORD SEARCH

The ability to blast a baseball out of the park with ease is a rare talent. Hidden in the puzzle below are the last names of the 10 players who topped the MLB home run leaderboard in 2015. Look for them in every direction: up, down, forward, backward and diagonally. See how many you can find!

N E C S T W S K A B S N
 O R D A I D O V J I L P
 S G H M D V D X Y F O A
 D X C K B Q A H L T J Z
 L T O L P E N D U E U C
 A N Y P H R E F X R P A
 N O I C A N R A C N E H
 O S W G R D A B P T R E
 D A V M P L I K C U Z S
 U Z J Z E L A Z N O G L
 R E N A R F Q B U R V I
 C V O B A U T I S T A D

DAVIS (47)

CRUZ (44)

ARENADO (42)

HARPER (42)

DONALDSON (41)

TROUT (41)

BAUTISTA (40)

GONZALEZ (40)

PUJOLS (40)

ENCARNACION (39)



BRYCE HARPER

Harper's 42 homers in 2015 nearly doubled his career total and helped him win the NL MVP Award.

BRAD MANNING/MLB PHOTOS

YOU MAKE THE CALL!

1

You're on first base with no outs. The batter bunts toward the third baseman, who fields it and throws to first. The first baseman then fires to the shortstop covering second, but you dive back into first. The shortstop argues that you are out because it was a force play and he stepped on second. **What's the call?**

- A. It's a double play and you are out, as there's a force play at second base.
- B. In this instance, the force on you, the lead runner, is removed once the batter is retired. Therefore, you remain safe at first base.
- C. You are awarded second base, as the batter successfully sacrificed you over.

2

You are on first base when the batter, who also happens to be the fastest base runner on your team, hits a ball into the gap. As you're rounding second, she passes you on the bases. The umpire says: "You're out!" Your coach asks him which player is out. **What's the call?**

- A. The runner who passed you.
- B. You are, because you were passed.
- C. The umpire is wrong, and neither runner is out.

WHO SAID IT?

Players around the Major Leagues are just as passionate about the game as you are, and they aren't afraid to express that. Can you guess which players made the statements below?

1. "Just playing the game is good enough for me, and to be in the same category as Sonny [Gray] and David [Price] was special in its own right. It's something I never expected."

Who said this after winning the American League Cy Young Award in 2015?

- A. Jake Arrieta
- B. Chris Sale
- C. Dallas Keuchel

2. "The fans give me a lot of energy. Hearing all those fans in the stands calling my name — 'Eddie, Eddie, Eddie' — [I thought], 'I have to do it for them.' And I did."

Who said this after Game 1 of the ALCS between the Royals and the Blue Jays?

- A. Edwin Encarnacion
- B. Edinson Volquez
- C. Edwin Jackson

3. "To throw a no-hitter takes luck. But if you want to be a dominant pitcher, you look at what you can control. When you're able to go out there and punch guys out and not walk anybody, that's what I'm proud about."

Who said this after throwing his second no-hitter of the 2015 season?

- A. Max Scherzer
- B. Jake Arrieta
- C. Cole Hamels

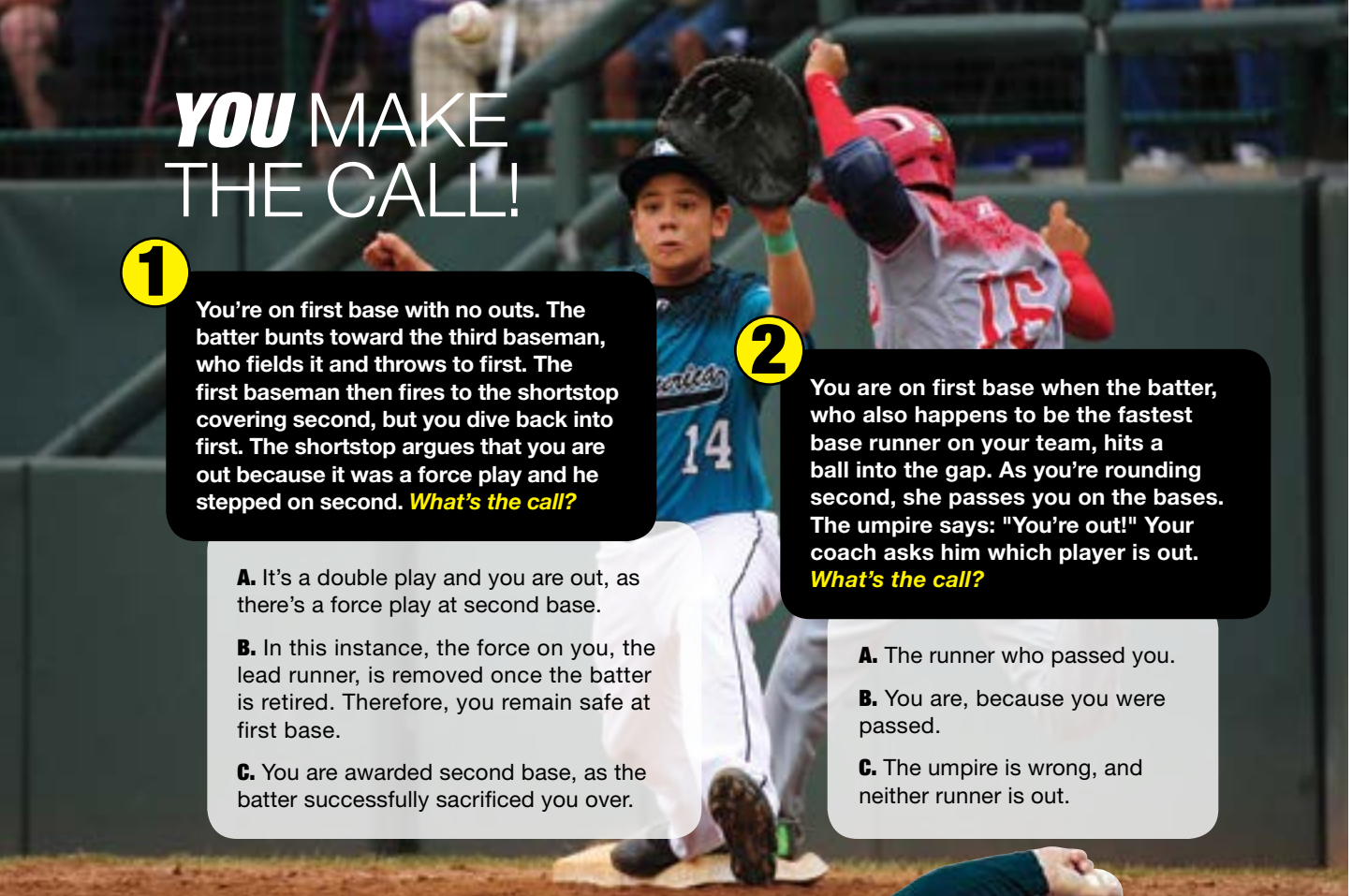
ANSWERS

DAVIS
 CRUZ
 ARENADO
 HARPER
 DONALDSON
 TROUT
 BAUTISTA
 GONZALEZ
 PUJOLS
 ENCARNACION

WORD SEARCH

1. C; 2. B; 3. A
 WHO SAID IT?
 1. B; 2. A
 YOU MAKE THE CALL!

ALEX TRUONG/MLB PHOTOS (LITTLE LEAGUE); JASON O. WATSON/GETTY IMAGES



SONNY GRAY

Field of Dreams



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More than 100 games on the ESPN family of networks. Thousands of fans packing the stands and the iconic Lamade hill. Nearly 100 teams from leagues around the world competing for one of nine Little League World Series championship banners. Thousands of Little Leaguers just like you get the chance to participate in Little League World Series events. And the best thing is, the games they're playing in late August are just like the ones that millions of you play on your home fields during the year. Don't miss a moment of the 2016 Little League World Series tournament season. Visit LLWS.org and follow #LLWS on Instagram.