

Little League Magazine 2018

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The first MLB Little League Classic



Tips from the pros



Baseball's best nicknames

LIGHTS CAMERA ACTION!

Little League hero Cody Bellinger is ready to be L.A.'s leading man



MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

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ROB TRINGALI/MLB PHOTOS (BELLINGER);
ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS



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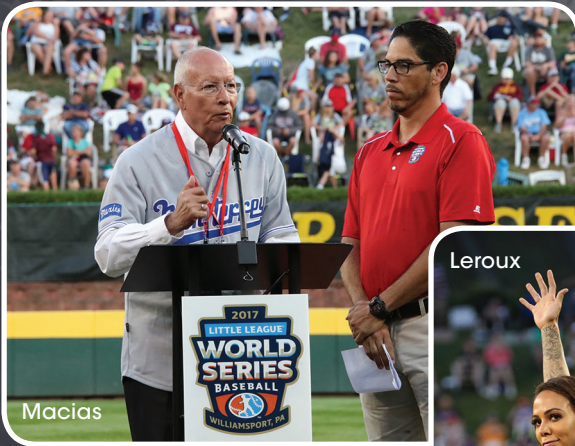
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AROUND THE HORN



Macias



Leroux



Champ Pederson and Mark Teixeira



^ HALL OF EXCELLENCE

The Little League Hall of Excellence recognizes Little League grads who have enjoyed successful careers in their chosen professions and made positive impacts in their communities. In 2017, three individuals earned Little League's highest honor:

SYDNEY LEROUX (B.C., CANADA, WHALLEY LL) A member of the U.S. women's soccer team, Leroux earned a gold medal at the 2012 London Olympics and helped lead her team to the 2015 Women's World Cup title, the U.S.A.'s first since 1999.

CHAMP PEDERSON (PALO ALTO, CALIF., LL) The older brother of Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder, Joc, Champ has become an inspirational speaker as well as an advocate for individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities.

ANGEL MACIAS (MONTERREY, MEXICO, LL) The only pitcher ever to pitch a perfect game in the Little League Baseball World Series final, Angel has since served as a major influencer in the growth of baseball in Mexico.

^ WELCOME COMMISSIONER

Along with last year's three new enshrinees, Little League also welcomed Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred into the Little League Hall of Excellence during the 2018 Little League International Congress in New Orleans this past January.

In 2015, Manfred, a graduate of Rome (N.Y.) Little League, became the first alumnus of Little League elected to the Commissioner of Baseball, and has since continued to provide a major focus on connecting and engaging youth in baseball and softball through initiatives and events.

TALKING WITH TEX

The Canon Little League Photo Contest celebrates the best local Little League photos, and in 2017 the winners had a special prize in former Major Leaguer Mark Teixeira, who took time to visit the Little League Baseball World Series in August and to meet with the victors.

SUNDAY NIGHT SPOTLIGHT

For the third year, Little League worked with MLB and ESPN to spotlight Little League programs through "Baseball Tonight: Sunday Night Countdown." New this year, these profiles featured 11 local league stories, bringing the Little League experience to life through video storytelling.



^ GREEN LACES SHOW SPORTS MATTER

Every player at each of the seven Little League World Series events in 2017 were provided with green shoelaces to wear throughout the tournament. Green laces are a symbol of support for the DICK'S Sporting Goods Foundation Sports Matter initiative to help raise awareness of the youth sports funding crisis.

HOMETOWN HEROES

Celebrating the 21st year of partnership with Little League in 2017, American Honda continued to show its support of local league programs with more than \$100,000 in funding granted to local leagues as part of the Honda Little League Grant Program.

^ WELCOME TO THE SHOW

Four Little League Baseball World Series graduates got to live out their dreams last June when they were selected in the first two rounds of the 2017 Major League Baseball Draft. Never before have more Little League Baseball World Series graduates been selected in the first two rounds of the MLB Draft.

NICK PRATTO

First Round, 14th Pick,
Kansas City Royals
2011 LLBWS - Ocean View Little League (Huntington Beach, Calif.)

KEVIN MERRELL

Second Round, 33rd Pick,
Oakland Athletics
2008 LLBWS - Citrus Park Little League (Tampa, Fla.)

DREW ELLIS

Second Round, 44th Pick,
Arizona Diamondbacks
2008 LLBWS - Jeffersonville (Ind.) Little League

HAGEN DANNER

Second Round, 61st Pick,
Toronto Blue Jays
2011 LLBWS - Ocean View Little League (Huntington Beach, Calif.)



^ TAKE A LOOK

During the 2017 Little League Baseball World Series, Visionworks — along with their partner Transitions — provided free "Eclipse-Safe Viewing Glasses" to all players, coaches, staff, volunteers and fans to help ensure the safety of all LLBWS attendees as they took a look at the historic total solar eclipse on August 21.



Pratto



Merrell



Danner



Ellis

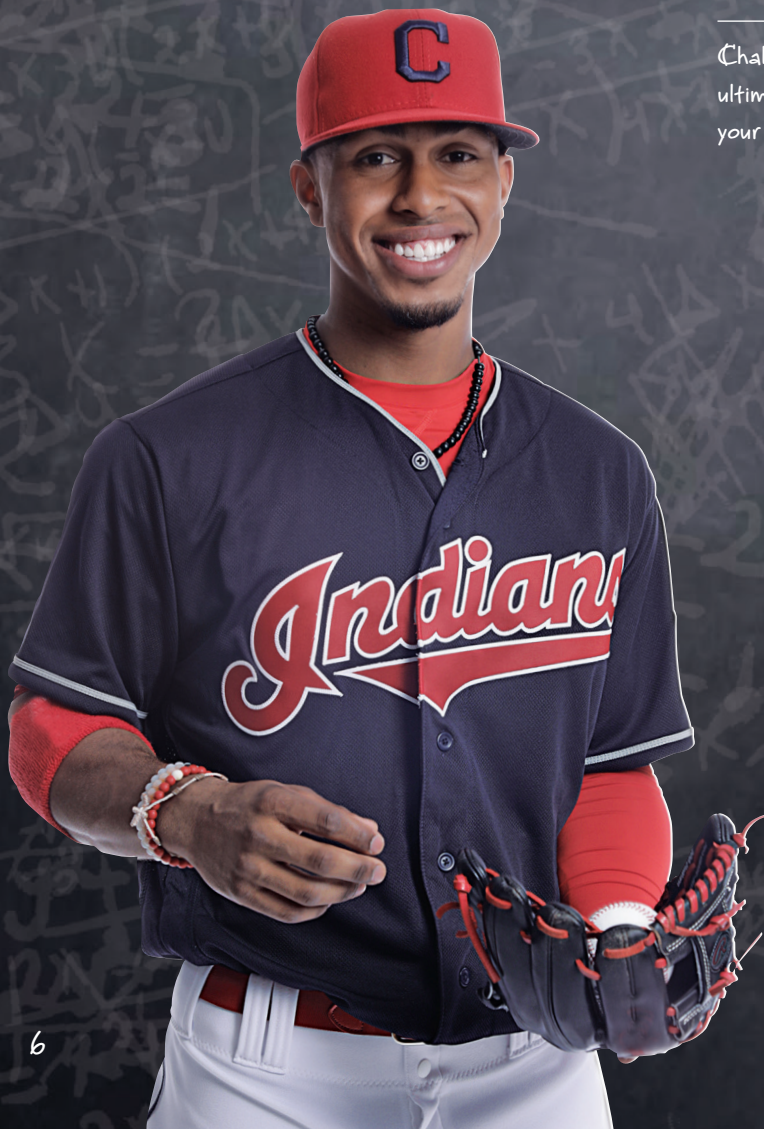
ALEX TRAUTWIG (TEIXEIRA); LITTLE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL (9)



GAME ON

It's a whole new ballgame with **R.B.I. Baseball 18!** R.B.I. 18 steps up its game, delivering all-new Franchise Mode, Home Run Derby Mode, brand new detailed player models and so much more! This MLB season, get the baseball game that will leave you wanting to **PLAY IT AGAIN!**

Indians All-Star shortstop Francisco Lindor graces the cover of this year's edition. Use his big swing to take the Indians to glory, or play as any of the other 29 MLB teams and try to dominate the Big Leagues in an authentic MLB experience.



Take control of your favorite MLB team in Franchise Mode! Make trades, pick up free agents, or call up rookies through multiple seasons. Our player progression system allows players to develop, improve and ultimately retire.

Play as one of the all-time greats by choosing from more than 100 MLB Legends.

Get the latest rosters throughout the 2018 season and use the new Import Rosters feature to keep your in-progress Franchise current without starting over.

Challenge a friend in local head-to-head play or the CPU in the ultimate Home Run Derby! See how your skills stack up against your friends and the rest of the world on the leaderboard.





LITTLE BIG LEAGUE

*Cody Bellinger's rise to stardom has its roots in the Little League World Series.
By Ken Gurnick*

ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

HE'S A BIG LEAGUER NOW, COMING OFF a World Series appearance and a Rookie of the Year Award, but Cody Bellinger's first big-stage moment came way back in 2007, when he and his Chandler, Ariz., team advanced to the Little League Baseball World Series U.S. Championship Game.

Bellinger's Little League squad lost that game to the eventual world champions from Georgia, but he says that experience propelled him on the path to the Major Leagues, where he has already set the National League record for home runs by a rookie and is established as the starting first baseman for the reigning 2017 National League champions.

Bellinger is the first player from that 2007 LLWS to reach the Major Leagues.

At the Dodgers' Camelback Ranch Spring Training complex in Glendale, Ariz., only around 30 miles from where he played youth ball, Bellinger spoke with us about the solid link between Little League and the Major Leagues.

WHO WAS THE FIRST PERSON YOU TALKED TO AFTER FINDING OUT THAT YOU WERE NAMED THE NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR, AND WHAT DID YOU SAY?

MLB Network was there, and we had a bunch of family there at the house. I think the first to come up was my dad (Clay, who played for the Yankees for three seasons); he gave me a hug. That was really special having him there.

COULD YOU FIND ANY SIMILARITIES IN PLAYING IN THE MLB WORLD SERIES AFTER MAKING IT TO THE LITTLE LEAGUE WORLD SERIES 10 YEARS EARLIER?

No, it wasn't even close, honestly. The World Series was just wild.

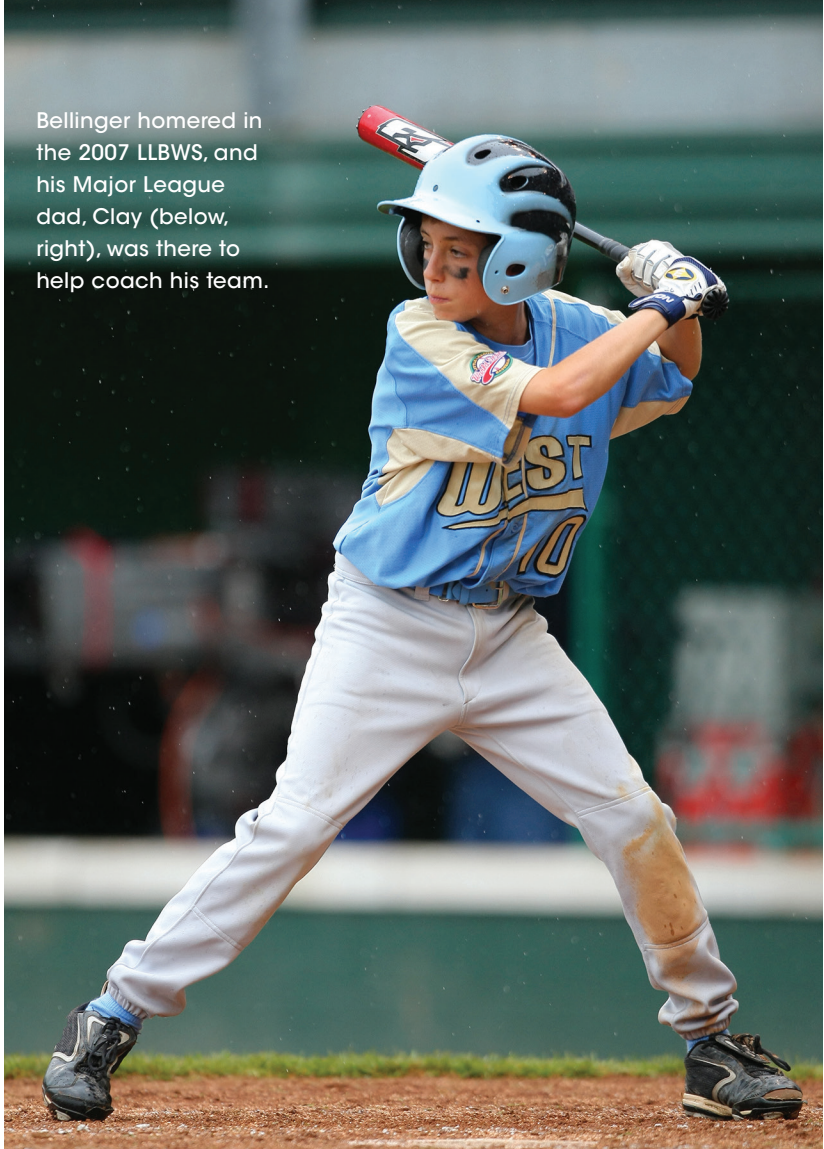
IF YOU HAD TO BALLPARK-GUESS, HOW MANY AUTOGRAPHS DID YOU SIGN IN WILLIAMSPORT COMPARED TO DURING LAST YEAR'S MLB WORLD SERIES?

A lot less in Little League. We did sign autographs, but it was mostly local Pennsylvania kids coming out as we walked back to our dorms. Not even close to up here. I think I just printed my name, but it was cool. It makes you really feel like a Big Leaguer.

CAN YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING SPECIFIC ABOUT THE HOME RUN YOU HIT IN THE LLWS?

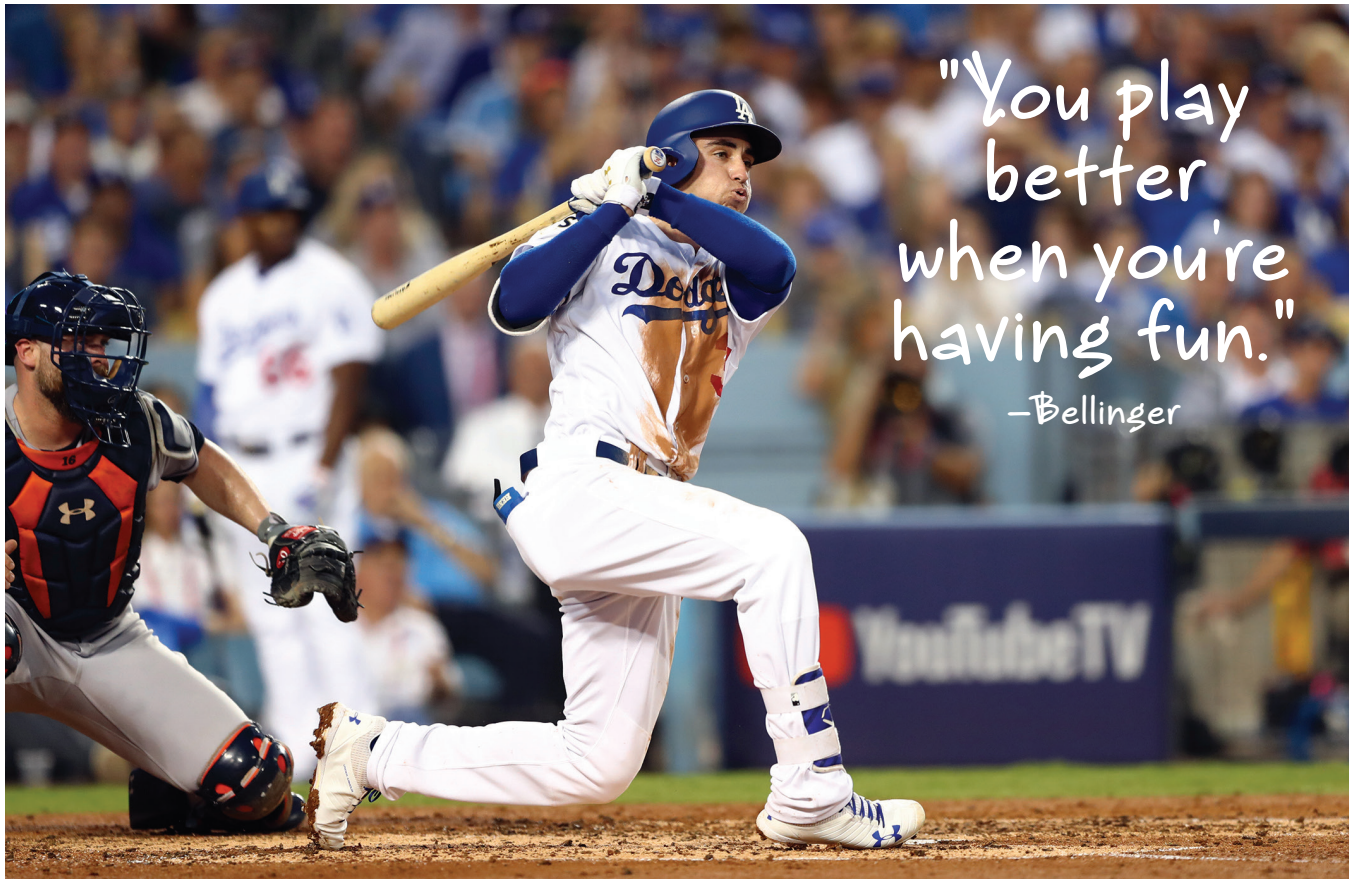
I hit one, it was left-center, and it was in the first game so it was cool to get it out of the way. We were a good team and I was the little guy on the team, so it was cool to pop one out of there. I was younger, and I was tiny.

Bellinger homered in the 2007 LLBS, and his Major League dad, Clay (below, right), was there to help coach his team.



WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE POSTGAME TREAT AS A KID, AND HOW ABOUT NOW?

The sliced oranges. We had those when I played soccer, too, at halftime. Fresh oranges with the Powerade. Now I just go for something sugary: ice cream, candy, for sure.



"You play better when you're having fun."

—Bellinger

YOU DID SOME PITCHING ALL THE WAY UP THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL. DO YOU EVER MISS TAKING THE MOUND NOW THAT YOU'RE A MAJOR LEAGUER?

I'm really curious to see how hard I could throw now, to see if I have velo now, or if I lost it. I don't really miss pitching in games, and I don't think my arm could hold up. But I would still love to try the radar gun, but not pitch on a consistent basis. I'd love to go and try to fire up the radar gun, though.

HOW DID YOUR FAMILY'S BASEBALL BACKGROUND HELP YOU AS A KID?

A lot. Just because I was in the locker room a lot when I was a little kid. Just talking to professional athletes and seeing what they do. That was cool, and I still remember a lot of stuff from then.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO KIDS WHO WANT TO BE LIKE YOU?

It's a game. Have fun, honestly. We get caught up in the moment up here, as you should, and it's easy to, but Little League Baseball is just a bunch of kids having fun, enjoying the game no matter how they're doing.

WHAT CAN MAJOR LEAGUERS LEARN FROM LITTLE LEAGUERS?

Just that. Have fun. It's a game to be enjoyed. For us, it's also a business — it's a job. But you play better when you're having fun.

HOW COOL WOULD IT BE IF YOU GOT THE CHANCE TO PLAY IN A FUTURE MLB LITTLE LEAGUE CLASSIC IN WILLIAMSPORT, LIKE THE PIRATES AND CARDINALS DID LAST AUGUST?

That would be cool to go back and be there as a Big Leaguer, instead of imagining being a Big Leaguer. I actually watched that, and it was a pretty cool thing they set up. I couldn't have imagined what it would have been like if there had been a Major League team there when I was a Little Leaguer. I would have been scared to death.

PARENTS NOW GET THEIR KIDS INVOLVED IN ALL SORTS OF TRAVEL SPORTS. WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING TRAVEL OR CLUB BALL, AND WHAT'S YOUR OPINION ON HOW YOUNG THAT SHOULD START?

I loved it. I think it's also great to play other sports and not just be focused on one sport. I don't remember when I started, but I would wait. You don't want to be burning yourself out because you started too early.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE ROAD CITY TO VISIT, AND WHY?

I love going to San Diego. The weather is always great and it's so convenient [being close to Los Angeles].

WHAT'S THE COOLEST PART OF BEING A MAJOR LEAGUER?

Playing in Big League stadiums every day, in front of thousands of people. It's a dream come true, for sure.

Ken Gurnick has covered the Dodgers for MLB.com since 2001.

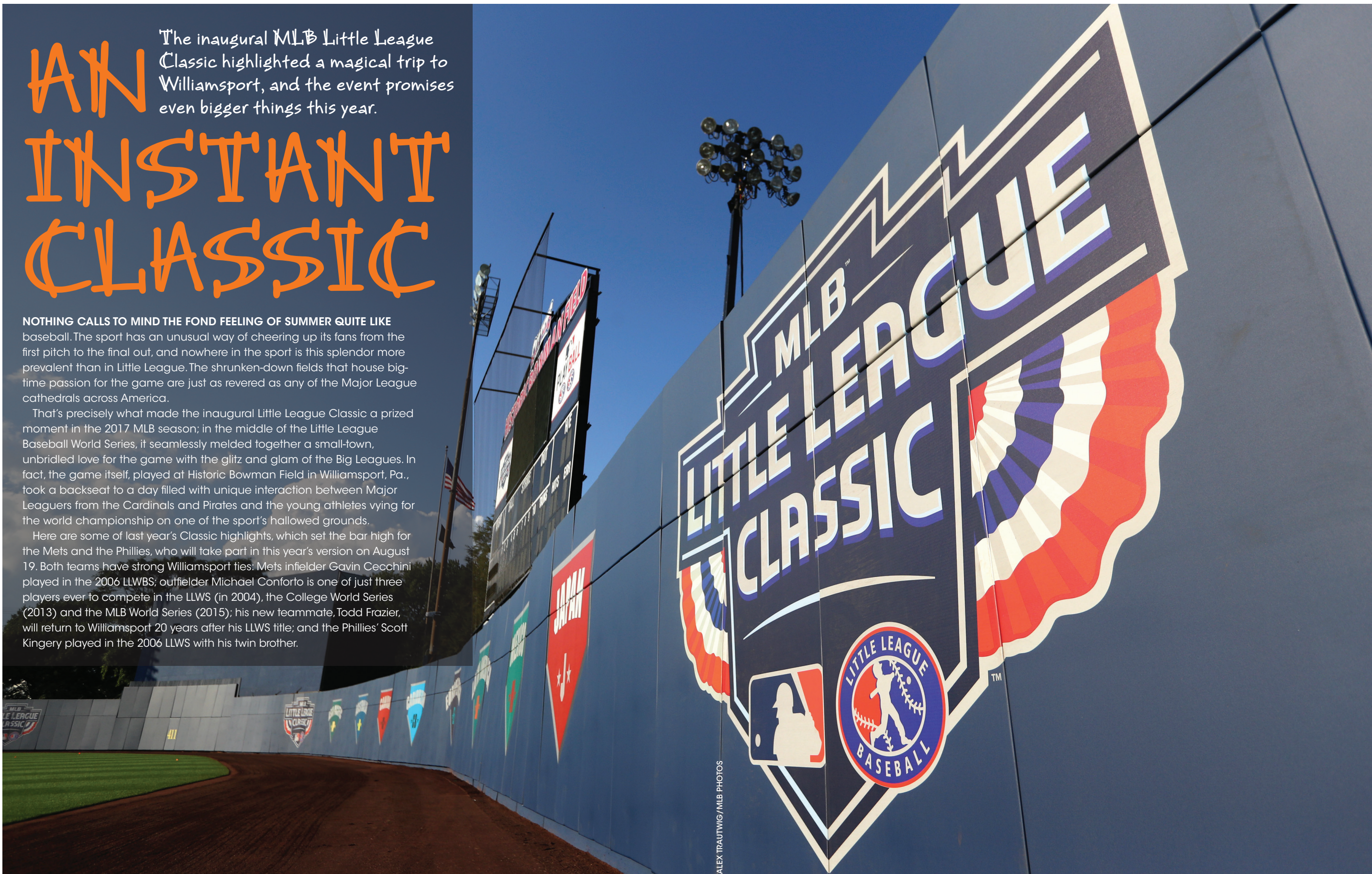
AN INSTANT CLASSIC

The inaugural MLB Little League Classic highlighted a magical trip to Williamsport, and the event promises even bigger things this year.

NOTHING CALLS TO MIND THE FOND FEELING OF SUMMER QUITE LIKE baseball. The sport has an unusual way of cheering up its fans from the first pitch to the final out, and nowhere in the sport is this splendor more prevalent than in Little League. The shrunken-down fields that house big-time passion for the game are just as revered as any of the Major League cathedrals across America.

That's precisely what made the inaugural Little League Classic a prized moment in the 2017 MLB season; in the middle of the Little League Baseball World Series, it seamlessly melded together a small-town, unbridled love for the game with the glitz and glam of the Big Leagues. In fact, the game itself, played at Historic Bowman Field in Williamsport, Pa., took a backseat to a day filled with unique interaction between Major Leaguers from the Cardinals and Pirates and the young athletes vying for the world championship on one of the sport's hallowed grounds.

Here are some of last year's Classic highlights, which set the bar high for the Mets and the Phillies, who will take part in this year's version on August 19. Both teams have strong Williamsport ties: Mets infielder Gavin Cecchini played in the 2006 LLWS; outfielder Michael Conforto is one of just three players ever to compete in the LLWS (in 2004), the College World Series (2013) and the MLB World Series (2015); his new teammate, Todd Frazier, will return to Williamsport 20 years after his LLWS title; and the Phillies' Scott Kingery played in the 2006 LLWS with his twin brother.



ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

HOMECOMING

On a day inspired by the unfiltered passion of young ballplayers, a trio of Big Leaguers took a trip down memory lane at last year's LL Classic. Lance Lynn and Randal Grichuk, then of the Cardinals, and Pirates infielder Max Moroff were honored before one of the Little League contests as former LLBWS players. Lynn pitched for the Central Region team from Indiana in 1999, while Moroff's appearance came for the Southeast representative in 2005. Grichuk starred for Lamar (Texas) Little League in both the 2003 and '04 tournaments, leading all players in hits, home runs, slugging and RBI in his second year at Williamsport.

"To be fortunate enough to play in the Little League World Series was a dream come true," Grichuk said before the game. "To do it twice was incredible. It's special to come back here and I'm glad to be a part of it."

To celebrate their success then and now, all three players were given framed jerseys from their LLWS days during an on-field ceremony before the Classic kicked off.

CHILD'S PLAY

Throwing out the first pitch at a Major League game is no small task, so instead of it falling on one player's shoulders, several Little Leaguers teamed up for the ceremonial toss before the Classic began. A representative from each of the 16 LLBWS squads lined up from the center-field wall all the way through the infield to take part in a perfect relay throw to Moroff, who was waiting at home plate to conclude the ritual.

Of course, the Pirates and Cardinals ended the contest — a 6-3 Pittsburgh win — in a similar fashion, copying a timeless Little League tradition and joining together at home plate for a post-game handshake line. The gesture wrapped up a full day of groundbreaking excitement and inspiration around Williamsport, feelings that many Major Leaguers shared with their Little League counterparts.

"I'm a firm believer that there are far more important things than what I do on the field," Pirates second baseman Josh Harrison said. "I want to go 4-for-4 and make every defensive play, but it's also cool to take a step back and meet those kids and realize they're the future of the game we're playing today."

CHILLING OUT

Above all else, though, the Classic was about Little Leaguers hanging out with their Big League heroes. The Pirates and Cardinals shared a bus ride into Williamsport with a few youth teams and shared everything — from musical tastes, to George Kontos's World Series ring, to Team Australia's infatiable kangaroo mascot (appropriately named 'Rally Roo').

Once they arrived, the pros dispersed throughout the LLBWS complex, capitalizing on their rare chance to play spectator instead of spectacle. Pirates manager Clint Hurdle made the most of his limited free time, signing autographs literally everywhere.

"I've never signed so many autographs in the men's bathroom," he said.



"It was just like fireworks. Things kept happening — things that made you smile, things that made you happy you were here, appreciative you had the opportunity to be a part of something that was happening for the first time ever." CLINT HURDLE

From Ping-Pong and arcade games in the famed "Grove," where Lynn split his frozen pop in two and shared it with a Little Leaguer, the day long chill session continued even as games went on in Lamade Stadium. Two hundred lucky Little Leaguers enjoyed a free snow cone, courtesy of Cardinals outfielder Tommy Pham and pitcher Carlos Martinez.

The snow cones and dance parties arose from the love of the game that every Big Leaguer, Little Leaguer, parent, coach, umpire and fan shared that day. It was baseball, a truly universal language, that pushed this idea from the start, and it was baseball that made it such a successful occasion.

"It was almost like fireworks," Hurdle said. "Things kept happening — things that made you smile, things that made you happy you were here, appreciative you had the opportunity to be a part of something that was happening for the first time ever."

Adam Berry, Anthony Castrovince and Jesse Sanchez contributed to this report.

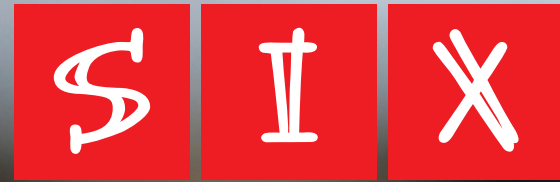


ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

Even before Little Leaguers lined up for the ceremonial first pitch/relay throw (top left), many of them already had a full day of excitement thanks to Big Leaguers such as Pirates skipper Clint Hurdle (top right) and Elias Diaz (above).

The softball legend dishes on coaching, parenting and getting involved on the diamond.

By Kevin Fountain



INNINGS WITH JESSICA MENDOZA



JESSICA MENDOZA IS AMONG THE MOST POWERFUL WOMEN in baseball. A member of the ESPN family since 2007 and a Sunday Night Baseball analyst since 2016, she also has some game of her own. Mendoza is a two-time Olympic medalist with USA Softball, a Little League mom, and has to be one of the coolest Coach Pitch coaches in the world.

She has served as a major role model for women in sports throughout her illustrious career, and is currently co-chair of the Women's Sports Foundation Athlete Advisory Panel. In

2015, she became the first female analyst for a nationally-televised MLB postseason game. A few months prior, she became ESPN's first female MLB game analyst during the August 24, 2015, edition of Monday Night Baseball, and earlier in the year became the first female analyst for a Men's College World Series telecast. She even got the call for the first-ever MLB Little League Classic last year.

We had the chance to have a six-inning conversation with Jessica about everything Little League.

1ST INNING

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER AND BECOME A COACH?

A coach is like a Sharpie on your brain; it's a permanent marker. I remember some of the things that were told to me by coaches at the youngest of ages.

It's not only the information that you're sharing as far as the knowledge of the game, but the role model that you are. Yes, I learned a lot of skills, but it was the conversations about life that we had all along the way. The coach is the one that can be a huge influence on these kids' lives.

2ND INNING

WHY SHOULD GIRLS GET INVOLVED IN SPORTS?

For girls to be able to play sports is one of the most important things because of all the life choices you have to make.

I played a lot of sports growing up, but the important part was that it gave me the confidence to say no when I had friends telling me to do something I didn't want to do, to find out who I was, and to know that I was a strong girl.

3RD INNING

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR A KID THAT MIGHT BE SCARED TO GET INVOLVED IN SOFTBALL OR BASEBALL?

I see fear a lot of times in girls and boys playing baseball and softball. It's not a sport you can just pick up and jump

right into. There are mechanics and there are things that



Mendoza earned medals in two Olympic Games.

MAXX WOLFSON/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); SUE OGRÖCK/AP

you have to learn, but at the end of the day, it's about having fun. I was awful when I first started playing softball. I struck out once playing Tee Ball, but I had the biggest grin on my face because to me it's about being with your friends, enjoying the game, and not your individual accomplishments. It's a game of failure, but it's also a game of learning and having fun with your friends.

4TH INNING

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU WANT TO HAVE ON THE FUTURE OF THE SPORT?

The biggest thing is to encourage girls to be themselves. I don't want them to be me. I learned that I didn't want to be someone else, but being a role model

is important to be able to show strong women. I think now, more than ever, it's important for girls to be able to see themselves in someone else. My biggest goal for any young girl is for them to figure out who they are, look themselves in the mirror and realize 'this is who I am,' and then look back and see someone that is strong, smart and beautiful. A lot of times we are trained as girls and women to find all the faults, and I just want girls to be able to look at themselves and understand that they are who they are and be the best version of that every time they wake up.

5TH INNING

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR A SOFTBALL PLAYER GETTING READY TO TAKE THE FIELD BEFORE A GAME?

Remember why you play. I'm just as guilty of that as anyone. At the end of the day, if I could go back and play

one more game, I would close my eyes and have the biggest grin on my face. I would just say, "Let's do this. Let's get grassy, let's get dirty, and let's have some fun." That's why we play. I think a lot of the times we get caught up on how we win and how to be successful, and I get it, but that's what practice is for. When game day comes, just let it loose and have fun.

6TH INNING

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR MOMS WHO AREN'T SURE IF THEY SHOULD GET THEIR KIDS INVOLVED IN LITTLE LEAGUE?

Little League isn't just about playing baseball or softball, it's about community.

One of the biggest things I learned, and I didn't realize it when I was playing, but now can as a parent, is how much it really brings a community together. There's something about Little League, especially when you put it across your chest and you go out there and represent your community in different districts. There's a pride that comes with that. It's a fun thing to do, but the most important thing is that it gets everyone involved throughout the entire community.



PLAY BALL!

The Play Ball program gives boys and girls more ways to enjoy the game.

EVERY YOUTH LEAGUE HAS ITS LEGENDS, FROM THE

pinch-hitter who won the championship game with a walk-off double to the impossibly tall starting pitcher who throws harder than most coaches. These hometown heroes dominate local diamonds around the country and help make the lasting impressions that define youth sports. Now, imagine stepping between the lines and working on your skills with world-famous heroes, ones that we watch on TV and imitate in our backyards. Seems like a dream come true, right? Thanks to the Play Ball initiative, these dreams are becoming reality for young athletes across North America.

Launched in 2015 by MLB and USA Baseball, Play Ball aims at getting children involved in baseball- and softball-related activities, and enlists the help of the game's stars to hit its goal.

Kids have learned, played and found their passion for our pastime through clinics led by All-Stars such as Francisco Lindor and Carlos Correa, and Hall of Famers such as Tim Lincecum and Ozzie Smith.

The Play Ball campaign provides plenty of exciting ways to get in the game, from cranking homers like a real Big Leaguer, to showing off your skills on a national level. Here are just a few of the ways that young ballplayers everywhere are getting involved (for more information, visit playball.org).

PLAY BALL PARK AT THE LLWS

Play Ball made its Little League World Series debut last summer, and it brought a whole new dimension to the week-long excitement in Williamsport. Along with learning techniques that are vital to the sport — including bunting and baserunning — those in attendance at Play Ball Park copied some of the powerful prodigies playing in the tournament at the popular home run derby station.

"The future of USA Baseball is these kids," said Bill Krejci, a USA Baseball coach who helped out at Play Ball Park and has worked with several MLB stars. "If we don't get them engaged at a young age, we aren't going to have a Manny Machado or a Bryce Harper. So when you have something like this, it creates some enthusiasm for baseball. These kids will keep this in their mind. These are our next future Big Leaguers."

PITCH, HIT & RUN

Do you prefer a little more competition on the diamond? Then sign up for your local baseball or softball Scott's MLB Pitch, Hit and Run competition in 2018 for the chance to win a national title during July's All-Star weekend in Washington, D.C. Competitors participate in three challenges: pitching into a strike zone, hitting off a tee and a timed sprint from second base to home plate.

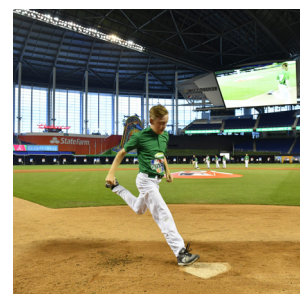
Pitch, Hit and Run alumni include MLB All-Star and World Series champion Eric Hosmer and Phillies outfielder Rhys Hoskins. Local competitions usually take place before mid-May, putting the thrill of baseball into your local ballpark. Learn more about hosting a competition, or find an existing one near you, at pitchhitrun.com.

JR. HOME RUN DERBY

Kids can even swing for the fences in a locally-hosted MLB Jr. Home Run Derby, one of the most exciting events of the year! The derby, designed for players 14 years old and under, is also free to host on a local level and, like Pitch, Hit and Run, gives children the opportunity to advance to the National Finals during MLB All-Star Week, being held in the nation's capital in 2018.

To register as a host, or to view a listing of local events, check out mlb.com/junior-home-run-derby.

ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS (PLAY BALL PARK); PRESTON MACK/MLB PHOTOS (PITCH, HIT, RUN); LG PATTERSON/MLB PHOTOS



PlayBall Park at the LLWS (left); Pitch, Hit & Run (top); Jr. Home Run Derby (bottom)

ANTHONY RIZZO ON HITTING



< You have to find a batting stance that puts you in the best position to track the ball coming out of the pitcher's hand.

In just a few years, Chicago Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo has evolved from a young beacon of hope for a franchise on the rise to the elder statesman of a curse-shattering superpower. The 28-year-old led the North Siders to three straight NLCS appearances — including the team's first World Series title in 108 years — from 2015–17 by hitting more than 30 homers and crossing the 100-RBI mark in each campaign. The left-handed slugger also owns a Gold Glove and a Silver Slugger award in addition to his three All-Star nods and four top-15 MVP finishes.

Rizzo, along with Cubs teammate and former NL MVP Kris Bryant, has Cubs fans salivating at the thought of hoisting the trophy for the second time in three years. Now, with another opportunity to win it all on the horizon, Rizzo is ready to share his secrets to being one of the toughest outs in baseball.

Locked and Loaded

The most important thing in baseball, regardless of how old you are or what level of baseball you're playing, is to see the ball. I know it's an old cliché: "Keep your eye on the ball," but it's true.

Fast and Furious

[I'm] hunting the fastball 100 percent of the time. The best way to hit a curveball is to hit a fastball. You have to have the eye and be disciplined enough to not swing at the pitches off the plate or the pitches in off the plate, and just control the strike zone.

Down, but Not Out

With two strikes, they could throw that nasty pitch and if I foul it off, I win, because the odds are that a pitcher's not going to throw two or three of those in a row. I go with the mentality that says, "He just threw his best curveball, there's no way he can throw that again." If he does, hopefully I can foul it off again.

Track the Ball

Being comfortable in the batter's box sets up your whole at-bat. You have to find a batting stance that puts you in the best position to track the ball with both eyes coming out of the pitcher's hand.

A LEAGUE OF HER OWN

Hailey Dawson, a Little Leaguer born with only one fully-formed hand, inspires with every first pitch she throws.

THROWING OUT THE FIRST PITCH AT A MAJOR LEAGUE GAME IS A dream come true for all baseball fans. But for Hailey Dawson, that dream set her on a special quest, and will ultimately become a reality more than 30 times over.

The seven-year-old Little Leaguer from Las Vegas was born with Poland Syndrome, a rare birth defect that left her with just two fully-formed fingers on her right hand. That hasn't stopped her from becoming one of the most famous first-pitch guests in the world, though, earning a trip to Game 4 of the MLB World Series between the Dodgers and Astros to partake in the ceremonial toss. Dawson is outfitted with a 3D-printed hand, specially developed for her at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, each time she takes the mound.

"She's pretty spunky," says Hailey's mom, photographer Yong Dawson. "She doesn't believe she inspires people. I say, 'What do you mean? How can you say people aren't encouraged by what you're doing?'"

"She says, 'I'm just being Hailey. I'm just being me.'"

Dawson has several versions of the hand, including one painted gold from the Fall Classic that's imprinted with the phrase "Vegas Strong," a reminder of the mass shooting during a country music festival in her hometown that left 58 people dead and more than 800 injured. She also used one marked with the logo of her favorite team, the Baltimore Orioles, when she threw out the first pitch at Camden Yards last season.

A video about her desire to throw out the first pitch at every Major League stadium went viral on social media last year. Now, Dawson has standing invitations from every Major League club to fulfill her ambitions, fully equipped with the confidence of a Big League veteran.

"I always had it in my head that it would be cool if she would throw out the first pitch at all the stadiums, and after throwing out the pitch with the Nationals, Hailey kept asking me 'What's next, what stadium is next?' And I knew we had to make it happen," Yong Dawson said. "I was going to write letters to the other 28 teams, but instead the tweet on Bleacher Report took care of it for me as all of the teams began to respond, asking for Hailey to come to their stadiums."

Doug Miller contributed to this report.





INSTANT CLASSIC

2017 MLB Little League Classic

LITTLE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL

THE HOME RUN BOYS

These three former Little Leaguers are once again set to send baseballs flying from sea to shining sea. *By Dylan Hornik*

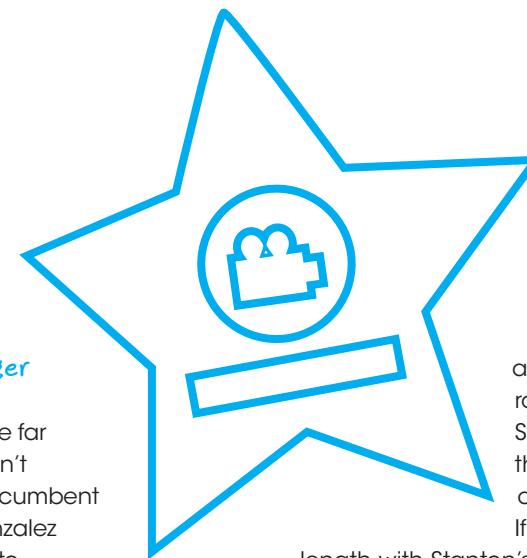
THE PATRIOTIC TUNE "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL" OPENS UP WITH A POETIC LINE THAT DESCRIBES the vast expanse of land that spans much of the United States: "Oh beautiful, for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain." Well, if the 2017 MLB season was any barometer, those spacious skies are more crowded by the minute.

Collectively, Major League players hit 6,105 home runs last season, shattering the record set in 2000. And while there were plenty of sluggers who played a crucial role in setting the new mark, three standout performances drove the 2017 home run train. A pair of Rookies of the Year, Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge and Dodgers first baseman Cody Bellinger, had record-breaking campaigns of their own; and the reigning National League MVP, Giancarlo Stanton, put on a hitting clinic in Miami before being traded to New York and forming this generation's version of the Bash Brothers with Judge.

Collectively, the trio hit 150 regular-season home runs that accumulated a total length of nearly 11 miles. While that figure isn't quite big enough to cover the 2,800-plus miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, these three hitters have stats that stack up against some of the most iconic attractions across America, and they all got their start on local Little League fields.



ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS (JUDGE); ROB LEITER/MLB PHOTO (BELLINGER); MIKE CARLSON/MLB PHOTOS



The West Wing: Cody Bellinger 2017 HR total: 39

Cody Bellinger's meteoric rise to the far reaches of the universe almost didn't happen. It took an injury to then-incumbent Dodgers first baseman Adrian Gonzalez for Bellinger to even get called up to the Big Leagues in 2017. He was nearly unstoppable upon his debut in late April, though, belting 39 homers and driving in 97 runs in just 132 games to help L.A. to the best record in baseball. His .581 slugging percentage was second among rookies to play at least 100 games, trailing only Judge, and his 39 longballs broke the National League mark for first-year players previously held by Wally Berger and Frank Robinson.

Bellinger's 39 homers traveled a total length that checks in at just under three miles — or 1.2 times as long as the Hollywood Walk of Fame, where the Dodgers have their very own star signifying their importance to the Los Angeles community. While his homers can't quite match up to the 655-mile, picturesque Pacific Coast Highway, Bellinger's blasts would definitely get pulled over for speeding. The first baseman's average exit velocity finished at just under 90 miles per hour in 2017, while the PCH posts a top speed limit of 60 mph. With a full season ahead of him in 2018, Bellinger will look to add even more mileage.

Beast of the East: Aaron Judge 2017 HR total: 52

Aaron Judge nearly became the third player ever to win both Rookie of the Year and MVP honors in the same season. Astros star Jose Altuve beat him out for the latter honor, but he took the American League by storm in his first full season, posting the Yankees' first 50-home run campaign since Alex Rodriguez in 2007. Judge also led the league in runs scored and walks while finishing in the top five in OBP and slugging percentage. Not bad for a freshman.

It's going to be difficult to follow up numbers like that, but if anyone can handle the bright lights of New York City, it's the mild-mannered Judge, whose 6-foot-7 frame now has extra protection in the lineup thanks to Stanton's equally gargantuan physique. If you add up all of Judge's home run distances from 2017, you'll get a sum that's more than 13 times the height of the iconic Empire State Building, which stands

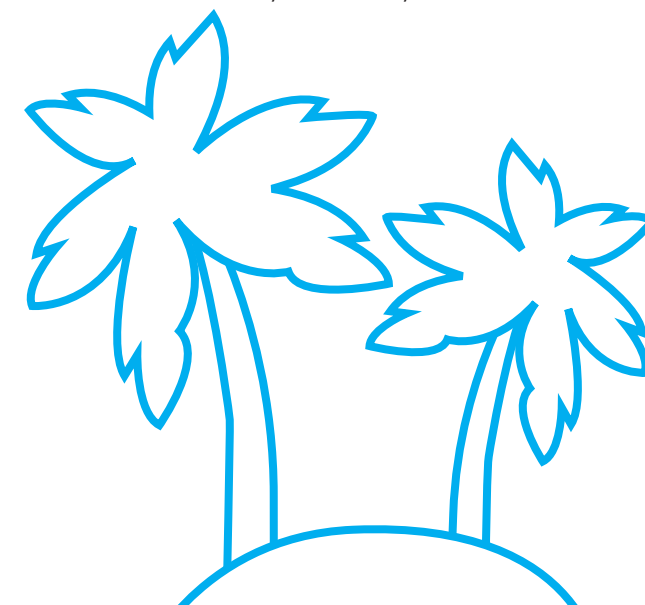
at 1,454 feet with its antenna. It's also roughly the distance between Yankee Stadium and the Bronx Zoo, where they house just a few creatures that can match Judge's brute strength.

If you combine Judge's home run length with Stanton's, you can follow the path of the baseball all the way from the Bronx to Teaneck, N.J., more than eight miles away.

Mashed Taters: Giancarlo Stanton 2017 HR total: 59

There may not have been a single player last year that could completely change the game with a single swing the way Stanton did. From July 1 through August 31, the slugger belted 30 longballs, including 18 in August, which tied a record for that particular month. The power output — while a career high by far — wasn't unexpected from Stanton, who averages more than 40 home runs per 162 games for his career. A history of injuries, rather than opposing pitching, has been his primary deterrent from previously reaching the 40-homer mark.

While the Marlins are going to miss his presence in the lineup, opposing pitchers in the National League can breathe a lot easier this season. His nearly 4.5 miles of home runs in 2017 were more than Judge or Bellinger, and could stretch the entire length of Key West, which sits at the southernmost tip of the Florida Keys at a hair under four miles long. With the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry now renewed, Stanton hopes to carry his 92 mph average exit velocity from 2017 into this season, with his eyes set on Boston's Lansdowne Street beyond Fenway Park's Green Monster.





Make sure you have > everything behind the pitch, just like loading in hitting, then transfer the weight forward.

JENNIE FINCH ON PITCHING

There's only one word to describe Jennie Finch: legendary. The two-time U.S. Olympic medalist and three-time All-American at the University of Arizona is one of the most recognizable faces in softball history, once winning 60 consecutive starts for the Wildcats and bringing home gold at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece.

After retiring from an illustrious domestic and international career in the sport, she became one of the game's most passionate promoters, teaming up with various partners to take softball to new heights. Last year, she was named MLB's youth softball ambassador, a role that allows her to connect with the game's next crop of superstars and share her tips on being a softball ace.

Snap, Crackle, Pop

Throwing a ball is not natural, I don't care if it's underhand or overhand. If you have unsafe mechanics, then there's just as much stress on an underhand pitcher as there is by throwing overhand. I'm a big advocate of having the right mechanics before you start pushing your body to the max.

Full Force

So much of it is getting everything behind your pitch, just like loading in hitting; making sure you have everything behind it, and then you transfer everything forward. The big key is the resistance off the front side. I always say, "Stick it and spin it." Stick [your stride foot] and transfer it to the ball.

Pick your Poison

My dad never wanted me to have a go-to pitch because if I did, everyone would know what was coming in that go-to situation. He was such an advocate of, "You have to throw any of your pitches in any count and any situation." Depending on the time in my career, the umpire's zone, even the hitter, I couldn't pick out one pitch. It depended more on the situation.

All or Nothing

I'm a huge advocate of "If you're out there trying to get better, give it everything you have." Make sure that your game speed is close to your practice speed. That's the challenge; when nobody is in the stands, nobody is on the bases, and it's just you and a bullpen catcher or your dad, that's when the biggest difference is made.



SCIENCE AT BAT

A look at the trampoline effect, the guiding force behind Little League's new bat regulations.

IF IT SEEMED LIKE FAR MORE GIFTS THAN usual were wrapped in long skinny boxes this past holiday season, there was good reason: New youth baseball bat standards took effect Jan. 1.

As announced by Little League in August 2015, players in the Major Division and below now need a bat that adheres to the new rules, called USABat, that are aimed at producing youth bats that act more like wood. That may sound like an impossible task, but luckily some of the country's top scientists are on the case, and we're here to tell you what you need to know.

VISIT
LITTLELEAGUE.ORG/BATINFO
FOR MORE INFORMATION

BOUNCIN' AROUND

Before a bat can get the seal of approval (literally — all certified bats are stamped with a USABat logo), scientists run the new stick through a series of tests to ensure that it meets the new regulations and performs like its wooden counterpart in the batter's box. These tests check the bat's trampoline effect, a measurement of how fast a ball bounces off a bat when it makes contact.

A simpler way to show the trampoline effect is to imagine yourself jumping on a trampoline. When you land, the trampoline springs back and bounces you up into the air. This is the same thing that happens when you hit a ball with a bat and the ball sails into the field, and it is the speed of the ball's "bounce" that is measured in these new regulations.

TEST DRIVE

To test a bat's trampoline effect, scientists conduct laboratory studies, shooting a ball at a bat with an air cannon and measuring the ball's reaction with high-tech equipment such as lasers and high-speed cameras that can capture the speed of the baseball as it leaves the bat. Different materials produce different trampoline effects, which is why a standard has been implemented for both metal and composite bats.

The results of this testing are USABats that have a similar performance as wood, but are much lighter and stronger, so Little Leaguers around the world can still enjoy playing the game they love.

**EXPERIMENT:
TEST THE TRAMPOLINE EFFECT AT HOME!**
Take a baseball or another ball that is not bouncy. Drop the ball on a table or a desk from about six inches above the surface. How far and how fast does the ball bounce back? Now try dropping the ball on an elastic surface like a drum from the same distance of six inches above the surface. How does the ball bounce against the new surface? You will see that the ball bounces back faster and farther when it contacts the elastic surface. Try dropping the ball on different surfaces to see how they produce varying trampoline effects against the ball, and you'll figure out what these new bats are all about!



- Starting January 1, 2018, USA Baseball is instituting a new bat standard which will be approved for play in AABC, Baseball, Babe Ruth & Cal Ripken, Dixie Youth Baseball & Dixie Boys Baseball, Little League Baseball® (all divisions except Senior League) and PONY Baseball.
- Barrels up to 2 5/8" are now approved
- Players will need a new bat stamped with the USA Baseball mark
- New USA Baseball approved bats were made available for purchase on September 1, 2017.



Look for the USA Baseball mark on the handle of your bat

THESE GUIDELINES ARE GOOD TO FOLLOW, BUT YOU SHOULD ALWAYS CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL LEAGUE TO CONFIRM WHICH BAT RULES THEY WILL BE FOLLOWING

SEE THE ENTIRE APPROVED BAT LIST AT

USABAT.com



Little League Baseball
 Tokyo Kitasuna Little League of the Japan Region powered past the Southwest Region's Lufkin (Texas) Little League to secure an unprecedented fourth Little League Baseball World Series Championship. The Southwest Region took an early lead in the first, when Chandler Spencer hit a home run with no outs, but Japan took over in the second as Keitaro Miyahara tripled for his third hit of the game, driving in two runs.



Little League Softball

For the second year in a row, the Little League Softball World Series title was captured by the Southwest Region as Lake Air (Texas) Little League bested the Southeast Region representatives Rowan (N.C.) Little League. The Southeast attacked first with a single by Brooke Kennerly in the top of the first, but the Southwest team countered with three runs in the bottom half of the inning thanks to an error, a wild pitch and a Makayla Ramos single. The Southwest Region would remain on top for the rest of the game with the help of a big fourth inning that included a double by Yanijah Quintanilla and another single from Ramos.

Little League's 2017 champions represented countries from all over the globe.

AROUND THE WORLD





Junior League Baseball

Shing-Ming Junior (Chinese Taipei) Little League of the Asia-Pacific Region bested the East Region's Kennett Square KAU (Penn.) Little League in the 2017 Junior League Baseball World Series Championship. The boys from the Asia-Pacific Region got their bats going early when Hao Yu Lee belted a three-run home run in the first inning. The big inning, however, came in the fifth when Asia-Pacific scored seven runs on an error, a single by Yi Hsiang Sung, a walk and a home run.



Intermediate (50/70) Baseball

Radames Lopez Little League from Puerto Rico took home the 2017 Little League Intermediate (50/70) Baseball World Series Championship in dramatic fashion against the East Region's Freehold (N.J.) Little League. The championship game ended with a Rolando Cruz walk-off single in the bottom of the seventh to take the title.



Junior League Softball

Poland Community (Ohio) Little League of the Central Region took home the 2017 Junior League Softball World Series with a win over the host team of Kirkland American/National (Wash.) Little Leagues. Kaili Gross led the Central Region in the circle with a seven-inning performance, striking out 10 while allowing five hits and only one run.



Senior League Baseball

Latin America's Aguadulce Cabezera (Panama) Little League outlasted the Southeast Region representatives from North Springs (Fla.) Little League to capture the 2017 Senior League Baseball World Series Championship. Latin America was up, 5-1, in the fifth inning when the Southeast Region began to chip away at their lead thanks to singles by Colby Mayo and Trevor Kole. The Southeast Region pulled within one with a home run by Andrew Jenner in the seventh, but Latin America held on for the win.



Senior League Softball

Delaware District 3, the host region for the Senior Softball World Series, took home the 2017 Senior League Softball World Series Championship with a strong performance against the Asia-Pacific Region representatives from Bacolod City (Philippines) Little League. The game was scoreless until the fifth inning when the Delaware broke the ice with a run scored on an error. With the help of a home run by Jakayla Sample and singles by Kylie Kruger and Jordan DiFava in the sixth inning, the host region sealed the victory and took home the title.



LITTLE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL (L)

ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

FRANCISCO LINDOR ON PLAYING THE INFIELD



< In order to flip it to second base, you have to have a stiff wrist. You don't want to flip it [with your wrist] because it'll go into right field.

An athlete's nickname says everything about the kind of player he or she is. Monikers like Nelson Cruz's "Boomstick," Noah Syndergaard's "Thor" and Josh Donaldson's "Bringer of Rain" tell us exactly what to expect from these larger-than-life stars. The same goes for young shortstop Francisco Lindor, or "Mr. Smile" as he's known around baseball. At any given moment, the Indians superstar could flash his signature grin on the diamond, lighting up the ballpark in more ways than one.

In just his third MLB season, Lindor secured a top-five MVP finish by posting career highs in walks, home runs, RBI and OPS, while leading Cleveland to the best regular-season record in the American League.

Lindor isn't just a threat at the plate, though, as evidenced by his 2016 Gold Glove Award. With an elite skill set on both sides of the ball and a sparkling smile, it's no wonder Lindor ranks as one of the brightest stars in the game at just 24 years old. Here, he shares some tips on being a steady presence in the infield.

Mighty Momentum

You always have to have momentum whether you're throwing to second base, to first or as part of a relay — whatever you're doing on the field, you have to have momentum.

Blocking the Ball

I try to work off my left leg so I have something just in case it takes a bad hop. The ball will still hit me in my chest.

Flipping Out

Giving good feeds to your double play partner is very important. In order to flip the ball to second base, you have to have a stiff wrist. You don't want to flip it [with your wrist] because it'll go into right field. You're going to get your momentum, catch it and flip it.

Consistency Is Key

You have to stay low. It should be the same flip every single time. You have to be consistent.

MLB stars aren't the only players with unique nicknames. Just ask Little Leaguers.

By Mike McCormick

NAME
THAT
DUDIE

WILLIAMSPORT DID NOT MISS OUT ON MLB'S INAUGURAL PLAYERS

Weekend last August, when players from around the league wore their nickname on the back of their jersey. For every "Boomstick" and "Joey Bats" roaming the Major Leagues, Little Leaguers have their own share of unforgettable nicknames.

Since unfiltered fun and creativity dominate the dugouts of youth ball, it came as no surprise that last year's Little League Baseball World Series teams had nearly as many entertaining monikers as there are players on the roster. From the "American Dream" to "ZPS," from "Corndog" to "Pickles," there were loads of clever options for these kids to use under future high school yearbook photos and on the shoulders of varsity jackets.

The 2017 champs, the team from Tokyo Kitasuna Little League in Japan, clearly took the art of nicknaming seriously, boasting titles such as "American Dream," "Seaweed" and "Touchy Itchy." Their counterparts in the championship game, the Southwest Region representatives from Lufkin, Texas, boasted some heavy-hitting nicknames to match their firepower at the plate. With players dubbed "Big Cheese" and "Chipper" on their side, it's no wonder that they outscored their U.S. opponents 42-15 to reach the finals.

Of course, there were plenty of other great nicknames at the tournament, including North Carolina's speedster Cash "The Wagon" Daniels-Moye, who happens to boast a pretty cool first name, too. The team from Mexico featured a trio with the nicknames "Coco," "Paco" and "Toro."

The Mexico players also got the chance to learn from the best when the Pirates and Cardinals visited Williamsport to play in the inaugural MLB Little League Classic, and they did so wearing the special Players Weekend uniforms.

"My favorite nickname was 'El Coffee' for Gregory Polanco," Mexico's Isaac Miranda said through a translator. Added teammate Erick Vazquez (who goes by "Toro"), "I liked 'Tsunami' for Carlos Martinez."

The West Region champs from California had some clear top picks, too, among the Cards and Bucs players: Danny Lawler singled out "Sparky" from Mike Leake's jersey. Tyler Ankrum — who goes by "Tyrail" — liked the simplicity of "Dex" for Dexter Fowler. Garrett Strenger — nicknamed both "GMan" and "Stranger Danger" — liked both "Cutch" for Andrew McCutchen and "J-Hey" for Jason Heyward.

Canada's Ty Fluet ("Ty guy") concurred on "Cutch," while Kyle Chyzowski ("Chyzz," of course) was more impressed by the uniqueness of Felipe Rivero's "Nightmare."

The Mid-Atlantic contingent from New Jersey also voiced some strong opinions about several Major League monikers. "My favorite MLB player nickname is 'The Rook' for Jordy Mercer," said Dean Daddio ("Dino").

"I really like Travis d'Arnaud's jersey because his is 'Lil' D,' just like the name is spelled," said John Grano ("Johnny G").

Like Chyzowski, Chris Carnick ("Diesel") gives big points for originality: "Dave Human" (for David Freese) was my favorite, because it's weird," he said.

When it comes to the perfect nickname, it most definitely pays to be weird. Just ask the "Elastic Pig" (South Korea's Jin Won Shin) or "Pickles" (Northwest's Landon Welter), who shares that briny nickname with the Yankees' Sonny Gray.

"I don't have a favorite, but I like 'Wonger' for Kolten Wong," New Jersey's Tai Mann said. Mann's squad didn't take home the title, but he may lay claim to the reigning LLBWS championship nickname: "Corndog."

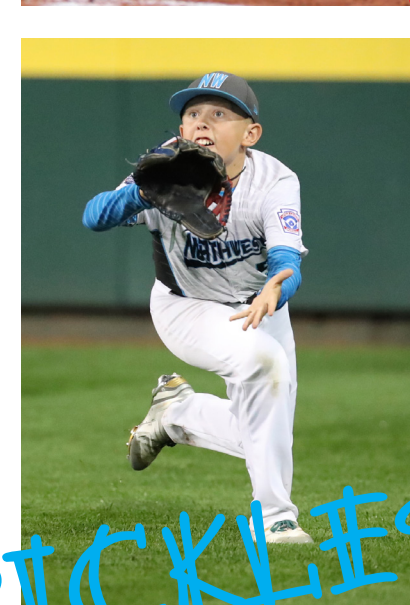
Mike McCormick is an editorial director for MLB.com.



ELASTIC
PIG



TYRAIL



PICKLES



HOMIE-FIELD ADVANTAGE

The Copp Family's experience with the Little League Challenger Division shines on HGTV's hit show, "Fixer Upper." *By Kevin Fountain*

TIM TEBOW, THE "FIXER UPPER" SHOW, AND A WHOLE LOT OF support from the community. That's what the Copp family from Waco, Texas, has experienced after starring in an episode of the HGTV show "Fixer Upper" in January.

"We've had the dream of wanting an accessible home for our boys for about 10 years now," said Melissa Copp. "What I wanted as a parent was to give my sons a house that is 100 percent wheelchair accessible so they could be who they are, and we wouldn't settle for anything less."

After almost 10 years of determination, that dream finally came true when Chip and Joanna Gaines, who remodel homes on the HGTV show, reached out to the family along with Tim Tebow and the Tebow Foundation to build the Copp family their dream home as part of the special "Touchdown for a Family in Need." Jody and Melissa Copp are parents to two boys — Calan, 9, and Lawson, 5 — who were born with a life-threatening condition that hinders their ability to stand and walk on their own, causing them to rely on wheelchairs for mobility.

"One of our biggest hopes [by appearing on 'Fixer Upper'] was to show the need for accessibility and show how small changes can make huge differences," said Jody Copp. "It really has given us a platform to be able to discuss it and get people thinking."

Thanks to the dedicated work of the Gaines family, Tim Tebow — a former NFL quarterback and a Minor League outfielder in the Mets organization — and a group of excited volunteers, the Copp family's new home allows their two sons the opportunity to be themselves and enjoy all of the features built especially for them.

Calan and Lawson are members of the Lake Air Little League Challenger Division, which provides unique opportunities for individuals with physical and intellectual challenges to experience the game of baseball. Being involved in that program gives both Calan and Lawson a place where they can let out their true competitive spirit.

"One of the things that we have noticed is how quickly someone falls in love with the Challenger program when they see it for the first time," said Mr. Copp. "For me, as a coach, it's really special because I get to be out there with both of my sons and play with them. I get to try to teach them a little bit about baseball, but mainly just let them have fun and teach the importance of getting out and having the experience that we all should have."

For everyone in the Copp family, being involved in the Little League Challenger Division has been a blessing, bringing them all closer together.

"It really is a great way for Calan and Lawson to bond, and I love that it does that for a lot of siblings out there," said Mrs. Copp. "The Challenger program allows our sons to experience things they never thought they would, and allows all of the kids' personalities to shine through."

Mr. and Mrs. Copp have tried to get their sons involved in a variety of adaptive programs, but Little League has been the one that has made the biggest difference in their lives.

"Little League has brought us closer together as a family because we found something that we can all be together doing," said Mr. Copp. "Challenger Baseball was the first thing that really brought us all together, and that's why it holds such a special place in our heart." Months after the airing of their special moment on "Fixer Upper," the Copp Family continues to share the excitement that this opportunity has provided for their family, and are truly proud and thankful for everyone that was involved in helping their dreams come true.

"Thank you to everyone for letting us be the family we were meant to be," said Mrs. Copp. "We never gave up on our dream of allowing our sons to have a home that is accessible to them, and one where they can just be kids. We're experiencing things for the first time with our family now, and everyone who has supported us has allowed us to become stronger, and we are forever grateful."

A spectacular moment during the Little League Baseball World Series reminded us that it's not about wins and losses, but how you play the game.
By Luke Ramirez

THE GOOD IN THE GAME

THE LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL WORLD SERIES HAS ITS share of flashy plays and big home runs, but the passion and emotion from its participants, win or lose, make it special. With these emotions comes the opportunity for tremendous displays of sportsmanship that transcend every other level of the game.

During the 2017 LLBWS, the Caribbean Region and the Latin America Region were locked in a close game, with the Caribbean representatives from the Dominican Republic holding a 2-1 lead. With runners on first and second base and one out in the bottom of the sixth, weather halted the game.

Pitching for the Dominican Republic was 4-foot-8, 85-pound Edward "Sopita" Uceta. In his first LLBWS appearance on the mound, Sopita — which translated means "Little Soup" — had not given up a run and struck out four batters. He had a 2-1 count on Venezuela's Omar Romero when the game was put on hold.

Romero remained ready to hit during the lengthy break and sent the second pitch from Uceta over the right fielder's head for a game-winning, two-run triple. The Latin America dugout exploded out onto the field in celebration as the team mobbed Romero at third base.

As Romero rose, Uceta fell. He laid flat on his stomach, face in his palms just in front of the mound as he sobbed over giving up the game-winning hit.

"I felt bad because I wanted that win for the Dominican,

and I wanted to go all the way in this tournament," Uceta said through interpreter Antonio Gonzalez.

"Edward is the engine of the team," Caribbean Region Manager Jose Cordero said through Gonzalez. "I don't want to talk about 'Sopita' because I might start crying [as well]."

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT AT VOLUNTEER STADIUM EPITOMIZES Little League and the bond of friendship and respect between two teams. Coaches and players from the Latin America team halted their jubilation to console Uceta.

"Edward has a big heart," said Latin America manager Alex Ballesteros. "It could have been the opposite way, and I know that we would have been feeling the same way. I just told him that I was very proud of him."

"That made me feel good when they showed good sportsmanship," said Uceta. "Some teams will want to push you down when they beat you, so it felt really good that they were supporting me."

Latin America advanced to the next game, but was eliminated from the tournament by Mexico. Who was sitting behind home plate in support of the Latin America team? "Sopita" of course.

"We are Latin; we are like brothers," Cordero said.

When the game against Mexico concluded, Uceta made his way down to the Latin America team's dugout to shake the hands of his Venezuelan "brothers," a fitting way to end their LLBWS experience.



BOYS OF SUMMER

IAN KINSLER, SECOND BASE, LOS ANGELES ANGELS

I played in Tucson, Ariz., in the CDO Little League. We had some kids that were pretty good. Our team was basically the best in the league – we won the championship three years in a row. I wasn't necessarily the best, but I was pretty good. I was the shortstop, so that was important. I hit a home run left-handed. I was thinking of switch-hitting, and my dad said that I could only switch-hit when we were getting beat by a lot or winning by a lot. I swung as hard as I could and I got it. It wasn't my first left-handed swing, but I definitely remember that one.

COREY KLUBER, PITCHER, CLEVELAND INDIANS

The most important thing for a pitcher just starting out in Little League is the same as it is for a pitcher in the Majors: You have to be able to command the fastball. If you can throw the fastball over the plate for strikes and learn how to move it around in the strike zone to keep hitters off balance, then you're on your way to having success. It really doesn't matter how well you throw other pitches – curveballs, sliders or split-fingers – if you don't have good fastball command. Everything in pitching revolves around throwing the fastball for strikes.

MICHAEL BRANTLEY, OUTFIELD, CLEVELAND INDIANS

My best advice is have fun, especially if you are just beginning to play. The pressure shouldn't come until later, when you get to high school, college or the pros. Don't worry so much about the score, your swing, your pitching mechanics or any of that stuff. If you just concentrate on having fun, everything else will fall into place. The more you play and practice, you are naturally going to get better from the experience you gain.

HOWIE KENDRICK, INFIELD/OUTFIELD, WASHINGTON NATIONALS

My grandmother signed me up for a Tee Ball league when I was 5 years old and I played on a team called the Pirates. We didn't have complete uniforms, just T-shirts that said Pirates on the front, but I was just as proud to wear that shirt as I would have been to put on a Major League uniform. It made me feel so special to be on a team and be a ballplayer. It gave me something to focus on and kept me on a straight path. I'll never be able to thank my grandmother enough for signing me up.

BLAINE OHIGASHI/LOS ANGELES ANGELS (KINSLER); JOE SARGENT/MLB PHOTOS (KLUBER); ROB TRINGALI/MLB PHOTOS (KENDRICK); DAVID MAXWELL/GETTY IMAGES



FUN &

DRAW THE LINE

Can you match these MLB Stars (and Little League grads) with the award they won in 2017?

- Nolan Arenado**
Lake Forest (Calif.) Little League
- Aaron Judge**
Linden (Calif.) Little League
- Kenley Jansen**
Pabao Little League
(Willemstad, Curaçao)
- Cody Bellinger**
Chandler (Ariz.) Little League
- Torey Lovullo**
Encino (Calif.) Little League
- Mike Moustakas**
Northridge (Calif.) Little League
- Andrelton Simmons**
Mundo-Nuvo, Curaçao
- George Springer**
Walicki Little League
(New Britain, Conn.)
- Giancarlo Stanton**
Tujunga (Calif.) Little League
- Ryan Zimmerman**
Virginia Beach (Va.) Little League

- National League
Rookie of the Year
- World Series MVP
- National League
Manager of the Year
- American League
Comeback Player
- National League
Reliever of the Year
- American League
Gold Glove (\$\$)
- National League
Comeback Player
- American League
Rookie of the Year
- National League
Gold Glove (3B)
- National League
MVP

STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES (BELLINGER, JANSEN); JUSTIN EDMONDS/MLB PHOTOS (ARENADO); ROB TRINGALI/MLB PHOTOS (ZIMMERMAN); ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

GAAMES

YOU MAKE THE CALL!

1. A batter swings and misses at a dropped third strike and walks back to the dugout entrance. Before he enters the dugout, he realizes that the catcher threw the ball over the first baseman's head and into right field. The batter sprints to first and touches the bag before the throw comes in. The batter thinks he reached first, while the defense claims that he gave himself up and should be ruled out.

What's the call?

- He's out. Once the batter leaves the dirt circle surrounding home plate, he gives himself up.
- He's safe. It does not matter where the runner goes, as long as he touches first base safely.
- The batter reaching the dugout and the error cancel each other out, and the play is declared dead. The batter must continue his at-bat with two strikes.

2. During an at-bat, a batter is striding toward the pitcher, and hits a single to the outfield. After the ball is returned to the infield and "time" is granted, the defensive manager approaches the home plate umpire, claiming that the batter should be called out for illegally batting the ball because one of their feet touched the front line of batter's box at the time the ball was hit.

What's the call?

- The umpire should call the batter out for having part of his body outside the batter's box when he made contact with the ball.
- The batter is forced to hit again. A re-do is called when the defensive manager brings up a rule violation after the play occurs.
- The hit should count. The batter did not completely leave the box when he made contact.

HOME RUN TRIVIA

Can you cover all your bases in this MLB trivia challenge?



FIRST BASE

Whose rookie home run record did Yankees slugger Aaron Judge break by smashing 52 homers in 2017?

- Mark McGwire
- Barry Bonds
- Willie Mays

SECOND BASE

Who won World Series MVP last year by hitting a homer in four straight Fall Classic games?

- Jose Altuve
- Justin Turner
- George Springer

THIRD BASE

The Washington Nationals played their first game in D.C. in 2005. What were they known as before they moved to the nation's capital?

- Montreal Expos
- Calgary Flames
- St. Louis Browns

HOME PLATE

Who was the last MLB player to bat over .400 during a full season?

- Ichiro Suzuki
- Ted Williams
- Lou Gehrig

EXTRA INNINGS

Which one of these teams currently holds the longest World Series title drought?

- Cleveland Indians
- New York Mets
- Miami Marlins

KYODO/AP (CHIHO); LOUIS REGUENA/MLB PHOTOS (MAYS); ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

DRAW THE LINE 1) 1, 2) H, 3) E, 4) A, 5) C
 YOU MAKE THE CALL 1) A, 2) C, 3) HOME RUN TRIVIA 1) A, 2) D, 3) F, 4) B, 5) J, 6) F, 7) J, 8) B, 9) J, 10) G

TOGETHER AS ONE

Members of the Cardinals, Pirates and Latin America Region circled up on the field at the LLBWS.

During a memorable visit at the Little League International Complex as part of the MLB Little League Classic, members of the Pirates and Cardinals made sure to spend some time hanging out with all 16 teams playing in the LLBWS. For many of the Pirates players, it was a chance to show their home region pride before they took the field. Be sure to tune in to ESPN on August 19 to watch the New York Mets take on the Philadelphia Phillies in this year's MLB Little League Classic!



ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS