

Baseball



Aptos begins title quest

Little Leaguers' first challenge comes today vs. Kentucky team

Chasing the dream

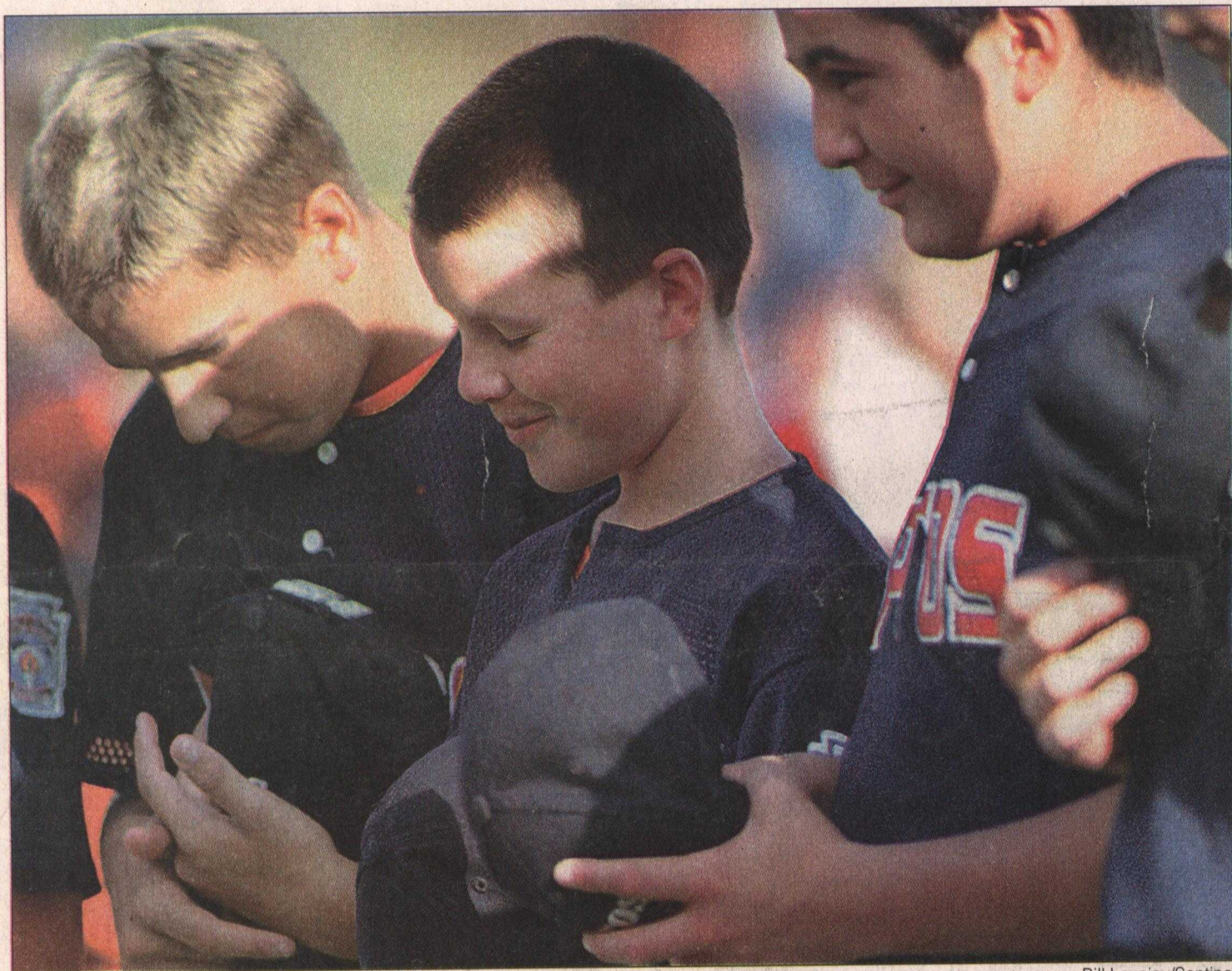
The Sentinel offers expanded coverage of the Aptos Little League All-Stars' pursuit of the Little League World Series championship in Williamsport, Pa.

■ **Today:** Everything you need to know about the team's players and coaches, their road to the World Series and an assessment of the team's title chances. **Sports, D1**

■ **Sunday:** Game-day coverage from Williamsport from Sentinel sports reporter Bob Linneman and photographer Bill Lovejoy.

■ Schedule:

Today, 9 a.m., vs. Louisville, Ky. (ESPN); Sunday, 10 a.m. vs. Clemmons, N.C. (ESPN); Tuesday, 4 p.m. vs. Harlem, N.Y.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Kevin Eichhorn tries to keep from breaking up after Brian Godoy, right, egged him on during an otherwise solemn moment during a pre-game ceremony in San Bernardino earlier this week.

Getting to game more than half the battle

WILLIAMSPORT, PA.

Aptos team gets support from some heavy hitters/Back Page

Twelve hours and three close-order body searches later, I arrive in the land of Little League, a place of reverence for the youth game. Just getting here was more than half the battle; it could be the whole ballgame.

Not only was I searched twice at SFO — my home airport, for crying out loud — and once at O'Hare in Chicago, but the guy in Wilkes-Barre was sure giving me the stink eye about something. Do I radiate a terrorist aura? Geez, give a sportswriter a break.

BOB LINNEMAN

The only thing I was packing was a bum computer. Luckily, I'm traveling with Sentinel photographer Bill Lovejoy. If the word "up" can describe anyone, it's Bill.

All he could talk about the whole way, the whole bloody 12 hours, was how exciting it was going to be.

Well, here we are, and like the Montrose song goes, it's "Hot, Sweet and Sticky."

So long, my cozy old friend the marine layer, this is the humid hinterland: America's Heartland.

How do I know it's America's Heartland? Why here? Because I passed a tractor-trailer on the way from Wilkes-Barre to Williamsport that said so.

So there.

As a quick aside on the difference between Santa Cruz and Williamsport: The marquee at the Rio in Santa Cruz announced that Michele Shocked is coming to town; the marquee here is revving folks up for a visit from Michael Bolton.

The reason we're here, of course, is the Aptos Little League All-Stars, those cuddly

and lovable ballplayers who have become the talk of the town, and then some. Surely they're tired of being called cute all the time, but that's what happens.

And, as Bill keeps telling me, today's opening game against Louisville is going to be doggone exciting. How does one calm a photographer so wrapped up in his work?

The trip out wasn't exciting, that's for sure. It was torture. We cried, we whined, we insulted people, we wished for more pretzels. And finally we made it, although after getting up at 3 a.m. to catch our flight, we're kind of running on empty.

Then there's the aforementioned computer. It quit on me just before the biggest story of the year. Talk about panic.

Fortunately, the good people at the Williamsport Sun Gazette allowed me the use of one of their machines so I could share my travel woes.

I don't object to a search, per se, but when they come in bunches, something should be done. Can't they stamp your forehead with a

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Game

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big "S," to signify searched, so you will be left alone for the rest of your travels?

Not a chance. They just pluck you out of line for looking at them funny. Next thing you know they're going to insist people lay on that conveyor belt themselves instead of the luggage.

Today will be all about baseball. The road warrior Aptos team, which hasn't been home since May, will see what it can do on a national stage. So far, they've done nothing wrong.

As for baseball, the Little League World Series got under way Friday, and the tears were already evident, not to mention a few smiles. You can always tell in the hotel lobby which team won and which lost.

It's evening now, and I'm settling in at the Genetti, one of the city's oldest hotels. I'm going to pop open the window and let that evening humidity wash over me. If I'm lucky, maybe there will be a thunderstorm.

Today will be all about baseball. The road warrior Aptos team, which hasn't been home since May, will see what it can do on a national stage. So far, they've done nothing wrong.

In the words of Bill: "This is exciting."

Bob Linneman is the Sentinel's assistant sports editor. Send your feedback on the Aptos Little Leaguers' run to Williamsport, Pa., to sports@santa-cruz.com.



The Associated Press

Waipahu, Hawaii, pitcher Kurt Tanabe keeps his eye on the batter as he delivers a pitch during the fourth inning against Worcester, Mass., at the Little League World Series in South Williamsport, Pa., Friday.

All-Stars get heavy-hitting support

By BRIAN SEALS
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

APTOS — Heading into this morning's big game, the Aptos Little League All-Stars are garnering support from some heavy hitters.

Politically speaking, that is. Though the Legislature is in the late innings for this season, area lawmakers and the governor are crafting commendations and resolutions honoring the group of 11- and 12-year-olds representing California and the Western Region in Williamsport, Penn.

State Sen. Bruce McPherson, R-Santa Cruz, said his office was sponsoring a resolution recognizing the Aptos team. The resolution was expected to hit the floor of the Senate next week.

"That is a phenomenal achievement," McPherson said Friday. "Their hard work paid off."

The team is one of the few things getting support from both sides of the batter's box in the state capital this year.

Democratic Gov. Gray Davis pitched in with encouragement, issuing a commendation Friday honoring the club.

"I commend the players, coaches and the Aptos community for their hard work in making this season a success," Davis wrote. "Their talent, determination and thrilling victories have provided great enjoyment to baseball fans of all ages."

A spokesman for Assembly mem-

To donate money to help pay travel expenses for the families of the Aptos Little League All-Stars, make checks payable to 'Aptos Little League,' not the Chamber of Commerce, and send donations to P.O. Box 1416, Aptos, CA 95001.

ber Fred Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, said a resolution honoring the team would be offered in the Assembly as well.

Contact Brian Seals at bseals@santa-cruz.com.