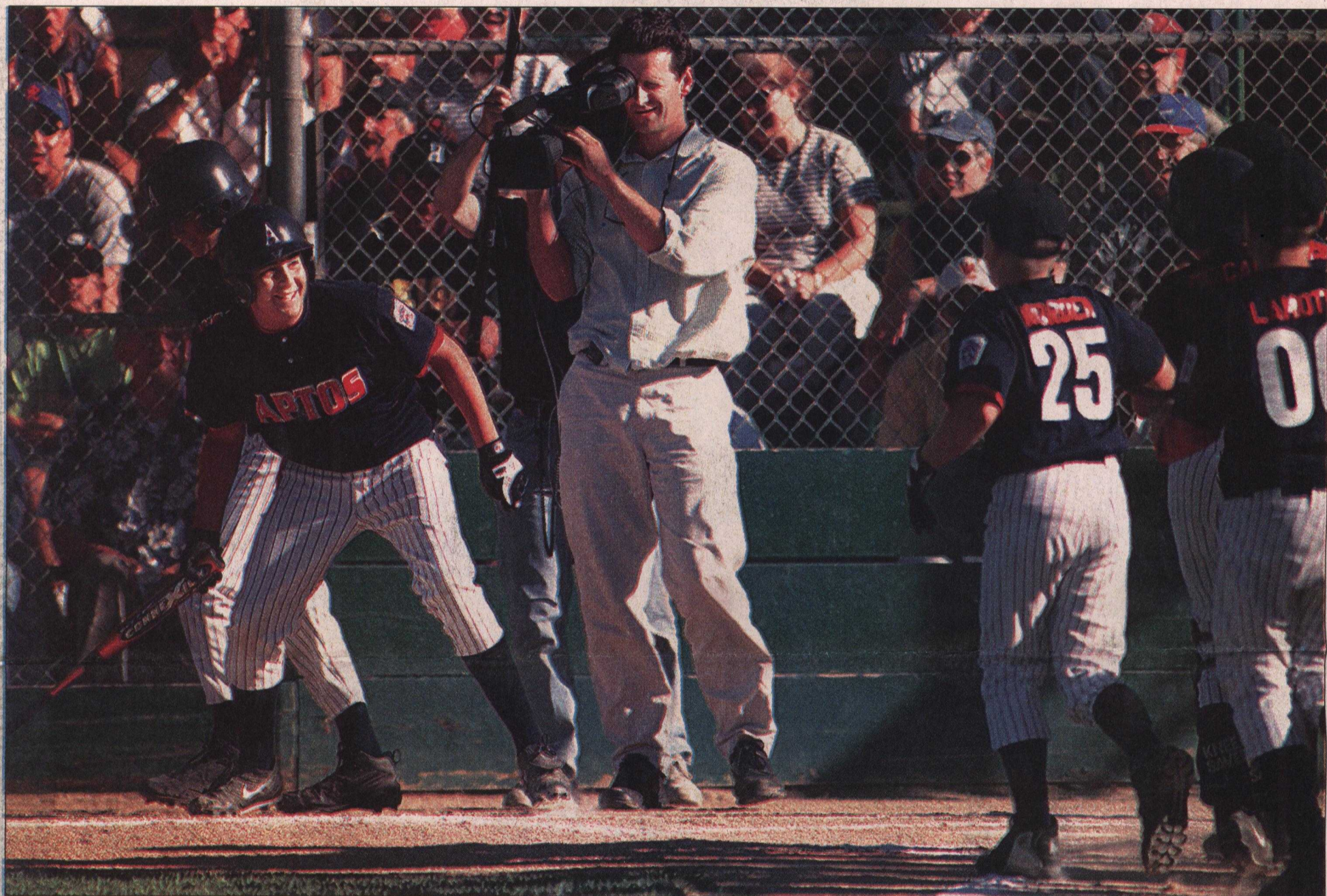


'This is one of those deals you dream about.'

DAVE ANDERSON, APTOS MANAGER

# LIGHTS, CAMERA ... WILLIAMSPORT?



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

ABOVE: The celebration of a home run by Brian Godoy, left, during the sectional tournament in San Jose finds its way onto film. BELOW: A team huddle is captured for PBS.

*Santa Cruz Baseball*

## For a group of Little Leaguers from Aptos, the spotlight is already burning white hot

By MARK CONLEY  
Sentinel Sports Editor

The doors of the In-N-Out burger joint swung open and in walked the camera crew, pivoting back toward the door to capture the grand entrance. Heads turned. Voices hushed. People whispered.

Star power couldn't be far behind.

Then the pack of 12-year-old boys rambled in.

"People were like, 'What is this?'" says Dave Anderson, the ringleader of this pee wee circus. "It's a horde of 12 year olds."

Yes, but this horde can play some ball just as well as it can cram double-doubles into its collective face. Well enough to lure the lens' of a PBS documentary crew filming a piece on Little League baseball.

The Aptos Little League Major All-Stars are one win away from becoming the best fielding, throwing, hitting outfit in all of Northern California. That's the best single team out of 400 leagues.

"This is one of those deals you dream about," said Anderson, the Aptos manager.

A win today over San Carlos — a team Aptos has already beaten,

5-0 — in the Division II Tournament championship at Lucchesi Park in Petaluma at 5:30 p.m. would send the squad to San Bernardino for the Western Regional Tournament, which starts this weekend.

A victory there would send them to that mysterious capital of the universe for all prepubescent baseball dreamers — Williamsport, Pa., site of the Little League World Series.

"Every team dreams of going to Williamsport and you never really know the road," said Anderson. "We're still figuring it out."

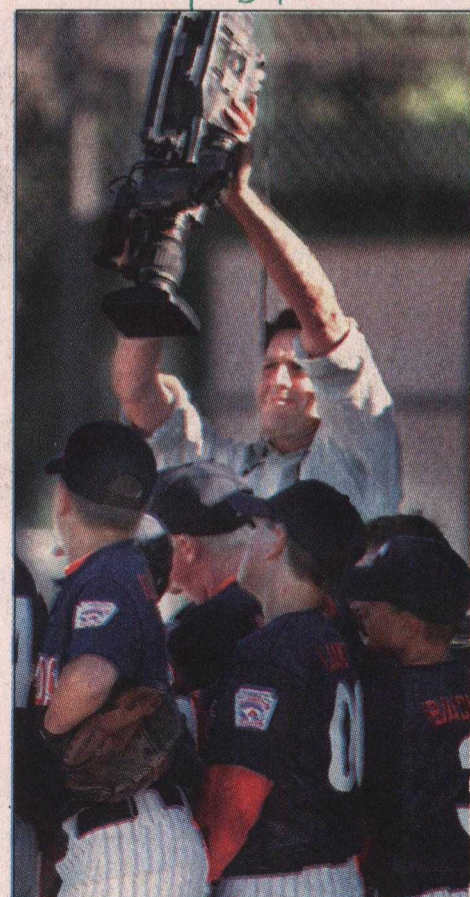
"You get your little bracket thing, play locally, and, if you're lucky, maybe go to district. Then you move on to sectionals and you meet a lot of Little League junkies who tell you stories about Williamsport. All the history and lore. And you just sit there with rapt attention."

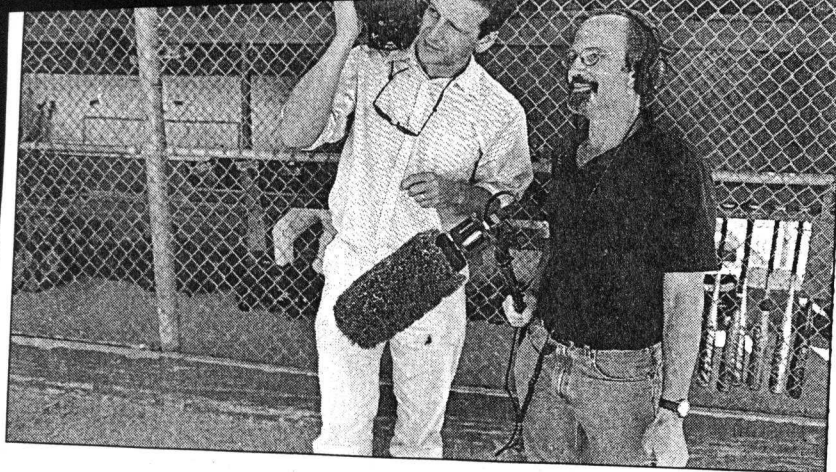
"But our job is to keep the kids believing it's just another baseball game."

The last — and only — Santa Cruz County team to advance to the Western Regionals was Watsonville American in 1986. That squad lost, though, to eventual region winner, Tucson International, in its first game and went home early.

Those who have been watching this team closely through its 10-0 all-star run can't help but believe it may just have the right stuff.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Cameraman John Chater and producer, soundman Andrew Kolker have been shadowing the Aptos Major All-Stars during tournament play.

## Aptos

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It's about as veteran a team as you'll find at this level — six of the 12 players were part of last year's squad that just fell short at sectionals. The team has two bona fide aces in Kyle Anderson and Kevin Eichhorn. And it's shown a penchant for opportunism.

"It's not surprising they're playing so well because they have so many good elements," said Peter Connery, the Aptos Little League commissioner. "The core of that group has played together for three years, many of whom have played year-round baseball. They've had good skill and good luck."

Perhaps not as much luck, though, as the Center for New American Media — the production company commissioned to film the documentary for PBS. When producer Sandra Zweig got an e-mail response from an Aptos assistant coach to an online ad placed looking for potential subjects for an upcoming documentary, she thought Aptos might be a good candidate.

The fact that former major league pitcher Mark Eichhorn was a coach and his son Kevin was a star pitcher seemed like a good hook. They also knew the team had fared well last year, with many players returning. But no one truly expected the bonus that is still playing itself out before the camera's eye.

"It's been a little bit of serendipity," said Zweig. "Our intention was not to follow teams; what we were looking for were interesting characters. One goal was to find an all-star team that might go somewhere, but you certainly couldn't predict a team going all the way to the world series."

But from their first meetings with the Aptos players, coaches and parents, the crew could predict an interesting story regardless of the outcome on the field.

"What we've discovered is that Aptos

is a place where people set goals for themselves as adults and that trickles down to the children," said Zweig, who is based in New York. "It almost makes sense that this is a place where kids could excel and go far."

On their off-day Tuesday afternoon, Anderson and the other parents and kids headed up to Rohnert Park to race some go-karts and play some miniature golf. The cameras followed.

"At first they make you kind of uncomfortable, but now we've become so oblivious to them," Anderson said of his team's brush with reality TV fame. But, he said, it makes you wonder if the cameras aren't somehow getting to the opposition: "You never know. There's the possibility that they've become the 10th guy. Maybe the other team's are thinking 'Wow, who are these guys?'"

They are still, Anderson insists, a bunch of good-natured, 11- and 12-year-olds who steal one another's hats and pull out the squirt bottles when their coaches are talking strategy. But they are also a bunch with the sight of surrealism — Williamsport, Pa. — not too far off in the distance.

Last Labor Day the team was gathered at the Eichhorn house for a BBQ, and the Little League World Series just happened to be on the TV. The parents and kids gathered around to daydream just a bit.

"We were watching and thinking 'Hey, we could hit that guy, we could hit that guy,'" recalled Anderson. "You ask yourself 'Are these guys really that much better than us?' We were all thinking, 'Well, probably not.'"

First things first, though. Tonight, with the cameras rolling, the Aptos Little Leaguers will find out if they're the best in Northern California.

"We were just thinking about the fact that if we win tomorrow, we're the best. My god," said Anderson. "It starts to get surreal."

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