

BIG

TIME

BY

Gary Cohen and Ed Hartig



There was nothing small about these future Cubs' performances in the Little League World Series.

The best players in the world all have to start somewhere. They just don't materialize fully formed on baseball's biggest stage. They're built on dusty diamonds and bountiful backfields located all around the globe.

Since 1947, the best of these young players, ages 10-12, have converged on Williamsport, Pennsylvania, every August to compete in the Little League World Series (LLWS). Initially, the tournament was limited to just teams from the U.S., but it has since grown into a worldwide phenomenon, broadcast annually on ESPN and watched by millions of fans hoping to catch their first glimpse of baseball's next wave of talent.

Over the years, the LLWS has showcased incredible young athletes, including future major league stars such as Gary Sheffield, Todd Frazier, Michael Conforto, Jurickson Profar and Cody Bellinger. Seven Cubs have also sharpened their skills in Williamsport.

To celebrate the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat (on a Little League scale), we look back at how these future North Siders performed under the national spotlight for the first time in their careers.





1954

BILLY CONNORS, KEN HUBBS



Billy Connors



Ken Hubbs

The 1954 LLWS championship game featured two future Cubs: pitcher Billy Connors, playing for National Little League from Schenectady, New York, and second baseman Ken Hubbs, playing for Lions Club Little League from Colton, California.

Connors' group, which also included future major leaguer Jim Barbieri, reached the championship game by beating a Lakeland, Florida, team that included future big leaguers Boog Powell and Carl Taylor, 16-0, and then taking down Masontown, Pennsylvania, 7-3. The Colton squad beat Hampton, Virginia, 4-2, and Melrose Park, Illinois, 8-1, behind Hubbs' stellar pitching.

New York's strength was also its pitching, which was led by the "Twin Bills," a reference to Connors and Billy Masucci, son of one of the New York coaches. In an era without pitch counts, the "Twin Bills" threw all but one inning during qualifying, tossing six shutouts and two no-hitters. Schenectady, which had lost in the championship game the year before, was the favorite heading into the finale versus Colton.

New York jumped out to a 5-0 lead through two innings and fended off a late Colton rally for a 7-5 win to take home the crown. Connors went 1-for-3 with a run scored and an RBI. Hubbs went 2-for-4 with two runs, a home run and an RBI.

Hubbs also made the defensive play of the game at shortstop. On a pop fly to short-center, the future NL Rookie of the Year stumbled backward and managed to get a glove on the ball as he was falling down. The ball bounced out of his glove, but Hubbs turned his body in midair and caught it in his bare hand just before it touched the grass. The catch drew raves on the TV broadcast, with venerable Yankees announcer Mel Allen giving it his patented "How about that?" call.

And Hubbs did all this despite playing with a broken toe, suffered when he stepped in a hole at a picnic celebrating Colton's advancement to Williamsport.

1958

HECTOR TORRES



Long before he embarked on his nine-year big league career, future Cubs infielder Hector Torres starred for Industrial Little League out of Monterrey, Mexico, leading his team to the 1958 title. Though he spent most of his pro career as a middle infielder, Torres did his Little League damage on the mound.

With the win, Torres' Mexican club became the first to ever capture

back-to-back Little League titles. Monterrey bested teams from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 11-0, and Darien, Connecticut, 11-5, to reach the championship game.

Torres, whose father was a longtime player and manager in Mexican pro ball, fanned 11 batters and allowed only three hits in a complete game, 10-1 victory over Kankakee Jaycee Little League of Illinois in the final.



1971

LLOYD McCLENDON

title contest. In three games in Williamsport, McClendon recorded five at-bats ... and hammered home runs in all five of them. Unfortunately, opposing teams eventually figured out the secret to beating Gary — walk McClendon.

Gary beat Lexington, Kentucky, 7-2, and Madrid, Spain, 7-0, to advance to the title game against Tainan City Little League from Taiwan. Taiwan won the game, 12-3, in nine innings in the first championship contest ever decided in extras.

McClendon's three-run homer in the first inning gave Gary an early 3-0 lead. That would be all the offense for the Gary squad, however, as they notched only one other hit. Having seen McClendon's power, Taiwan wisely decided to walk him in each subsequent at-bat. McClendon finished the tourney with five walks in addition to his

five homers, posting a 1.000 batting average and on-base percentage, and a 4.000 slugging percentage.

On the mound, McClendon dominated Taiwan's lineup, fanning 12 batters before faltering in the ninth inning. The big right-hander was as much a power pitcher as he was a power hitter. His beleaguered catcher battled through 10 passed balls on the day. The Taiwanese pitcher was a little better, striking out 22 Gary batters while allowing only two hits.



Few have ever made a bigger splash in the LLWS than Lloyd McClendon, who dominated the 1971 tournament, earning himself the nickname "Legendary Lloyd." The future Cubs outfielder nearly pitched and clubbed his Anderson Little League team from Gary, Indiana, to the championship but fell just short in the



1978

DAVE VERES



The 1978 LLWS didn't quite go as future Cubs right-hander Dave Veres envisioned. Veres' father, John, was in the Air Force and was stationed at the Torrejon Air Base in Madrid, Spain. Veres played for the Torrejon Air Base Little League team, which swept through the European Region and came into Williamsport confident and ready.

But Torrejon lost its mojo when it reached U.S. shores. The team was outscored 27-0 in three games, losing to clubs from the Dominican Republic, New York and Palatine, Illinois.

Veres would become just the second future major league player to come from a foreign-based Little League, following fellow Cub Hector Torres.



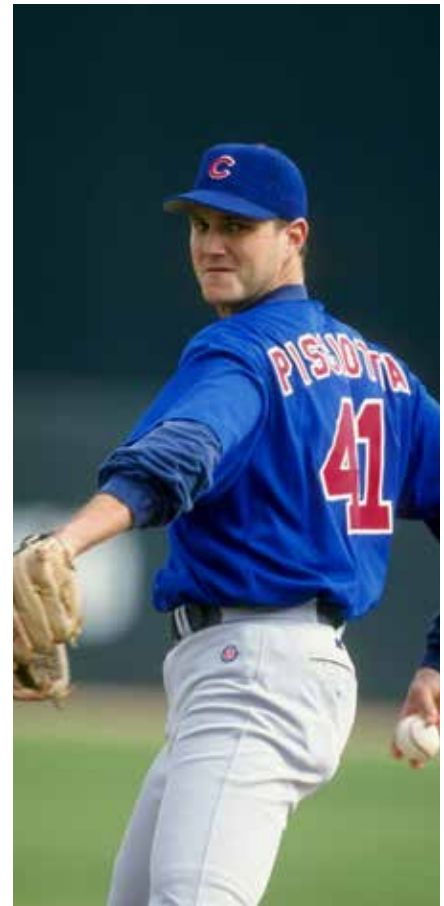
1983



MARC PISCIOTTA

Future Cubs pitcher Marc Pisciotta's East Marietta National Little League out of Georgia rolled through the South Region, going 11-0 to qualify for Williamsport. And that roll didn't stop once they reached Pennsylvania. East Marietta beat Jackie Robinson West Little League from Chicago, 7-2, in the opener and then held off Stamford, Connecticut, 9-8, to reach the championship game.

Pitching before 40,000 fans, the 12-year-old Pisciotta, who already stood 6-foot-2, scattered six hits and fanned five. His complete-game effort carried East Marietta past Liquito Hernandez Little League of the Dominican Republic, 3-1, for the title. The big right-hander also helped turn a double play on defense to shut down an early rally and knocked in a run at the plate.





1991

JASON MARQUIS



South Shore American Little League out of Staten Island, New York, finished third in the 1991 LLWS on the strength of future Cub Jason Marquis' arm. With Marquis toeing the rubber, South Shore won their opening game over Hamilton, Ohio, 8-0. Without Marquis on the mound in Game 2, they lost 13-4 to Danville, California.

The longtime big-league starter tossed his second shutout in the third-place game, no-hitting Glace Bay Little League from Nova Scotia, Canada, en route to a 16-0 South Shore win. He was just the sixth pitcher to toss two shutouts in a single LLWS. At the plate, Marquis, a career .196 hitter in the bigs, went 8-for-12 over three games.

