

West Side Little League's All-Star Season

No trip to Williamsport, but league sent two squads to district tournaments

By Adam Bloch

The West Side Little League has been around for 23 years, but never has it experienced the kind of success it has seen over the past two weeks. The league, which contains 96 teams, sent two all-star squads to the district tournaments, one for 9- and 10-year-olds and the other for 11- and 12-year-olds. Both ended up taking home titles.

"The West Side Little League has so much to be proud of this summer," league president Debbie Kling wrote in an email.

The older team entered the District 23 tournament, an eight-team, double-elimination contest (the district is a geographic

Sarah Paisner became the first girl to start on the mound in tournament history, but East Harlem kept the score close until the last inning, when West Side finally pulled ahead 7-6.

area comprising Manhattan and parts of The Bronx). Things did not begin promisingly. Although the West Side won its first game 11-1 over the Downtown Little League, it then lost 6-1 to Inwood. The defeat moved the youngsters over to the losers' bracket and put them one game away from elimination and the end of their season.

Not to worry. Jens Olavson threw a complete-game victory with seven strikeouts to beat Harlem 5-2 in the next contest. The following game was not nearly as easy. Sarah Paisner became the first girl to start on the mound in tournament history, but East Harlem kept the score close until the last inning, when West Side finally pulled ahead 7-6.

"We had all kinds of really remarkable plays to pull out all these wins," head coach Tom Olavson, Jens' father, said.

North Riverdale was the next opponent, and the game did not start well as West Side fell into a 3-0 hole in the first inning. But after that, the pitching settled down and the offense took off in an 18-3 blowout. Michael David provided most of the firepower, hitting a grand slam and a three-run homer in the same inning.

"He had a brilliant offensive game," Olavson said.

That left only Inwood, which West Side needed to defeat twice to claim the title. The young ballplayers were up to the chal-



Jens Olavson pitching in the championship for the West Side Little League's 11- and 12-year-old team.

lenge, however. They squeaked by in the first game. After heading into the bottom of the sixth inning with the score knotted at 5, Lucas Schwartz smashed a walk-off home run to earn the victory.

Such last-second heroics were unnecessary in the championship game, which took place in Riverside Park two weeks ago. Things were tied up 2-2 after the first inning, but Jens Olavson shut down Inwood on the mound after that, and the bats provided plenty of runs in a 15-2 triumph.

"We got a series of heroic efforts from many different players in game after game to stave off elimination," Olavson said.

Any dreams of a trip to Williamsport, Penn., and the Little League World Series

faded, however, when West Side lost in the sectional tournament opener to a powerhouse squad from Queens.

That ended the season for the 11- and 12-year-olds, but their younger counterparts were just getting warmed up. The 9- and 10-year-old team, known as the Mighty Hawks, claimed their tournament championship last week with a 14-1 drubbing of Peter Stuyvesant. They followed that up by winning the first game of the sectional competition 8-1 over Spring Creek Little League of Brooklyn. The Hawks' run finally ended last Saturday with a loss to Staten Island.

Half-Marathon Rundown—Early birds around town last Sunday morning may

have caught a glimpse of the third annual NYC Half-Marathon, but it's more likely that the majority of New Yorkers who saw the race were actually running in it. More than 10,500 people took part, braving plenty of humidity and some lightning that crackled across the sky shortly before the race began.

With some major prize money at stake, the top finishers were mostly professionals. Tadesse Tola edged out Patrick Makau to win the men's title, while veteran Catherine Ndereba was the top female finisher. Dathan Ritzenhein was the first American across the tape in third place. New Yorker Girma Tola was two spots back with an impressive time of 1:02:58 over a 13.1-mile course that started in Central Park and ended in Battery Park. One other Manhattanite, Demesse Tefera, made it into the top 20. He was 10th and finished 80 seconds behind Tola.

A trio of Manhattan residents placed among the first 20 finishers in the women's standings. Alemtsehay Misganaw led the way in 15th, followed by Meseret Kotu and Caroline Bierbaum.

Up next on the New York Road Runners calendar is a non-competitive marathon training run at 7 a.m. this Saturday in Central Park. Participants can choose a variety of courses, with distances ranging from six to 20 miles.

Let the Games Begin—With the members U.S. Olympic Team all but determined, the East and West Sides will be sending five athletes to compete in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, which begin on Aug. 8. Four of them—shooter Sandy Fong, sailor Sarah Mergenthaler, fencer Emily Cross and table tennis player Wang Chen—have already been profiled here.

The fifth is Anthony Famiglietti, the top American runner for the steeplechase, a long-distance running event involving hurdles and water pits. The Upper East Sider, who often runs in Central Park, finished eighth in Athens in 2004.

There are plenty of other Olympics competitors with New York connections. George Hincapie, for example, will be competing in his fifth Olympics. This will likely be his last chance to win a medal. The closest he has come before was taking eighth place in the road race at the 2000 Games in Sydney. Hincapie, originally from Queens, grew up cycling in Central Park. Most recently, he finished 35th last Sunday in the 2008 Tour de France. ■