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Hillsborough champs

July 25, 2007, 12:00 AM By Emanuel Lee, Daily Journal Staff

The Hillsborough 10 and 11-year-old All-Stars cemented their place in Bay Area Little League history on Tuesday, hammering Pleasanton American 11-4 at Palo Alto Little League Ballpark to repeat as Section 3 champions.

Hillsborough advances to the final stop at this age level, the state tournament in San Jose. Since losing its first game in District 52 play, Hillsborough has won 11 consecutive games, at one point winning six games in six days.

Hillsborough is not simply red-hot, it's blazing.

Hillsborough dominated Pleasanton in much the same way it has its previous 10 opponents — with solid pitching, great defense and a killer lineup.

Hillsborough's offense has been unstoppable; it scored 40 runs in three games in sectional play after averaging 11.2 runs per game in district action. During this amazing run, the team's lowest scoring output came in the loss to Highlanders — and it still scored five runs. Despite the final score, Tuesday's game was actually tied at 3 until Hillsborough broke things open with an eight-run uprising in the top of the sixth inning.

Hillsborough received a break — as if it needed any — when Pleasanton reliever Jake Dronkers left with an apparent back injury a couple of pitches into the inning. When Dronkers had to depart, Hillsborough started to lay down the hammer. Will Reilly got things in motion with a walk, Andrew Schmitt singled and Chris Mark walked to load the bases.

Gordon Barrows followed by drawing an RBI walk, plating pinch runner Austin Marcus, and Henry Caruso was hit by a pitch to score Schmitt. A wild pitch scored Mark, Brock Cozad drilled a two-run double and Grant Goodman hit a run-scoring single to make it 9-3. After Frankie Ferrari walked, Goodman scored on a wild pitch. Charlie Boyd capped the outburst with an RBI single. Andrew Segre had an RBI single in the third.

Hillsborough produced nine hits, two from Caruso, who hit home runs in his first two at-bats. With six home runs since the start of district play, Hammerin' Henry has shown why he's one of the best talents in his age group in the Bay Area. His first homer was a shot to right field and his second was a blast to dead-center, clearing the fence by a good 20 feet. Oh, and for good measure, Caruso started and went the distance.

"I told Henry before the game that I wasn't going to take him out," Hillsborough coach Jeff Cozad said. "He was going all the way. He's been a real leader for us and is a wonderful kid. I've coached a lot of these kids since they were 6 or 7, and after a while they become like your own (children)."

Indeed, after the Hillsborough players were done punishing the opposition, they tackled their coach to the ground in a long and jubilant postgame celebration. It was obvious from the players' reaction that the second title was even sweeter than the first.

"It's amazing what we've been through," Caruso said. "It's been super exciting. I was upset with our first loss because we had so many chances in that game. But after that we took it one game at a time and kept on battling."

Did they ever. Hillsborough's dynamic two-year run has been nothing short of spectacular. Center fielder Goodman made a fantastic diving catch in the fourth, and an inning later right fielder Brendan Barrows made two highlight-reel grabs on back-to-back Pleasanton hitters.



Nathan Mollat / Daily Journal
Hillsborough's Andrew Schmitt singles in top of the sixth inning. He eventually scored during Hillsborough's eight-run inning, capturing the Section 3 title.

What do you think of the Board of Supervisors' decision to not place a measure on the ballot allowing voters to decide between district and county-wide elections for supervisors?

- The current county-wide system is working fine
- There should be district elections to allow for more competitive races
- Either way, it should be up to the voters

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"Those were some (former Pittsburgh Hall of Famer) Roberto Clemente-type catches," Cozad said. "They were some world class plays, and it has such a huge impact on all the other kids. At some point in every game since we started in district our kids are going to bust open."

While Hillsborough basked in the glory of a repeat championship, Caruso said the team has some unfinished business to take care of. Last year at state, Hillsborough was shocked when a couple of its players had to miss the opening game because of an issue with "abstract birth certificates," Cozad said. The team still managed to finish fourth, but the experience left a bitter feeling.

"I thought we got kind of robbed," Caruso said. "Obviously our goal this year is to win it all."

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