

Kids' All-Star Quest Powered by Pirates Ancestors

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The Little League World Series is coming up pretty soon, that time when a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of Williamsport, Pa. **Billy Funkhouser** and **Brenden Barrows** (center and right, below) are no different — they're teammates on the Hillsborough (Calif.) 11-12 year-old All-Stars, and had been co-MVPs of their league during the regular season. But they had more in common than they knew.



While researching an old baseball last month that Funkhouser's dad had in his collection, the boys discovered that they each had rather famous ancestors who were also teammates — on the 1909 World Champion Pittsburgh Pirates. **Sam Leever**, a star pitcher on that Pittsburgh team who won nearly 200 games in his big league career, is Brenden's great-great uncle. And **Fred Clarke**, the Pirates' player-manager that season and a member of the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, is Billy's great-great grandfather.

It was pure coincidence that the kids found out about their 100-year-old Pirate connection just before they became All-Star teammates. The ball is the last ball put in play in the '09 World Series, which the Pirates won over Detroit.

*"It's pretty amazing to think that there's a connection that goes back a hundred years," said Barrows, whose twin brother, **Gordon**, also plays on the team. "We should use that ball in practice. But our dads would kill us."*

"We just found out about it last month," Billy Funkhouser said. "And ever since then, it's done something to our team. We've become beasts."

Powered by the mysterious essence of the '09 Pirates, Hillsborough has won four straight games in District 52 All-Star play, and is one win from the tournament title (they play tonight). The district tournament level is the first of four needed to reach the Little League World Series (and be interviewed by **Erin Andrews!**).



In their second game of the tournament last week, Hillsborough beat Redwood City National 17-0, powered by four home runs from 12-year-old **Eric Whitfield**. Whitfield is the son of former San Francisco Giant, Los Angeles Dodger and New York Yankee **Terry Whitfield**, who is the team's batting coach.

The terms "World Series" and "Pittsburgh Pirates" don't get many chances to mingle these days, but in 1909, the inhabitants of Forbes Field were formidable. Leever had a lifetime 2.47 ERA and a 194-100 career record. Clarke was a left fielder who hit .300 or better in 11 different seasons (during the dead-ball era, remember), and owns the 11th-longest hitting streak in Major League history at 35 games. He hit ahead of **Honus Wagner**, forming one of the most feared one-two punches in baseball.



(100-year-old ball, almost used in batting practice)

In addition to some of the '09 Pirates, the ball above is also signed by National League president **Ban Johnson**.

Brenden Barrows (above) was 4-for-4 with a home run and was the winning pitcher in the team's latest win. Funkhouser was also 4-for-4.