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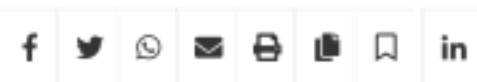
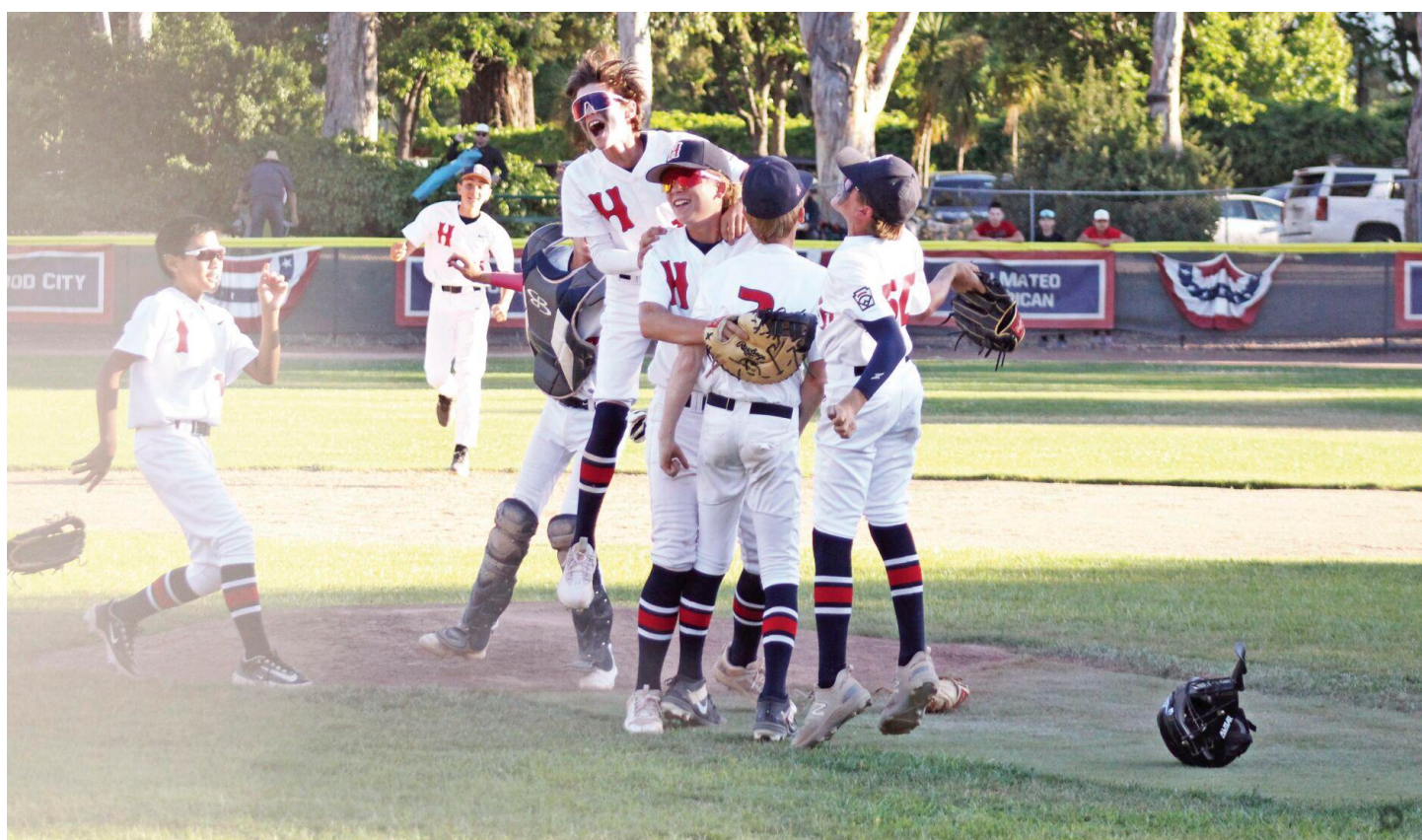
FEATURED

Hillsborough takes the District 52 All-Stars 12s title

Ramirez fires gem, hits go-ahead HR in thrilling 3-0 win over Alpine

Terry Bernal Daily Journal staff

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PALO ALTO — The arm of Hillsborough ace Robert Ramirez was in the spotlight, and deservedly so.

The two-way standout not only fired 5 2/3 shutout innings to earn the win in the District 52 Little League All-Stars 12s championship finale Wednesday night at Middlefield Park, he also belted the go-ahead home run in Hillsborough’s 3-0 win

over longtime nemesis Alpine.

While Ramirez threw 85 pitches, though, it was one throw from left fielder Tayden Flores that defined the game. Amid a scoreless tie in the top of the third inning, with runners on first and second, Flores charged the ball on a sharp single over the third-base bag and fired a laser beam directly over the shoulder of the base runner between third and home to cut him down at home plate.

“That was gas,” Hillsborough catcher Johnny Gall said. “It was a great throw.”



Hillsborough catcher Johnny Gall, right, tags Alpine’s Amit Garg on a throw from Tayden Flores in the third inning.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

Like the famous play from the 2012 World Series when San Francisco Giants second baseman Marco Scutaro threw out Detroit Tigers base runner Prince Fielder at home plate, Flores’ throw was a momentum shifter of epic proportions.

“The play he made today was so important for the momentum of these games,”

Hillsborough manager John Gall said. “Of course, both sides, emotions ride high and low. And for him to make that throw right on the mark — that would have made it 1-0, and Alpine would have got the lead — again, he made a nice, easy, firm throw. He’s had a great tournament.”

Ramirez has had a great tournament too. Actually, make that a tournament for the ages.

Hillsborough needed a stop job in a big way in Wednesday’s if-necessary championship game. It was the third time in the tournament Hillsborough and Alpine went head-to-head, with Alpine earning a dramatic victory Tuesday in the opening round of the championship series, a game that saw Hillsborough leading most of the way until Alpine, down to its last strike in the top of the sixth, rallied for a 5-3 victory.

The rivalry between the two Little League teams goes back several years, as the two core rosters previously met in the District 52 championship games at 10s and 11s. [Alpine won the 10s title](#) in 2021, while Hillsborough bounced back to knock Alpine out of the 11s tournament last season.

“We’re on top of the world right now,” Johnny Gall said after Wednesday’s triumph, wearing the District 52 12s banner like a superhero cape. “That was a very exciting ... to finally get it done.”

Ramirez locked up with Alpine ace Jake Scott for the second time in the tournament. Unlike the previous matchup July 1, when Scott lasted just one inning in a [10-2 Hillsborough victory](#), the two right-handers battled in a classic pitching duel, trading zeroes for each of the first three innings.

Ramirez allowed five hits and walked one while striking out 10, but Alpine had its chances. But the Hillsborough defense made all the plays, cutting down two Alpine runners in scoring position in the contest.

In the first inning, Alpine’s Oli Coupe reached on a one-out single, and moved to second on an errant pickoff throw by Johnny Gall. But a chopper to shortstop saw Cole Callen pivot toward third and toss to Noah Edling to for the tag out for the

second out of the inning.

And in the third, after Henry Carey's sharp single over the third-base bag just past the diving glove of Edling, Flores came through with the laser throw that sent shockwaves around the packed house at Middlefield Park.

"I saw the guy at second trying to round third, and trying to go home, and I just picked it up and threw it as hard as I could," Flores said.

Scott was in control the first turn through the Hillsborough batting order. But in the bottom of the fourth, Callen led off the inning by reaching on an infield error, bringing Ramirez to the plate in a situation Scott was then all but forced to pitch to him. Hillsborough's No. 3 hitter had three previous homers in the tournament and was looking for a fastball out over the plate.

When Ramirez got that fastball, he pulverized it, sending a screaming line drive over the left-center field wall to give Hillsborough a 2-0 lead.

"It felt amazing," Ramirez said. "I just love pitching with insurance and having that there for me made it a lot easier. Hitting that, it just set the tone for the rest of the team."





Robert Ramirez hits a two-run home run in the fourth to give Hillsborough the lead.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

Hillsborough added on in the fourth. RJ Alcantara drew a walk. Scott struck out the next two batters, during which Alcantara advanced on a passed ball. Edling then delivered a two-out RBI single to center to up the lead to 3-0.

It was all the runs Ramirez would need, who pitched into the sixth. Starting the inning with seven pitches remaining before reaching the maximum 85-pitch limit, he recorded a quick three-pitch strikeout, and looked as though he might have a chance to finish the game.

The next at-bat dispelled that notion as it took Ramirez four pitches to induce a grounder to the left side of the infield, but Hillsborough's final play with its ace on the mound was web gem, as Callen at short went into a knee slide to nab it with a backhand, pop to his feet and throw to first. The throw was in the dirt, but first baseman Declan Harris picked it clean for the second out.

Hillsborough then turned to left-hander Griffin Luceno to get the final out, and the closer nailed it down, ending the game on a called third strike, setting off a championship celebration in the middle of the infield.

“Right as he called it, I was ready to just throw all my stuff in the air,” Johnny Gall said. “It was very exciting.”

Through seven games in the tournament, manager Ryan Sweeney's Alpine team outscored its opponents 57-24.

“I told Ryan Sweeney how much I respected their kids,” John Gall said. “And I told him, if we could just take these two teams and play them all summer, we'd have some incredible games. It seems like every time we get together, they're intense. They have a ton of talent ... and they just battle at every turn. And I'm just proud of my guys for getting them.”

Hillsborough now advances to the Section 3 tournament, set to open Saturday, July 15 at Marshall Park in Fremont. Hillsborough will face host Fremont-Centerville at 1:30 p.m. in the opener of the four-team, double-elimination tournament.



Terry Bernal, Daily Journal staff