

A Big League for Little Players

A Reading A-Z Level S Leveled Book
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A Big League for Little Players



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Written by Jane Sellman

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Front cover: Catcher Nick De Jong, of the Daniel Boone National Little League in Columbia, Missouri, fields a pitch while umpire Jim Smith of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, calls the game. De Jong's team was the Midwest Region's champion for 2006.

Back cover: Canada's team from Surrey, British Columbia, won against the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands team from Saipan in the third game for each team in the 2006 Little League World Series.

Title page: Spectators enjoy games at Howard J. Lamade Stadium during the 2006 Little League World Series.

Table of contents: The Canadian province of British Columbia dedicated this totem pole to the Little League Organization. British Columbia established one of the first Little League teams outside the United States in 1951.

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Correlation

LEVEL S

Fountas & Pinnell	○
Reading Recovery	34
DRA	34



Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Baseball Begins	7
History of Little League Baseball	9
How Teams Get to the Championship	13
The 2006 Little League World Series	15
Conclusion	18
Glossary/Index	20

Introduction

“Josh Lester takes a short lead off first base. Japan leads 1–0 in the third inning. ”

As the sun sets behind the bleachers, the players start to notice the bright glow of the lights above the field. The grass here smells different, almost as if it’s been waiting a whole year for the kids to come back to play.



“Cody Walker steps to the plate to face pitcher Go Matsumoto. We’ve seen two great pitching performances so far today. Kyle Carter has been at his best pitching for the U.S. team.”

Cody Walker takes a swing.

Back home in June, there were only about 50 people in the stands. Now it's August, and there are almost 5,000, and even more are watching on national TV! All those weekend practices and stretching exercises paid off. The boys are playing in the 2006 Little League World Series.

"Here's the pitch . . ."

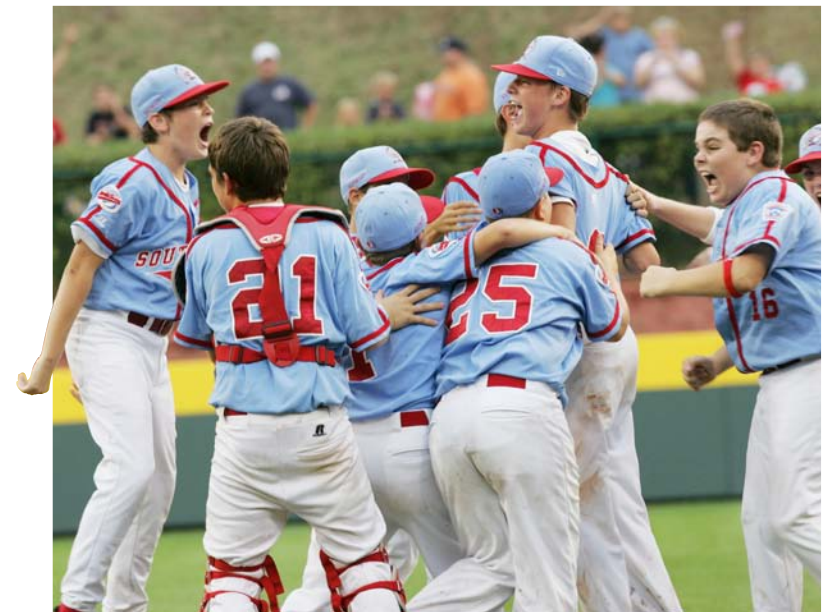


Every game is exciting, but this is the championship game. The players are no longer representing just their team or their state. Now they represent the whole United States!

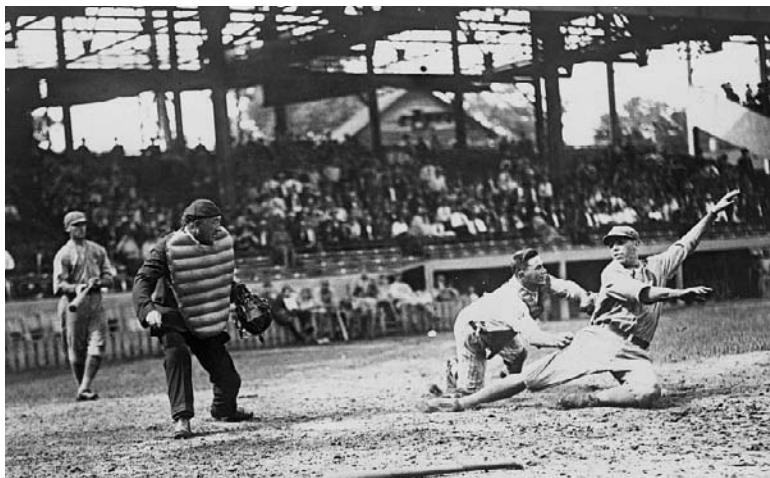
"There it goes! No doubt about it, that ball is out of here! It's a two-run home run by Cody Walker, and the USA takes a 2-to-1 lead! Wow, what a moment for this young man and his teammates!"



That ended up being the game-winning play. Cody's team, from Columbus, Georgia, went on to win the Little League World Series championship game 2–1. The **spectators** watched as players and their families jumped for joy. Gloves and caps flew through the air. A similar scene plays out every summer in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, as some of the best baseball teams from around the world play in the Little League World Series. This is a popular event today, but how did Little League Baseball get to this point?



Teammates from Columbus, Georgia, celebrate their 2006 Little League World Series championship.



The catcher tries to tag the runner out during this early Washington Senators professional baseball game.

Baseball Begins

Experts cannot agree on when the game of baseball began. Games with balls and sticks have a long history around the world. Baseball is similar to older games, including the British games of cricket and rounders, but baseball has its own rules and **equipment**.

In 1744, the word *base-ball* first appeared in print, which helps us know that the game existed at that time. Baseball became popular during the Civil War in the mid-1800s. Soldiers used it as a diversion and played it in their free time.



A crowd enjoys the professional baseball World Series between the Detroit Tigers and the Chicago Cubs in 1907.

Professional baseball began around the end of the Civil War. The first major league was **organized** in 1871. It became the National League in 1876. By the 1890s, baseball was so popular that it became known as the United State's national **pastime**. In 1901, a second major league formed: the American League. The first World Series, which matches the champions of the American and National Leagues, took place in 1903. The Boston Americans beat the Pittsburg Pirates in eight games, making them the best baseball team in the United States.

History of Little League Baseball

For as long as there has been baseball, there have been kids eager to play it. Before there was television, many children would rush home from school and huddle around a radio to listen to their favorite teams' games. Sometimes they would pretend to be one of the star players. *"No, wait! You're Mickey Mantle, and I'm Jackie Robinson!"*

Families living on farms set aside land for a baseball diamond. City kids played stickball in the streets, using broomsticks for bats and mailboxes or trees for the bases. Vacant lots were turned into playing fields. Winning was great, but the joy of playing a sport with your friends was just as important. Playing baseball was fun, but it was not very well organized.



Kids play a pickup game of baseball.



Carl Stotz poses with players before an early 1950s Little League World Series game.

Then came Carl Stotz. When Carl was a boy, the older kids would not let him play baseball with them. When he grew up, he wanted to give all young boys a chance to play baseball. His hope was that an organized league would teach boys the ideals of sportsmanship, fair play, and teamwork. Instead of knocking on doors to see whether their friends could come out to play, now kids could be on a team, play **scheduled** games, and be coached on how to play better.

In 1939, Stotz formed Little League Baseball in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The league had only thirty players and three teams. He received donations from local businesses. He was the manager of the Lycoming Dairy team. He asked two brothers to coach two other teams, Lundy Lumber and Jumbo Pretzel. With thirty dollars for each team, he bought uniforms for all the players. Players' moms sewed team names on the uniforms. Teams had to share gloves as well as the only catcher's mask. The teams played on a vacant lot.

In 1947, twelve teams played in the first Little League **tournament** that would later become the World Series. The Maynard Midgets from Williamsport beat Lock Haven Little League in the championship game. About 2,000 fans turned out, despite the August heat, and a great tradition was born.



A crowd cheers during a 1955 tournament game.

As news of the league spread, teams quickly formed all over the country. Any boy, age 9 to 13, could play Little League Baseball. He could be any race, religion, or color. (Girls were not allowed to play until 1974.)



A Girls Little League team poses for a picture.

By 1948, the league grew to ninety-four teams. Today, about 2.7 million children play on Little League teams not only in the United States but also around the world!



The Chinese Taipei team gets ready for a game in the mid-1980s.

How Teams Get to the Championship

Now more than 100,000 teams compete in different **divisions**. A player's age determines the division in which he or she plays. Little League, the most famous division, has teams of 11- and 12-year-old players. Each local Little League team is part of a district that includes teams from the same area. In June, the best players from each district are chosen to be part of an all-star team, which has no more than 14 players. The coach and manager for the all-star team are also chosen. In July, these teams play in many tournaments to narrow the field of **competitors**.



A batter from the Saudi Arabian team swings at a pitch during the teams victory over Whalley Little League in 2006's World Series tournament.

By August, only 16 teams remain in the Little League Baseball Division. They have earned a trip to Howard J. Lamade Stadium in Williamsport for the Little League World Series. Game by game, teams are eliminated until two remain. One team is from one of the 80 countries outside the United States that compete in Little League, and one team is from the United States. These final two teams play one game to determine the Little League World Series champion.

The 2006 Little League World Series

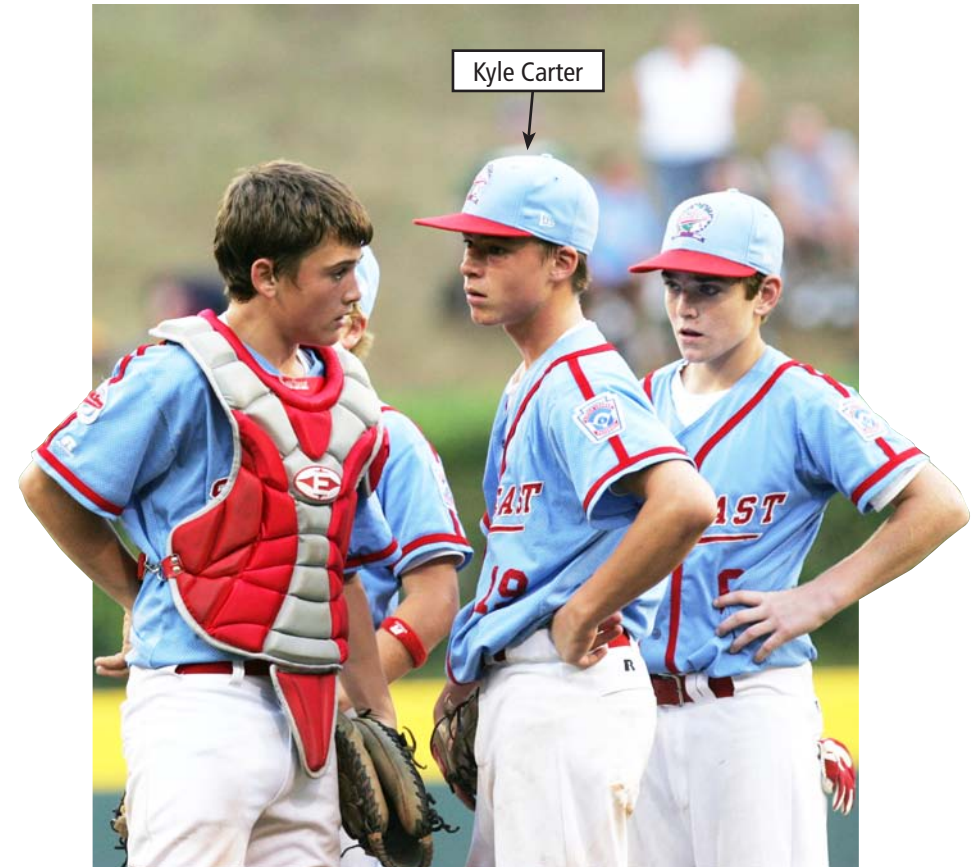
For the 2006 Little League World Series, teams from as far away as Saudi Arabia and Russia made it to Williamsport in late August. Kawaguchi City, Japan, won the International Championship over Matamoros, Mexico, by a score of 3–0.

Japan's star player, Go Matsumoto, hit a home run and was brought in as a relief pitcher to get his team out of a bases-loaded, no-outs bind. In the U.S. Championship game, the team from Columbus, Georgia, defeated the Beaverton, Oregon, team 7–3.



Matsumoto pitches.

It was up to Georgia to carry the banner of the United States against Japan in the World Series Championship game. And carry it, they did.



Kyle Carter talks with his catcher and other teammates on the mound during the game against Japan.

Georgia's pitching phenom Kyle Carter struck out eleven batters and gave up only three hits. Matsumoto's pitching kept the game close, but the Georgia team won to take the series for the United States for the second year in a row. It was quite a **feat** as the Kawaguchi City team had been undefeated.

Successful Little Leaguers

Many Little League World Series players have grown up to become baseball, hockey, and football players.



Gary Sheffield

Gary Sheffield, a nine-time Major League Baseball All-Star, played in the 1980 Little League World Series. Derek Bell, who played on that same Little League World Series team, later played in the Major League World Series for the Toronto Blue Jays. Little League World Series players



Chris Drury

Chris Drury (1989), Stephane Matteau (1982), Pierre Turgeon (1982), and Ray Ferraro (1976) have played hockey in the National Hockey League. Brian Sipe, a former Cleveland Browns quarterback, played in the 1961 Little League Baseball World Series.



Jason Varitek,
Boston Red Sox
catcher

Wilson Alvarez,
former Major League
Baseball pitcher



Sean Burroughs,
Tampa Bay
Devil Rays
third baseman

Conclusion

The Little League World Series continues to grow and change. More than 300,000 people attended tournament games in 2006, and the games were televised around the United States. When second baseman Josh Lester of Columbus, Georgia, fielded the last out of the championship game, the crowd broke into cheers and chanted, "USA! USA!"



The Georgia team celebrates its 2006 victory for the USA.



In true Little League spirit, the Georgia team members asked the Kawaguchi City players to join them in a victory lap around the field. This proves that Little League’s **goal** remains the same after decades of growth: to provide a game that teaches players the principles they should use as good citizens of the world.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls, we’ll see you next year for another exciting Little League World Series!”



Explore More

To learn more about Little League Baseball and Softball, visit the website: www.littleleague.org

For Little League World Series history, including records and more famous former players, visit the website: www.littleleague.org/worldseries

Glossary

competitors	people or teams that one plays against (p. 13)
divisions	separate groups that are part of a larger organization (p. 13)
eager	excited and interested (p. 9)
equipment	tools used in work or play (p. 7)
feat	an amazing action or accomplishment (p. 16)
goal	something one wants to accomplish (p. 19)
organized	grouped and managed by leaders (p. 8)
pastime	a hobby or activity (p. 8)
scheduled	set to begin at a certain time (p. 10)
spectators	people who observe an event without taking part (p. 6)
tournament	a series of games or competitions that determine a final champion (p. 11)

Index

base-ball, 7	Drury, Chris, 17
Bell, Derek, 17	Japan, 4, 15
Carter, Kyle, 4, 16	Lester, Josh, 18
championship, 5, 6, 11–19	Matsumoto, Go, 4, 15, 16
Civil War, 7, 8	professional baseball, 8
Divisions,	Sheffield, Gary, 17
American League, 8	stickball, 9
Big League, 13	Stotz, Carl, 10, 11
Little League, 6, 9–19	tournament, 11, 13, 18
Major League, 17	Walker, Cody, 4–6
National League, 8	World Series, 5, 6, 8, 11,
Tee Ball, 13	13–19