

HALL OF FAME TEAM AWARD



Mid-Atlantic (Hollidaysburg) team members include (from left): First row-Jackson Boob, Brody Dull, Chase Link, Easton Metzger. Second row-Aspen Anderson, Braden Hatch, Alex Dively. Third row-Tyler McGough, Caleb Detrick, Coach John Rabel, Manager Jim McGough, Coach Brad Hatch, Nate Phillips and Beau Rabel.

Bullish: Hollidaysburg team made Little League history

Became first county team to advance to Williamsport

By Matt Michelone
Altoona Mirror

Being the first at anything in sports can be a difficult and demanding task no matter if you're a 20-year professional or if you happen to be between the age of 10-12 years old.

The latter occurred just two years ago for the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame's 11th team inductee.

That was when the Hollidaysburg Little League team became the first team ever from Blair County to make its way to the Little League World Series in South Williamsport.

The team's journey was first made possible back in 2014 when a group of board members for the Hollidaysburg Area Summer Baseball League decided to affiliate with Little League International, which

governs the sport.

Member leagues must be chartered with the Little League International organization in order to participate in the Little League World Series. This requires members to list the boundary they serve, estimate teams in each division, provide board information and insurance preferences along with a local league constitution.

Hollidaysburg currently operates the only Blair County Little League organization that affiliates with the international group.

Many seasons would pass as the program continued to build toward what ended up being a special summer for the first team to make it happen and provide memories people won't ever forget.

Thousands made the trip to Williamsport. Bars and restaurants were packed as the team was on ESPN for two weeks and

became the talk of the town.

The Hall of Fame recognition tops it off.

"I think it's really amazing, especially with the fact that we got inducted into this Hall of Fame so quickly," shortstop-pitcher Ty McGough said of the chance to be inducted. "I think it's amazing we get to be there with all of the support of the town we got."

"It's pretty cool to do it with my friends (while still in school)," third baseman and power hitter Chase Link said. "I think that everyone on the team is going to enjoy it. It's a very special moment."

Building a roster starts with a group of coaches taking a vote among the many players within the league to decide who will make up the all-star team.

The 2022 Mid-Atlantic Regional Champions roster was comprised of a group of

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11 players. Nine of them are natives of Blair County while two came from neighboring Bedford County.

Coaches Jim McGough, Brad Hatch and John Rabel guided the team on this historic run.

"I honestly didn't expect them to go that far, I don't think many people did," Hollidaysburg Area Summer Baseball League President Andrew Snare said. "You always had that hope, but when you're coming from a league of 80 kids in your little league taking on these bigger cities or towns, that's a tough place to get through.

"For them to strive through all of this and get through the state of Pennsylvania – which I think might be harder than the Mid-Atlantic Regional – was definitely an accomplishment."

Brad Hatch felt the kids' familiarity of playing travel ball with each other through Flood City Baseball helped lay the foundation for what they accomplished.

"A lot of our players played together throughout Little League," Hatch said. "We had a couple players that didn't have little league sanctioned Little Leagues. One from Chestnut Ridge and one from Bedford joined our little league and were able to join our team."

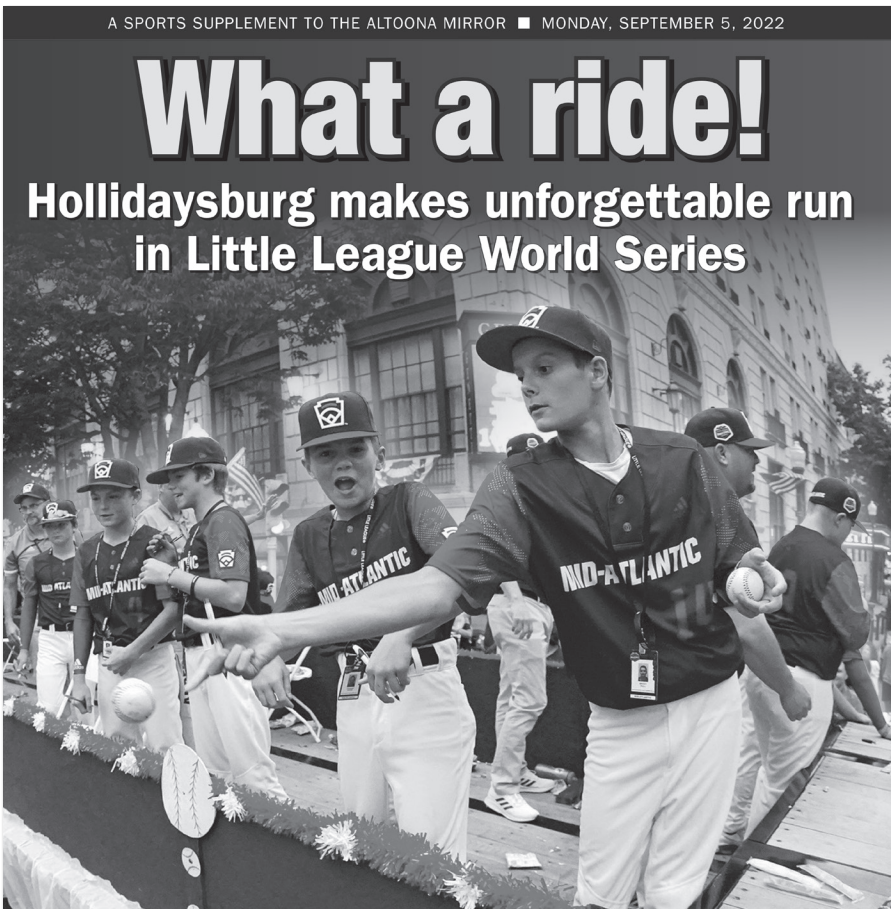
After winning the District 11 tournament, Hollidaysburg's next step was winning the Section 4 Tournament in State College against the hometown club it fell short against at the 11U level the previous season.

It was a Ty McGough home run that helped put the game away, sending Hollidaysburg to the state tournament with the 5-1 triumph.

Moving ahead to the state tournament, that's where a trademark celebration was born as the team made history once again.

Following a victory over Keystone, Hollidaysburg's players and coaching staff participated in what is known as the Challenger Game for those with intellectual or physical challenges. That day, the team made a connection with a young man named Carmine Calderone, who inspired their signature celebration better known as Bull Power.

The bull power gesture involved making the bullhorn around their heads and kicking up the dirt symbolic of when a bull would charge toward the direction it was traveling.



The Mirror published a special section on the team's historic run.

"Our teams got to be coaches and player helpers," Jim McGough said. "We got to play with the kids that were in the challenger game. That's where bull power came about. One of our kids told us when he hit a home run, that was the bull power."

This grew plenty of support from the Bradford locals and was a way of showing Carmine that he was part of the team.

"We were really loose going into the game," McGough said. "We already knew what we were up against, but we were ready for it. Throughout the process, we were able to create the hometown favorite with Bradford. It really helped us go up against Greencastle."

Jim McGough didn't sense much nervousness in his team, knowing that a trip to the regional tournament was potentially on the horizon.

"We were really loose going into the game," he said. "We already knew what we were up against, but we were ready for it. Throughout the process, we were able to create the hometown favorite with Bradford. It really helped us go up against Bradford."

The victory sent Hollidaysburg on to the Mid-Atlantic Regional in Bristol, Conn. located where it would face teams from Delaware, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

The team made its presence felt with a 7-3 win in the first regional game against Washington, D.C., but later suffered a setback to Wilmington, DE.

Hollidaysburg went on to wallop the D.C. entry 13-0, setting up a rematch with Wilmington.

Caleb Detrick set the tempo in the batter's box going 4-for-4 – nearly hitting for the cycle – with four RBIs and two runs scored. Ty McGough pitched four innings, striking out six and walking two.

Hollidaysburg captured the Mid-Atlantic Regional Championship thanks to a 7-3 victory over the Wilmington entry, and punched its ticket to South Williamsport.

"I came in the second inning and was pitching pretty well," Ty McGough said, "Once we got closer to the end, I got very excited. When I made that final out, it was a dream come true since I was little. Knowing that we made it there as a team, it was a dream come true. It brought a lot of joy to



The coaches for the Hollidaysburg team were, from left: John Rabel, manager Jim McGough and Brad Hatch.

our family, our friends, and our community at home watching.”

When the team arrived for the first game in Williamsport, it could feel the excitement the community had for its appearance.

“Even we just practiced on the field the day before the first game, it was amazing how the field felt,” Link said. “Whenever we ran out onto the field for the first inning, it felt like an earthquake with how it was so loud. In the dugout, we could feel everything shaking.”

The team’s first appearance at Howard J. Lamade Stadium came up against Pearland, Texas and couldn’t have started better as Hollidaysburg jumped out to an early 2-0 lead but ended up falling 8-3 after a six-run fifth inning.

On Aug. 20, Hollidaysburg took on Middleboro, Massachusetts, the champion of the New England Region.

After falling behind 1-0 in the fourth inning, the Hollidaysburg bats went to work as Link smacked a solo home run, sparking a four-run rally.

“The at bat before that in the first inning, I struck out to a high fastball,” Link said. “I think I was in a two-strike count again; I was expecting the high fastball again. It was one of the most exciting moments of my life.”

New England answered in the fifth with two runs of its own, but Jackson Boob responded as he smacked a two-run single to center field for the team’s first ever win in the international tournament, 7-5.

Hollidaysburg took pride in knowing it



The Hollidaysburg players proudly carried their Mid-Atlantic championship banner to Williamsport.

was able to top the performance of another Pennsylvania team that it made it in 2021.

“We thought it was so amazing because we always looked up to that Upper Providence, PA team the year before,” Link said.

Next up was a date with Massapequa, New York, champions of the Metro region. Link went 2-for-4 with five RBIs and a home run as Hollidaysburg went on to win that game, 7-1.

One of the most staggering statistics about the team was its ability to keep fighting off elimination as it racked up an impressive 15-0 record combined when its season was on the line.

“We trusted in everybody,” pitcher-catcher Braden Hatch said of the team’s ability to bounce back. “When we had a tough moment, we’d trust in whoever was up to get the job done.”

There was no shortage of support for the team as it was treated to pictures from watch parties at Tiger Stadium and establishments across the area to having a home field advantage every time the team took the field.

There were also plenty of videos from local athletes, including Hollidaysburg graduate Luke Rhodes of the Indianapolis Colts and current LSU outfielder and Central alum Paxton Kling.

The dream, though, would end much like it started against the Southwest Champion from Pearland, Texas as the locals bowed out following an 8-4 decision.

Hollidaysburg finished 3-2 in the LLWS,

making the U.S. Final Four and the final eight in the world.

Snare said the historic run has inspired more kids to pick up a bat and glove during the baseball season in Hollidaysburg and throughout the region.

“You couldn’t have asked for a better group,” he said. “They held their heads high; they represented the community well; they were well behaved. Every aspect that you would look for somebody representing your league or your community I feel they brought to the table.”

Ty McGough hopes the team’s experience showed the next generation the standard for baseball in the Hollidaysburg Little League.

“It sets a bar,” he said. “They saw what we did, and I think it gives them more fire to just keep working. They want to work even harder to do what we did, and maybe accomplish more as a second timer.”

Neil Rudel, president of the Hall of Fame, said the Selection Committee felt “with all the national recognition the team generated, the time to honor the team was now,” rather than delaying until the players are older.

“The Hollidaysburg Little League team brought our entire area together like nothing we can remember – and right after Covid, when people needed something to feel good about,” he said. “They won three games on the international stage and represented the area with class. We shared in that pride and didn’t want to wait.”