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A baseball giant

GILROY

The inaugural Gilroy Garlic Baseball Classic is now history, and the record books will show that the Gilroy Mustangs were waxed twice by Hart High School of Newhall. Wednesday's 15-3 drubbing in the Championship Game came on the heels of a 13-1 loss Tuesday.

Clearly Gilroy was outmatched, but the Mustangs should not despair. In the world of high school baseball, Hart is a giant, and there was no way the Mustangs could slingshot their way to victory behind the tired arms of Vince Carrasco and John Peck.

As a result, the Indians of Hart went home with all the hardware. It's something they're quite used to doing.

In 1988, Hart went 26-0 before losing in the California Interscholastic Federation playoffs. A year later, the Indians advanced to the CIF Southern Section Championship Game and played in Dodger Stadium. This year's 14-1-2 squad has been ranked as high as eighth in the nation.

It is a tremendous program — one that baseball fans in Gilroy were lucky to see over the past three days. Of course, a few people were asking why the Indians came to Gilroy. A fair question, considering that they had to drive six hours and spend two nights in order to play in this tourney.

They came because Coach Bud Murray wanted them to. You see, Bud's son Roc is an assistant coach at Gilroy, and he figured his father's team would be the perfect guest.

"Having grown up around the program, Roc told me that Hart was talented, athletic, and disciplined," Gilroy coach Jim Gama said. "Well, they were everything he told me and more."

Much more. You see, Hart baseball is more than a team. It is a phenomenon.

How else could you explain the 45 fans who made the trip from Newhall (40 miles north of Los Angeles) to see this team play? They were absolutely obsessed with Hart baseball. Many of them took vacation time from work in order to come to Gilroy. They wore Hart sweatshirts, hats, and jackets. They delivered non-stop baseball chatter from Monday to Wednesday.

"As I sat down to talk to a few members of the Hart foundation, I discovered that this jaunt up to Gilroy was nothing unusual. Kathy Migita, mother of second baseman Lance and the longest-serving member of the group, has been to Pennsylvania, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Illinois, and Utah to see her son play.

It seems that the nucleus of the current Hart team has been together since capturing the World Championship of Pony Baseball as a group of nine-year olds. Since then, they've won World Championships at every level of Little League — from Mustang to Bronco to Babe Ruth.

"We had a corps group of parents that made arrangements to be at every game," Migita said. "Out of that, a bond formed. Now, when a freshman makes the team, we bring his parents into the group real quick."

"They go wherever we go," said Lance, who cracked homers in both games against Gilroy. "I think we're all used to it, but we know it's a privilege."

Some of the supporters are downright maniacal. Such is the case with Mike Gaber, the team's traveling computer jockey. With his lap-top perched in front of him, Gaber sits atop the bleachers and inserts data on every pitch, every hit, every putout.

I was skeptical when Gaber told me he would be able to hand me a complete box score and a play-by-play narrative minutes after game was over. But when I arrived at his car, he already had them waiting for me.

"I was friends with a lot of the people whose sons were playing on all those World Championship teams," said Gaber, who also keeps a conventional scorebook in case anything goes wrong. "I wanted to find something I could do for the team. It started off basic, and now I have it so I can list all the stats on a spread sheet.

And Gaber does mean all the stats. You name the situation, and he can tell you how a particular Hart player handles it.

What does third baseman Chad Miyata bat from the fifth inning on? Answer: .353.

How many times has Migita walked while leading-off an inning? Answer: six.

"I like to think that the things I do help to keep the parents interested and involved," Gaber said. "People want to know why I bother doing all this for a high school team. I always tell them that Hart is no ordinary high school team."

No, Hart is not an ordinary high school baseball team. The Gilroy Mustangs and a lap-top computer back in Newhall will both testify to that.

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