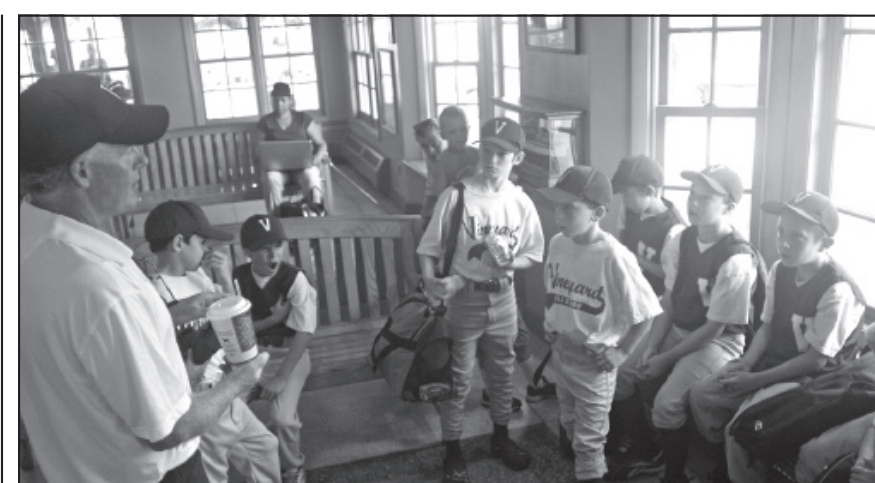




Pictures by Ivy Ashe



JACOB GUNDERSEN PRACTICES WITH AIDEN ALIBERTI.



HEAD COACH DREW KELLY GIVES THE 9-YEAR-OLDS ADVICE.

EMILY TURNEY TAKES BATTING PRACTICE WITH ANDREW WILEY BEHIND THE PLATE.

Little League All-Stars Hit the Road

By IVY ASHE

Maybe you've seen them when you drive past Veira Park in Oak Bluffs or Nunes Field in Edgartown. You might have heard the metal clinks of their bats connecting with a fast-moving — relatively speaking, Dustin Pedroia would send it right over the fence — pitch, or maybe the booming voices of their coaches calling out plays from across the field. What you might not have seen or heard, though, are the sounds of actual game play. These baseball players are good, and for just over a month each summer, they take their talents on the road (with certain exceptions, usually in the form of Nantucket).

They are the Martha's Vineyard Little League All-Star teams, one team each of nine, 10, 11 and 12-year-

olds who have been recommended by their regular-season coaches to the all-volunteer staffs of the summer travel squads. Extending the Little League season and offering kids the chance to play against some of the best talent in the Northeast, and, in the case of the 12-year-old team, the entire country, is a way of "seeing how far you can up the ante" of baseball skills, said Drew Kelly, head coach for the nine-year-olds.

Mr. Kelly, as is the case with nearly all of the teams' coaching staffs, is in the dual role of parent and coach; sons Hollis and Mercer have both played under his guidance. Kris Lukowitz, who works with the 11-year-olds and is current president of Martha's Vineyard Little League, coached his son Ben through

Little League All-Stars right into Babe Ruth ball, and is now doing the same for son Jonas.

"It's a little easier the second time around," he said with a laugh during a friendly game against Ernie Chavez's 10-year-olds, commenting on the added pressure of balancing the "business" relationship of coach-to-player with the everyday father-son dynamic.

Pressure, however, is something the all-stars welcome.

"I like the thrill of playing against other kids," said Emily Turney, the lone all-star girl for three years running. "It's good to watch the other teams and learn from them."

Ms. Turney, 12, is in her last Little League season and says she will likely move on to softball next year. For now, though, she is making the most of her time on the squad. Coach Bob Moore, director of the Charter School in the off-season, described Ms. Turney's performance during the annual team trip

to Cooperstown, N.Y., where she hit a home run, as "the talk of the town." Being at the Hall of Fame grounds seemed to bring out the best in the team's bats. Jack Slaton and Andrew Wiley turned in three homers each during the tournament and Tucker McNeely, Silas Berlin, and Isaac Higgins all sent one over the fence. Mr. McNeely, Mr. Slaton and Mr. Berlin, along with Kevin Cleary, Nate D'Angelo and Morgan Michalski turned in solid performances on the mound, backed up by Greg McCarron and Mr. Wiley behind the plate. Mason Jeffers and Emerson Mahoney played infield.

Other league coaches echoed the sentiment. "The team is improving," said 10-year-olds coaching assistant Andrew Aliberti, "and I think that's really what we're here to do."

Perhaps the greatest seasonal improvement was shown by the youngest team. The nine-year-olds took a heavy loss in their very first tournament against West Taunton, only to return 10 games later to beat the same opponent 3-2. The Taunton coaches "were amazed," said Mr. Kelly during a phone interview.

Mr. Lukowitz said that his team, too, has "played some tougher competition this summer." They have risen to the occasion each and every time; the 11-year-olds were 5 and 0 in their final tournament in Bourne last weekend.

The evolution of the team units was mentioned by all of the coaches as one of the most rewarding parts of working with the all-stars.

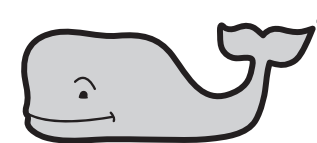
"I like the idea of a team," said Mr. Kelly.

"They've become close teammates," said Mr. Aliberti, "and they back each other up."

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We also have a beautiful pale yellow tiger male — very young, about a year old — who was found wandering on the West Tisbury Road near the golf club at night and brought to the shelter. So far no one has claimed him, so he will be neutered and put up for adoption. Now for the kitten department. We have five absolutely adorable kittens in the kitten room — three gray (one female and two males) and two black

kittens (one male and one female), about six to eight weeks old. We have all had such fun watching them play and interact with each other. It will be hard to choose one; they are all so cute.

We have two exceptional dogs: Katama, a fawn Boxer cross and Ozzie, a four-year-old Mini-Pin cross. They love people.

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