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District 52 resurgence

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Being a history buff, I’m always curious to see how things have changed through the years. The District 52 Little League website is a dream for those who want to see which leagues have won which championships since the district came into existence in 1958.

On the district’s site, if you click on the “home” button and then the “about us” tab, you can scroll down, where the district has listed all the winners of the various age-bracket tournaments. For the first 34 years, there was only one district tournament played: the 12s, AKA Majors, AKA the age group that plays in the Little League World Series.

The 9-10s all-star tournament started in 1994, while the 11-year-old age bracket didn’t come into being until 2004. And with three divisions, you can really see how the balance of power has shifted up and down the Peninsula.

Looking at the tournaments since 2004, since that is the first year there were tournaments in all three age groups, Hillsborough dominated through the 2000s and into the early 2010s and has consistently fielded strong teams in all divisions since then.

But over the last four years, including 2024, San Mateo American has been the dominant program. Of the nine championship games played since 2021, SMA has won seven titles — one 10s crown, three 11s titles and three of the last four 12s championships. And SMA was in the championship series of the 10s, 11s and 12s this season, settling for titles in the 11s and 12s, with only Hillsborough winning the 10s preventing the SMA sweep.

San Mateo American went a long time between 12s championships. It won its first in 1970 and didn't win another until 2015. It got its first 10s title in 2003 and its initial 11s championship in 2019.

But as much as this will be seen as the summer of San Mateo American, I wanted to shout out to the Alpine Little League program, which services the Menlo Park, Portola Valley and Woodside area.

Unlike San Mateo American, Alpine was a solid program from the early years of District 52 and throughout the 1980s and 1990s. But then the winning kind of dried up in the south end of San Mateo County. It won a 12s title in 1999 and 2001, but haven't won that bracket since. It won an 11s crown in 2009 and didn't win another section title until the 10s team won it in 2021.

But there has been a resurgence at Alpine the last couple of years and, if not for the likes of San Mateo American and Hillsborough, we might be looking at another dynastic-type program.

Instead, its been a series of near-misses for Alpine in 2023 and 2024. Last year, all three age groups made deep runs — the 10s team got to the loser's bracket final, the 11s lost in the championship series to SMA and the 12s squad lost in the championship, if-necessary game to Hillsborough.

It was more heartbreak for Alpine this season, although it started well enough with Alpine teams winning both the District 52 Minors and Majors Superbowls.

I was talking with the 12s coach after his team clinched the title and he said expectations within the Alpine community was that its all-star teams were primed for deep runs in this year's brackets.

Turns out he was right as the Alpine 11s fell in the if-necessary game in the championship round. The 12s team made it to the winner's bracket final, losing to the SMA, before being eliminated by Menlo-Atherton in the loser's bracket final.

The list on the District 52 website includes only the winners of each division, so it's hard to know how far a team advanced otherwise. Now, if you want to do a real deep dive, the district does archive tournaments back to 2021. So if you want to get real granular, here's your chance.

I'll admit, I looked back at the 2023 brackets for this column. I just love sports minutia.

For those who may want to continue following the District 52 champs, here's a lot at what's coming up in the Section 3, which begin July 17 for the 10s, 11s, and 12s, divisions.

District 52 will host the 10s tournament, with Hillsborough serving as the host site, with games played on the fields at the Hillsborough City School District.

District 52 administrator Jono Gibbs said Hillsborough, as winner of the District 52 tournament, was offered the chance to host the Section 3 tournament, which it accepted.

The 11s tournament is being hosted by District 14 at Newark Little League’s Newark Junior High School. District 57 is the host of the 12s bracket, which will be played at Athan Downs Park in San Ramon.

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