

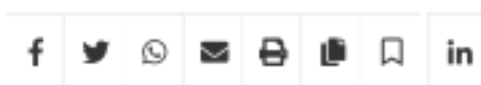
https://www.smdailyjournal.com/sports/local/all-san-mateo-matchup-in-district-52-all-stars-10s-semifinals/article_e7e5aaa2-1643-11ee-ae44-a7b901430dd1.html

FEATURED

All-San Mateo matchup in District 52 All-Stars 10s semifinals

SM American walks off against Hillsborough; SM National holds off Pacifica National

Terry Bernal Daily Journal staff
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By virtue of two exciting one-run wins, both San Mateo teams will advance to the winners' bracket semifinals of the District 52 Little League All-Stars 10s tournament.

San Mateo American won a thriller Wednesday evening at Fairway Park with a 2-1 walk-off over Hillsborough. Later that evening, San Mateo National rallied for three runs in the first inning and held off host Pacifica National for a 3-2 win.

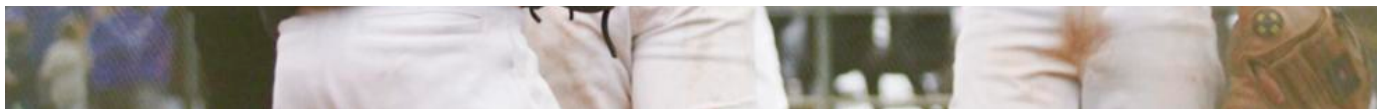
The two San Mateo squads will now meet Saturday in the semifinals of the double-elimination tournament, with the winner advancing to Monday's championship round.

"They're our crosstown rivals," San Mateo National coach Gary Falzon said. "A lot of players on our team play with players on their team, so we know each other very well. It's always meaningful when we play each other. Friendly crosstown rivals, and it's going to be fun."

National's Caleb Fuata and American's Mazin Khoury — both of whom play for the same West Coast Federals tournament team — closed their respective games Wednesday with heroic efforts.

Fuata entered in relief of starting pitcher Jackson Bottani in the fourth inning against Pacifica, and went on to earn the save by striking out the last seven batters he faced. After earning the win in Saturday's opener, a 7-0 victory over Palo Alto, Fuata now has 18 strikeouts in the tournament.





San Mateo National pitcher Caleb Fuata, middle, celebrates after striking out the side in the fifth inning against Pacifica National with William Falzon, left, and Mason Lambrechts in the District 52 All-Stars 10s tournament Wednesday night at Fairway Park.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

No surprise there to the National coaching staff, that includes manager Dave Fuata, Caleb's father.

"Not at all," Falzon said. "I've coached Caleb for the last two years and he's a tremendous pitcher, a tremendous competitor. He throws the ball hard, and he always wants the ball, and that's the type of pitcher you want."

In American's walk-off win, Khoury raced home to plate the winning run in the bottom of the sixth inning, scoring all the way from second on a heartbreaking infield error. With runners at first and second, Hillsborough's second baseman got in front of a hard grounder off the bat of Zach Marinec toward the second-base bag, but had the ball rattle around his glove, then off his foot as his stride step toward the bag kicked the ball into the outfield.

"I thought it was going to be caught by the pitcher," Khoury said. "But it was two outs, so I kept on running hard. Zach Marinec, he hit it ... and it was a good hit. So, with two outs, got to run hard."





San Mateo American's Mazin Khoury slides home with the game-winning run against Hillsborough in the District 52 All-Stars 10s tournament Wednesday at Fairway Park.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

Khoury said he scored two walk-off runs during the regular season with his San Mateo American Seawolves team. But nothing could have prepared him for the greeting he got at home plate after sliding feet first with the game-winner Wednesday.

"They were jumping on me, just hitting me on the helmet, saying: 'At-ta boy!'" Khoury said.

The pitching duel between Hillsborough's Will Duffell and American's Owen Bittle was a pillar of Little League-tournament matchups. Duffell took the ball for the second time in the tourney, but his first as a starter. And the left-hander was nails, allowing one runs through four innings of work before giving way to reliever Jack Swethen.

"He was great," Hillsborough manager Chase Rowbotham said. "This was a big spot for him. It was his first real start in an All-Star game and, yeah, he just delivered. Cool under pressure. ... You couldn't ask for anything more."

Each team scratched out a run in the third inning before both starting pitchers settled in and slammed the door. Bittle, making his first start of the tournament, worked into the top of the sixth inning, going 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ before he reached the maximum pitch count, forcing American manager Jon Wells summon reliever

Jacob Armstrong to record the final out of the inning.

“Owen did a fantastic job,” Wells said. “It’s the first time he’d done this for us. He’s pitched quite often in short stints, and today we decided to give him the ball because he’s a very confident young man, and had the ability to throw different types of pitches, and he throws a lot of strikes. And we knew that he could keep us in the game.”

In the bottom of the sixth, American set the table when the No. 12 hitter (in the universal batting order, with all 12 players batting) Joaquin Lee reached with one out on an infield error. Khoury followed by reaching on a fielder’s choice, with Lee being retired for the second out. Colton Baker then reached on an infield error to set the stage for Marinec’s heroics.

The walk-off win in a high-profile tournament is quite the confidence builder, Wells said.

“It just builds a lot of confidence within the team,” Wells said. “We’ve been building for this and, it’s one of those things, when you have these close games you find out what you’re made out of, and these kids learned a lot today. They’ve worked extremely hard to be in this position, and all that hard work paid off.”

Hillsborough moves to the elimination bracket, and will play Friday against the winner of Thursday’s matchup between San Carlos and Half Moon Bay.

Through the three current District 52 tournaments — 10s, 11s and 12s — Hillsborough had the only teams to advance through the tourney openers in all three brackets.

“I think it speaks to the quality and the depth,” Rowbotham said. “I’m really proud of them. I’m really proud of our league.”

San Mateo National relied on one big inning in the top of the first to score all its runs against Pacifica National. Bottani opened the inning with a single, then Armstrong got hit by a pitch and Nathan Falzon drew a two-out walk to load the

bases. Setting the table certainly put the momentum in the San Mateo dugout.

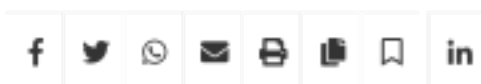
“Just cheer as loud as you can,” Fuata said. “Don’t shut up, and then the pitcher gets annoyed, and he doesn’t throw strikes and he walks them all.”

The approach paid off, as Nathan Bosick got hit by a pitch to force home the first run. Lambrects then singled home Armstrong, and Caleb Shifflet drew a walk to bring home Bosick. But Pacifica’s starting pitcher Dylan Murphy and gutted through four innings.

“It was a little bit rough in the first inning,” Pacifica National manager Louie Potencion said. “But even with that, he was able to focus and pull all the way through until the fourth inning. So, he did really good.”

Pacifica added single runs in the third and fourth. In the third, Chase Tevis led off with a triple and scored on an RBI single by Miles Tucker. In the fourth, Carson Bancroft got hit by a pitch then stole second, and later scored on an RBI groundout by Nico Garcia.

Bancroft now has five hits in three tournament games. He had a two-hit performance in Pacifica’s 10-0 win over Pacifica American in the tourney opener — a game in which every Pacifica National player recorded a hit — and two more hits to go with four RBIs in a 14-3 win over Menlo-Atherton in the second round.



Terry Bernal, Daily Journal staff