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FEATURED

Hillsborough in home stretch of District 52 All-Stars 12s tournament

Win over Alpine propels team to championship round

Terry Bernal Daily Journal staff

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PALO ALTO — The baseball world could learn a thing or two from the way the Hillsborough All-Stars carry themselves on the field.

Off to a 4-0 start in the District 52 Little League All-Stars 12s tourney,

Hillsborough's one-two punch of Cole Callen and Robert Ramirez had every chance to hotdog during Saturday's 10-2 victory over Alpine. The win propelled Hillsborough into the championship round of the double-elimination tournament, with Callen and Ramirez combining on a 5-for-5 night with a home run apiece at the plate, while also accounting for 5 1/3 innings pitched on the mound.

But the most animated on-field celebration out of either of them was from Callen. On a two-run double in the third inning, he hustled into second base and, once there, simply smiled and clapped his hands together a few times as his team took a commanding 6-1 lead. Just one instance of the 12 rostered Hillsborough players giving a masterclass in keeping it classy.

"We try to be humble," Callen said.



Hillsborough pitcher Robert Ramirez gets a hug from coach Tim Luceno after battling through the third inning Saturday in the District 52 Little League All-Stars 12s tournament.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

Not that the Hillsborough kids don't know how to celebrate. On the contrary, they sure aren't shy during the postgame about breaking out the Mias thug shake — the dance is currently all the rage on TikTok — but on the field they are all business. And it's a good thing as, otherwise, Saturday's offensive output would have turned into an on-field dance party.

Hillsborough banged out 11 hits, with 11 of its 12 players reaching base. The one who didn't, cleanup batter Jeremy Pak, contributed in the fourth inning with a fly ball allowing Callen to advance from second to third, and ultimately score on the plate on a throwing error from the outfield.

Pak also earned the team's filthiest uniform after the catcher's fine performance behind the plate. Not only did he steady each Ramirez and Callen through several bouts of wildness — each pitcher issued three walks, including two straight by Ramirez in the third inning, while Callen walked three of the first four batters he faced in the fourth — but Pak also helped bail Callen out of the fourth-inning jam by throwing out a would-be base stealer when Alpine had runners at the corners with no outs and attempted to send the back runner.

"It's pretty fun (to throw)," Pak said. "You can get more outs, and it helps the pitcher on the mound too."

Ramirez contended with the game's first bout of wildness. Matching up with Alpine ace Jake Scott, Ramirez was a bit shaky in the top of the first. He opened by inducing a quick groundout to third baseman Noah Edling, but then gave away the game's first run by tying a dubious baseball record, allowing Oli Coupe to circle the bases on four wild pitches — one on a swinging third strike that skipped to the backstop, then three more wild pitches to move him all the way around, one base at a time, to score.

That's when Ramirez flipped a switch, retiring the last two batters of the inning via strikeout. In the third, he had another unique turnaround, allowing a single to Kaden Gross before walking the bases loaded on eight consecutive balls. But he turned things around by throwing eight straight strikes to the No. 2 and 3 hitters, allowing a mere sacrifice fly to cut Hillsborough's lead to 6-2 before striking out two straight to retire the side.

“He pitched amazing,” Pak said. “He got through the tough parts. He really strived on the mound and threw a strike when he really needed to.”

The Hillsborough offense, meanwhile, scored early and often, turning over the 12-man universal lineup twice in the first three innings. Hillsborough scored two in the first, four in the second, and three more in the third.

Callen and Ramirez flipped the script in style in the bottom of the first, hammering back-to-back home runs to put Hillsborough ahead 2-1.

“They’ve been swinging it really well,” Hillsborough manager John Gall said. “It’s obviously a super important game. I mean, wow, to be honest, you have back-to-back from those boys against such a great, tough pitcher. Jake Scott is one of the best pitchers in the area. So, I was happy for them.”

Callen’s solo homer was an arcing pull shot down the right-field line that had plenty of distance, and just managed to stay inside the foul pole. Ramirez followed with a majestic opposite-field blast to right-center to give Hillsborough the lead.

“I think it was on another planet or something,” Hillsborough center fielder Griffin Luceno said.

Scott departed after one inning, and Hillsborough greeted the Alpine bullpen with a four-spot in the second. Parker Perotti led off the frame with a single to right. Then with two outs, No. 12 hitter Tayden Flores lined a single to left. Johnny Gall followed with a hard double over the third-base bag to drive home Perotti. Callen’s two-run double to center capped the rally.

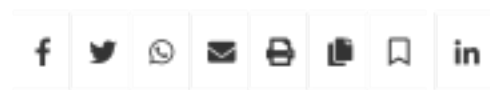
In the third, RJ Alcantara led off with a towering popup mishandled by the Alpine infield. After a Luceno walk, both runners moved up on a wild pitch. Edling then reached on a fielder’s choice on a hard grounder to the left side, with Alcantara beating the throw home from the drawn-in infield. Declan Harris capped the scoring with a two-run double to left to make it 9-2. Luke St. Claire followed with a sharp single to center to put runners at first and third with one out, but two straight flyouts ended the inning, with Alpine’s strong outfield arms keeping the

runner at third in check.

Hillsborough added one more run in the fourth as Callen walked and Ramirez singled to set the table, with Callen advancing two bases to score on Pak's fly ball to right.

With the win, Hillsborough advances to Tuesday's championship round, a rematch between Hillsborough and Alpine. Saturday's loss forced Alpine to the elimination bracket, and they bounced back Sunday with a 7-6 win over Menlo-Atherton.

Alpine must beat Hillsborough twice to win the District 52 title, while Hillsborough need win just once. Tuesday's championship-round opener at Middlefield Park is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. An if-needed game would tentatively be played Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.



Terry Bernal, Daily Journal staff