


ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

World Series Champs Make Hawai'i Proud

It was an amazing month-long, cross-country journey that took them from San Bernardino, California, to South Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and when all was said and done, the boys from Honolulu returned home with the title of Little League World Series champions.

Led by their remarkable manager Gerald Oda, this unbeatable band of brothers bested the top youth baseball teams from throughout the U.S. and earned the crown by topping South Korea in the final game to finish the season undefeated at 12-0. The team performed with poise and discipline

throughout its title pursuit.

Honolulu became the third Hawai'i team to win it all within the past 13 years — only six other states have won at least three such titles. Let's not forget that in 2010, Waipahu's Little League team played in the World Series championship game. The first Little League champion was the team from 'Ewa Beach in 2005.

When I was mayor, we feted those players and coaches, as well as about a dozen other championship teams, with a grand parade through Waikiki, where an estimated 20,000 locals and tourists participated. We were able to schedule the



Little League World Series champions Sean Yamaguchi, Ka'olu Holt, Chandler Murray and Aukai Kea flash shaka in Williamsport following their win.

PHOTO COURTESY LEINA YAMAGUCHI

appearance of 'Iolani great Mike Fetters, who went on to play for 16 years in the major

leagues, and who also played Little League ball in 'Ewa Beach.

In 2008, we threw another Parade of Champions that included Hawai'i Olympians Robyn Ah Mow(-Santos) and Natasha Kai, among others, for the Waipi'o Little League team that captured the state's second World Series crown. The parade culminated with a Sunset on the Beach celebration accompanied by a fundraiser sponsored by State of Hawai'i Police Officers Union to help defray traveling expenses of team members and their families.

My takeaway from the performance of the 2018 Honolulu Little Leaguers was that not only were they amazing

athletes, but they were also outstanding "Ambassadors of Aloha." These young men displayed exceptional sportsmanship, dignity and grace during their pursuit of excellence, and were a tremendous source of pride for all the people of the islands.

Indeed, sports can uplift a community in untold ways. Even as those of us at home were hunkering down for the approaching Hurricane Lane, the Little Leaguers gave us a welcome lift from the worries and concerns of daily life. Just like the storied Fab-5 of University of Hawai'i fame or the winning Rainbow War-



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prior teams of Bob Wagner, Dick Tomey and June Jones, or Dave Shoji's Rainbow Wahine, sports teams can transcend their exploits on the field of competition to symbolize the joys of a community united in its support for those chasing a dream. Besides, you gotta love 13-year-old second basemen/pitcher Sean Yamaguchi's description of his squad — "We're not a team, we're a family" — proving that the family that plays and prays together stays together and emerges as champions in every aspect of life!

Ala Wai Canal A Concern

On the subject of the hurricane, most of the state dodged the worst of the storm, but the Big Island and parts of Maui

and Kaua'i were not spared the heavy rains and windy conditions.

With hotels indicating that reservation cancellations are continuing and businesses in general being down, Hawai'i Tourism Authority needs to redouble its marketing and promotion efforts in our major markets, reassuring prospective visitors that Kaua'i and especially Hawai'i Island are open for business.

Also, during the lead-up to the hurricane, my thoughts kept turning to the plight of Ala Wai Canal. Since 2001, we've known that Congress appropriated \$345 million for an Ala Wai flood mitigation plan, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and local government leading the

way. According to the corps, they've been warning of the flooding danger for years, and estimates that it could damage 3,000 structures, cost more than \$1 billion in repairs, and jeopardize the Waikiki visitor industry and tens of thousands of workers, not to mention the residents who would be placed in harm's way.


Now, more than ever, we need to develop a proactive canal flood mitigation plan with the corps, state and county leaders, and key stakeholders within the community getting involved to provide input. This long-overdue endeavor should be on the front burner of everyone's to-do list.

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