

'Team Igo' – Motivated Bunch of All-Stars

Buoyed by teammate's illness, Central Springfield Majors, reach District 9 finals.

By RICH SANDERS
THE CONNECTION

In the end, Central Springfield's Majors' All-Stars (11-12 year olds) fell just short in their bid to capture the District 9 Little League baseball title last week, finishing second in the 10-team tournament field to the West Springfield Americans.

But what a run it was for the Central Springfield team, which went 6-2 at the tournament and made a strong run at becoming the first Central Springfield Majors' squad in 10 years to win the district crown. The team's All-Star season ended with a 13-0 loss to the West Springfield Americans on Friday night, July 9.

Right from the start of districts, the team, under Manager Vicki White, was extra motivated to succeed and play its best. That incentive came as the result of an illness to team member Andrew Igo, a shortstop/pitcher recently diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma, a form of bone and soft tissue cancer that has resulted in Igo, 13, having to undergo chemotherapy treatments at Inova Fairfax Hospital.

"The kids really wanted to play for Andrew," said White. "They wanted to play hard for him because Andrew couldn't play for himself.

"This was truly a team effort," said White, of her team's outstanding 6-2 record. "If we had been giving game balls after the games, there would have been multiple game balls given. Everyone was selfless and just banded together. There was no arguing and bickering. It's been a long time since a Central Springfield Majors' team went this far at the District 9 tournament."

Igo said it was difficult not to play in the All-Star games, but that he loved watching the games and being with his teammates.

"I enjoyed myself because I like baseball a lot," he said. "We have really [physically] big players on the team and they were real motivated to go to states. They said they wanted to win it for me. I didn't get to watch the championship game [on Friday] because I had a little fever."

It was at about the same time the Majors' All-Star team was selected on June 15 that team members learned of Igo's diagnosis and the likelihood of him not being able to play with regularity in the District 9 tournament.

Igo competed this past spring/summer with the Majors' Mets Central Springfield

house league team, where he was a key player on a club which won several ball games after having won just one game the year before. His postseason All-Star selection was the fourth in four years for the youngster.

While Igo had doctors'



PHOTO COURTESY OF IGO FAMILY

Andrew Igo has the look of a champion after solidly connecting bat to ball.

pre-tournament practices due to his hospital stays and, as a result, thought it unfair to play in any games. He also, naturally, was not at full strength.

But when Igo could he would attend and watch the Majors' All-Star practices, and he also got to most of the games.

"He would sit in the dugout and watch the entire practice," said White. "It was pretty cool. He was at all our games except the last one. He did not play at all [in games] but we let him take some swings during a couple of practices."

He also pitched some batting practice to the league's 9-10 All-Stars team.

"He's a treasure, he really is," said White. "He loves the game of baseball. He plays very hard and is very skilled. He's quiet if you don't know him, but once you get to know him all bets are off. He's a fun-loving kid who loves to laugh and giggle."

A BATTLE CRY by his teammates prior to each inning in the field during tournament games was to surround the pitching mound and to exclaim loudly, "1, 2, 3 Team Igo." Sporting the No. 4, Igo's All-Star game jersey was also placed in the team's dugout as an inspiration and a reminder of their teammate's struggle.

"We brought the jersey to every game," said Jordan McIntyre, the Majors' shortstop



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Members of Central Springfield's Majors' All-Stars team are, from left, front row, Evan Smoot, Aden O'Donoghue and Zane Colza; second row, Manager Vicki White, Justin Maranon, Zachary Branca, Ben Davenport, Tyler McDaniel and Coach Michael Branca; and, third row, Coach Kevin Byrne, Jordan McIntyre, Matthew Bardak, Peter Block, Andrew Trainer and Coach Martin Bardak. Bardak and Block are holding Andrew Igo's jersey, #4.

permission to participate in All-Stars, he had missed several

and son of Manager Vicki White. On one occasion when a team member did not have his own game jersey on-hand for a game, he used Igo's uniform top instead, with the blessing of teammates, fans and, of course, Igo himself.

He missed the Majors' first tournament game as a result of being in the hospital, but the Igo clan — his mother Jeanne, his father Joe and Andrew — received telephone updates of the team's win over Fort Hunt. On another occasion, after getting out of the hospital, Andrew Igo got to a game in time to see the final inning of a Central Springfield victory.

McIntyre, the team's shortstop, said not being able to compete in the games was pretty difficult for Andrew Igo.

"It was sad seeing him sit in the dugout because I knew how much he wanted to play," said McIntyre. "We really wanted to win the tournament for him. We played real good. I just think we were all dedicated and serious to do well for him.

"He's very courageous," said McIntyre, who attended Hayfield Secondary this past school year with Andrew Igo. "He has this illness but would come to every practice and was smiling from ear to ear. I never saw him frown. He'd sit in the dugout and cheer for us. He'd stay until he got tired."

Even though he could not make all of the practices or each inning of all the games, Andrew Igo wanted to be with his teammates whenever possible.

"I think it was important for him to be there," said Jeanne Igo, his mom. "He loves his baseball buddies."

And Andrew Igo is proud of what his teammates accomplished.

"They had a real good team chemistry," he said. "The guys all know each other from long ago. We hang out together sometimes and some of us go to the same school."

ANDREW IGO HAS HAD to endure chemo treatments for four or five day stretches once every two weeks. He and his family have received a wealth of love and support from friends and family. Friends even helped renovate the Igos' downstairs basement into a "man cave" room for Andrew. The basement was re-painted, new furniture was added and a 60-inch television, along with a computer and X-box set, were brought in for the young teenagers' use. It is there, with friends and family members, where Andrew Igo spends much of his time when he is at home.

"It's a place for Andrew to entertain and be comfortable," said Jeanne Igo.

"Andrew is the kindest, nicest, well-mannered boy you'll ever meet," said Jen Bishop, a good family friend of the Igos. "This is a very special family and Andrew is a special boy."

Bishop's daughter, Hannah, has known

"He loves the game of baseball. He plays very hard and is very skilled."

— Vicki White

Cancer Patient Inspires All-Stars

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Andrew Igo since the two were in kindergarten. The families have been close ever since.

Hannah Bishop came up with the idea to have baseball T-shirts made up with the words, "Team Igo" across the front, and "Ewing's socoma, You're Going Down" scripted across the back.

"Hannah said, 'Mom, we need to order shirts,'" said Jen Bishop. "We ordered 50 T-shirts and they went fast."

Throughout the tournament, the Majors' ball players sported the T-shirts during pre-game warm-ups.

Andrew Igo is a Washington Nationals fan and received a huge thrill one day when he was visited in the hospital by Nationals players Ryan Zimmerman and Matt Capps.

"I had just woke up from anesthesia," he said. "My mom woke me up and said the Nats [players] were here. My eyes got real big. They gave me their autographs and a T-shirt. Ryan Zimmerman was real nice and he knew a lot about baseball."

Andrew Igo's favorite all-time baseball player is pitching great Nolan Ryan, whom he has learned about through his grandmother's re-collections. His favorite player on the Nationals is pitching sensation Stephen Strasburg, a fastballer like the great Ryan. Recently, Andrew went to a game in which

Strasburg pitched against the White Sox.

"It was amazing," said Andrew Igo. "He makes batters look silly. He's fun to watch."

Last week, following another Nationals game he attended, Andrew Igo and his family returned home around 11 p.m. Jeanne Igo got a kick watching her son, just prior to bed time, mimicking the pitching motion of Strasburg in front of a mirror.

Jeanne Igo said Andrew, a rising eighth grader, will likely not attend Hayfield Secondary this fall. The plan is for him to be home schooled through a Fairfax County school program.

Jeanne Igo, whose family resides in the Island Creek area of Alexandria off of Beulah Road, is uncertain what lies ahead for her family.

"I think the future's up to God at this point," said Jeanne Igo, who with her family attends St. Raymond Catholic Church in Springfield. "Our friends and family have been incredibly supportive and helpful in whatever they've done, from getting a cleaning service to getting things that will keep Andrew occupied."

Andrew Igo, who first underwent testing in March, has handled his condition as good as could be expected.

"He's had a great attitude and hasn't really shown any signs of depression," said Jeanne Igo. "He's shown spirit. The nurses think he's fabulous."