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Michael Stetz

Fame hits Park View players at young age

By [Michael Stetz](#)
Union-Tribune Columnist

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Call Michael at
619-293-1720

[E-mail Michael \(column ideas appreciated\)](#)
[Bio Page](#)

Like everybody else, I'm on the Chula Vista Park View Little League team bandwagon.

Why not?

For once we have a local team that plays exciting, mash-it baseball. I bet even Petco Park would have trouble containing their sluggers' moon shots.

And they're doing so on Wheaties, not pharmaceuticals.

Even though the team's success ranks up there as one of the best feel-good stories of the year, I still have a couple worries.

Hey, it's my nature.

These kids are getting a ton of attention. ESPN is covering the games live. I look at my newspaper and it might as well be called, *The San Diego Park View Little League Daily*. (Available online, too.)

The Chula Vista players are bigger than Miley Cyrus. I bet babies born in Chula Vista are being named Kiko.

It's not simply that they're winning. Until last night, they were winning in Ruthian ways. Last night's loss to the team from San Antonio was meaningless, since they won their first two by a combined score of 29-0. They're headed to the semifinals tomorrow.

One of my concerns is that this level of achievement comes before they can even shave.

What could possibly compare to this?

Going to a school dance?

Acing a history test?

Hitting a home run during a sandlot game. (“Dude, I hit, like, five of them in the World Series... ”)

I called some Chula Vista family and adolescent therapists to get their take on what's going on and they all think the kids will be fine, as long as everybody keeps what they're doing in perspective.

(Have you seen the Chula Vista game parties?)

“It's important that their parents treat them like normal kids and not like celebrities,” said Lori Linn Pele, a therapist whose specialties include work with adolescents.

“For the kids, it's cool. I don't think they personalize it.”

Well, I hope not.

It has to be tough to get over such heady moments. Once the world is yours, it's pretty hard to give it back.

Look at child stars.

Look at Michael Jackson.

Look at me. (This author once hit a scorching double in Little League.)

But there's nothing wrong with a kid getting a boost for doing something good, said Jose Lichtszajn, a psychologist whose work includes helping adolescents cope.

“Every kid needs that,” he said.

But what about this kind of a boost? Some of the boys may get an inflated ego over all the attention, but he doubts it'll be long-lasting. They have a lot of years ahead of them. They're only 12 and 13.

“Reality will bring them back to reality.”

A lot of this depends on the parents, said Jeff Palitz, a marriage and family therapist. If the parents are balanced, then the children have a better chance of remaining so as well, he said.

If they're cool about the whole thing, stressing that it's just a game, the children will follow suit. If they blow it out of proportion — and some parents surely do — that's a problem.

Palitz is also OK with the burst of celebrity, as long as the children are told how fleeting it is.

Again, parents need to step up and explain this to them. Me? I'd show them a picture of Britney Spears, the one where she just had her hair whacked off.

That would get them.

Another of my worries is that this run could end in a nightmare for one of the Chula Vista kids. What happens if one of the boys botches a play, or strikes out with the bases loaded? Who wants to be the goat?

If that happens, it's important to rally around the guy, to let him know that it's not the end of the world, Palitz said. Failure is part of life, and it's important to learn how to cope with it.

But winning, I fear, could bring problems as well. Success at this level doesn't mean we'll see any of these players on a Padres roster any time soon. (Question: Could current Padres make their roster?)

Will winning give the players a false sense of a fantastic future? Very few Little League World Series players go onto The Show.

But success could trigger other achievements, Palitz said. It could “be a motivator throughout their lives.”

Well, I'm all for that.

So go Blue Bombers. Just remember: You've got 15 minutes. Don't use them all up before you turn 15.

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[Michael Stetz](#): (619) 293-1720