

The 29ers of *Caldwell County, NC*

Editorial and photos submitted by Keith Gray

Caldwell County, North Carolina is home of some of the finest baseball in the state, including the 29ers! The 10U 29ers was originally founded by Gary Hamby, Coach of the state's most successful Legion baseball team, Post 29. The idea of the younger level "prep" teams was to prepare the serious athletes for Legion level baseball at a young age.

The current 10U 29er team, coached by Keith Gray, was originally formed when they were 8 years old. Open tryouts were held and the players with the most talent and/or potential were chosen. The core of the team has managed to stay together making them a very bonded group of boys with great chemistry.

From the beginning the team has been extremely competitive. When they started at age 8 they played machine pitch. Once they moved up to 9U they had to face the new challenge of pitching. In fact, they won



their very first tournament in 9U competition going 6-0 for the weekend! The team is extremely fortunate in the pitching department as most of the 11 players can pitch. Their current record is an impressive 34-12!

The team is an extremely dedicated group and practice most of the winter in a local indoor batting facility, therefore they basically work on baseball year 'round. They manage to do this in spite of the busy life of a typical 10 year old with school, homework, church activities, other sports, etc.

The mission of the 29er Prep Program is not only to teach these young





GANT "PUDGE" SMITH # 25: Catches and plays outfield. Gant is the team's primary catcher. When he started with the team at age 8 he had never played the catcher position before. However, the team needed a catcher so he was willing to "give it a try." He has put in a great deal of time and work and has become a very talented catcher. Gant is a 4th grader at Gamewell Elementary School. Legion Post 29 ball is in Gant's blood as well as is catching; his father was a catcher for Post 29!

GARRISON "CHICKEN WING" BURRESS #33: Plays primarily outfield, due to his speed and strong arm. Garrison is also known for his smile. This kid is always happy! He is a 5th grader at Granite Falls Elementary School in Granite Falls, NC. 29er baseball also runs in this family. Garrison's father once played for Post 29.

athletes an advanced level of baseball but also to teach them sportsmanship, citizenship and the importance of education.

The team is made up of the following players:

CHASE "LIGHTNIN'" GRAY #7: Primarily plays SS, CF and pitcher. Stealing bases is one of Chase's favorite things to do. He loves being a closing pitcher and coming in when the bases are loaded! He is one of the team's stronger batters. He is also quite the soccer player. Chase is a 4th grader at Hudson Elem. School in Hudson, NC and is involved in various clubs and activities both at school and church.

CARSON "CC" VANCE #10: Plays 2nd base, SS, outfield and pitcher. Carson loves to pitch and takes after his cousin who pitched for the Post 29 Legion team several years ago. Carson is a strong middle infielder and plays both sides as needed. He is a hard worker and also excels in basketball and soccer. Carson attends Davenport Elementary School in Lenoir, NC.

JOHN MATT "JMATT" CAMP #8: Plays 3rd base, catcher and pitcher. He is known for his amazing attitude and faith. He is an extremely good student and attends Marion Intermediate School in Shelby, NC. John Matt has a good arm and is a consistently strong player. He travels an hour to practice one way. This exemplifies the dedication required to play at this level.

RYDER "El Gigante" MARTIN #16: Plays 1st base, 3rd base, outfield and pitcher. He is one of the team's stronger batters. Due to his 5'5" size he is quite intimidating on the mound! He is often teased by other coaches and asked to show his drivers license or birth certificate. Ryder is a 5th grader at Granite Falls Elementary School.

NOAH "THUNDER" HANEY #3: Primarily plays 1st base, outfield and pitcher. Noah is as competitive as any 10 year old that you will see. He leads the team in slugger stats and maintains one of the higher batting averages. He also excels in football, basketball, soccer and golf. Noah is a 4th grader at Lower Creek Elementary School in Lenoir, NC.

SAMMY "ONE CARD" ICARD #21: Plays 2nd base, SS and Outfield. This is Sammy's first season with the team but he is certainly not new to travel baseball. He is known for being a team player and his speed. Sammy practiced with the team all winter. In addition to baseball he also plays basketball. Sammy is a 4th grader at Valdese Elementary School in Valdese, NC.

BRYCEN "LIL' BIT" WALKER #2: Plays 2nd base and outfield. This is Brycen's first season with the 29ers as well, and he also practiced with the team over the winter. He also plays basketball and wrestles. Don't let his size fool you, what he lacks in size, he makes up for in heart. Brycen is a good listener and a very coachable kid. Brycen is a 5th grader at Banoak Elementary School in Banoak, NC.

NATHAN "NATE DOG" TREADWAY #44: Plays outfield. Nathan is also new to the 29er family and practiced with the team over the winter. Nathan has a winning attitude and is eager to learn. Another kid that is easy to coach. He also plays basketball and is a good student. Nathan is a 4th grader at Valdese Elementary School where he is the Vice President of the Student Council.

JACKSON "DOWNTOWN" BROWN #34: Plays 1st base, outfield and pitches. Jackson is the newest addition to the 29ers roster however; he started playing competitive baseball at the age of 7. He is a team player with a great attitude. He is a good student who enjoys reading. His hobby is collecting baseball cards. Jackson is a 4th grader at Valdese Elementary School in Valdese, NC.

HEAD COACH: Keith Gray;
Assistant Coaches: Willis Vance,
Eric Smith and Caleb Gray.

