

12U Jackson Bears Purple Travel Baseball Team

Submitted by Tom Kingsbury

The 12U Jackson Bears Purple is a community baseball team from Jackson Township, Stark County, Ohio. Jackson Township is located in Northeast Ohio overlapping parts of Canton, North Canton and Massillon. The Jackson Bears baseball program operates under the Jackson Baseball Association, Inc. (JBA), which is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. The JBA is a volunteer organization that provides baseball for over 900 youth in Jackson Township. The JBA operates a Recreational League that includes teams ranging from 5/6 year old T-ball through 15/18 year old kid pitch, and a Travel League that includes fourteen Jackson Bears teams ranging from the ages of 10U through 14U. All of the Jackson Bears travel teams are 100% community-based teams. There are two to three teams at each age group with the different teams being designated by the colors Purple, Gold and Black, which are the colors of Jackson High School.

The JBA administers the Jackson Bears travel teams through the age of 12U. At 13U, the JBA has partnered with the Jackson High School varsity baseball staff to create a 13/14 Travel Baseball Program. The 13/14 Program was created to emulate a middle school sports program without having the teams fall under school and high school regulations. The high school varsity baseball staff runs tryouts, interviews and selects the managers for the teams and assists in dividing the players between the teams. The 13U and 14U teams work out with the high school coaches and players during the winter and the high school coaches monitor the progress of the players throughout the season.

The 2010 12U Jackson Bears Purple team has been playing together for over three years. Nine of the ten players were together as a 9U All-Star team from the JBA recreational league. As All-Stars, the team played in four tournaments in the NE Ohio area, winning two and finishing runner-up in the other two. The team compiled a record of 18-3 during its 2007 All-Star season.



After the 2007 All-Star season the team added one player and played as a 10U travel team the following season. As a 10U team, the Bears played in the Stark-Summit Baseball League (SSBL) against other teams from the Stark, Summit and surrounding Ohio counties. The team finished in third place in league play with a 10-7 record. The team also played in five (5) tournaments including the USSSA Ohio State Tournament, Battle of the Border, Boys of Summer, Jackson Bowen and the Northwest Tournaments.

In the USSSA Ohio State Tournament, the Bears beat teams from New Albany, Pickerington and Teays Valley in pool play. The Bears ended up with the #5 seed in the field of 40 teams from around the state of Ohio. The team won its first game in the tournament bracket beating the Hilliard Panthers 9-1 before losing to Grove City in the quarter finals 13-10. In the Battle of the Border Tournament the Bears faced teams from Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. The Bears beat the Morgantown, WV Blue and Gold and The Militia from Trafford, PA to earn the #2 seed in the field of 18 teams. The team lost in extra innings in the quarter finals to the Norwin Knights from Huntingdon, PA. In its home Jackson Bowen Tournament, the Bears beat Revere, Aurora and Solon to win its pool. The Bears mercied the Ohio Bombers 15-1 in the semi-finals before beating the Amherst Comets 3-2 to win the 10U Travel Division of the tournament. The team finished its tournament season with a 17-4 record and a 27-11 record overall.

All ten players returned to the team for its 11U and 12U seasons. As 11 year olds, the Jackson Bears Purple team finished with a 30-12 record. The team finished in second place in the SSBL Continental Division with a 12-5 record and went 18-7 in tournament play. The Bears lost in the semi-finals of the Blue Chip Classic Tournament 4-0 to West Allegheny, PA after beating West Allegheny 4-1 in pool play. The Bears earned the 10th seed out of 35 teams in the Battle of the Border beating Twinsburg 6-1 and the Pittsburgh Diamond Dawgs 3-2 in pool play. The 10th seed put the Bears in the Championship bracket where it won its first game 3-2 over the Pittsburgh Prowlers before losing in the semi-finals to the Steel City Riverbats 5-2 in the quarter finals. The Bears earned the #1 seed in the USSSA State Tournament beating Grove City and the Pickerington Predators in pool play. They were knocked out of bracket play in the quarter finals. The team rebounded the next week by defending its title in the Jackson Bowen tournament beating North Canton 9-1 in the Championship game and followed that by winning the Dusty Diamond Classic beating the Lake Blue Streaks in the finals.

As 12 year olds, the Jackson Bears Purple took all comers. As the only community team in the SSBL Open Division, the team finished 8-7. The Bears finished third in a rain-shortened Battle of the Border tournament qualifying the team for the Triple Crown Summer Nationals. Then it made its run at the Nations Baseball 12U Select Ohio State Tournament. The team opened against

Union Post 79 Black. Sam Miller pitched five solid innings striking out four. Dan Platek shut the door in the sixth to give the Bears a 4-2 victory. In its second pool play game, the Bears mercied the Albany Eagles Select 15-3 in four innings. Nate Kingsbury went 3-3 driving in two, Kyle Nicolas went 2-2 driving in two and scoring twice and Sam Miller went 2-3 with a HR and three RBI.

The 2-0 pool play record gave the Bears the #8 seed in the 68 team bracket. In their first bracket game, the Bears gave up two unearned runs in the top of the first before mercying the Stow Bulldogs 10-2 in 5 innings. In the second round, the Bears faced the Copley Indians, who the Bears split two games with earlier in the season. The Bears pounded out 16 hits on their way to a 13-5 mercy of the Indians. Kevin Rieger went 2-3 with two RBI in the win. The two victories advanced the Bears to Sunday.

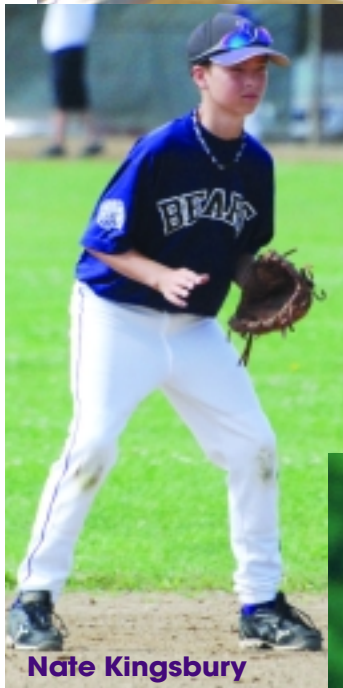
The first game Sunday was a rematch of the first pool play game against Union Post 79 Black. John Colangelo went 2-3 with two RBI, Sam Miller hit his 2nd home run of the tournament and David Smith went 2-2 and scored a run to help the Bears squeak out a 6-5 victory over Union Post. In their 4th round game against the Dublin White Sox, the Bears fell behind two runs for the fifth time in their six tournament games. Behind homeruns by Sam Miller and Seth Reed and three RBI by Dan Platek, the Bears stormed back to mercy the White Sox 13-4 in five innings. The win put the Bears in the semifinals against the Licking County Cardinals.

Continuing their ways, the Bears again fell behind 2-0 to open the game but as in the prior games, the team battled through the slow start. John Colangelo hit his second homerun of the tournament and drove in four, Nate Kingsbury went 2-3 with 3 RBI and Nate Mallue went 3-3 scoring three times and driving in two, including the game winner. The 14-6 victory over the Cardinals put the Bears into the State Championship Game.

After a much needed



Justin Johnston



Nate Kingsbury



Sam Miller



David Smith



Nate Mallue

two hour break from the 90 degree temperatures, the Bears prepared to play the Olen tangy Thunder in the Championship Game. The Bears jumped out to an early 6-0 lead in the top of the first only to watch Olen tangy slowly chip away and cut it to 6-5 after the fourth inning. In the top of the 5th with two on and one out, Justin Johnston laced a single up the middle to drive in two runs to give the Bears some much needed breathing room. Nate Mallue finished the game with four innings of relief holding the Thunder scoreless in the fifth and sixth to seal the victory and State Championship for the 12U Jackson Bears Purple.

The season finale for the team was a trip to Cooperstown Dreams Park. After an opening loss to the Cannon McMillan (PA) Wolfpack, the Bears rattled off five straight wins against the Wheaton Briarcliffe (IL) Blazers, Forest Hill (MD) Express, Long Hill (NJ) Lightning, New Castle (NY) Quake and Asheville (NC) Avalanche. The 5-1 record earned the Bears the #18 seed out of the 103 team field and a bye into the fourth round of bracket play.

In typical fashion, the Bears fell behind the Cape Cod (NY) Eagles 2-0. Kevin Rieger, David Smith and Sam Miller all homered as the Bears beat the Eagles 16-4 in five innings to advance to the round of 32. In a back and forth game against the Mac-N-Seitz (KC) Red Sox, the Bears season and four year run together would end with an 8-6 loss.

A short bio of the players follows (in alphabetical order):
#26 John "JC" Colangelo: JC plays SS, pitches and is the team's backup catcher. JC thrived in the #3 hole this year leading the team in home runs, RBI, runs and stolen bases. JC's 5-1 record tied him for the team lead in wins. John is a seventh grader at Massillon St. Mary's.

#9 Justin "JJ" Johnston: JJ plays 1B, RF and pitches. JJ's unmatched work ethic allowed him to make huge strides in his pitching, compiling one of the best ERA on the team. He's the first one to the field and often can be

found at the batting cages during off days working on his swing. His hard work paid off with a huge two RBI hit in the State Championship game. Justin is a seventh grader at Jackson Middle School.

#24 Nate "Kings" Kingsbury: Kings plays 2B and OF. Being the coach's son he gets moved all over the field and adapts to any position he's put in. A contact hitter who can put virtually any ball in play, Nate hit .524 and drove in nine runs at the State Tournament. Nate is a seventh grader at St. Michael's.

#32 Nate "Nater" Mallue: Nater plays CF and pitches. Nater is the team's leadoff hitter and fastest player. His speed allows him to stretch doubles into triples and track down balls in centerfield that most other players couldn't think of getting to.

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Nater stepped up in the State Tournament to allow one run in eight innings of work and close out the Championship Game. Nater is a seventh grader at Jackson Middle School.

#6 Sam " Bull" Miller: Bull plays SS, 3B and pitches. Bull stepped up as the team's clean up hitter this year hitting .509 with a .884 slugging percentage. As the hardest thrower on the team, Sam was called on to pitch in the toughest games and lead the team in strikeouts, all while battling a misplaced tendon in his ankle during the season. Sam is a seventh grader at Jackson Middle School.

#00 Kyle " KT" Nicolas: Kyle plays SS, 2B and pitches. As the youngest player on the team, KT held his own and then some. Playing primarily the middle infield, Kyle's baseball instincts allowed him to be a part of a team leading eleven double plays and amass a 4-1 record as a pitcher. In Cooperstown, KT's backhand and flip of a grounder started a phenomenal 4-6-3 game ending double play. Kyle is a sixth grader at Jackson Middle School.

#7 Dan " Hollywood" Platek: Hollywood plays 1B, RF and pitches. Hollywood is the team's only left handed pitcher and has one of the best pick-off moves around. Hollywood lead the team with a 3.09 ERA, because when kids did get on base they were quickly erased by his pick-off move. Dan is a seventh grader at St. Joan of Arc.

#28 Seth " Tanner" Reed: Tanner is the team's starting catcher. Tanner emerged as the teams' leader this year picking the players up when things weren't going well. Tanner was a workhorse who rarely came off the field catching 247 of the 286 innings the team played. Seth is an eighth grader at Jackson Middle School.

#17 Kevin " Reegs" Rieger: Reegs plays LF and 3B. Reegs is a tremendous athlete who took the left field position and owned it this season. Reegs chased down balls to the fence, balls in foul territory and developed into one of the best outfielders on the team. Reegs is one of the team's "headiest" base runners. Kevin is a seventh grader at Jackson Middle School.

#25 David " Smitty" Smith: Smitty plays 3B, OF and pitches. Smitty carried the team with his pitching for the first half of the season tying for the team lead with five wins. Smitty's quick reactions make him a perfect fit for the hot corner and his speed allowed him to play any outfield position. David is a seventh grader at Jackson Middle School.

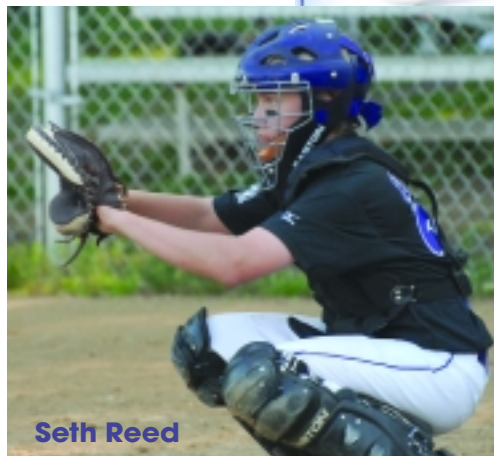
#2 Petey " Lefty" Williams: Lefty plays 1B, OF and pitches. Petey played with the team in Cooperstown and during the team's tournament season. During his limited innings with the team, Petey stepped up when called upon. He got on base, as evidenced by his .614 on OBP



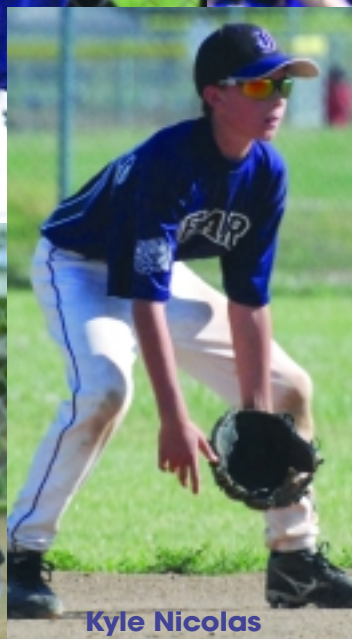
Dan Platek



Petey Williams



Seth Reed



Kyle Nicolas

and threw three innings of no-hit ball against the Asheville (NC) Avalanche in Cooperstown. Petey is a seventh grader at St. Joan of Arc.

Not pictured are Coaches Tom Kingsbury, Todd Nicolas and Andy Smith.

Last but not least are the Bear Families. The families played perhaps the most important role on the team over the years. From the parents and grandparents who got the players to practices and games, to the sibling who made signs, music and cheered for the team, the Bears

were blessed with great family support.

The 12U Jackson Bears Purple finished their four years together with a combined 107-40 record. The team will split up as the players prepare to enter the 13/14 JBA/Varsity Staff Travel Baseball Program. The success of the team can be attributed to many factors. Not the least of which is that being a community program the players are all neighbors, classmates and friends, as well as teammates.

Go Bears!



John Colangelo



Kevin Rieger