

Cougars Conquer Southern California

Submitted by Anne McNally



2007 Lamorinda Cougars

Photo provided

The 11-year-old Lamorinda Cougars feasted on some Southern California competition over the Thanksgiving Day weekend. By winning the USSSA Thanksgiving Super NIT in Chino Hills, the Cougars not only captured the season's most prestigious baseball tournament, they also earned a berth to the Elite World Series in Orlando, Fla.

In the championship game of the Super NIT, the Cougars defeated the San Diego Stars 4-3 behind a strong starting pitching performance by Daniel Slominski. Slominski pitched four innings, allowing one run and striking out three for the win. Matthew Bicker earned the save by pitching the final two innings, shutting down a late Stars rally in the bottom of the 6th inning. With two outs and the tying run at second base, a hard grounder was smashed to the left side. However, third baseman Mitchell Tom made a diving stop and then hopped up to throw the runner out at first base by half a step as the Cougars erupted in jubilation on the field.

The Cougars got off to a quick start in the championship game. In the first inning, Bicker doubled, was advanced to third on a grounder by Joe DeMers, and then scored on a passed ball. The Cougars added two more runs in the third inning as DeMers' triple knocked in Tom and then a grounder by

Slominski scored DeMers. Then, with two outs in the fourth inning, Walter Tucker singled, stole second, and scored on DB Vidal's single for what would prove to be the winning run.

The Super NIT Champion Roster included: Eric Benedetti, Matthew Bicker, Joe DeMers, Drew Downing, Remy Fujioka, Conner McNally, Jake Rider, Daniel Slominski, Matthew Tarantino, Mitchell Tom, Walter Tucker and DB Vidal. With his ten RBI's, a batting average of .588, and a slugging percentage of 1.176, DeMers was named the tournament's most valuable player.

Also batting over .400 were Tucker (.500), Benedetti (.455) and Bicker (.438). Tarantino's seven RBI's in a limited role due to his injury trailed only DeMers. Bicker led the team with nine runs scored, followed by DeMers and Tom with seven each and Vidal with six. Downing who pitched in the pool-play rounds didn't allow any earned runs during the entire tournament and Fujioka pitched four strong innings for the semifinal win. Bicker (5) and Tucker (4) led the team in steals. The defense was led by the brilliant catching of Benedetti and Tom. Consistent and solid middle-infield play was provided by Vidal, Bicker and McNally who were filling in for the injured Tarantino. Game-saving outfield plays

were made by Slominski and Rider.

Since the start of the Fall Baseball season, the Cougars have won two of three 12-and-under Tournaments and are six for six for 11 U Tournament, including the State Championship and the Las Vegas Desert Classic. The Cougars, who won the Northern California Fall Championship in October, currently hold title to the most important fall tournaments in both Northern and Southern California. They are currently ranked #2 in the Country behind the North Carolina Angels.

The Cougars will now begin preparations for a trip to the Elite World Series in Orlando in July where the best 24 teams in the country will assemble for a week-long tournament to decide travel baseball's national champion.