

Ocracoke Raptors Capture Little League Championship



Photo by Jacqui Kalna.

Ocracoke's first ever Little League Baseball Team ended their inaugural season as Champions in the Hatteras Island Cal Ripken/Babe Ruth League, 10-12 age group. Finishing second in the regular season, they entered the playoffs on a hot streak, winning four of their last five games. Not bad for a group of boys who only had two players of the fifteen with any prior experience. Most of the boys had only played a few games of softball while in the Cub Scouts and four or five games in last summer's Baseball 101 camp organized by Karen Lovejoy. Despite the inexperience and the lack of a regulation field to play on, the boys really showed their true grit, determination and love for the game day in and day out.

Graciously, Mr. Keith McDermott allowed the team to practice in his front yard. Brian Samick, one of the coaches, put his carpentry skills to work and made a portable wooden mound so the pitchers could simulate real game settings.

Head Coach Bill Cole paced off the distances between the portable bases and although left field was woefully short with an old cedar in the middle of it, McDermott Field was created. And what a home it turned out to be for the boys who practiced at least twice a week in between the twelve regular season games. John Kattenberg and Vince O'Neal were the other two coaches who help drill the team on base running, batting, pitching and game situations as such they could with field limitations. Also lending their baseball experience to rookie ears and eyes were Matthew Sitterson and Adam Carter. Most of the team participated in the Pitch, Hit and Run prior to the season opener and some actually won and placed in the individual categories. It is now clear that this was a indication of the talent and determination this group possessed. The team then had a one game pre-season scrimmage with the Hot Rods of the HI League prior to the season opener, so they actually got to

play on a real field for the first time.

After a Season opening tie against the STORM, the Raptors showed a lot of resiliency and always seemed to bounce back as they and their Coaches learned the rules of official Little League Baseball. Every player played and batted every game and most played more than one position as having fun and sportsmanship was stressed by the coaches. And what fun and lifetime experiences did this fine group of kids have with their story book ending.

They really became a solid team as they worked their way through the double-elimination Championship Tournament. After beating the STORM in the opening playoff game, they twice had to knock off the top ranked Braves. After topping them in the second round game by a 13-4 score, the RAPTORS won the Championship game in a 14-13 thriller with the winning run driven in by Jordi Perez. What a fitting ending to a thrilling season by

a history making group of Ocracoke Island boys.

Many thanks need to go out in addition to the faithful fans who crossed the inlet to support the team. The team and coaches express much gratitude to Mr. McDermott for the field and the Ocracoke Civic Club for their sponsorship. Also to HI Little League President Rusty Wilkinson and board member Kathy Tawes for all their help.

The future looks bright for baseball on Ocracoke as the hope of finding a regulation field has all involved dreaming of playing on our own home field. Also the coaches are already making plans are for additional age group teams so all boys and girls on the island can enjoy America's favorite past time.

By Vince O'Neal

