

SPORTING GOLD

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Youth Baseball Teams Fall Short of World Series

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After summer-long seasons, two Sacramento-area baseball teams were eliminated from regional tournaments on Aug. 3 after making valiant runs at a World Series berth. The Rocklin Little League Junior All-Stars (13-14 years old) and the 18-and-older California Cobras proudly represented Northern California in an attempt to win a national title.

In the Western Regional tournament held in Aliso Viejo, Calif., the Rocklin Little League All-Stars lost to Southern California representative Rancho Santa Margarita 18-8 to finish pool play 3-1. Both teams carried the same record after game's outcome, but Rocklin did not advance to the championship game played on Aug. 4 because it lost the tie-breaker, which was based on the team's runs allowed ratio. The winner of the championship game held the right to travel to Taylor, Mich., to play in the Junior Division World Series held from Aug. 10-16.

"I think the overall feeling was disappointment," Rocklin coach Eric Hall said in a phone interview. "All the parents and the community have a lot of pride for how far the kids went and their accomplishments.

ON THE COVER: Clockwise from top left: Rocklin's J.R. Robinson celebrates with his team after a homer; Rocklin's Zach Green tags out a runner; Cobra John DeCarlo picks off a runner; Rocklin's Carson Wittwer pitches; Cobra Dustin Stoddard pitches. (Rocklin Photos Courtesy David Kinsella, Cobra Photos Courtesy Bob Stoddard)



Steve Camillucci slides home during a recent game for the California Cobras. (Photo Courtesy Bob Stoddard)

In the same sense, it's the disappointment with being knocked out by the tie-breaker of the runs allowed ratio."

Rocklin Rollin'

The Rocklin Junior All-Stars won their district, sectional and divisional tournaments on their way to the regional tournament. After going undefeated during district and sectional play, the Rocklin All-Stars lost for the first time, a 6-1 loss to the Tracy All-Stars in divisional play on July 22. Hall could tell that his team wanted to make a comeback in that game but was not able to because it was in unfamiliar territory.

"It wasn't until the game after that against Almaden [on July 23], when we were down 3-1 in the sixth inning, that I saw the fire in the eyes of the kids and the sense of playing in an adverse situation," Hall said.

Rocklin went on to win that game 4-3 after Sean Kinsella's walk-off RBI-single in the bottom of the seventh inning.

"That game was the turning point of the team. It was really what brought the kids together on a higher level," Hall said. "Aside from baseball, it was a great experience for a lot of kids because it furthered and developed relationships."

Out of the loser's bracket, Rocklin then topped Tracy in consecutive games to win the Division II tournament on July 25.

Hall said that the majority of the players on the team will be playing for Rocklin High School this upcoming year as freshmen or sophomores, while a couple will be attending Whitney High School and one will attend Jesuit High School.



Carson Wittwer unloads for a homer during a Rocklin victory in July. (Photo Courtesy David Kinsella)

"I think that the opportunity to play together through the month of July with very skilled baseball players puts them that much further ahead for when they start playing with each other in high school because they know each other's characteristics and nuances," Hall said.

Cobras Struck

In the American Amateur Baseball Congress Western Regional, held at McAuliffe Fields in Sacramento, the Cobras lost 6-2 in the championship to Fontanetti's, which earned the winner a spot in the World Series held in Huntsville, Texas. The Cobras collected a 3-2 win over the Sacramento Legends in 15 innings and a 2-1 victory over the Pasadena Redbirds before losing to Fontanetti's two consecutive times in the double-elimination tournament.

The Cobras were made up a group of collegiate players from Northern California – the majority of which are from the surrounding Sacramento area – looking to develop their skills during the summer before returning to school in the fall. Many of the players attend junior colleges while a few have signed intention letters to play for Division I schools. Their manager was impressed by the way they operated as a working unit during play this summer.

"They got together like they had been playing baseball together their whole lives," Cobras' manager Mike Breining said via a phone interview. "I think this is really going to help the guys roll into the fall season on their college teams because at that is really when your tryout is, at that

level. They'll have a chance to stand out in that first week of practice."

"No one outside of the Cobras' organization would have predicted that this first-year collegiate team of young, local guys would have had a chance to even participate in postseason games, or certainly to have had the success they did against teams that recruit ball players from Division I schools around the country," Breining wrote in an email to *The Union*.

Even without a national title in the trophy case, these two teams raised eyebrows as representatives of the Sacramento-area baseball community.

For more information on the Cobras, visit the team's Web site at www.cobrasbaseball.us. For more information on the Rocklin squad, visit www.rocklinllb.com.



Cobras' infielder Luke Gadow chases a runner. (Photo Courtesy Bob Stoddard)