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Shelton hoping for the Trumbull experience

By Dave Solomon , Sports Columnist

Tom Galla understands, as few others can, the prescient comment made by Shelton National manager Ed Szymansky Saturday, minutes after his team qualified for the Little League World Series.

Szymansky said that the lives of his Shelton players will be changed forever by their upcoming experience in Williamsport, much as the lives of the little leaguers from Trumbull — and their manager Tom Galla — were changed in a wondrous, magical way 19 years ago.

“Your wedding, the birth of your children, the birth of your grandchildren ... and then the 1989 Little League World Series is right there,” said Galla Monday night. “It was as good as it gets. Actually for me, it becomes a bigger deal the more time that passes. And it’ll be that way for Shelton.”

Galla said that Shelton Little League is comparable to Trumbull for the professional way it conducts its business, adding, “I have a lot of friends over there and I couldn’t be happier for them. They deserve everything they’re going to get and I hope they win the whole thing.”

Galla is in the process of planning next year’s 20th anniversary of Trumbull’s 5-2 win over Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in Williamsport behind the five-hit pitching of current New York Rangers star Chris Drury and a cast of 11- and 12-year-old kids with exceptional talent and poise.

Oddly enough, it was years before those kids truly understood the extent of their achievement, wrestling back for the United States a title that had belonged in the hands of either South Korea or Taiwan the previous five years.

“The awe of it didn’t really come into play until years later,” said former Trumbull first baseman Ken Martin, who hit a solo home run and drove in three runs in the championship game. “At least for the players, we were very wrapped up in playing and sort of being 12 years old. We were very much sequestered. We played in Bristol, we left the day after on a bus and we basically were in army barracks for two weeks. We just played baseball and goofed around. I think we were too naïve to realize what we did until later.”

There’s no defining date as to when the enormity of the achievement hit home, but Martin remembers being at Providence College and meeting new people from other parts of the country. The name recognition with Trumbull was immediate.

They’d ask him if he knew any of those guys who played on that championship team.

Both Martin and Dave Galla, the team’s second baseman and son of the coach, singled out one vivid memory of the actual Little League World Series that has remained with them for nearly 20 years. When the bus first arrived at Williamsport’s Lamade Stadium, it parked on the hill high atop the majestic stadium.

“That was kind of a culmination of everything we did,” said Dave Galla. “That was awe-inspiring. And I also remember stepping on the field and looking around and seeing 40,000 people. As a 12-year old, that’s pretty cool.”

He said that people bring up the Little League World Series almost every other day in some shape or form, and perfect strangers will tell him exactly where they were when

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Trumbull beat Taiwan.

It's as if Neil Armstrong had walked on the moon that day.

"I don't know why, but they still remember us," said Dave Galla. "And that's a good thing."

Dave Galla's reputation as one of the fabled Trumbull little leaguers carried right to the University of New Haven where he played for three years for the inimitable UNH former head coach Frank "Porky" Vieira. You can probably guess where we're going with this because if you know Vieira, you can just hear him reminding Galla about his Little League championship pedigree after every less-than-productive at-bat.

"Yeah, he may have mentioned that once," said Galla sarcastically.

You mean after every time you made out?

"You got that about right," Galla laughed.

And you know what? A hard-boiled baseball man such as Vieira would be the first in line to tell you that what Trumbull accomplished in 1989 is worthy of people's utmost respect and reverence.

Even Drury, with international fame as a New York Ranger, to this day has people come up to him to talk about his, and their, Little League experiences. Drury even joked that he meets tons of people who tell him they were one out away from getting to the Little League World Series — much like Ron Darling says he has talked to about 50,000 fans who saw him pitch, in person, against Frank Viola at Yale Field in the greatest college baseball game ever played in 1981. That's a lot of people for an old ballpark that wasn't even filled that day.

"It is amazing," Drury said of the attention he still gets for his exploits as a kid. "It's everywhere ... and it's close to 20 years ago now. I guess (the Little League attention) is kind of surprising, but baseball is so huge," added Drury shortly after being traded to the Rangers last July. "Everyone plays Little League in one form or another."

And of those tens of thousands of youths who play Little League baseball each and every spring, every one of them has the very same dream that Trumbull lived: to play in the Little League World Series.

A dream now being lived by Shelton.

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