

LETTER FROM THE TEAM

Hillcats Fans,

Thank you for your continued support of the Lynchburg Hillcats.

When we purchased the team in October of last year, we knew there was work to be done to get the fan experience up to our standards. Fortunately for us all, we inherited a dedicated staff that shares our goal of making our team the best family-friendly entertainment available to the 434.

During this season, you'll begin to notice small improvements and changes to the fan experience. These will include more affordable food and concessions offerings to our community, new artwork around the stadium, and a reimagined game area for fans of all ages. At the completion of the 2025 season, we will embark on a major stadium renovation made possible by the dedicated efforts and support of the Lynchburg City Council.

Along first-base, we plan to add a second floor covered bar and lounge stretching down the concourse, a new picnic area along the right field foul line, and a new carousel and carnival area beyond that. Along the third-base concourse, we plan to add a new two-tier bar and over-21 lounge area. Finally, we will replace all of our bleachers with food and drink rail seating and add new cabanas in the main seating bowl. As you can see, the scope of our project is expansive and we hope you become as excited as we are to see it completed before the start of the 2026 season.

Our family has had roots in Lynchburg for three generations and we are very fortunate to help write the next chapter of baseball in lynchburg.

Warmly, Dylan, Holly, Abby, Olivia, and Ivy Narang











HILLCATS CLINCH PLAYOFF SPOT

The Lynchburg Hillcats celebrated the first-half crown with a heart-racing 2-1 victory over the Carolina Mudcats on Sunday afternoon.

Coming into the series, the Hillcats needed to sweep the series to clinch on their home field. Facing the division leaders since the start of the season, Lynchburg rattled off six in a row at home to take the title. In addition, they extended their season-high win streak to nine games.

For Lynchburg, it will be their first postseason appearance since 2022.

Lynchburg would do early damage in the first inning. Despite losing their leadoff runner on a failed double steal, the Hillcats would still score two on a Luis Merejo two-run single up-the-middle.

From there, it became a pitcher's duel. Lynchburg and Carolina each had opportunities with runner's in scoring position, but each time, they came up empty.

It was not until the seventh inning when Carolina would scratch across their first run. After a triple from Reece Walling off the center field wall, he would scamper home on a wild pitch, cutting the deficit to one.

Carolina would have another chance in the eighth with a runner in scoring position, but Luis Flores would strike out the final two batters of the inning to leave the runner stranded.

Then in the ninth, after two quick outs, an error allowed Carolina another runner in scoring position. With Jesus Made at the plate, he would ground sharply to third. Alberto Mendez gathered and rifled a dart to Robert Lopez at first to clinch the first half title.

The party commenced and the champagne flew as Lynchburg secured their first postseason trip since 2022, which will begin on Tuesday, September 9. Ticket information for the Divisional Round will be provided at a later date.

Lynchburg travels down to Augusta and Charleston over the next two weeks before returning to face Salem July 1-6 at Bank of the James Stadium. Tickets to see the first half champs are on sale at Lynchburg-hillcats.com.



Family Owned & Affordable

PLAYING ON HIS LAST SHOT

You would be hard-pressed to find someone more grateful to be on the mound than Donovan Zsak.

Drafted in the eighth round in 2024 out of Rutgers, Zsak recognized that this moment wasn't always a guarantee. In fact, there was a time when he considered quitting baseball altogether. However, it is that moment that has paved the way for the positive emotions in which he exhibits now, through all the ups and downs of a Minor League Season.

"Early in the season, I really struggled here," Zsak said. "I was like, you know what? I'd rather struggle than be in a cast or a sling and not play at all."

Zsak grew up in New Jersey and, from a young age, his arm was what set him apart.

"I remember playing center field, being in the outfield," Zsak said. "I always remembered I had a good arm, so I just always had that with me."

He grew up a diehard Yankees fan, idolizing the likes of Brett Gardner and Bryce Harper. At the time, his dreams involved roving the outfield of Yankee Stadium. As he got older, his coaches began realizing that the mound may be his calling card.

His father, Don, was a pitcher in college, and was the person who influenced his love of the game. Despite trying his hand at other sports, Donovan realized that baseball had a pull on him like no other. By the time he reached high school, he began to realize he had a shot of turning the sport into a career.



"In high school, I was throwing pretty hard on the mound, getting close to 90 miles an hour," Zsak said. "I realized this could be my ticket."

It did not take long for others to take notice as well. As a freshman, Zsak committed to the University of Virginia, a regional baseball powerhouse in the ACC. They barely saw him pitch before offering him a scholarship, which he quickly accepted.

With UVA in his corner, Zsak continued his high school career. Though, despite the joys of his freshman year, his sophomore season brought a lot more heartache.

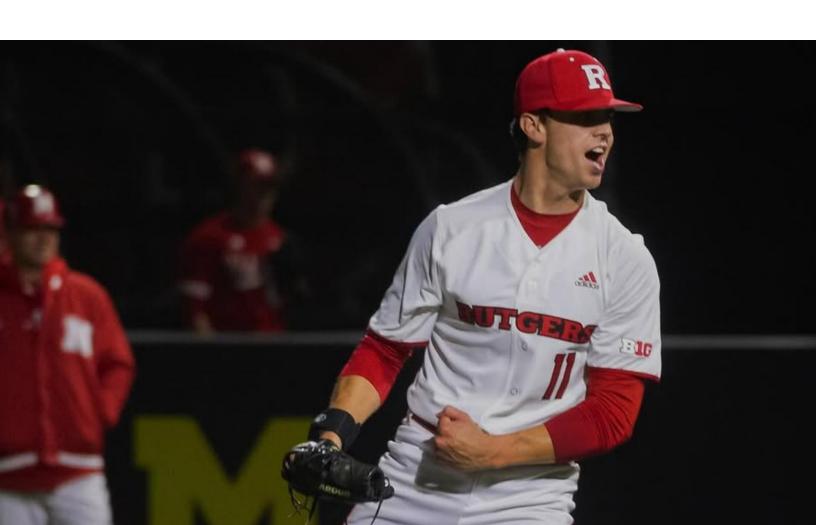
At the start of his sophomore season, Zsak suffered a UCL tear, which required surgery. The surgery, more commonly known as Tommy John surgery, set him back two full years, as he not only missed sophomore year, but his junior season as well.

"I was scared and didn't know what was going to happen," Zsak said. "I was 16 and you never expect you're going to hear that you need Tommy John surgery."

Despite being sidelined for two years, Zsak worked hard to make sure he could return to the mound for his senior season. Through the recovery process, UVA stuck with him, and he felt destined to become a Cavalier.

However, his senior season had different plans. On July 10, 2022, he tore his UCL for a second time, requiring another surgery.

"That was probably the lowest point of my baseball career," Zsak said. "I was super disappointed. I didn't know if I was going to keep playing."





At the Major League level, numerous pitchers have undergone multiple Tommy John surgeries. Names like Jacob DeGrom, Walker Buehler, and Dustin May fit the bill. As a high schooler, though, a second Tommy John surgery in as many years is often the end of the line for most pitchers.

"The second one definitely hurt worse," Zsak said. "I was like, damn, I worked really hard, and it didn't really work out in the end."

UVA decided to revoke his scholarship right before he moved to Charlottesville, crushing the dream and certainty he had since his freshman year.

Now, with a freshly repaired elbow, Zsak thought about how he wanted to proceed. Despite dreaming of making a comeback, he settled on attending Rutgers as a normal student. Only 15-minutes from where he grew up, it was a chance for him to start fresh.

He ended up getting ahold of the coaches there and explained the whole situation. They were able to get him into the school in time for the first day of classes, and when September rolled around, he finally caught the

The Scarlet Knights had an open roster spot and asked Zsak if he would join the team.

This was not the end of the road, as he still had to redshirt his freshman season while he recovered. This time, the program stuck with him.

"I love Rutgers," Zsak said. "Super fun school, but also great teammates and great coaches. These guys allowed me to play and work in rehab with Big 10 trainers, so that helped a ton."

The coaches recognized Zsak's talent. As a hard-throwing, lanky, lefty reliever, he slotted nicely into the Scarlett Knights bullpen. They kept pushing him to give it his all, understanding how lucky he was to have recovered for a second time.

"They were like, 'you've got one shot at baseball, just give it everything you've got," Zsak said. "I took that mentality and ran with it. Baseball was going pretty bad, but I always knew and had a feeling that it would work out in the end."

He turned that motivation into an outstanding season with Rutgers. He finished the campaign having made 19 appearances, earning a 3-1 record with a 4.11 ERA. In addition, he racked up 39 strikeouts across 35 innings of work.

Since he was so limited in his pitching over the last four years, he decided to go to the Cape Cod League to get some additional reps. He ended up only making two appearances for the Bourne Braves when he heard his name called in the 2024 MLB Draft.

"When I got the call saying that the Guardians were going to take me with their next pick, I was super happy, so excited," Zsak said. "My dad was crying, and it was such a good feeling because all the hard work paid off."

The decision to turn pro was easy for Zsak. With everything he had been through, he did not want to waste this opportunity.

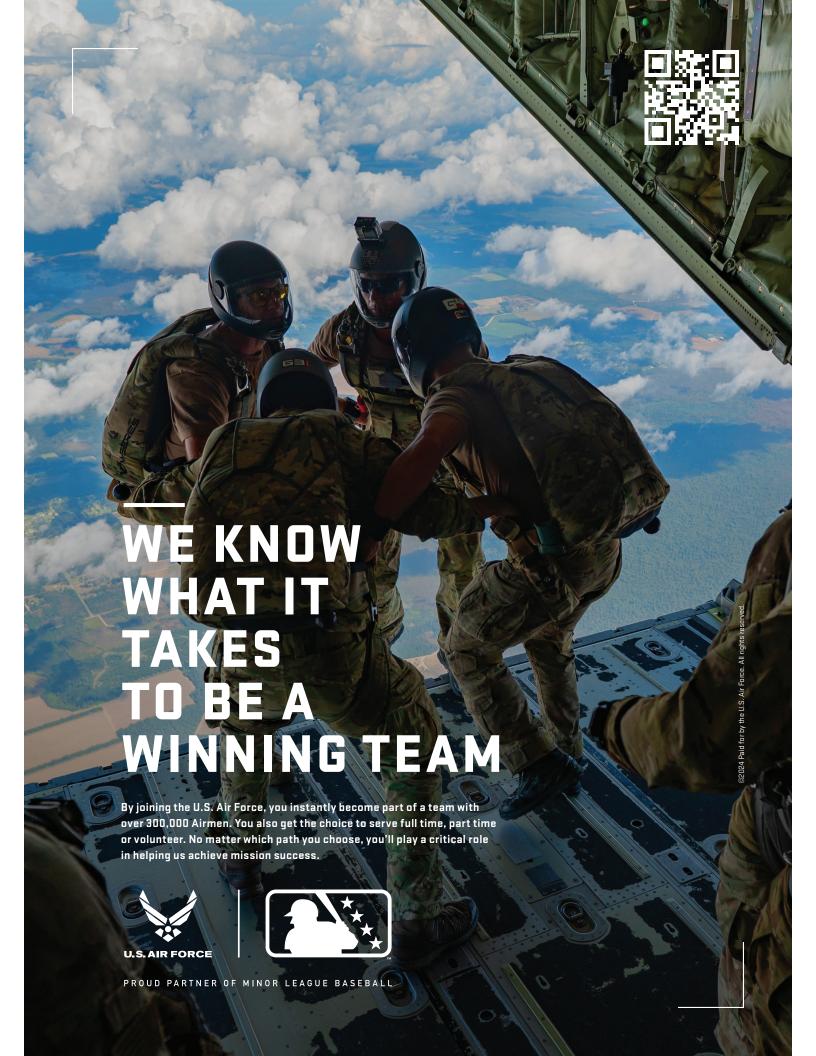
"I knew if I had a shot to play pro baseball, I was going to take it," Zsak said. "I just wanted my shot to play pro, so I'm taking it and running with it."

He was quickly assigned to Lynchburg after the draft, posting a solid 1.86 ERA across seven outings of relief. This season, he started slow, but in the middle of June, he had dropped his ERA to 5.73, with 32 strikeouts, over 19 appearances.

Looking back, Zsak has been able to put his whole journey into perspective: He's making every moment count.

"You're going to have bad games, and you're going to have tough times and difficulties," Zsak said. "You just gotta take these games with a grain of salt and just be happy you're playing."







Oakie stood out the most in a deep 2023 Area Code Games, striking out five of the 12 batters he missed while reaching 96 mph and throwing some unhittable sliders. He also excelled at the 18-and-under World Cup that fall and while winning Gatorade Iowa high school player of the year accolades last spring. The state's highest-drafted prep pitcher since 2014 (Mitch Keller), he signed for a well-over-slot \$2 million as a third-rounder.

Oakie featured one of the best sliders in the 2024 Draft, a mid-80s weapon with two-plane depth and plenty of horizontal movement. It works well in tandem with his two-seam fastball, which sits at 92-94 mph and tops out at 97 with considerable armside run and sink. He has begun to work on a changeup with similar action, though it was too firm in high school and he barely used it in games.

While Oakie doesn't have an ideal starter's delivery and needs to provide more consistent strikes, he does have a quick arm and works with little effort. He adds deception with a flat approach angle that could be conducive to throwing a four-seamer with more velocity and carry up in the zone. His competitiveness and work ethic contribute to his mid-rotation upside.

Courtesy: MLB Pipeline





The Lynchburg Hillcats are thrilled to announce several new changes coming to the ballpark for the 2025 season.

With single game tickets on-sale today, fans can explore all the new additions to the organization, from our ownership down to our gameday operations.

New to the club this year is Dylan K. Narang, who has taken over ownership of the team. Narang is no stranger to professional baseball, having served as a minority owner of the Albuquerque Isotopes before selling his stake at the start of 2024.

A Virginia native, after graduating from UVA's School of Commerce in 2002, Narang enlisted in the U.S. Army. After his active service he pursued an MBA from Georgetown University and earned a commission in the U.S Army Reserve. In 2011, he completed an MFA from Chapman University, coinciding with the creation of his own media production company, Foggy Bottom Pictures.

Narang, who currently resides in Washington, D.C., purchased the club from the Elmore Sports Group, who concluded a nine-year run as owners of the Hillcats.

The sale of the organization ushers in a new era of baseball in the Hill City, with a renewed focus towards creating a family friendly atmosphere. New for 2025, the organization is proud to announce a large-scale reduction in concessions prices to make Lynchburg baseball affordable with an eye on families.

Furthermore, summer nights at the ballpark just became a lot cooler, with the installation of a new soft serve ice cream machine. Fans can enjoy cups each night throughout the season.

Finally, the Hillcats are installing a new in-house dining option serving Mexican cuisine.

Beyond the concessions stand, the Hillcats are building the best promotional calendar in team history. This season, the schedule includes nearly 20 giveaways and a dozen fireworks shows. Giveaways include jersey and t-shirt giveaways, campfire mugs, and multiple hat giveaways.



schewels home



VOTE FOR PLAYER OF THE YEAR

The Lynchburg Hillcats are excited to bring back one of the traditions from our past this season.

Lynchburg and Arthur's Jewelry are teaming up to bring back the Hillcats Player of the Year! Fan's in attendance at Bank of the James Stadium will have the opportunity to place their vote for which Hillcats's player they believe deserves the award.

As part of the award, both the player and one of the fans that voted for them will receive a free watch, courtesy of Arthur's Jewelry. The award and the watch will be handed out at Fan Appreciation Night on August 31st.

Arthur's Jewelry is a family owned and operated jewerly store located in Bedford, Virginia. Located at 111 N Bridge St., Arthur's Jewelry is the communitie's home for engagement rings, fine jewelry, and diamonds.

Fans can cast their vote for Player of the Year by visiting the promotions booth located on the concourse during any of the Hillcats home games in 2025.



HILLCAT ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: CJ KAYFUS

There may be no player in the Guardians organization who has made a faster rise than CJ Kayfus.

After being drafted in 2023, he was initially assigned to join the Hillcats. He did not spend much time in the Hill City, but in his limited action, he left his mark.

After being drafted in the 3rd round out of the University of Miami, Kayfus only made 17 appearances for the Hillcats in 2023. However, he found a way to slash a ridiculous .271/.429/.542 through the month of August and September. In addition, he demonstrated some late game heroics on several occassions, demonstrating a flair for the dramatics.

Upon leaving Lynchburg, all he did was hit.

In 2024, he began the year with Lake County, where his OPS was over 1.000 through 40 games. He earned the right to be called up to AA Akron, where he continued to impress with an OPS of .836.

In college, he was never considered a power hitter, but he worked on that skill before being drafted and it came to fruition in his first full Minor League Season. In 2024, he also crushed 17 home runs across the two levels.

Those numbers have continued into 2025, and have even jumped to a new extreme. He began the year back with the RubberDucks, however, after only 18 games, it became clear that Cleveland could not keep him there.

He arrived in AAA Columbus in late April, and he just picked up where he left off. So far, as of June 17, he has a slash line of .320/.389/.585 with the Clippers.

Now, on the cusp of the big-leagues, Kayfus has made his case for a mid-season call-up. Though he still finds himself behind a few platoon players at the Major League Level, the former Hillcat appears ready to make the jump.

After being unranked when drafted, he currently sits at 5th in the MLB Pipeline Guardians prospect rankings. Though none of his graded tools pop off the page, Kayfus continues to impress.

It's only a matter of time when his fast rise culminates in an MLB debut.





HILLCATS STATEMENT ON FORMER MANAGER TONY MANSOLINO

Former Lynchburg Hillcats manager Tony Mansolino has been named the interim manager of the Baltimore Orioles.

Mansolino is the last Hillcats skipper to lead the team to a Carolina League Championship, which he did during his lone season at the helm in 2017. That season, he led Lynchburg to a record of 87-52 while defeating the Frederick Keys to claim a share of the league crown. The Championship series against Down East was cancelled due to Hurricane Irma, and both teams were named co-champions.

In addition, Mansolino was named the Carolina League Manager of the Year for his performance.

"Although Tony was with the Hillcats for just a season, his impact was great," Hillcats owner Dylan Narang said. "In his only year with the Hillcats, Lynchburg finished with the best record in the Carolina League - a feat the Hill City had not seen since 1992. Additionally, the Hillcats were Co-Champions of the league and that honor is no doubt due to Tony who was also named Carolina League Manager of the Year. We wish him great success as he takes another step forward as interim manager of the Baltimore Orioles."

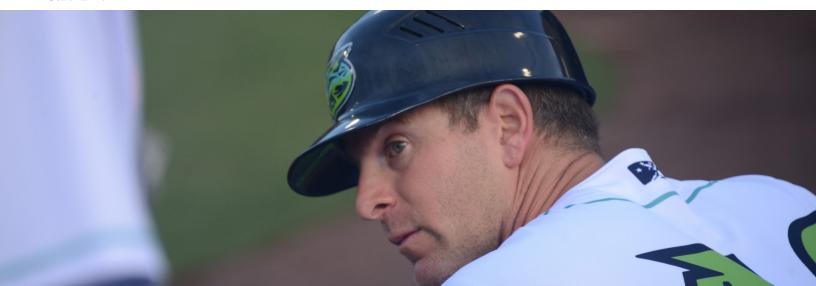
Following Lynchburg, Mansolino would continue to climb the ranks with the Cleveland Indians organization (now named the Cleveland Guardians), culminating in serving as their interim third-base coach during the 2020 season.

Following the season, he was hired by the Orioles, becoming their full-time third-base coach, where he remained until this season.

"I'm excited to see Tony take on this new opportunity with the Baltimore Orioles," Ryan Henson, the Hillcats clubhouse assistant in 2017, said. "After spending a season in the clubhouse with him in 2017, I saw his work ethic and drive on full display. He was easy to work with and well deserving of his new role."

Mansolino replaces Brandon Hyde, who was fired following a slow start to the season from the Orioles. He now has the chance to guide young stars such as Gunnar Henderson, Jackson Holliday, and Adley Rutschman in their professional journeys.

The Lynchburg Hillcats are proud that his journey to the majors began within the confines of Bank of the James Stadium.





NEW FOR 2025





COOPERSTOWN FEATURE: REMEMBERING THE CANNON 5TREET ALL-5TAR5

By BRUCE MARKUSEN

By 1955, Jackie Robinson had established himself as one of the game's all-time great second basemen. A number of other Black players had followed him to the National and American leagues during that eight-year span that began with Robinson's entry in 1947. The list of African American pioneers to debut during that time included Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks, Roy Campanella, Larry Doby, Monte Irvin, Willie Mays, Minnie Miñoso, and Don Newcombe, just to name a few.

Yet, at other levels of the game, all was not well. In some southern minor leagues, Jim Crow segregation persisted. And at the amateur levels, large pockets of discrimination prevented young Black players from participating in the game. One of the problem areas involved Little League Baseball, particularly in the South.

In 1955, Little League sanctioned only one southern-based league that featured Black players. That league was located in Charleston, S.C. In 1953, the YMCA had chartered that league, making it the first African American Little League in South Carolina's history. Out of that league came a team called the Cannon Street All-Stars, located at the Cannon Street YMCA, who registered to compete in Charleson's city-wide Little League tournament.





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One of the 14 players on the team, John Rivers, remembers the atmosphere surrounding the Cannon Street team and the YMCA. "Well, it was a great community," Rivers told historian Larry Lester during a 2023 oral history interview. "Of course, you understand it was under the laws of Jim Crow and segregation, but our neighborhood was very rich with love and care for one another."

The Jim Crow realities of Charleston would soon come into play. Sixty-one other teams, all white, were scheduled to take part in the city tournament, but when they learned about the inclusion of the Cannon Street club, they all withdrew from the competition. "Little League issued 62 charters to the state of South Carolina for leagues," Rivers explained in his interview with Lester. "62 leagues. We were one of em. So 61 were all white and one was Black, and we were that charter, the Cannon Street Y. And we had all the rights and privileges under that charter. And Little League, when it started in 1937 I believe, they have in their bylaws and the rules, there's no segregation, no discrimination, all that stuff. So they had the same charter, but I guess they didn't realize the policy, Little League's policy was no discrimination. So that's kind of what opened the door for (Cannon Street YMCA president Robert) Morrison to enter us into playoff. And of course they wouldn't play. They wouldn't play us." With no other teams willing to participate, Cannon Street was declared the winner, by forfeit, of the city tournament.

In the meantime, the situation only hardened in Charleston. Although Little League Baseball, citing its own policy banning racial discrimination, had ordered the other teams to play in the city tournament, their managers and coaches had steadfastly refused. The team managers eventually seceded from Little League Baseball and chose to form their own segregated league.

Eventually becoming known as Dixie Youth Baseball, that organization still exists, though its segregationist policy has long been abandoned.

As Rivers recalls, the Cannon Street All-Stars prepared to play in South Carolina's state tournament, but opposition teams took the same approach as the opponents in Charleston.

"They're like, oh no, it ain't going to happen. Whites don't play Blacks. So they walked out. So we won the state by default forfeiture. And the next stop was Rome, Ga., where the regional, Southeast regional was being played. And our coaches said, we'll go to Rome. And of course, Rome pulled the rule books out, and they found some paragraph in there that says a team cannot be seeded if they hadn't played a game to advance to Rome. Well, we didn't play a game, but it wasn't our fault. It was a convenient way out of not seeding us."

Little League President John McGovern tried to justify the ruling by saying that teams needed to win games on the field, and not advance by forfeit, in order to move on to regional play. That declaration officially ended the Cannon Street All-Stars' season, thereby preventing the Charleston club from participating in the Little League World Series.

As part of a large public outcry, some members of the media railed against Little League Baseball. They included famed baseball writer Dick Young, who called for McGovern to resign his position as the head of Little League, citing his inability to follow his own organization's ban against racial discrimination.

With a public relations disaster in the making, McGovern quickly came to regret his decision. Hoping to offer a partial remedy, he invited the Cannon Street All-Stars to come to Williamsport to watch the Little League World Series. (Expenses were paid by Cannon Street YMCA President Robert Morrison and civil rights leader Esau Jenkins.) Prior to the championship game, the Cannon Street team was allowed to practice on the field and was introduced by the public address announcer. Moments later, fans began to chant, "Let them play, let them play." Instead, the Cannon Street All-Stars watched.

To make matters more frustrating, Little League's governing body eventually declared that Cannon Street's 1955 championship was not official and would not be formally recognized in Little League records.

According to Rivers, he and the other players chose not to talk much about the situation, but that did little to ease the pain of what they had to endure.

"So we didn't talk about it. So it tells me how painful it was. We didn't express anything about it... And we never blamed. We went on to other things. I went on and played two more years of Pony League baseball on segregated [teams], on the opposite side of town, and concentrated on my doing well in school. Those were the things that we did to compensate for that disappointment. And fortunately, it paid off for most of us. I think everybody did reasonably well. [Rivers himself became a successful architect.] What was also painful, and on a side note when this was happening, my dad was in Korea. He's in the Army. He's defending the United States of America in Korea... and he reads a clipping about his son back in America – the country that he's fighting for – is not allowed to play baseball because [of] the color of his skin, that's painful."

In 2002, Little League Baseball finally addressed the Cannon Street dispute by inviting the players from that team to Williamsport. There they were introduced to a crowd of fans and treated to a standing ovation. More importantly, the players received a championship banner recognizing their state title, which was now officially restored to the record books.

For many, the awarding of the banner and the correction of the records had come too late in the story, but they at least ensured that future generations would recognize an undeniable fact: The Cannon Street All-Stars, and no one else, had won the Little League championship for the state of South Carolina in 1955.

Bruce Markusen is the manager of digital and outreach learning at the National baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

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CAPTION

The Cannon Street YMCA All-Stars were invited to the 1955 Little League World Series, practicing on the field and watching as spectators but unable to play. (Little League Baseball and Softball)



SOUTHPAW'S FUN ZONE

