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KENT LITTLE LEAGUE: Kent Seniors brace for state



Kent's Austin Benson has reason to smile. Benson and the Kent Seniors Little League All-Star team, a group comprised of 14-16 year olds, will play in the state tournament beginning Saturday, July 11. COURTESY PHOTO/D1 Photography

By **ERICK WALKER**
 Kent Reporter Sports reporter
 Jul 16 2009, 12:23 PM · **UPDATED**

The numbers don't lie.

But in the case of the Kent Seniors — Kent's veteran Little League All-Star team comprised of kids between 14 and 16 years old — those numbers don't necessarily tell the entire story. Sure, Kent outscored its opponents at the district tournament two weeks ago 43-6. And, yes, the boys from Kent won the championship, throttling

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As good as Kent did offensively and on the mound, it might be the defense that stood out most.

"We have great hitters who make contact and don't strikeout, but we had one error in all four games (combined)," said Kent coach Kevin Vallala. "It was incredible."

The Kent team is hoping to continue its incredible ways beginning Saturday, July 11 when it opens the 13-team state tournament at Bothell High School. Kent plays Grays Harbor at 3 p.m. in its opening game. The tournament runs through July 26 with the winner earning a ticket to the regional tournament in Ontario, Calif.

"I haven't seen the rest of the (state), but I don't know of a better group of kids," Vallala said. "They play the game the right way."

That was evident during the district tournament. Not only did Kent play near flawless defense, the pitching staff — a group that goes 11 deep, Vallala insists — peppered the strikezone for four straight games.

"We had very few walks and made them put it in play," Vallala noted.

Jessie Keliiliki, who also plays center field, emerged as the ace of the staff as he picked up a pair of wins at the tournament.

Offensively, Kent was led by DJ Vallala, who hit .630, and Kevin Clutter, who anchored the middle of the batting order. However, there wasn't a single player on the roster that didn't deliver during the district tournament, when Kent hit .400 as a team.

The key now is keeping that momentum going at the double-elimination state tournament.

"I think the only way we'd have any issues is if we beat ourselves," Vallala said. "The first (game) will be the biggest one."

SHORT HOPS

- **COACH:** Kevin Vallala.
- **RECORD:** 4-0.
- **ACE ON THE HILL:** Jessie Keliiliki, RHP. Keliiliki will run it up there around 78-80 miles per hour, hit his spots all day long and doesn't get rattled. Keliiliki picked up a pair of wins in the district tournament.
- **BIG BOPPERS:** DJ Vallala, Kevin Clutter. Vallala delivered a sweltering .630 batting average during the district tournament while Clutter proved to be the RBI machine in the middle of the order.

Kent Reporter Sports reporter Erick Walker can be reached at ewalker@kentreporter.com.

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