

Little League Cheats Don't Win the Day

BY MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

Danny Almonte was the 14-year-old pitcher who tore his way through the 12-and-under Little League in 2001, winning all 17 games he played. This disgraceful episode of cheating was perpetrated by Danny's father, who forged a birth certificate, and Rolando Paulino, a man with a long history of cheating who founded a league he named after himself.

Little League president Stephen Keener put it plainly and accurately: "Clearly, adults have used Danny Almonte and his teammates in a most contemptible and despicable way. Their actions are reprehensible."

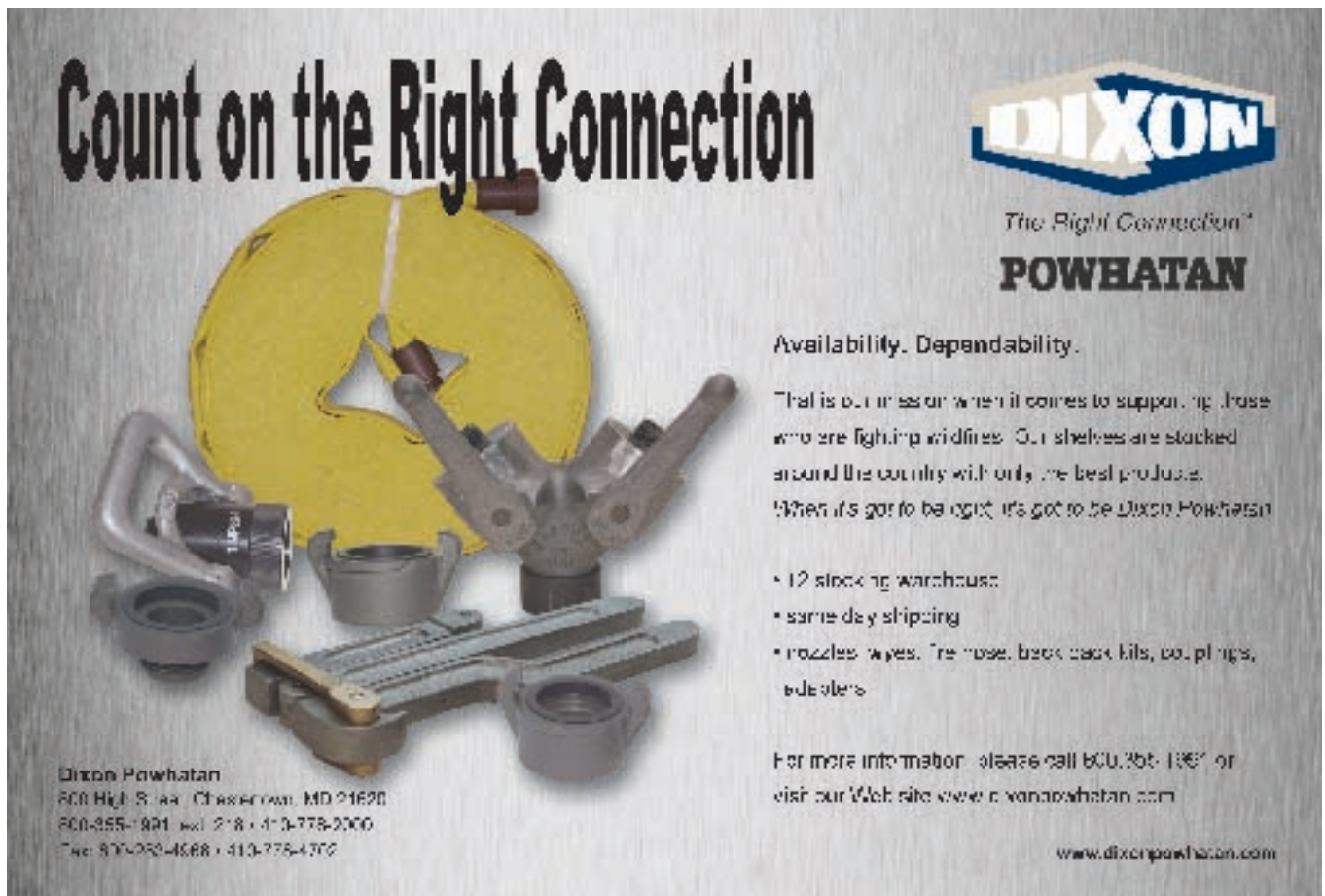
It added fuel to the fire to learn that Almonte and Paulino had done the same thing with Danny's older brother. The scary thing is that the scam almost worked. The team placed third in the World Series, losing only because Danny could not pitch every game, and Danny received the kind of fame that legends and very large signing bonuses are made of.

Diligent efforts of suspicious opponents to prove Danny

was a ringer had consistently failed. Only the persistence of a *Sports Illustrated* reporter uncovered the truth. To those who minimize the two-year difference, keep in mind that by pretending to be a 12-year-old, Danny could throw his 70-mile-per-hour fastball from a mound 40 feet away. If he played kids his own age, it would have been 60 feet.

Paulino and the Almontes stole opportunity from every team they played, but to the credit of the Little League organization that has fought mightily to assure that fair play and sportsmanship prevail, and some really classy parents and kids from College Park, Pa., and Oceanside, Calif. (teams that suffered elimination in the regional and national finals), the virus of cheating failed to destroy the gratitude and good memories of the boys who played it straight. ■

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