

**FEBRUARY 8, 2007**

## Baseball Team Honored For 2006

A successful 2006 season has carried over for six local baseball players, who were recently honored as part of a Triple Crown Sports 10-year-old team. Participating alongside players from around the area, the Cheshire youngsters were excited to take home a pair of honors at the seventh annual Northeast Sports Awards from Wading River, New York on Jan. 20.

The Connecticut Naturals were chosen as the Northeast's 10-and-Under and Overall Team of the Year out of 875 squads across the region. Cheshire residents Rocco Davino, Daniel Lawler, Matt Millea, Matt Muzyka, Michael Purcell, and Jonathan Rizzo felt that the awards rewarded their hard work after spending six months in off-season preparation.

"It felt really good," said Millea, a versatile player and key lead-off hitter for the Naturals. "I'm proud of the team's accomplishments."

Many players trained diligently with Head Coach Paul Cambra throughout the off-season. Transforming a professional swing into a 10-year-old body, the Naturals excelled with power hitting including 34 home runs over 200 feet.

"I felt proud for the kids because they worked hard all season long," said Cambra, who works at Ultimate Sports and Training in Wallingford. "It's (team awards) a tough honor to get so we were very surprised."

Finishing with a 53-19 record and number seven ranking in the world, the Naturals won a collection of tournaments on their way to Cantono, Puerto Rico for the American Amateur Baseball Congress (AABC) World Series. They compiled a 1-2 record in the double-elimination event including a 12-5 victory over Illinois.

"It felt great to play against teams from around the country," said Lawler, a pitcher. "I hope that we can keep winning in the future."

The Naturals earned an appearance in Puerto Rico after going undefeated (5-0 record, July 14-21) in the AABC North Atlantic Regional tournament. Manny Cruz, a key addition during their championship run, pitched a 4-0 shutout over Clarkstown, New York in the title game.

"The kids from the draft are going to stay with us because they enjoyed working with Paul (Cambra) and being part of our team," said Lawler, who is excited about this spring.

Scheduling conflicts with Little

League left the team short-handed for the AABC state tournament, held from July 5-8. Missing five starters from their line-up, the Naturals rallied to win the title (4-2; 4-1 record) in their second victory over the Cheshire Reds.

"I really enjoyed the state championship game because we had to come from behind," said Purcell.

The team advanced to the statewide event on the strength of a 14-1 record in the Connecticut Sportsplex League. Ending as the national runner-up in the Triple Crown Sports League, the Naturals compiled a 15-1 record over three tournament titles (Early Bird, Spring Frost, Memorial Day) and they also took second at an 11-U event (Myrtle Beach Tune Up).

"It was a little tougher, but the pitching wasn't that much harder because we were used to the fast speed," said Millea, of playing against older kids.

The Naturals also traveled to Cooperstown, New York for the Dreams Park national tournament. They earned a 6-3 overall record, finishing 32nd out of 96 teams.

"It was pretty sweet," said Purcell, who took second overall in the Home Run Derby contest. "It was tough, but I couldn't have done it without Paul (Cambra) and his facility."



Photo courtesy of Ralph Pizzuti

Members of the Connecticut Naturals 10-and-under baseball team pose with their trophies at the Northeast Sports Awards, held on Jan. 20. Pictured, are front row (from left): Rocco Davino (Cheshire), Dylan Reynolds, Matt Millea (Cheshire), Douglas Schaffer. Middle row: Michael Purcell (Cheshire), Daniel Lawler (Cheshire), Mike Acampora. Top row: Head Coach Paul Cambra, Assistant Coach Dan Lawler.