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Bob Avery takes a practice swing with the commemorative baseball bat he received as a member of the 1952 Norwalk Little League all-star team that won the Little League World Series in Williamsport. He loaned the bat to the Norwalk Museum for its "Sports in Norwalk" exhibit in 2009. The bat had been stored away for the last two years, but returned to Avery over the weekend. His name, and that of all his teammates, were engraved on the Louisville Slugger.

Bob Avery was reunited with his Little League bat over the weekend. This was no ordinary bat, mind you.

No, this was the special commemorative bat Avery and his teammates on the 1952 Norwalk Little League all-star team received after winning the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pa., exactly 60 years ago Wednesday.

That date -- Aug. 29, 1952 -- still rates as one of the all-time great moments in Norwalk sports history. That's why Avery, an outfielder on that team, had loaned the bat to the Norwalk Museum back in 2009 to be part of its "Sports in Norwalk" exhibit. The exhibit ran until January 2010, right about the time Avery moved upstate to Berlin.

The bat, with every Norwalk player's name engraved on it, was safely stored away for the last two years. But on Saturday morning, it found its way back to its owner.

"It feels great to have it back again," Avery, now 72, said as he took a couple of practice swings in the parking lot at City Hall where the reunion took place. "This bat is going to my son's house in Fairfield and in a case right above his fireplace."

Avery and the rest of those 1952 "Boys of Summer" representing the Norwalk National Little League took everyone by surprise by winning 11 straight games. Back then, all tournaments were single elimination.

"One loss and you were out," Avery pointed out.

Pool play? The term hadn't even been invented yet.

No, there was no room for error 60 years ago. Avery and his teammates played 11 games -- three in the districts, three in the states, two in the regionals, and three more in Williamsport -- and they won all 11.

"It's some accomplishment," Avery said proudly. "But I don't know if we could do that good today. The rules are so different now. When we played, a pitcher couldn't pitch two days in a row. Now a pitcher can throw a few innings one game and a few innings the next game."

True, but like everything else in sports, it's all relative, and in 1952 that Norwalk team was the best. Or at least the most resilient. They came from behind in nearly half their games.

But under the guidance of manager George Buschbaum and his assistant Jack Sutton, they always found a way to win and advance. All 12 players contributed, but no one more so than Ralph DiMeglio.

In fact, the Norwalkers could have been eliminated in their very first game if not for DiMeglio, who hit two home runs, drove in all four runs, and pitched the last inning in a 4-3 come-from-behind win over Park City American of Bridgeport.

In the district championship game, DiMeglio threw a no-hitter while Julio Landa, the other star on the team, belted a two-run homer as Norwalk beat Stratford 2-0.

In the state championship game in Naugatuck, DiMeglio hit a pair of solo homers while pitching a three-hitter with 10 strikeouts as Norwalk beat East Hartford 2-0.

"A few years later, I played with Ralph on Strawberry Hill in the Recreation League and during batting practice we used to put three guys on the street over there to catch the balls he would hit over the fence," Avery said with a laugh as he sat on a bench at City Hall and pointed to the outfield where he used to play. "He put one on the porch of that house way out there."

After DiMeglio helped Norwalk wrap up the state title, the locals beat Pittsfield, Mass., 4-2, in the regional semifinals to set up a showdown against Fall River, Mass., for the right to go to Williamsport.

"That's one of the things I remember most because it was the only time our coaches ever got mad at us," he said. "The game was in Woburn, Mass., and we stayed at the Boys Club. The coaches stayed downstairs while we slept in the gym. They had a pool room right near the gym and we played pool all night.

"When the coaches found out the next morning, they said you guys didn't get much sleep and they made us take a nap at 11 o'clock before our game. Ralph DiMeglio pitched for us and the first batter up for Fall River hit a home run.

"George Buschbaum was so mad. He said if you guys lose this game I'll never forgive you. We ended up winning 17-1."

With that, it was off to Williamsport and the Little League World Series.

"The biggest thing I remember was playing our first game and there were maybe 7,000 people there," Avery said. "They announced Norwalk, Connecticut, and we came running on the field from the center field fence."

The car loads of fans from Norwalk had plenty to cheer about as the local all-stars came from behind in all three games. In its first game, Norwalk trailed Whiting, Ind., 6-0, but rallied to tie it on a DiMeglio grand slam. Then after falling behind again 7-6, Landa belted a three-run homer in the fourth and Norwalk added an insurance run in the fifth to pull out a 10-7 win.

The Norwalkers came from behind again in the semifinals to beat San Diego 3-2, setting up a championship game matchup against Monongahela, Pa. And once again they fell behind, trailing 3-2 before rallying for two runs in the bottom of the sixth for a dramatic 4-3 victory. Norwalk, Connecticut, was the 1952 Little League World Series champion.

"We never gave up," Avery said. "Even when we were down 6-0 that one game we never gave up."

But Avery also admits he and his teammates never had any expectations. They never thought about getting to Williamsport.

"We had fun, that's all," he said. "We knew we were good, but we just played one game at a time. One bad game and you were out. Nowadays a team wins two games and they talk about going to Williamsport. We never really thought about it. Where do we go next, that's all we thought about."

Where the Norwalk Little League all-stars went next after winning the World Series was a series of guest appearances.

"We went to Yankee Stadium and each of us got an autographed baseball from the '52 Yankees," Avery recalled. "We also went on a bunch of shows.

We went on the (Yankees') Tommy Henrich TV show and Joe DiMaggio's TV show. We also went on Happy Felton's Knothole Gang (Dodgers' pregame show) at Ebbetts Field. We met Duke Snider and Pee Wee Reese."

Avery stayed in contact with several former teammates over the years and 10 years ago, on the 50th anniversary, some of them even got together for a brief reunion.

But it's been harder the last few years as some of the players from that '52 team are no longer around.

"In the last five years I've been to four funerals of former teammates," he said. He mentioned Julio Landa and Harry Brower and Pete Pollard.

The last funeral he went to this past June, however, was the toughest. It was for his twin brother John, who moved to Florida 17 years ago.

"He was on the team, too, but you could only have so many players on the roster," Avery explained. "So they made him a bat boy and he came everywhere with us."

Shortly before he passed away, John Avery's grandson, pitcher Matt Iannazzo, signed a pro contract with the Chicago Cubs organization.

"That was about a week before he passed away and he was so happy when he heard that, and I was happy for him," Bob Avery said. "He even wore a Cubs hat for a couple of days."

It was just one more reminder that time marches on. But with every passing year, that Summer of 1952 becomes even more special.

It'll be 60 years on Wednesday, but for Bob Avery the memory is still as magical as ever.