



between the lines

ROBIN BRINKLEY

Equipment volunteer needed to step up to the plate

I still have the baseball glove I wore in Little League. It's a Roger Maris signature Spalding.

The leather is dry and cracked as a desert creek bed. But if you hold it to your ear – like a seashell – you can almost hear Phil Rizzuto's call of Maris' historic 61st home run.

The glove is worth \$25 on eBay – and a whole lot more to a Dominican boy with dreams, but not means, of becoming the next Alex Rodriguez.

He won't get my Maris glove. Everyone is allowed to keep one artifact of their youth. But I have a garage full of bats, cleats, shirts and caps that could use new homes.

That's how Stephen Pindar of Oneonta, N.Y., felt when he founded the Baseball Equipment Project in 1999. He's shipped tons of used and new equipment throughout Latin America.

Last year, Pindar merged his group with one run by Steve Tremiere of Newtown, Pa. The new initiative, called Roberto's Kids, has the backing of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and the sons of Hall of Famer Roberto Clemente.

Larry Padersky had never heard of Roberto's Kids when he was helping to

Want to help?

What Roberto's Kids distributes new and used baseball equipment to children in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

Call Larry Padersky at 651-5066 or larry@danvillesales.com.

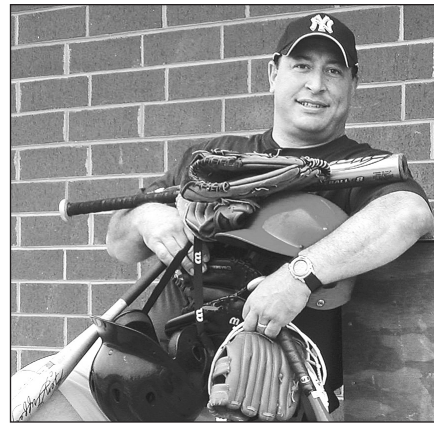
Details For more information on Roberto's Kids, visit www.robertos-kids.org.

clean out the equipment shed at Great Neck Pony Baseball last fall. But he knew that Virginia Rush conducted a used soccer cleat collection each year, and wondered if someone did the same for baseball equipment.

He went on the Web and discovered Roberto's Kids. Padersky, 43, made his first shipment of equipment last November, then approached Great Neck's board of directors about establishing a formal program.

A large wooden bin was placed next to the concession stand for people to drop off contributions. Padersky, who coaches his son, Zachary, 8, on the Pinto Yankees, attached posters explaining who Clemente was and the purpose of the program.

"It's worked out great," he said.



ROBIN BRINKLEY

Larry Padersky set up a donation bin at the Great Neck Pony Baseball concession stand so that used equipment can be donated to the Roberto's Kids program.

Every two weeks Padersky cleans out the bin and mails the contents to Pindar. He's shipped about 80 baseballs, 50 helmets, and hundreds of shirts and pants, along with various others items totalling 640 pounds.

Roberto's Kids operates in 23 states and Canada and Pindar's goal is to distribute 100,000 pounds of equipment this year. Most will go to Latin Ameri-

ca, but he's received requests from Africa, India and Israel.

Roberto's Kids doesn't reimburse volunteers, so Padersky has picked up the shipping costs for Great Neck. It's a small price, he believes, to teach kids about helping others, while learning the history of the game.

Roberto's Kids is not named for Clemente by accident. The native of Puerto Rico died Dec. 31, 1972 in a plane crash while delivering relief supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

Major League Baseball recognizes that sacrifice with the annual Roberto Clemente Award. It honors a player who demonstrates commitment to community and understanding of others. New York Mets first baseman Carlos Delgado won last year.

Padersky, a manufacturer's rep for Danville Sales Co., doesn't volunteer to win awards. But like Clemente, he'll soon be missed.

He's being transferred next month to New Jersey.

"I hope someone will step forward and take over," Padersky said. "It's been very satisfying for me."

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KELLAM SOCCER

Self-effacing O'Neal looking with team at a title

By Barbara J. Woerner
Correspondent

Ask Aaron O'Neal how he's doing, and he'll mention that every starter on the boys soccer team at Kellam has scored this season.

He'll tell you that team co-captain Matt Hampton has provided exceptional leadership. That the top-ranked Knights are a team, and how thrilled he is to play with his best friends, Hampton, Harrison Myrdal and Jordan Martin.

"We've been playing together since rec league soccer," said O'Neal, "and we're having a great year as a team."

Only then will O'Neal talk about himself. The center-midfielder was All-Beach, All-Region and All-State last year, and is a good bet to repeat.

His 12 goals tie him with Chandler Barton for the team lead.

"He's the best player I ever coached," Kellam's Craig Powers said. "When he's on the field, he's on a different level, and even if he's not scoring he makes an impact."

There's only one thing missing from O'Neal's high school soccer resume.

"We're kind of looking at the last shot for Kellam to win a state title," he said.

O'Neal said he feels the pressure, even though Kellam entered Thursday's game against No. 5 First Colonial at 12-1



Aaron O'Neal

overall and 8-0 in the district.

"There is pressure on us as a team to continue to play well, that's a given," said O'Neal. "Every game we just want to continue to move forward."

O'Neal, who also plays for Virginia Rush's U18 Nike, has signed with Boston University.

"I still can't get enough soccer," he said," he said. "I like it because you play in a system, but you don't have to run plays."

O'Neal said his father, Dallas, is the person he most admires.

"My dad told me lots of stuff when he was coaching me and I wouldn't listen," he said. "Then I would hear the same thing from other people. I found out he was usually right, so I'm listening now."

He said his parents have always supported him in soccer. Last year, they got up at 4 or 5 a.m. on Saturdays to get him to Richmond for Olympic Development Program soccer.

"Playing in that was so demanding," said O'Neal. "It's a faster pace, and I learned to cope during a higher level of soccer."

"I love playing tournaments. You have to play your hardest and you have to play well."

O'Neal is looking forward to playing in three tournaments in the next three weeks: district, region and state.

"I'm looking forward to going all the way to state and being part of a team that brings back the state soccer championship," he said.

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