

Mets Welcome Kids to Citi Field

By Anthony Sulla-Heffinger New York Post August 8, 2012



Mets stars, past and present, welcomed dozens of kids to Citi Field on Wednesday to spend a day living the dream. The Mets partnered with the Cory Lidle Foundation and Tuesday's Children, which helps children of 9/11 victims and first responders, to offer a baseball clinic, hear motivational speakers and attend batting practice as well as the Mets game on Wednesday night.

Over 80 children from both charities took part in infield and outfield drills alongside Mets players, including Mike Baxter, who was a 16-year-old at Molloy High School when the 9/11 attacks happened.

"It's great to meet with the kids because I feel like I can relate to them a little bit more," Baxter said. "Everytime we get kids out here, it's exciting and to be a part of that means a lot to me, to interact with them on our field, because I know I would have loved to get on the field at Shea. This is something I can do and one of the perks of being with the Mets."

The children enjoyed getting to experience what the players go through on a daily basis.

"It's like being in the major leagues," John, 11, said. "I learned that if you don't catch a fly ball with two hands, the ball will pop right out of your glove."

After the on-field clinic, the kids were treated to snacks and heard from motivational speakers including former Mets pitcher and current SNY analyst Ron Darling, who shared his experience growing up as well as some stories from his playing days and what life is like now that he is broadcasting.

"I want to announce a championship team," Darling told the kids. "Johan [Santana]'s no-hitter is the closest I have come to that so far."

While most of the kids were never able to see Darling pitch for the Mets, they did pick his brain and asked who his favorite Mets player is this season.

"My favorite player when he came up this year is Kirk Nieuwenhuis because he has a combination of great athletic skill and toughness," Darling said. "I think he can be a really good ballplayer, he's one of my favorite young guys."

Darling even admitted that he learned a thing or two from being around the Mets team.

"The other day I had a conversation with Johan Santana," Darling said. "When you're around him it's like being around pitching royalty. You think you know a lot about pitching but then he teaches you something new. I like being around the guys who teach you things."

On hand were members of Cory Lidle's family, notably his wife Melanie, son Christopher and his twin brother Kevin. Lidle began his career with the Mets in 1997 and the team helped orchestrate the event for the foundation named after the late pitcher who tragically died in a plane crash in 2006.

"The Mets said whatever you need, we'll do it," Dave Blatcher, who works with the Lidle Foundation, said. "The team has been 100 percent on board with us and with Tuesday's Children. Everything has been streamlined so perfect by the Mets. They have provided everything that we've asked for on and off the field and they are a wonderful organization."

"It's like two different worlds, from one side of the coast to the other, and it's neat to get [the

kids] together for the same reason and to get them out there and play on the field," Melanie Lidle said. "It's a great experience that most kids don't get to have and it's great to see it."

The Mets have worked closely with Tuesday's Children in the past to aid and provide for children who lost parents in the 9/11 attacks as well as those whose parents were among the first responders after the terror attacks decimated lower Manhattan.

"The Mets have been a partner since the beginning [of Tuesday's Children], sponsoring programs, donating money," Brian Curtis, a Tuesday's Children board member said. "The partnership would not have gone on this long if the people in charge of the Mets didn't believe in what [Tuesday's Children] was doing. You're talking about a partnership that hasn't wavered in 10 years."

The day was one the kids are not soon to forget.

"It means so much to these kids. This is something the kids are going to remember [for the rest of their lives]," Curtis said.