

NEWS > CALIFORNIA NEWS

Orange County kids get Big League encounter with Angels' Mike Trout



Frank Macuil, 11, is all smiles as the Angels' Mike Trout signs his cap at Gamers Only Baseball Training Center in Anaheim, California, on Thursday, August 3, 2017. (Photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **GREG MELLEN** | gmellen@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: August 3, 2017 at 5:45 pm | UPDATED: August 3, 2017 at 11:33 pm

0 COMMENTS

ANAHEIM — Although he was attending a youth hitting clinic, Antonie Smith brought not one but two gloves with him. The 12-year-old from Fountain Valley had

the rare opportunity to meet his hero, Angels star center fielder Mike Trout, one-on-one.

Trout signed a baseball for Smith and then the gloves. The second glove was special. Smith had sneaked away from his home in the morning with the glove belonging to his 6-year-old niece, Kalani Smith.

“It’s a surprise. I’m going to give it to her tonight,” Smith said. “It’s a secret.”

Although Smith said he was “a huge fan” of Trout, he said his niece, who went to preschool with a member of Trout’s family, was also a big fan.



1 of 13

The Angels' Mike Trout signs signs a ball and a glove for Anthonie Smith before talking to visitors at Gamers Only Baseball Training Center in Anaheim, California, on Thursday, August 3, 2017. (Photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)



Smith and his Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County mentor Drew Tighe met Trout up close on Thursday, Aug 3. Trout stopped at the Gamers Only Baseball Training Center in Anaheim, where several hundred children and their parents congregated. Representatives from several charities that help at-risk children, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and Olive Crest, also attended.

Trout, 25, said it was important for him to attend such events when time allowed.

“It’s cool,” he said. “It’s always good to see kids and give back.”

He said he was happy to be an available role model to the kids.

“I’m just a normal guy,” said the two-time American League MVP. “They all have dreams, just like I did.”

Trout arrived at the baseball facility about 12:45 p.m. in his green Ford Raptor truck. After a short media session and a couple meet-and-greets, he sat down for a question-and-answer session with the children.

He told them about the importance of getting good grades and doing homework before play and working hard and striving.

He answered questions ranging from what he has for breakfast and his favorite sports drink.

Not all the questions were softballs.

One young fan asked if Trout was going to play his whole career with the Angels.

Trout hedged but said he was very happy with the team.

An astute young fan, aware that Trout missed more than a month with a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his hand, asked how his thumb felt.

Trout laughed and said it was good.

After the question-and-answer session, Trout signed autographs and posed for photos with everyone who wanted them before hopping into his truck to head to Angels Stadium.

What was the most valuable lesson of the day from Trout?

“It was mostly to get good grades,” Smith said. “I’m going to really think about what he said about bringing up my grades.”

Tighe, from Costa Mesa, has been Smith’s “match,” as the organization calls them, for six months. He said he joined Big Brothers Big Sisters because, “I thought this was the most immediate way to have impact on kids.”

Smith, who doesn’t have a father in his house, had high praise for his mentor.

“This is probably the best big brother in the whole universe,” he said. “He’s a great guy. He’s like very kind-hearted and very open-minded.”

The day wasn’t just for children. Alex Schechter, 18, part of a contingent from Olive Crest, came from San Clemente with his foster family.

August 4, 2017

Schechter said he was removed from his mother's care when her drug addiction took over. Olive Crest stepped in and helped place him with a caring family, he said.

With the support he has received, Schechter said he will be attending Saddleback College in the fall.

"It's a great opportunity to be here and meet him," he said of Trout.

Another member of Big Brothers Big Sisters on hand was Frank Macuil, 11, of Santa Ana. He had his Mike Trout jersey and an Angels hat signed. He also had a signed ball, but gave it to his match Joe Mauriello, 59, of Huntington Beach, so that Mauriello could present it to an ailing 3-year-old.

Macuil said he was nervous meeting Trout.

"I've never seen a major league player," he said.

He was looking forward to showing his autographs to his family.

"They'll be, like, wow," he said.