

Haddon Heights Softball Star Forms Special Connection With Second Grade Fan



The past few weeks will stay with Maddy Clark forever.

Clark, a junior on the Haddon Heights softball team, drew plenty of admiration for putting team above self when she shifted from pitcher to shortstop during the course of the season as freshman Sophia Bordi emerged as a star. It was particularly classy since Clark was an All-South Jersey pitcher in 2021.

The payoff was not only a Group 2 state championship, but the Tournament of Champions title as well for Haddon Heights, as Clark's bat and glove and Bordi's arm propelled the Garnets to unprecedented glory.

"I would do anything for my team," Clark said. "I've always had that mentality. Of course I want the ball in my hand, but I just knew this was what the team needed and I was happy to do it."

As great as that was, it was far from the only thing that has made the month so memorable for Clark, who has already made a verbal commitment to play at Lehigh.

On June 3, the day before Haddon Heights faced Hanover Park in the Group 2 final, Clark was part of a group of Haddon Heights AP Science students who visited Colleen Agnew's second-grade classroom at Glenview School. Their purpose was to give the young students a science lesson, which went off without a hitch.

The high school students taught the second graders about pollination, and followed up with engaging activities that included naming bees that they showed in glass-protected cases, as well as an art project. It was also mentioned that Maddy would be playing the next day in a state championship softball game.

"We were a little nervous going in, because we weren't sure what second graders would know," Maddy said. "But it was really cool."



One of the second-graders is Mason Green, a sports-loving kid who loves baseball and softball. He lives near the high school, so he was already a fan of its teams. Once he heard that bit of info, he was captivated. Maddy engaged Mason in conversation, and the two became instant buddies.

“They talked about catching, pitching, hitting and even the difference between baseball and softball,” Agnew said. “Maddy informed them that girls can play baseball, and in fact how a girl was a pitcher in the Little League World Series. All of the girls and boys were in awe, and you could see the admiration in their eyes.”

“It was absolutely incredible,” Maddy said. “We started talking and I was asking the kids if anyone played sports, and he was like ‘Yeah, I play baseball,’ and just automatically I saw a light in his eyes and I knew this was a kid I was going to have a connection with.”

Before Maddy left, Mason even asked for a favor. He wondered if she could hit a hit a walk-off grand slam for him in the state final. As it turned out, Maddy didn’t do that in game. Instead, she did something better. She hit two home runs, a three-run shot and solo blast, as Haddon Heights won, 4-0.

“It truly was an awesome chain of events that I got to witness first hand,” Agnew said. “Watching her interaction with the children was heartwarming. When the lesson was finished and we really started talking about the state championship game, the children, Mason in particular, were all glued to Maddy. It was evident that not only was she an excellent student, and amazing athlete, but also a truly caring person. When I asked her to take a picture with Mason in the classroom, right away, she said ‘Come over here buddy!’ He was a little hesitant, but she put her arm around him and told him to smile. The best part was that he told her to hit a ‘Grand Salami’ for him. She laughed and said she’d do her best.”

The game was at Ivy Hill Park in Newark, and Mason and his parents watched it all unfold via the livestream. And when the team bus arrived back at the school a couple of hours later, Mason was there to greet his new friend as she stepped off the bus.

“Our manager, Olivia Myers, was in the science group with me, and when we got back from the game, she looked over and said to me ‘Is that Mason?’ And I was like ‘Yeah, it is!’ and I knew I had to go over and give him a big hug,” Maddy said. “It was such a full-circle moment. And I told him that I hit those two home runs for him. It was really special.”



Six days later, Haddon Heights returned to Ivy Hill Park to play Watchung Hills in the Tournament of Champions final. The Garnets won the game, 2-0. Afterward, Maddy was asked if she thought her new friend would be there to meet the bus once again.

Since the TOC final was a night game, she figured the arrival back in Haddon Heights would be too far past his bed time. But to her great surprise, he was there along with his parents to congratulate Maddy and her teammates.

“I was so excited to see that he was there when we arrived home,” Maddy said. “It meant the world to me that Mason and his family would go out of their way to greet me and our team as we came off the bus. It was really special to see.”

What’s made the bond between Maddy and Mason extra special is that while it happened due to a classroom function organized by adults, the friendship was strictly the result of the interaction between students, one a high school junior and the other a second grader.

As proof of that, Maddy and teammate Haley Hawkins returned to Agnew’s classroom earlier this week. They brought along the state championship trophy, and presented each student with a team picture signed by the whole team.

“They spoke to the kids about how their wins were always a team effort, and when someone was down, another teammate would pick them up with a great defensive play or a solid hit,” Agnew said. “It was another special moment.”

The new friendships have left an impression on several of the other adults who saw it unfold.

“Maddy is a quintessential team player,” Haddon Heights coach Michelle Schlichtig-Hastings said. “As good of an athlete she is, she’s an even better person. She’s been talking about that visit ever since it happened. That meant so much to her. My son is also obsessed with her. She just has a way with kids.”

It’s also meant a lot to Maddy’s parents, Cheryl and Brian.



“We’re so proud of her and all she’s done this year,” Cheryl Clark said. “But that stuff means so much more to us than the hits or the strikeouts. It’s extra special. And when he showed up after the game, it melted everyone’s heart.”

Lastly, it has greatly impressed Mason’s family.

“Honestly, both after the state championship game and the TOC game, Maddy could have been celebrating with her teammates, her family and her friends, but each time she came off the bus, she saw Mason and just came right over to him,” said Meghan Green, his thankful mom. “She just has a way of connecting with kids and the impact she has had on Mason is something I could never imagine. It all began with a science lesson she was teaching, but then she really seemed to just relate and understand his passion. Mason is a very passionate kid and is all about any kind of sport, especially softball and baseball. As a parent, it was really neat to see a kid go from cheering on a team to meeting a star player, who turned out to be not only a star on the field, but in the classroom as well. We could not be more thankful for Maddy and all the confidence and lessons she has taught Mason in such a short time.”