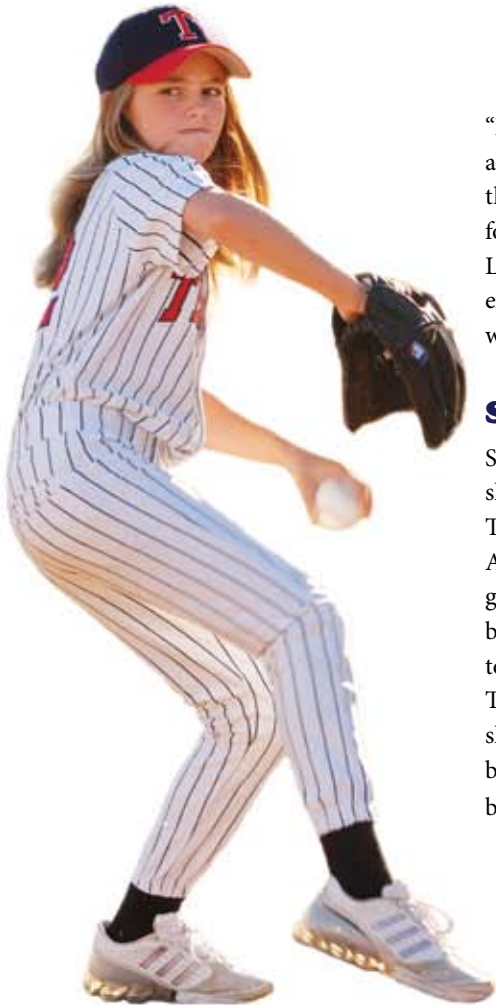


AMAZING KIDS

Seven Sugar Land Kids Who Are Taking Their Talents to the Next Level

By Ann Weisgarber
Photography by Suzi Issa



“Don’t be scared,” advises 10-year-old Sarah Hudek. She knows what she’s talking about. She’s the only girl who plays baseball in the Lamar Little League. Although this is Sarah’s advice for girls who want to give baseball a try, it’s a common theme for other area kids who tackle big projects. Whether it’s appearing on the Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon or teeing off in the Future Masters Tournament, kids who do extraordinary things know it’s important to not be scared. It’s also important to love what they’re doing.

Sarah Hudek, Winning Baseball Player

Sarah Hudek knew she loved baseball when she started playing T-ball. By the time she was eight, she was pitching overhand. “It’s fun to strike out boys,” she says. That’s what happened when Sarah, playing with the 2006 Lamar Little League All Star team, was asked to step up to the plate. It was the fifth inning in a crucial game. Bases were loaded, there were no outs, and her team was losing. The manager brought Sarah in to pitch. “I was nervous,” she says. The only girl playing in the tournament, her presence on the pitcher’s mound surprised the opposing team. The crowd went crazy, but Sarah stayed focused. The first batter hit the ball to Sarah; she threw the ball home and got the runner out. Sarah struck out the next two batters, and her All Star team went on to win the district championship. “Playing baseball with boys is a challenge,” she says. And that’s just how Sarah likes it.

“ **Don’t be scared.
Don’t let anyone
stop you from doing what you want.** ”

Sarah Hudek, 10 yrs. old

Catherine Godfrey, Triathlon Champion

Catherine Godfrey, too, likes a challenge. Age 11, Catherine competes in both children and adult triathlons. She got hooked on the event after watching her mother, Patty, compete in triathlons. "I thought that was so cool," Catherine says. She began running with Patty and then decided she wanted to train for competition. She says, "After my first triathlon, I liked it. I started wanting to do more and more." Her favorite part of the event is running, "because I've been working on it the longest and it's my best event." It's clear that Catherine is also a strong cyclist and swimmer. During the past two years she competed in six adult triathlons, and in July 2007, she placed first for her age group, 14 and under, at the Jeff & Brede Triathlon held in Katy, Texas. As every serious athlete knows, practice is the key. Catherine swims, bikes, and runs every week.

**“ You have to train a lot but
the most important thing is
to have fun.”**

Catherine Godfrey, 11 years old



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Jacob Richard, Goodwill Ambassador

Jacob Richard, age 10, understands the importance of practice and experience. Beginning in kindergarten, Jacob has served twice as the goodwill ambassador for the local chapter of the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA). "I want to make a difference," Jacob says about his work to raise awareness about muscular dystrophy. In September 2007, Jacob had the opportunity to take his involvement to a new level: he participated in The Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon in Las Vegas. "It was very exciting," he says. Jacob met Jerry Lewis, was interviewed by Jann Carl from Entertainment Tonight, and sang with The Commodores. One of his favorite things was meeting the eight other goodwill ambassadors from all over the country, and he is proud that the telethon surpassed its fundraising goal. "I want to go again," Jacob says about the telethon.

**“ Make everyone happy.
Fill people with joy.
Spread joy to everyone. ”**

Jacob Richard, 10 years old.

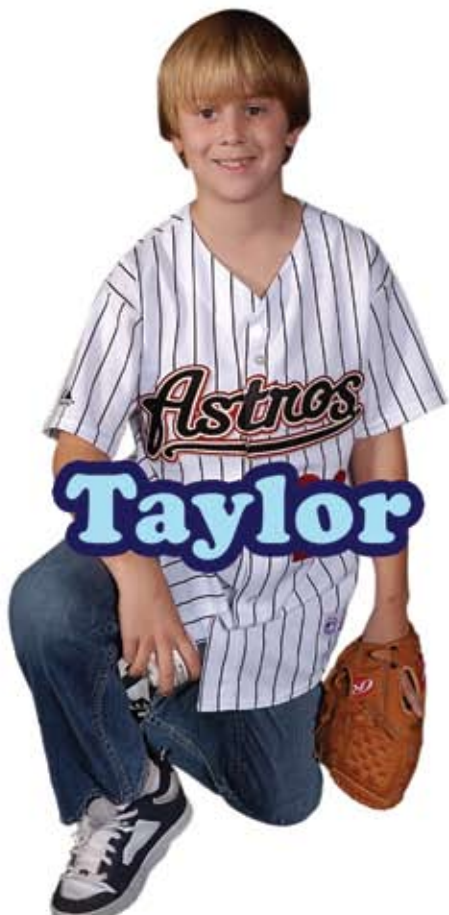
Mercedes Mackay, Houston Rockets' Little Dipper

Mercedes Mackay, 10, knows that feeling. This is her second season performing with the Houston Rockets' Little Dippers, a 34-member dance team that performs during time outs. "It was scary the first time I was on the floor," she says about dancing before the crowd at Toyota Center. But Mercedes was ready for the pressure. An accomplished dancer, she has been taking lessons for years, and she and the other Little Dippers practice Friday evenings at Toyota Center. Mercedes is equally serious about the Rockets. She follows the games and quotes statistics about the players. "We aren't allowed to smile, wave, or talk to the players," she says about the Little Dippers. "But if players talk to us, we can respond." Rafer Alston and Yao Ming spoke to the dancers during several Friday night practices. "I came up to Yao Ming's hipbone," Mercedes says.

**“ You must be
prepared... practice
whenever you can. ”**

Mercedes Mackay, 10 years old





Taylor Sears, Champion the Cure

Taylor Sears, 9, knows what it's like to work with a famous athlete. In October 2007, Taylor, known for his Taylor Sears Champion the Cure for Cystic Fibrosis, teamed with Astros pitcher Woody Williams, honorary chair, for the third annual fundraiser dinner and Great Strides Fun Run. To honor his fundraising efforts, Mayor Wallace presented Taylor with a special certificate proclaiming the day, "Taylor Sears Champion the Cure for Cystic Fibrosis Day" at the dinner that was held at Mercedes-Benz of Sugar Land. "It was so much fun," Taylor says. "I got to stay up late." He adds, "At the Fun Run, I ran three miles without stopping." In preparation for the fundraiser, Taylor and Woody Williams had their picture taken together on the field at Minute Maid Park. While there, Williams pitched to Taylor and gave him a tour of the dugout and locker room. "I want to be a baseball player when I grow up," Taylor says. "Or a swimmer."

“ Take your medicines even if they taste bad, do a sport every day, and eat your vegetables. ”

Taylor Sears, 9 years old

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Brayden Theriot, All Star Swimmer

Brayden Theriot, 10, spends hours in the pool, and it pays off. Last summer Brayden, a member of the Lake Olympia Swim Team, won the freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, and butterfly events at the All Stars competition. "I'm competitive," he says but that doesn't mean swimming was always a snap. When he was five, he was scared to participate in swim meets. Finally, Brayden says, "I jumped in the pool and won first place in freestyle." Some of the best advice comes from his older sister Brittani who swims for two teams. He says, "My sister tells me to swim my best," and that's just what he does. When not in the pool, Brayden is on the baseball field. He plays for two select baseball teams: The Texans and the Fort Bend Rebels, which are ranked in the top tier for the state. His pitches have been clocked at over 60 miles per hour.

**“ Aim for first place
and don't give up.”**

Brayden Theriot, 10 years old

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Ashton Radvansky, Junior Master Golfer

Ashton Radvansky, 10, has some impressive statistics of his own. A golfer since age three when he got his first set of clubs and golf shoes, Ashton is known for his long drives. He consistently drives over 230 yards and is a nationally top ranked junior golfer. Golfing without a caddy, he played in the 2007 Future Masters Tournament in Dothan, Alabama. "I loved it," Ashton says about that experience. "It was awesome." Next summer, when he plays again at the Future Masters, he'll have an opportunity to tee off at Pinehurst in North Carolina. Ashton also qualifies to play at the U.S. Kids European Championship, US Kids World Championship, and in the Texas Junior Master Tournaments. His heart, though, belongs to The First Tee of Houston, an "organization that encourages character development through the game of golf. Ashton says, "Someday I want to be able to help make First Tee's facilities even better. I also want to help kids do better in school."

People with a Purpose

Doing things better and making a difference are what these kids are all about. Whether it's dancing at a Rockets game, running and swimming, or raising awareness about a cause, these kids know who they are. They're people with a purpose; they're people doing extraordinary things. **SLM**

ANN WEISGARBER is a freelance writer who lives in Sugar Land.

**“Stay focused
and don't let your
brain wander.”**

Ashton Radvansky, 10 years old

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