

S.D. State Amateur Baseball Tournament

Historic Tourney Run For SCL?

South Central League Has Four Teams In Quarterfinals

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A year ago, all five South Central League teams at the S.D. State Amateur Baseball Tournament ran into a brick wall in the second round and were sent home.

Twelve months later, the league has become the talk of the 2014 tournament, as four teams have advanced to the quarterfinal round of the tournament being held at Mitchell's Cadwell Park.

The consensus among the remaining managers? The league-wide success, while a far cry from last year, is not all that surprising.

"It's unique, I guess you could say," Wynot manager Lee Heimes said Wednesday.

"We're all playing well, and playing well at the same time."

The SCL will be heavily represented in tonight's (Thursday) two quarterfinal games: Tabor plays Clark at 6 p.m., followed by Wynot against Irene in an all-league matchup. Then on Friday, Crofton faces the Parkston Mudcats at 6 p.m.

The tournament semifinals will be held Saturday, with the championship game set for 2 p.m. Sunday at Cadwell Park.

With a good chance the SCL sends one, if not more, teams to the semifinals, league managers say it's good exposure.

"It goes to show how much stronger our league has gotten," Irene manager Kendall Johnke said.

With four of its five teams into the quarterfinal round, the SCL is poised for one of its most successful runs in recent memory.

A look at how the SCL has fared at the state tournament since 2008

- 2013: All five SCL teams won in the first round but lost in the second round
- 2012: Crofton lost in the state title game, two others lost in the second round
- 2011: Crofton beat Tabor in the championship game
- 2010: Dimock-Emery beat Crofton in the title game
- 2009: Menno was the only team to advance to the quarterfinals
- 2008: Dell Rapids Mudcats beat Wynot in the championship game, with the Expos being the only SCL team to advance to the quarterfinals

With so many of the players across the league familiar with each other, a natural bond is formed that leads to trips to the state tournament to root for other teams, according to Tabor manager

Jon Vavruska. "When it comes to the state tournament, you cheer for your league," Vavruska said Wednesday. "It makes you all look better, and you want your friends to keep winning."

And that's exactly what the SCL has done this season, boasting an 8-1 record through the first two rounds. The only loss was by Avon in a 1-run decision to defending champion Alexandria.

"I think if you look over the years, the South Central has performed very well. We always seem to have at least one team this far," Vavruska said.

"The size of our towns is definitely small-town baseball. We don't draw from bigger cities; it's a lot of home-grown talent."

Particularly on the mound.

Tabor, Wynot and Crofton, specifically, boast a number of veteran pitchers who made previous deep runs at the state tournament.

Tabor boasts veterans such as Jon Vavruska and Rob Keppen, while Wynot has Scott Morrison, Eric Hames, Brett Wiebelhaus and pickoff player Brett Scherschligt. Crofton, perhaps the deepest in the tournament, has Scot Donner, Seth Erdmann, Rand Thygeson and Aaron Losing.

"We've all got guys who understand how to throw to batters and use their defense," Wynot's Heimes said.

Irene, the youngest of the four SCL teams still playing, has relied on a number of young players in its tournament run.

Andrew Hora was 5-1 on



Wynot's Ryan Eskens, right, high-fives pitcher Brett Scherschligt during Monday night's second round game against Akron, Iowa, at the S.D. State Amateur Baseball Tournament at Mitchell's Cadwell Park. Wynot is one of four South Central League teams to advance to the quarterfinal round.

JEREMY HOECK/P&D

State Amateur: Crofton Tops Lake Norden 8-2

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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MITCHELL — The Crofton Bluejays advances to the quarterfinals of the South Dakota State Class B Amateur Baseball Tournament for the fourth time in five years, pulling away late to claim an 8-2 victory over Lake Norden in a second round matchup on Tuesday at Mitchell's Cadwell Park.

The victory set up a rematch of the 2012 championship game, with the Bluejays facing the Parkston Mudcats. Parkston won that game.

"We knew it was going to be a tough road, but we'll take it one game at a time," said Crofton manager Carl Schieffer. "We wanted this one."

Tyler Zimmerman went 4-6 and Rand Thygeson went 3-6 with a home run to lead Crofton. Macon Oplinger had

a pair of hits. Scot Donner and Kyle Mueller each doubled in the win.

For Lake Norden, Jesse Van Overbeke had a pair of hits. Jordan Johnson drove in both runs.

Seth Erdmann went six innings, striking out five and allowing two runs, to pick up the win. Thygeson pitched the final three innings, also striking out five, for the long-relief save. Tim Kuphal took the loss.

"Seth came out and did what we knew he could do," Schieffer said. "Randy struggled a little bit, but he settled down, got his control and kept pounding the strike zone."

Crofton got on the board in the third. Zimmerman and Thygeson led off the inning with singles. Zimmerman advanced to third on a



Crofton pitcher Seth Erdmann sends the ball home during the Bluejays' second round matchup with Lake Norden in the South Dakota State Class B Amateur Baseball Tournament on Tuesday at Mitchell's Cadwell Park.

JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

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Nebraska AD: Program 'Stable' With Pelini

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska athletic director Shawn Eichorst did his part Wednesday to cool any speculation about coach Bo Pelini entering the season on the hot seat.

In a 45-minute interview with The Associated Press and reporters from the state's two largest newspapers, Eichorst said the program is "stable" and that the Huskers have a "seasoned coach who has won a bunch of games."

Pelini has won at least nine games each of his six years at Nebraska but has never lost fewer than four. The Huskers haven't won a conference championship since 1999, though Pelini led them to title games in the Big 12 in 2009 and 2010 and in the Big Ten in 2012.

Last year was turbulent. A secretly recorded audio of Pelini criticizing fans in 2011 went public two days after the Huskers blew an 18-point lead in a home loss to UCLA. Pelini nearly struck a sideline official with his cap while arguing a call in a home loss to Iowa, and afterward when asked about his job status, he said, "If they want to fire me, go ahead."

Eichorst issued a statement of support the next day, and Nebraska finished 9-4 after a bowl win over Georgia. Pelini received a one-year contract extension through February 2019.

"I really enjoy what he brings to the table," Eichorst said. "He's the first to admit he's kind of walked that line a little bit. Everybody is different. You've got calm and collected, high strung and everything in between. I try not to make judgments about that."

Eichorst, who's entering his second full year after succeeding Tom Osborne, said he has three priorities for every coach at Nebraska.

"Represent the University of Nebraska with honor and distinction, number one. Number two, give our kids, our students, an exceptional opportunity they can't get anywhere else. And then compete for championships. Everybody wants to win. But you can't win 'em all. And you've got to have reasonable expectations."

Asked if Pelini has met the three priorities to his satisfaction, Eichorst said, "Sure. I think so, yeah. I think folks are well-intended. There is no question about it."

After the season Eichorst met with Pelini to find out what he needed to be more successful. Eichorst said he granted Pelini's requests for additional staff for recruiting, aircraft for recruiting and technology for football operations.

"We've done everything they've asked us to do, within reason, so to me that should be a sign of support right



Nebraska head coach Bo Pelini, left, and South Dakota State head coach John Stiegelmeier exchange pleasantries prior to their game last season at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln.

P&D FILE PHOTO

there," Eichorst said.

Pelini has softened his image the past few months. He carried a cat above his head as he walked through the stadium tunnel before the spring game, a nod to the picture on a parody Twitter account called "Faux Pelini." A couple weeks ago Pelini surprised players by suiting up

in the alternate uniform the Huskers will wear against Illinois next month.

Eichorst pointed out that none of those antics were scripted "on this end."

Eichorst noted Nebraska's long tradition of success,

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Mauer Continues Streak, Gibson Cruises As Twins Top Astros 3-1

HOUSTON (AP) — On a day when he had everything going, the only thing that frustrated Minnesota pitcher Kyle Gibson was he had to leave the game.

The Twins' right-hander was dominant in a 3-1 win against the Houston Astros, allowing six hits and one run in 7 2/3 innings on Wednesday.

Gibson, who struck out four and walked two, took a shutout into the eighth before Chris Carter drove home Jose Altuve with a single.

"It's never too frustrating when you win a game but I definitely wanted it that's for sure," Gibson said. "That last inning I knew every pitch was important to keep the pitch count down and be able to go back out there for the ninth."

"That infield single that just didn't get hit hard enough and a bloop that just didn't get hit hard enough cost me the opportunity."

Gibson (11-9) was well under 100 pitches going into the inning and nursing a 3-0 lead thanks to a sixth inning home run by Joe Mauer and a two-run RBI single in the seventh by Kennys Vargas.

"I was sitting right there with him," said Twins manager Ron Gardenhire. "I said 'If he gets through the eighth inning under 100 pitches we let him go back out there and take a shot at it. He's earned

that.' Unfortunately they got a run on him and we had to get him out of there. I was thinking right along with him. I thought he was in control of the game."

Mauer gave Gibson some cushion when he hit a 2-2 pitch into the right field bullpen in the sixth inning to break up a scoreless tie.

Mauer, who extended his hitting streak to 15 games with a first inning single, drove the Brett Oberholtzer (4-8) pitch on a line to give the Twins a 1-0 lead.

"I'd like to have that back," Oberholtzer said of the pitch Mauer hit out. "Hindsight's 20-20 but it's a two-two count and I challenge there with nobody on to start the inning and he made me pay for it."

Glen Perkins pitched a perfect ninth inning to earn his 30th save of the season. Oberholtzer pitched well over seven innings. The left-hander allowed six hits and struck out four.

"Oberholtzer threw the ball well, 'Astros manager Bo Porter said. 'He did a tremendous job, and offensively we didn't swing the bats. So he ends up being the tough luck loser."



Mauer