

# Rapid City Post 22 Looking For Third Straight State Title

## Hardhats Draw Host Yankton In Opener

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK  
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If you look at the list of champions in the South Dakota State American Legion Baseball Tournament since 1965, the odds are pretty good that, in the year you are looking at, Rapid City Post 22 was the champion.

Since 1965, when Dave Ploof took the reins of Rapid City Legion baseball, 34 state championships and one national title have been won by the Hardhats. They will look to add one more when the state tournament opens today (Wednesday) at Yankton's Riverside Field.

The Hardhats (43-18) boast the last two titles, but have a fairly young team headed to Yankton this week.

"We have a really young ball club. The kids have really improved over the year," said Ploof, who has been at the helm for

nearly 2,500 victories at Post 22. "We've played an outstanding schedule and put up a lot of wins, and they've worked hard to do that."

A trio of players in their final year of Legion eligibility have anchored Post 22's efforts this season.

"We have three kids that have been the leaders of the ball club, Donte Bledsoe, Jake Bohne and Jarrett Jensen," Ploof said. "Then the rest of the kids are fairly young."

Rapid City has seven pitchers with three or more complete games this season, five of which have six or more victories on the mound. The ace of their staff though, Tanner Chleborad, is out for the tournament due to injury. Chleborad (6-3, 0.82 ERA, 69 K in 54 2/3 IP) was a 24th-round pick by Seattle in last month's Major League Baseball draft, but has committed to play collegiately at Washington State.

Bohne (8-1, 1 save, 3.30 ERA, 48 K in 60 IP), Asau Rodriguez (7-3, 2.43 ERA, 60 K in 66 2/3 IP), Hunter Jackson (6-1, 2 saves, 2.49 ERA, 24 K in 47 IP) and Jensen (6-1, 3.50 ERA, 36 K in 43 2/3 IP) have all been key starters for Post 22. Jake Sullivan (3-3, 5.95 ERA, 29 K in 42 1/3 IP) and Ryne Lees (2-4, 6.46 ERA, 22 K in 30 2/3 IP) have also pitched three complete games apiece.

"The innings have been kinda divided among those kids," Ploof said. "They really have done an outstanding job for us."

The Hardhats boast nine regular players batting .300 or better, led by Sullivan (.404, 3 HR, 60 RBI), the son of Mount Marty Hall of Famer Wayne Sullivan. Michael Kelly (.385, 31 RBI), Jensen (.384, 1 HR, 46 RBI), Newt Johnson (.373, 3 HR, 51 RBI), Bohne (.372, 44 RBI) and Bledsoe (.351, 21 RBI) are all hitting over .350. Jacob James (.332, 26 RBI), Ryne Lees (.325, 18 RBI) and Carter Wevik (.310, 15 RBI) have also been effective offensively.

Wevik has filled in at center field for

Greg Schaefer (.261, 20 RBI), who has been dealing with a hip pointer. Sam Parkinson (.235, 9 RBI) has anchored the Rapid City defense behind the plate.

"Those kids have been doing a pretty good job," Ploof said.

Rapid City draws Yankton in the opening round, playing the final game today (Wednesday) at 7:30 p.m.

"We're gonna have to play well. We know that they're gonna hit," Ploof said. "The fan base pulling for them, so we're going to have to be ready with our 'A' game and do it right."

Ploof is not worried about who Post 22 play, but how the Hardhats play themselves.

"Like I tell the kids, we don't care if we play the New York Yankees or Pumpkin Creek, we just have to play better baseball than our opponents," he said. "We hope we get better pitching, better defense and better hitting. If we put all those together, we'll be OK."

## Rapid City Post 22

(43-18)



COACH: Dave Ploof

Bohne

Leading Hitters				
	AVG	HR	BI	SB
Jake Sullivan	.404	3	60	5
Jarrett Jensen	.384	1	46	3
Newt Johnson	.373	3	51	2
Jake Bohne	.372	0	44	1
Donte Bledsoe	.351	0	21	15

Leading Pitchers				
	ERA	W-L	IP	K
Tanner Chleborad	0.82	6-3	54.2	69
Asau Rodriguez	2.43	7-3	66.2	60
Hunter Jackson	2.49	6-1	47	24
Jake Bohne	3.30	8-1	60	48

## Garretson Eyes Success After Class B Crown

BY JEREMY HOECK  
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The high-powered offense that has guided Garretson to the state's biggest stage took a while to develop.

But as head coach Kevin Steckler said, it came around just in time.

"We've been smoking the ball pretty good since about halfway through the season, and that's been the key for us," said Steckler, whose Class B champion Garretson Post 23 squad plays Brookings in today's first round game at 12:30 p.m.

Garretson rolled through a loaded Class B Tournament field — which included Tabor — last week, scoring a total of 76 runs in five games. After losing to Redfield on Saturday, Garretson rebounded to beat them 16-8 in Sunday's championship.

While the pitching and defense was strong from game one, once the offense got rolling the success started building, Steckler said.

"Coming off club (high school) ball, our kids already got plenty of work with fielding and throwing, so the arms were already developed," he said. "We spent more time early working on hitting with a pitching machine. We wanted to get a lot of swings in every day."

"Then when we started throwing live, it started clicking for us."

Covering the Region 2B and State B Tournaments, Garretson has scored in double figures in 11 of its past 12 games. Leading that attack are three players hitting over .400 — Class B Player of the Year Dustin Steckler (.452), Zach Lukes (.447) and Brady Bonte (.411).

Shane Dickey, the State B Tournament Big Stick Award recipient, is hitting .382, while Isaac Lukes is batting .370 and Steckler leads in hits (47).

Zach Lukes returned in late June from a broken hand suffered during the high school spring season, but is now back to full strength.

"Up and down the lineup, everyone of our kids have been hitting the ball," coach Steckler said. "We were able to develop some depth while Zach was gone, so when he came back, it gave us another strong bat."

While the offense has been rolling, the pitching has also proven to be a strong suit for Garretson.

Dustin Steckler is the team's No. 1 pitcher, recording an 8-0 record with 50 strikeouts in 55 innings. Zach Lukes (5-2, 35 K) and Isaac Lukes (3-3, 34 K) will also see the bulk of the innings at state for Garretson.

Even with the balanced offense and deep pitching, Garretson is well aware that they're in for a challenge this week.

"We realize we're the small fish in the big ocean," coach Steckler said.

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# Ellis Fondly Recalls Legion Days



Colorado Rockies second baseman Mark Ellis (14) tags out Atlanta Braves center fielder Jordan Schafer (1) during their matchup July 6 in Atlanta, Ga. Ellis, a Rapid City native, is the only South Dakota born-and-raised player currently active in Major League Baseball.

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK  
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Mark Ellis has played in over 1,000 Major League Baseball games over 10 seasons. He currently spends his days as part of the middle infield for the Colorado Rockies, teaming with Troy Tulowitzki for a potent double-play combination. But before he was a Major League second baseman, or even a shortstop for the University of Florida, he was an undersized shortstop for Rapid City Post 22.

Ellis is the only current Major League player who grew up in South Dakota and experienced American Legion Baseball in the state.

Growing up in Rapid City, Legion baseball was a highlight of the summer.

"When I was growing up in Rapid City, Legion baseball was the thing to do in the summer, going to Fitzgerald Stadium and watching the guys play," he said. "Playing there was something I always wanted to do."


The career .266 hitter first came to the attention of Post 22 head coach Dave Ploof when he was 14, two years before he was the starting shortstop for the Hardhats.

"The first time I met him was at a clinic when he was 14. He was just a sponge," Ploof said of Ellis. "When we'd get together and talk about different things, he'd be in the first row. With his eye contact,

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# SDSU Recruit Danforth, Watertown Aim For Victories

### Watertown



(24-13)

COACH: Ryan Neale

**Neale**

Leading Hitters				
	AVG	HR	RI	SB
Alex Turbak	.505	2	41	8
Eric Danforth	.472	4	41	8
Ryan Engels	.395	1	19	2
Tanner Neale	.288	0	33	0

Leading Pitchers				
	ERA	W-L	IP	K
Eric Danforth	3.38	5-2	50.2	57
Shawn Mack	3.51	6-2	51.1	42
Tyler Bayse	3.62	5-0	37.1	22
Mitch Trego	4.30	2-3	37.2	28

BY CASSIE BARTLETT  
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After a fourth place finish at the legion state tournament last season, Watertown Post 17 has the championship in their sights this year.

With a record of 25-13, Post 17 dominated at home with nine wins and only one loss, but struggled on the road. Playing in Yankton for the state tournament may pose some problems for the team so far from home, but head coach Ryan Neale thinks the team will find success this week-end.

"I think we can go in and compete," Neale said. "We finished fourth place at the state tournament last year, but we had a very young squad. This year, we're going into this tournament with a very experienced team that finished fourth place last year and

we think that we can compete with anybody."

Leading the team at state will be Eric Danforth, Watertown's ace on the mound and second leading hitter. As a South Dakota State University recruit, Neale said his strength lies in being a left-handed pitcher and his consistency. On the mound, Danforth has a 5-2 record with a 3.38 ERA.

At the plate, Danforth is batting .454 and has 59 hits so far this season. He leads the team in homeruns with four and also has 42 RBIs.

Behind Danforth, Post 17 has three other top-pitchers, two of which are also left-handed. Mitch Trego is the team's #2 pitcher with a 4.50 ERA. Shawn Mack and Tyler Bayse round out the team's top pitchers.

"Our pitching staff has done really well. Pitching wise, we

played 27 innings at the region tournament and our opponents only scored in four innings,"

Neale said. "We have the luxury of having three of our four pitchers be left-handed pitchers. We have three combo starters and a guy that can come in and close-out for us."

Watertown's pitching may lead its defense, but Neale said the team has outstanding fielders to throw out runners.

"We feel that we're really strong up the middle and that's a very, very big key when it comes to baseball. Eighty percent of the balls that are hit are hit up the middle, so you have to be strong defensively in that area," Neale said.

Leading the fielders are catcher Tanner Neale, a South-west Minnesota State recruit, and shortstop Ryan Engels, another SMSU recruit. Watertown also

has many versatile players, alternating between the infield and outfield.

"Tanner is one of the best catchers in the state and we feel that we have one of the best shortstops in the state," Neale said. "Defensively, we make all the plays and we're very happy with the way we're playing right now."

Offensively, the team is led by Alex Turbak, who's hitting .513. While he's not necessarily a long-ball hitter (having only two homeruns) his strength lies in advancing runners, as the majority of his hits are doubles (12) and has batted in 43 runs.

"We feel that offensively we can compete with anybody," Neale said. "Our guys, one through six, can provide a punch anytime in our order once they

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## Yankton

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In place, four different players have pitched at least 40 innings, with none more than 47.

Alex Wagner (5-2, 2.27 ERA, 36 K) and Josh Teichroew (5-2, 3.26 ERA, 30 K) lead the team in wins, while Janish (4-4, 5.71 ERA, 24 K) and Jordan Groves (4-2) rank second.

Ulmer (2-3) has also seen significant action on the mound.

"Knowing that we'd already be in state, we got people in good game situations as much as possible before," McClemons said. "Some of the younger ones had to learn under fire, but we were hoping that it would benefit us this week. In that respect, we've developed a little bit of depth."

"To win games at this level, you need everyone."

The winner of the S.D. state tournament advances to the Central Plains Regional, set for Aug. 5-9 in Dickinson, N.D. And so, aside from playing Rapid City Post 22 in a tournament field that also includes Sioux Falls East and West, there's a lot at stake, McClemons said.

# Consistent S.F. West Boasts Balanced Offense, Quality Pitching

BY CLAY STODDARD  
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Sioux Falls Post 15 West comes into the 2011 State American Legion Baseball Tournament as a team on top of its game and ready to take on the opposition.

"We are ready to go we played probably our best game against Mitchell to get into the state tournament, we beat them 12-1," head coach Joel Sage said. "We feel like we are in the position to be at the top of our pitching rotation and hopefully we go in and keep playing as long as possible."

West has had a very competitive season and has had their eyes set on the State Tournament since they first started practices indoors in January. Through all of their hard work they have developed into a competitive team who is ready for the challenge.

"We feel like we have played a very competitive schedule. We have been very up and down, but we have not had a big winning or a big losing streak so I guess you could see that as either very consistent or very not consistent, it depends on how you look at it," said Sage.

West will depend on a strong couple of pitchers to lead their team from the mound during the tournament. Sam Dunn is 3-4 on the season with 52 strikeouts and a 4.33 ERA.

Dunn will be the main starter for West, while Brady Aldrich will fill in the number two spot. Aldrich is 5-2 on the season with 26 strikeouts and a 3.66 ERA.

Trevor Hurley and Dusty Haffeman will each play a dual role as both a starting pitcher and a reliever for the team. Hurley was 3-2 on the season with one save and 28

strike out and a 5.69 ERA, while Haffeman is 3-3 on the season with three saves, 15 strikeouts, and a 4.65 ERA.

"Dunn has been our top pitcher this season, Aldrich has been our number two, and depending on how deep we go we will have a couple other guys who are ready to contribute," said Sage.

On the other side of the plate, West is a team that can wear down its opponents. Beginning with the leadoff hitter, Jared Frazier, who tallied up a .327 batting average, with 28 RBIs and 10 stolen bases.

Trevor Hurley led the team with a .357 average and added 17 RBIs.

Christian Wolfgang chimed in with a .344 average and 36 RBIs, while also tying for the team high two homeruns with Nick Mimmack.

"We have a very balanced attack, we don't have anybody hitting over .400 or five homeruns or more. We have a balanced attack, but we are going to look for Christian Wolfgang, who had the best region tournament for us," said Sage.

"We also will be looking for everyone else to step up."

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