

Brookings Sees Pitching As Top Strength For Title Run

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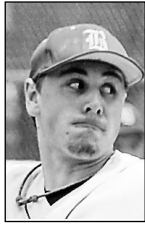
Beat out by Aberdeen in the region tournament last year, the Brookings Bandits are one of the top teams heading into the state legion tournament this year and believe they can win it all.

With a record of 28-12, the Bandits didn't have overwhelming home wins, but didn't struggle on the road either. While it took their opponents a few innings to build up their score, Brookings scored the majority of their runs in the second and third innings.

Head coach Rob Hirschhoff said the team had a successful season and it was the team's pitching that kept opponents from scoring.

"(The season) went well. We played all the teams except for Post 22 and whoever the Class B champion is, so that is something that is comforting," he said. "It's hard to say what our strengths are - obviously our biggest strength is starting pitching. It's really felt like that's where we've had the advantage all year and hopefully it'll stay the same for league."

The Bandits have five starters on the mound that have led them all season — Landon Busch, Joey Textley, Matt Thomas, Marcus Daniel and Kyle Kramer.

Brookings (28-12)					
COACH: Rob Hirschhoff					
	Leading Hitters	AVG	2B	HR	BI
	Kelby Beste	.402	16	5	36
	Landon Busch	.356	9	0	30
	Marcus Daniel	.351	11	0	35
	Matt Thomas	.325	3	1	17
Textley	Leading Pitchers	ERA	W-L	IP	K
	Landon Busch	1.02	5-1	53	82
	Joey Textley	3.68	4-2	44	48
	Matt Thomas	4.09	6-2	44	27
	Marcus Daniel	4.85	4-2	42.2	51

Busch is the team's ace, with a record of 5-1 and an ERA of 1.02. He's only allowed six earned runs in the nine games he's pitched and no hitter has earned a homerun off him.

Textley is next on the mound with a record of 4-2 and a 3.68 ERA. Allowing 18 runs in his seven games pitched, his strength lies in consistently throwing strikes as he's only walked eight batters. After allowing 50 hits, Textley only allowed 21 runs.

Thomas, Daniel and Kramer round out the pitching staff with records of 6-2, 4-2, and 5-2, respectively. Thomas and Daniel both have ERAs above 4.00, but Kramer

has an ERA of 6.00. Kramer has thrown the most games out of all the pitchers (10), but has allowed 61 hits and 36 runs.

"They've done a good job - our staff is as good as anybody's out there," Hirschhoff said. "As a staff, our biggest strength is throwing the fastball and being able to get ahead of the batter consistently."

Behind the pitchers, Hirschhoff said the Bandits' defense relies heavily on how well the pitchers are throwing.

"We're pretty solid defensively for the most part," he said. "When our pitcher is getting ahead and working fast that's when we get into our groove. The times we've

struggled defensively have been falling behind and not throwing as many strikes as we should. That leads to lapse in the defense."

Offensively, Hirschhoff said the team hasn't been as consistent as he would like heading into the state tournament.

"We've been a little up and down, but have been swinging it well recently. That's been our thing all year — whether we swing the bat well," he said. "It's been the determining factor if we win or lose. We're pretty consistent. We're only going to be as good as our offense is."

Kelby Beste leads the team at the plate, batting .402. With 43 hits and 43 runs scored, Beste leads the team with five homeruns and 36 RBIs.

Busch is not only the team's best pitcher, he is also one of the top batters. Batting an average of .356, Busch has 47 hits on the season and although he hasn't hit a homerun yet, he has batted in 30 runs.

While Beste and Busch lead the team at the plate, Hirschhoff said the Bandits have multiple players that step up behind those two.

"Offensively, our biggest strength is the length of our lineup one through nine," he said. "When we've done well offensively it's



P&D FILE PHOTO
Brookings' Austin Koenig, left, is tagged out by Mitchell third baseman Jared Schmidt during their matchup in the Lewis & Clark Wooden Bat Classic earlier this summer in Vermillion.

been when we follow that bat up and down the lineup. We've had somebody different step up almost every game. That's the biggest strength of our offense — the length of our lineup and the depth we have in it."

After not making it into state last season, Hirschhoff said the team isn't looking for revenge, the Bandits just want to stay focused

and play to the best of their abilities.

"We obviously hope to do well and hope to win the thing," he said. "But the way we're going to approach it is just one game at a time and realize that you can't look ahead into the bracket, you just have to take care of whoever your opponent is that day. You've just got to take it one game at a time."

Pierre Brings Hot Streak To State

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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Even though Pierre Post 8 has a record just above .500 (28-24), their experience, their late-season surge and their run in a tournament in Yankton earlier this season show that they will be a team to be reckoned with in this week's South Dakota State American Legion Baseball Tournament.

Pierre put up 38 runs in four games in the Region 3A Tournament, with their two losses both coming at the hands of two-time defending champion Rapid City Post 22.

"Toward the end of the year, we started to play better," said Pierre head coach Bob Sullivan. "We'd been losing a lot of close ball games, but lately we've been better."

Post 8 boasts 12 players in their final year of Legion eligibility, all of which were part of the team Pierre took to state a year ago.

"That experience has helped a lot," Sullivan said. "We fell behind in our first region game, 7-0 in the second inning. There was no real panic, no pressing, and we were able to pull out a victory."

Pierre has been anchored by a trio of pitchers, led by Scott Cichos (5-2, 2.70 ERA, 53 K in 60 IP).

"Scott has been our workhorse. He gets all the tough games," Sullivan noted. "Adam Deneke (2-4, 4.91 ERA, 43 K in 36 2/3 IP) has been fantastic in his last two games. Jordan Smith (8-1, 3.88 ERA) is a pitcher that keeps the ball down and throws strikes."

Nolan Merrill (3-2, 4.55 ERA), Mac Mercer (3-3, 6.00 ERA), Tyler Ness (2-5, 6.30 ERA) and Royce Pease (1-1, 13.32 ERA) also have three or more starts on the season. Taylor Owens (4-1, 4 saves, 4.75 ERA) has a team-high 16 appearances.

Merrill, who completed his freshman season at Mount Marty College earlier this year, has been one of the team's leading hitters. The outfielder comes into state with a .417 batting average, with 18 doubles, five triples, three home runs and 42 RBI, and leads the team in batting average, doubles and triples.

"Merrill is probably our overall best hitter," Sullivan said. "Jared Neelan (.389, 15 doubles, 3 triples, 1 HR, team-best 45 RBI)



P&D FILE PHOTO
Pierre shortstop Tanner Wolf fires the ball to first during Post 8's game in the Lewis & Clark Wooden Bat Classic earlier this summer at Vermillion's Prentiss Park.


leads off and does a nice job of getting on base. Adam Deneke (.365, 12 doubles, 4 triples, 6 HR, 41 RBI) has a ton of power and a lot of speed. Brandon Heckenlaible (.373, 16 RBI) has really come up with some key hits of late."

Pierre draws perennial power Sioux Falls East in the opening round, the tournament first overall game with a 10 a.m. start.

"They are a very good ball team. They score a lot of runs," Sullivan noted. "But if we play at our best, we can play with anybody."

After winning just one game in last year's tournament, Pierre is hoping for a deeper run this year.

"It would be a good tournament for us if we made it to the weekend," Sullivan said. "Since

Pierre Post 8 (28-24)					
COACH: Bob Sullivan					
	Leading Hitters	AVG	HR	BI	SB
	Nolan Merrill	.417	3	42	18
	Jared Neelan	.389	1	45	13
	Brandon Heckenlaible	.373	0	16	1
	Adam Deneke	.365	6	41	15
Scott Cichos	.309	0	24	9	
Cichos	Leading Pitchers	ERA	W-L	IP	K
	Scott Cichos	2.70	5-2	60	53
	Jordan Smith	3.88	8-1	53.1	27
	Taylor Owen	4.75	4-1	30.1	14
	Adam Deneke	4.91	2-4	36.2	43

we got knocked out last year, we've had our mind set on getting back to state and making it to the weekend. Hopefully we can play our best baseball this week."

Watertown

From Page 8

get going. We're swinging the bats well right now. We had 45 hits in three games at the region tournament."

Although the team doesn't have the heavy hitters to clear the bases, Neale said they play smart and make the hits that need to be made.

"I wouldn't say we're a long ball hitting team, I think we get on base with the top of our order and we're more of a gap-to-gap hitting team. We do a lot of things right when moving runners," he said. "We like to hit runs in and move guys over with bunting. I think the bats have made a change in that, but overall we just

do a lot of things right offensively. We hit a lot of doubles."

Heading into the state tournament, Post 17 knows what to expect from the top teams.

"Year in and year out, Rapid City Post 22 is always one of the top teams — they do everything well and they're very well coached. Sioux Falls East is very well coached and has a great squad — they play the game the right way," Neale said. "I put Brookings right up there with anybody because they have a very live pitching staff that can compete with anybody on any given day. I'd say, including us, those are the top four teams heading into the state tournament."

Despite some early struggles, Neale said the team is playing well and has high expectations for state.

"We made a lineup change in our batting order two weeks ago and that has really been an improvement for our team. We were banged up earlier and had some injuries that played a factor, but right now we're getting healthy and we're very happy with how we're playing right now," he said. "We think that we can come into this tournament and expect to win it — I don't think there's anything wrong with saying that. We're a very senior-oriented group that has a lot of state tournament experience."

Garretson

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"We understand the level of competition is going to get a lot better this week. All the kids know what's ahead of us."

To that end, recent history has not been kind to the Class B champions at the 'A' Tournament.

In each of the last four years, the Class B representative has been eliminated after two games. The last time the 'B' champion won a game in the 'A' Tournament was Winner-Colome in 2006.

In the case of Garretson, coach Steckler said the only Class A team his squad played this season was Valley Springs. Though he did point out that Garretson faced a tough

road to even get to Yankton.

"We haven't faced this type of play," he said. "We're excited about the opportunity to show off Class B, because there are some great teams. We'll see what happens."

Though, it hasn't been just the legion team having success in Garretson.

The city's 10-under Pee Wee squad won their class title in Mitchell last weekend, while the 13-14 VFW Teener team won a state title last summer. And in 2009, the 15-16 Teener team — with all the same players now on legion — won the Class B state championship.

"Most of the people in southeast South Dakota know about Garretson and what we can do," coach Steckler said. "We've got a good program,

Garretson				
COACH: Kevin Steckler				
Leading Hitters				
	AVG	AB	H	BB
Dustin Steckler	.452	104	47	15
Zach Lukes	.447	85	38	11
Brady Donte	.411	73	30	14
Shane Dickey	.382	81	31	14
Isaac Lukes	.370	108	40	8
Leading Pitchers				
	W-L	IP	K	BB
Dustin Steckler	8-0	55	50	22
Isaac Lukes	3-3	39	34	17
Zach Lukes	5-2	38.2	35	12
Patrick Whetham	2-1	21.2	23	14

up and down. It's just a great baseball town."

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