

BASEBALL | STATE LEGION TOURNEY

'99 Team Put Together Magical Run

Squad Posted Yankton's Best-Ever Finish In State Legion

BY KEITH A. BROCKBERG
P&D Correspondent

Riverside Park, which is hosting this year's State A American Legion Baseball Tournament, posts signs to honor all of Yankton's title winning teams — from teenagers to the city's amateur champions.

However, Yankton has never won a state Legion title, and no names represent the American Legion Post 12 heading at the park.

In 1999, Yankton put together a team and a run that nearly turned the trick amid a controversial regional tournament and a dramatic upset during the state tournament that propelled them into the finals played in Pierre.

The majority of the '99 team's players had teamed up to win a VFW state tournament title as the Yankton Black Sox in 1998.

"Getting to the state tournament — this group had won and expectations were that we would do fairly well," said 1999 coach Mike Stoll. "We were fortunate that the kids stuck it out together; they set a goal and they stayed with it."

The ride got interesting the week before in Sioux Falls as Post 12 came from behind to beat Sioux Falls Post 15 East 5-3. Then, as the Yankton players arrived in Sioux Falls to play the next day, it was discovered that East had ineligible players on their team after Mitchell had protested their game with them.

"I remember everybody was upset because we drove up for a game that didn't happen because Mitchell protested that East used players that were supposed to play for (Sioux Falls) West," recalled Stoll. "We were declared the region champions even though we didn't play."

When the protest was settled,

East was disqualified and Mitchell was declared to have taken second in the region, thus punching their ticket to the state tournament.

Once in Pierre, Post 12 trailed Rapid City Post 320 5-0 after two innings, but Tom Gause hit a grand slam, and Yankton opened with a relatively easy 11-5 win.

Yankton played Brookings Post 74 in their second game and used a four-run inning and survived four Brookings runs in the seventh inning to hold on to a 6-4 victory. Mike Stotz was that day's hitting hero with a homer and two RBI.

The win set up Post 12 to play the daunting Rapid City Post 22 team that had won the championship the year before.

Stoll decided to start Justin Nelson on the bump that game, and the sometimes walk-prone Nelson held up as Yankton led 4-3 after four innings.

"The key match-up there was Nelson," said Stoll. "When he threw against Post 22, he did his thing, threw strikes and kept us in the game."

Jeremy Wuebben relieved Nelson in the seventh after Post 22 had taken a 5-4 lead and, according to Stoll, kept Rapid City off balance and hitting ground balls.

Post 22 led 6-5 in the ninth, but Eric Baily, the tournament's batting champion and at the plate with two outs and two strikes, singled home Brandon May to send the game into an extra inning.

Wuebben shut down Post 22 in the top of the 10th to set up a heroic upset.

Post 22 got two quick outs, but Gause came through with a double to the wall and Nick Miller reached on an error. With a surprise move, Stoll had May, a 6-6 first baseman, bunt down the

third-baseline, catching the Post 22 third-sacker by surprise and loading the bases.

Clay Stoddard, Post 12's catcher, came through in the clutch and drove a clean single past the Post 22 shortstop for the walk-off 7-6 win.

"I called for time and just told Clay to look for his pitch, and he hit it over the shortstop's head," said Stoll.

"We were surprised after we had won against Post 22 and the boys were pretty jubilant and happy as clams," said Stoll. "I was proud of them that they hung in there."

The upset of Post 22 propelled Yankton into the championship round, where they had two chances to beat Mitchell Post 18 for the title.

Post 18 scored an upset of their own as they beat Post 22 4-2 to get to the championship.

However the glass slipper fit Mitchell better as they beat Post 12 twice by lopsided scores to take the championship.

"We had a tough time with Mitchell throughout the season; they were a good hitting team," said Stoll. "We didn't expect Mitchell to beat Post 22."

"We just ran out of juice," Stoll added.

It was the first time in 30 years that the championship series did not feature a team from either Rapid City or Sioux Falls.

"The goal was to get to the state tournament and we did that," said Stoll. "That was a very good ball team."

Other members of that Post 12 team were Matt Rabenberg, Bill Barron, Paul Barta, Jeff Bonertz, Danny Koletzky, Randy Ankeny, Nate Benson, Sam Kappel, Chris Climer and Dusty Koletzky, who was unable to play because of a back injury.



P&D FILE PHOTO

Yankton's Danny Koletzky slides home during a home game in the 1999 season. Koletzky was part of the 1999 team that put together a wild run to the State Legion title game.

100 pitches in the frame — got a groundout to get out of trouble.

The Bandits had a chance to pad their lead in the top of the eighth, but Post 22's Rodriguez struck out Marcus Daniel — his 10th strikeout of the game.

"He was consistently using that out pitch on the outside corner of the plate, and we were always trying to pull the ball," Ploof said of Busch. "You can't do that when someone is throwing in the high 80's like that. We didn't adjust."

Joey Texley came on for Busch in the bottom of the eighth and proceeded to strike out two batters, leaving two runners on base. He then set down Post 22 in order in the bottom of the ninth, setting off a celebration from the Bandits.

"It's nice to have Texley in the bullpen; it's a good feeling for us," Hirschoff said. "We knew that was a strength of ours, our pitching."

After a few minutes of celebrating, the Brookings players began packing up their equipment and heading for the gate, evidence, Hirschoff said, of the team's workmanlike attitude for the tournament.

"We accomplished our goal today. We've been talking to the guys about having singular goals; winning the first one and then worrying about the second," he said. "We know Sioux Falls East is playing well."

"In a tournament like this, you can't have emotional letdowns."

On the other side, Rapid City — the champions of the last two state legion tournaments — plays Sioux Falls West today (Friday) at 5 p.m., with the winner facing the victor of S.F. East and Brookings.

"This was a good learning experience for our younger guys," Ploof said. "We've got a lot of young hitters, and they'll learn from what happened tonight and get better."

"This is why I'm a big proponent of double elimination tournaments," he added. "You can lose once and still not be dead in the water."

Yankton

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to Ryan Engels and a sacrifice, Alex Turbak singled to put Post 17 on the board. Yankton answered with a Heath Arens triple and an error in the bottom of the frame.

Post 17 took advantage of a Yankton miscue in the second. After Jonny Pfeifer's leadoff double and the Mitch Trego single to score him, Matt Moes walked and Engels reached on a bad throw to second bases, allowing Trego to score and give Watertown a 3-1 edge.

Yankton scored a run on a bases-loaded walk to Alex Mueller in the fourth, but left the bases loaded after putting three on with no one out.

Watertown got that run back on an errant pickoff throw in the fifth to take a 4-2 lead. The inning marked the end of the game for Yankton starting pitcher Zach Benjamin, who had spent the summer on the CorTrust Black Sox VFW Teener team but was on both Legion and Teener rosters.

Reliever Tanner Termansen, another dual roster player, gave up a pair of runs in the seventh, on a Turbak RBI single and a passed ball, to make the score 6-2.

While the two youngsters gave up six runs, four earned, in a combined seven innings of work, they did keep Yankton within striking distance, according to McClemans.

"When we dual-rostered those two before the season, we knew we would need pitching depth if we were going to make a run in the State Legion Tournament," he said. "Benjamin threw for us in the (club high school) region championships and Tanner has good numbers. We knew they both had the ability to get batters out at this level."

In the bottom of the seventh, Yankton worked its magic.

After leadoff singles by Arens and Steven Stange, Cameron Schiltz ripped a double — his third of the game and fourth in two games — to score the first run of the frame. Mike Janish, who left his pitching start Thursday due to an elbow issue, followed with a RBI single.

"When we had to take him off the mound yesterday, we knew he didn't want to give up the ball," McClemans said. "He showed up really wanting to play. We told him we were going to give him an extra day's rest, knowing we might use him late. He came up in a big spot, and got us back to believing."

"I can't say enough about the hard work he's put in or how bad he wants it."

Alex Mueller tied the game with a two-run double to right, advancing to third as the ball was bobbled by the defender.



CLAY STODDARD/P&D

Yankton's Zach Benjamin fires the ball home during Post 12's victory over Watertown. Benjamin, who spent the summer on the Black Sox VFW Teener roster, pitched five solid innings to keep Post 12 in the game. Tanner Termansen, another Teener pick-up, got the win with two innings of relief.

Kory Bromley followed with a run-scoring single, his first hit of the tournament, to give Yankton the lead.

Post 12 added a run in the eighth on a Mueller single. From there, Alex Wagner closed the door, striking out three of the seven batters he faced for his first save of the tournament and of the season.

"I just wanted to come out there and throw strikes, let my fielders do the work, because I have a great defense behind me," said Wagner, who pitched two innings of scoreless relief Friday after his 4 1/3 innings of shutout ball to earn the win Thursday. "We came into the tournament wanting to get that first win (against Rapid City Post 22). It didn't happen, but we came back and things are going our way."

One of Yankton's top pitchers throughout the season, Wagner's demeanor made him the perfect pitcher to go to for the save.

"When we took the lead, the kids were excited. Then we look at Wags and he's still calm," McClemans said. "Nothing bothers him. He's got the same approach all the time."

Schiltz had three doubles and Mueller had three hits and four RBI for Yankton. Devin Gullikson had a double and two singles. Arens and Stange each had two hits in the win.

Turbak had three hits, and Trego and Engels had two hits apiece for Watertown, which finished with eight hits.

Termansen picks up the win in

relief. Shawn Mack, the third pitcher for Watertown, took the loss.

Mack had come into the tournament with a 6-2 record and three saves in a team-high 16 appearances. He had picked up the win against Sioux Falls West on Wednesday, allowing an unearned run in 5 1/3 innings of relief.

"We had things right where we wanted them," said Watertown head coach Ryan Neale. "(Teener dual-roster player) Brody Ries did exactly what we needed. He got us to the seventh after he came in for (Tyler) Bayse. Yankton just kept hitting."

Yankton now advances to the tournament's Final Four this afternoon (Saturday), playing either Brookings or Sioux Falls East. With Janish unable to pitch and the other starters having already pitched at least once, the pitching will be pieced together.

"It will be all hands on deck. Everybody has to be ready," Mc-

Fox Run

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just never know. It could be worse too, but I hope not."

Collins said although the course was in great shape and was playing easy, the most difficult part was the pin placements on the greens.

Every year he's played in the pro-am at Fox Run, Lammers said he has had the same two amateur teammates every year. Playing with the pros is part of the reason why they've been in it for over 15 years.

"It's fun, it's the only competition an old guy gets anymore," Lammers said. "It's fun playing with (the pros) - they've all got such smooth swings and our swings aren't exactly like theirs. If you ask them, they'll read a green for ya. I play for fun, but I like the competition, too."

As the tournament started, Fox Run pro Kevin Doby said it was almost the full field size he expected. Ten of the professionals had withdrawn before the tournament started and one was disqualified.

While the event is so popular among the professionals and amateurs, there are very few women playing in the tournament.

"We don't have any female professionals, but we have three women amateurs," Doby said. "That's a typical number in an event of this nature, although in the future we'd like to see a lot more ladies. Any ladies reading this,

please, we'd love to have you."

The heat of South Dakota was once again an issue, as temperatures reached the 90s. Doby said even though it was hot, the players were getting through the first round alive.

"It's been hot, it's difficult to play in this heat and humidity, but it's moving along pretty good, no glitches yet," Doby said. "Some of the guys are looking pretty haggard coming off the course, but we've got plenty of water at the turns, at the starter stations. As long as we keep them hydrated they should be fine."

Even with the heat, Doby said players were complimenting the course's condition. Although Collins set the pace early, both he and Doby said they wouldn't be surprised if there were lower scores throughout the tournament.

"Chris shot a really good score today. That's where we expect the leader to be - there might be scores lower than that," Doby said. "We're getting a lot of good comments about the greens, how great of shape they're in, and the course in general. Usually when you hear those kinds of comments, you see some lower scores. I wouldn't be surprised if a 65 or 64 comes out."

And they were right. Finishing later in the evening, Zenon Brown and Benoit Beisser passed Collins as they shot 64 and 65, respectively. Collins remains in third with 66 followed by Patrick Stolpe and Thomas Campbell in a tie for fourth with 67.

In his first Dakota Tour tournament, Brown shot under par every hole through the first five, eagling

on the third. While his hot streak cooled off in the later holes, he still finished eight under.

Beisser played consistently through all nine holes, paring 10 of the 18 and only shooting one bogey in the round. This is Beisser's fourth tournament in the tour, with his highest finish coming at The Bluffs, his most recent tour tournament.

As the heat is expected to increase over the weekend, it'll be more difficult for the golfers to stay focused and get through the rounds.

"That's the thing, it starts to become an endurance test," Doby said. "A lot of these guys are used to competing in this heat, the pros that is, but still it's a test of endurance and it'll be interesting to see what happens."

Lammers said in order to beat the heat, players need to stay focused on the task at hand.

"The game of golf is a hard sport, it ain't easy," he said. "Golf's a mental game all the time - stay focused whether it's hot or cold, all that stuff you've got to put out of your mind. You've got to hit the ball and you can't be thinking about fishing because you aren't going to hit it well if you're doing something like that."

The second round continues Saturday morning with tee times beginning at 7 a.m. and continuing until 2:15, with golfers teeing off from both the first and tenth holes. Groups will include three amateurs and one pro for the second day. Brown has the first tee off from hole 10, followed by Beisser at 7:22 a.m. and Collins at 1:07 p.m.

Ugandan Little League Team Strikes Out On Visas

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) — A youth baseball team from Uganda has lost its bid to become the first team from Africa to play in the Little League World Series because of discrepancies over players' ages and birth dates.

League and team officials did everything possible to ensure players on the Rev. John Foundation team from Kampala were qualified and had documentation, a league representative, Richard Stanley, of New York City, told The Associated Press on Friday. Children who are 11 or 12 as of April 30 can play in the World Series, which is held each August in South Williamsport, Pa.

Stanley is credited by Little League with introducing and establishing the organization in Uganda after building a baseball academy several years ago. He said Friday issues arose when ages and birth dates listed on documentation didn't

match those offered by parents, guardians or the players themselves during interviews with U.S. consular officials at the U.S. embassy in Kampala.

Several players provided false birth documents to make their ages appear younger, said a State Department official in Washington, speaking

on condition of anonymity because visa records are confidential.

Until now, the Ugandan team's success was considered a home run for Little League and baseball's international growth. The team would have been the first squad from Africa to play in the 65-year history of the World Series.



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