

SCL Notebook: Tabor Turning Things Around

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TABOR — One month ago, the Tabor Bluebirds were winless and looking at a potentially deflating summer of amateur baseball.

Suddenly, though, a roster that ranks as one of the youngest — if not, the youngest — in the South Central League has turned a corner. Once an after-thought in the always-competitive league, fifth-place Tabor (9-6) is now sitting well for a likely state tournament berth.

"At the beginning of the year, our younger guys were adjusting to the wood bats, and now they're finding a feel for it," said first-year manager

Jon Vavruska, whose team hosted Crofton on Tuesday night.

The Bluebirds started the season 0-4 and had been beaten by an average of 7.5 runs. A loss to Crofton on June 9 had Tabor sitting 1-5, but since then, the Bluebirds have won eight of their last nine games.

With a league-high four American Legion players on its roster, Tabor had to rely immediately on its youth to make the jump from high school and legions to the amateur ranks. Naturally, it took some time, according to Doug Vanecek.

"We have a really young team with some guys moving up, and it takes you a while

to get used to get the difference," said Vanecek, a 20-year-old pitcher and infielder who attends Morningside College.

Part of that adjustment comes with the change in bats. High school teams use wood bats, while the legions use BBCOR which have less of a 'trampoline' or 'pop' effect than regular aluminum. Amateurs, however, use wood bats.

"The wood is starting to feel a lot more natural for everyone, I think," Vanecek said. "We've scored over 10 runs in every one (win), so it's really been working for us."



P&D FILE PHOTO

Tabor shortstop Jason Humpal throw to third base from his knees to retire a Lesterville baserunner during their matchup on Saturday in Lesterville. Tabor was one of the last teams in the South Central League to claim a league victory, but has surged back to fifth place in the standings.

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Chase Elliott Impressing On NASCAR National Level

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Neither father nor son can remember a time when Chase Elliott wanted to be anything other than a race car driver.

The little boy spent his early years at the race track watching "Awesome Bill" win races deep into his 40s. One of Chase's earliest memories was the 2002 victory at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

His uncles worked on cars and engines, and so much time was spent in the Dawsonville, Ga., shop, that Chase never dreamed of doing anything but following in the footsteps of the 1988 NASCAR champion and 16-time most popular driver.

"I don't think I've ever wanted to do anything else," Chase said. "Who doesn't want to be like their Dad?"

He certainly wasn't destined to be a student, crying himself sick every morning as he tried to get out of going to school.

"I didn't think we'd ever get him through third grade. He hated it so bad," Bill Elliott recalled.

But it's funny how life changes, when commitment and desire become so overwhelming that attitudes adjust and tasks become more bearable. Chase wanted to race, but his parents insisted life wouldn't be all fun and games at the track.

"What we tell him is 'Right now, school is the most important part. The racing can go away in a heartbeat,'" Bill Elliott said. "Anything can take it away. So it's always been 'Get your education.' Chase is in a good school, and he's done a very good job of keeping his grades. He needs just a little prod now and then, but we work closely with the principals and teachers for them to understand what he needs to do. He's been very good about it."

So good that the 17-year-old is spending the summer before his senior year getting a taste of racing at NASCAR's national level. A tweak to the age requirements this year opened the gate for drivers as young as 16 to compete in the Truck Series on ovals a mile or shorter in length and on road courses. The previous age limit was 18.

It's allowed Chase to put together a partial Truck Series schedule this year in a joint effort between Hendrick Motorsports, where Chase is the first developmental driver the organization has had in six years, and Turner Scott Motorsports.

He heads to Iowa Speedway this weekend for his fourth Truck Series race of the year and a legitimate shot at picking up his first victory. In his previous three races, Elliott finished sixth, fifth and fourth.

And in ARC, which this year allowed 17-year-olds to drive at both Pocono Raceway and Kentucky Speedway after passing an approval test, Chase won his series debut at Pocono last month. He followed it with a fourth-place finish at Road America.

"He just surprises me every time I watch him," said Rick Hendrick. "The maturity he shows — most young guys with an opportunity, they wreck a bunch of stuff trying to figure out how to impress people. They are fast and have talent, but they don't know how to race."

"Chase has really impressed me with how smooth he is. He doesn't get rattled."

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Post 12 Sweeps S.F. West



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Levi Schmidt of the Yankton Black Sox lines a base hit to right field during Tuesday's VFW Teener game against Beresford at Riverside Field.

Baseball: Black Sox Blast Past Beresford In VFW Teener Action

SIOUX FALLS — Yankton First Dakota Post 12 earned a road sweep at Sioux Falls West in American Legion baseball action on Tuesday at Harmodon Park.

In the opener, Zach Benjamin tossed a complete game shutout and helped his cause with two hits as Yankton won 1-0.

Brady Hale also had two hits for Yankton. Lane Sawatzke had a hit, driving in the game's lone run in the fifth inning. Andrew Hummel and Mitch Gullikson added hits in the victory.

Jaden Holzer, Seth Bjordal and Kyle Schroeder had hits for West.

Austin Serck took the loss.

In the nightcap, Gullikson drove in five runs as Yankton pulled away to a 9-3 victory.

Gullikson finished with three hits, including a double. Landon Withrow doubled and singled. Brad Ulmer, Hummel and Adam Walter each had two hits and two RBI. Benjamin and Hale added hits in the win.

For West, Justin Kautz, Bjordal, Alex Linneman, Seth Peterson and Luke Kovaleski each had hits.

Dustin Hopper picked up the win, with Will Steward getting the final three outs for the save. Jack Lund took the loss.

Yankton, 10-15 overall and 2-5 in region play, hosts Brandon Valley today (Wednesday) in a single game. Start time is 6:30 p.m.

VFW Teener

Black Sox 24, Beresford 7

The Yankton Black Sox had six different players have two hits or more as they out-slugged Beresford 24-7 in VFW Teener baseball action on Tuesday at Yankton's Riverside Field.

Mason Townsend went 4-4 with a double, five runs scored and three RBI to lead the Black Sox barrage. Levi Schmidt went 4-5 with four runs scored and four RBI. Alex Withrow, Colin Muth and Reid Sawatzke each had three hits and two RBI. Hunter Ryan had a double, a single, three stolen bases and four RBI. Tyler Guthmiller and Bradey Sorenson added hits in the victory.

Sheldon Gant picked up the win on the mound.

The Black Sox begin play in the Sioux Falls Classic on Friday.

Black Sox 10-3, Norfolk 1-2

NORFOLK, Neb. — The Yankton Black Sox held Norfolk to three runs in a doubleheader on the way to a road sweep in VFW Teener baseball action on Monday.

In the opener, three different Black Sox players had three hits each as Yankton rolled to a 10-1 victory.

Tyler Guthmiller had a double, two singles and three RBI to lead Yankton. Alex Withrow posted three hits and three RBI. Sheldon Gant also had three hits.

Also for the Black Sox, Mason Townsend had a double, a single and a

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Three Decades Later, Brett Is Still 'The Pine Tar Guy'

NEW YORK (AP) — Three decades after his home run and hysterics, George Brett laughs that he's still known as "the Pine Tar Guy."

"I thought it was just going to be over with," the Hall of Famer said. "It's amazing how much play this has gotten."

Brett recalled the episode Tuesday night at Yankee Stadium before Kansas City played New York. Now 60, Brett is the interim hitting coach for the Royals.

On July 24, 1983, Brett hit a two-out, two-run homer in the ninth inning off Goose Gossage at the old Yankee Stadium that put the Royals ahead. But the shot was nullified and Brett was called for the game-ending

out when plate umpire Tim McClelland ruled there was too much pine tar on the bat.

Brett was wild-eyed when he charged from the dugout to argue. A few days later, AL President Lee MacPhail overturned the decision. The game was completed the next month and the Royals held on to win 5-4.

Brett recalled that on the day he hit the home run he didn't think the controversy "was that big of a deal."

Hardly.

Even now, Brett hears about it on a regular basis.

"Pretty much every time I play golf," he said. "They always want to check my clubs for pine tar."

Brett said he'd used that bat — it was unvarnished, 34 inches long and weighed 32 ounces — for a few weeks before homering off Gossage. Brett said used it for two more at-bats before donating it to Cooperstown.

Brett remembered that a week later, he came to bat in Detroit and McClelland was the plate umpire.

"Hey, you wanna have some fun?" Brett said the ump asked him.

"Timmy, let's just let it ride," Brett answered.

In those days, the Royals and Yankees were bitter rivals and Brett said he "hated" the team in pinstripes. Brett said he'd never even dealt with Gossage until years later during an exhibition game in Florida.

A person approached Brett before the game and said Gossage was opening a restaurant in Colorado and wondered whether he could have a bat from the star. The request came with a caveat, too — Gossage wanted the bat "all tarred up."

Brett gladly provided the slathered souvenir. And since then, they've formed a mutual admiration club.

The Royals said Gossage wanted to take part in Brett's remembrance Tuesday, but the hard-nosed closer was vacationing on a river in Colorado.

"We've become good friends," Brett said.

Hustling Home



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Yankton Fury baserunner Ellie Karolevitz, right, rushes home to score on a wild pitch during the opening game of the team's doubleheader with Norfolk Kelly's on Tuesday at Yankton's Riverside Field. Results from the twinbill were not available at presstime. The Fury open play in the South Dakota ASA Girls' Fastpitch Tournament on Saturday at Sioux Falls' Harmodon Park.

Young Ohio State Fan Names His Cancer 'Michigan,' Then Beats It

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio State football fans always want to defeat what they call "That school up North."

So when a 12-year-old Buckeyes fan was diagnosed with cancer 14 months ago, he chose to name his disease Michigan.

He wanted to beat it — and he has.

The young fan, Grant Reed, was released from Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus Friday after receiving a final chemotherapy session.

Grant's father, Troy Reed, on Tuesday said his son was readmitted to the hospital over the weekend because of a bacterial infection, but he added the boy is doing "very well."

"Our prognosis is very good," he said. "It shows that he has indeed beat Michigan."

In May 2012, Grant underwent a 16 1/2-hour surgery to have a brain tumor removed. Although the surgery was successful, he woke up without being able to move his left side or speak and had a serious vision problem.

He spent nearly 10 weeks at the hospital following the surgery. He then went through occupational and speech therapies and was able to continue to attend school. He will be in seventh grade this fall.

But his road to recovery included several rounds of radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

Grant's first chemo session, his dad said, was during the Buckeyes' season-opening game in September.

"We had a mini party and watched the Buckeyes play here at the hospital," Troy Reed said Tuesday while Grant was back at the hospital. He added that the Reeds continued to watch OSU games at the hospital during the weekends that Grant was admitted to continue his chemotherapy treatment.

Buckeyes head coach Urban Meyer visited the boy at the hospital in December. Grant's father said his son talked to Meyer for about 20 minutes.

"He was thrilled," the father said.