

Crofton Looks To Start Another Long Post-Season Run

Baseball: District 6B Amateur Tournament Begins Tonight

BY JEREMY HOECK

jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

SCOTLAND — Following a dominating regular season, the Crofton Bluejays have their eyes on a successful run through the District 6B amateur baseball tournament.

Crofton, state Class B runners-up in each of the past three seasons, enters as the top seed for the 9-team tournament, which begins tonight (Thursday) in Scotland with a 7 p.m. game between No. 8 Menno and No. 9 Scotland. The winner of that game will face Crofton on Saturday evening.

Do the first-place Bluejays (16-2) mind having the target on their backs?

"It's all right. It makes it more competitive, I guess," pitcher Rand Thygeson said. "It's always good."

Action resumes Friday with two games: No. 2 Wynot and No. 7 Freeman 6 p.m., followed by No. 3 Tabor and No. 6 Avon at 8:30 p.m. The final first round game is between No. 4 Irene and No. 5 Lesterville on Saturday.

Of the nine teams in the field, five will advance to the S.D. State Class B Tourney in Sioux Falls from Aug. 7-18.

The Bluejays, who lead the league in fewest runs allowed per game (2.17), reeled off a 13-game winning streak during the season and only lost to Yankton in the May 23 season opener and to Tabor on July 9.

A combination of a solid pitching staff and a quality defense has keyed the Crofton attack, Thygeson said.

"We play really well together, and we seem to click very well together," he said. "We make things work to get the win."

There have been plenty of those this summer for the Bluejays, who naturally figure to threaten Tabor's district tournament dominance. The Bluebirds are the defending district champions and have won the 6B crown three out of the last four years.

If someone is to dethrone Tabor, Crofton might just be that team, according to Avon manager Dan Bures.

"It will take a someone's best day to knock them off the top this year," Bures said.

While the top and bottom of the South Central League standings have remained fairly consistent all summer, the middle of the pack has seen plenty of shuffling. Tabor surged late

to jump to the third spot, while Irene, Lesterville and Avon have battled for the next three positions.

The stated goal from the beginning of the season for Lesterville (8-10) has been to reach state, which hasn't happened in a few years, according to manager Kevin Bloch.

"If we play as good as we're capable, there's no doubt we should make the state tournament," Bloch said. "We're young and have been a little inconsistent, but hopefully the guys are really focused."

Going by seedings, Avon (7-11) is on the outside looking in to crack the top five teams to reach the state tournament — which the Bards qualified for last summer.

An up-and-down season has not favored Avon so far, but it looks to be at full strength for districts, Bures said.

"We were in almost every game we played," he said. "We just felt like we couldn't get over the hump and get the big hit or make the catch when we needed it most."

The key for the Bards, Bures said, is improved defense and pitching.

"We feel if we can win against Tabor on Friday, we will be poised for a poten-

tial run at the championship," he said.

Pitching, as it is for every team, is especially critical for Menno (4-14) if the Mad Frogs are to get past tonight's play-in game and threaten Crofton, according to manager Ryan Liebl.

"I feel we have the pitching to get us to the state tourney," Liebl said. "Our defense needs to be greatly improved through if we're going to make any kind of run."

"When we've put it all together, we've looked very good this year, so that gives us some optimism."

Though it's on-the-field performance has struggled this summer, Scotland (1-17) has anxiously awaited its chance to host the district tournament, according to manager Dennis Kronaizl.

"Glen Baker is out there every day working on the field; he works like a dog out there," Kronaizl said. "We've been excited for it. And we should have some nice weather, which should really help the crowds."

The tournament runs through Aug. 3, with the district sending five representatives to the State Class B Tournament in Sioux Falls.

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck

P&D Selects SCL All-Star Team

From P&D Staff Reports

Though there is no All-Star Game, the South Central League can now boast it's own all-star amateur baseball team.

Following nominations from nine of the 10 teams in the league and some final decisions, the Press & Dakotan sports staff has named its inaugural SCL all-star roster for 2013.

The team includes three players (Scot Donner, Rand Thygeson and Nick Negge) from regular season champion Crofton, and a pair (Trey Krier and Jared Miller) from second place Yankton.

Also on the All-Star team are Dan Bures (Avon), Mike King (Irene), Doug Hall (Menno), Doug Vanecek (Tabor) and Lee Heimes (Wynot).

Post 12 Juniors Open State Play Today

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK

james.cimburek@yankton.net

Yankton Post 12 junior coach Drew Lawrence likes his team's chances in the 2013 Junior Legion Qualifier, which begins today (Thursday) at Sioux Falls' Harmodon Park, because of one big factor.

Experience.

Yankton (16-8) opens play against Brookings today at 7 p.m., sporting a hard-hitting and tough-pitching lineup that is seasoned for its age.

"All these kids know baseball because they've had good coaches early on," Lawrence said. "We get into good practices, which leads us to good games."

The juniors boast a .357 team batting average, including four players with averages over .400: Jordan Lightner (.432, 15 runs, 6 RBI, 10 BB), Austin Johnson (.423, 17 runs, 8 SB), Ben Cameron (.415, 21 runs, 5 doubles, 9 SB, 18 BB) and Brad Ulmer (.414, 8 SB). Johnson and Ulmer have had significant time with the varsity as well, with Ulmer batting .340 and Johnson batting .350.

"Austin was over .500 for part of the season. Lightner started 1-for-12 but has been hitting well since," Lawrence said. "We seem to do better against good pitching."

Adam Walter (.389, 5 doubles, 5 SB, 15 RBI), Brady Hale (.375, 10 SB, 11 RBI, 11 BB), Landon Withrow (.375) and Matt Hilson (.333, 7 RBI, 4 SB) have also swung the bat well, with Hale (.296), Walter (.288) and Withrow (.208) also seeing varsity playing time.

Cameron (6-2, 2.70 ERA, 20 K in 40 IP), Johnson (4-0, 1.80 ERA, 12 K in 25 IP), Greg Hauer (3-1, 2.70 ERA, 14 K in 30 IP) and Colton Diefenderfer (1-2, 3.71 ERA) have been the regular starters for the squad, with Hale (1-2, 3 saves, 4.05 ERA, 13 K in 20 IP) handling primary bullpen duties.

"Ben and Austin have helped a lot," Lawrence said. "Ben's around the zone all the time, and he's one of my favorites because of that. Austin's the same way."

While many of the Post 12 junior players have experience against some of the top players in the state and region, they don't have a ton of experience against many of the other teams in the field.

"We were supposed to play Brookings but there was a scheduling conflict," Lawrence said. "We've seen both Sioux Falls teams, but we haven't seen Brookings or the Rapid City teams."

While Lawrence has high expectations for the squad, he knows the team will play well, regardless of the outcome.

"We're going to come out and play hard," he said. "No matter where we go, we're going to play the game the right way. We're going to compete in every game."

Other first-round matchups include Watertown against Rapid City Post 22, Rapid City Post 320 against Sioux Falls West, and Pierre against Sioux Falls East. The tournament runs through Sunday.

You can follow James D. Cimburek on Twitter at twitter.com/JCimburek

Wrapping Up The Home Schedule



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Yankton Lakers shortstop Jordan Kathol catches a throw to force out a Mitchell baserunner during the opening game of a VFW Teener baseball doubleheader with Mitchell Black on Wednesday at Yankton's Riverside Field. The games were the final home contests for the Lakers, who will travel to Mitchell for the Class AA 13-14 Majors Tournament on Aug. 2-4. Results from the game were not available at presstime.

West Ends Yankton's Season

SIOUX FALLS — Sioux Falls West rallied from a 5-0 deficit to claim a 7-5 victory over Yankton First Dakota Post 12 in the Region 2A American Legion Baseball Tournament on Wednesday at Harmodon Park.

The loss ended Yankton's season at 16-20.

Mitchell and Brandon Valley will play for the championship today (Thursday) at 4 p.m. Mitchell beat Brandon Valley 15-5 to go into the final unbeaten in the tourney.

West was eliminated from the tournament with an 11-1 loss to Brandon Valley, but

will face the third place team from Region 1A for the final spot at state, scheduled for July 31-Aug. 4 in Rapid City.

Justin Kautz doubled, singled and drove in two, and Seth Bjordal and Jack Lund had two hits each to lead Sioux Falls West in the matchup with Yankton. Bjordal also walked three times. Kyle Schroeder added a double and two RBI in the victory.

Andrew Hummel had a triple, a double, a single and a run scored to lead Yankton. Lane Sawatzke had two hits and two RBI. Mitch Gullikson

and Brad Ulmer each had a hit and a RBI. Zach Benjamin and Adam Walter added hits, and Landon Withrow drove in a run for Post 12.

Alex Linneman went the distance for the win, striking out four. Gullikson, who came in after Sawatzke pitched six innings to start the game, took the loss.

Neb. Area C2

Hartington 3, Wakefield-Ponca 0

BATTLE CREEK, Neb. — Frank Herbolzheimer went 3-

3 with a walk, a run scored and a RBI as Hartington beat Wakefield 3-0 for the championship of the Nebraska American Legion Area C2 Senior Baseball Tournament on Wednesday in Battle Creek, Neb.

Hartington heads to O'Neill, Neb., on Saturday for the opening game of the Nebraska State Class C Senior Tournament, facing St. Paul in the 2 p.m. game Saturday afternoon.

Zach Wuebben had the other Hartington hit, a triple. Adam Drieling doubled for Wakefield-Ponca.

Trent Jansen tossed a two-hit shutout for the victory. Drieling allowed just four hits, but took the loss.

Wakefield-Ponca 10, Battle Creek 0

BATTLE CREEK, Neb. — Zach Kvidera allowed four hits over five innings as Wakefield-Ponca blanked Battle Creek 10-0 on Tuesday, advancing to the championship.

Kvidera and Colton Welke had doubles for Wakefield-Ponca, which scored five runs each in the second and fifth innings.

Big Ten Notebook: Michigan's Gardner Set At QB

BY JACK MCCARTHY

Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner enters the season with his position secure despite calling signals in just five games last year.

Gardner, who spent most of the season at wide receiver, stepped in at quarterback following Denard Robinson's injury and went 76 of 126 for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns running a pro-style offense.

Speaking Wednesday at Big Ten Media Day at the Hilton Chicago, Michigan safety Thomas Gordon said Gardner has steadily developed into a leader since his first start at quarterback last year.

"He's grown right into it," Gordon said. "He's a lot more comfortable, you can see that. ... He's taken it by the horns and he's spearheading this team and we look forward to how he (will) do when we go out there Aug. 31."

Among offseason work was a trip to the recent Manning Passing Camp while also working at home with returning and incoming players.

"The young guys are eager

to learn and eager to get better," Gardner said. "I've been working with those guys, trying almost to be perfect, as perfect as you could possibly be."

BEST IN THE COUNTRY?

Chris Borland is flattered that Wisconsin coach Gary Andersen calls the Badgers' line-backer the best in the county.

Now it's time to prove it. "It means a lot because obviously he's got confidence in me and he comes from a defensive background," said Borland, who earned first-team All-Big Ten honors last season. "It's great to hear that. That said, those are just words so I've got to play well this fall and prove him right."

Borland, who started all 13 games last year, enters his senior season with 308 career tackles, 41 1/2 for losses and 13 forced fumbles, the most in school history. He needs just to tie the FBS record of 14, shared by five players.

Borland said he appreciates why the NCAA adopted new rules on targeting players and hits above the shoulders.

"(But) it's concerning for me as a defensive player," he said. "You don't want to get ejected. A lot of times things

happen fast on the field. If you don't anticipate a running back going low and then he does, it could be helmet to helmet. It could be things like that.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS:

New Purdue coach Darrell Hazell, a longtime Ohio State assistant, won't settle for middle of the pack as he returns to the Big Ten after short but successful run at Kent State.

"One of the first things I said to our team (at) our very first team meeting was that Purdue was perceived in the middle of the Big Ten — never up here, never down here," he said. "I told them it's going to take a lot of work but we're going to climb ourselves out of the middle, we're going to put this program (into) national prominence for a long time."

Purdue went 6-7 overall while Hazell was 11-3 overall, 8-0 in the Mid-American Conference East in his second and final Kent State season. He also guided the Golden Flashes to the program's first bowl game in 40 years.

Delany Backs Changes To NCAA With Concerns

BY JAY COHEN

AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany knows change is coming to the NCAA, major developments that will alter the landscape of college sports.

He just wants to make sure it's done right.

Speaking Wednesday at the league's media days in a Chicago hotel, Delany echoed the chorus of major conference commissioners calling for a new model when it comes to the governing body of college athletics. But he said it's important to address the issues at the center of their concerns.

"I'm in favor of whatever restructuring that will lead to what I would consider to be resolving or improving certain areas where I think we're weak," he said. "If we restructure the NCAA and don't address some of the substantive concerns, I won-

der why we have restructured."

With the start of the college football season on the horizon, it's clear that conference commissioners across the country are talking seriously about the future of the athletic departments at their schools. The leaders of the Big 12, Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference have offered their critiques of the NCAA over the last week.

It looks as if considerable alterations are a foregone conclusion, and it's not very far away, either.

"Very optimistic we'll get it," Delany said. "And I think we may get it within a year. And I think the conference commissioners that I've spoken with throughout the range of Division I are open for that discussion."

"I think it's necessary and