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Fans watch the action in the amateur baseball game between Crofton and Wynot from the terrace on the left field line in Crofton. (James D. Cimburek/P&D)

A GREAT NIGHT FOR BASEBALL!

When Crofton And Wynot Hook Up For An Amateur Baseball Game, It's A Summer Night Like No Other

BY JEREMY HOECK

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CROFTON, Neb. — Two towns with a long baseball history separated by 17 miles on Highway 12 in Northeast Nebraska.

Crofton and Wynot.

Two towns with amateur baseball teams that happen to play in a South Dakota league and compete for the South Dakota State Tournament. And yet, they each consider their “big game” each summer to be the matchups between each other.

That was the scenario that played out at last Friday night's annual Fourth of July weekend game in Crofton. It was a typical small-town setting, with a twist (fireworks!): Families setting up their chairs earlier in the day to guarantee a good spot, kids riding their bikes around the park, the smell of the concession stand grilling firing up early, and for good measure, another competitive baseball game.

The fact that Crofton won the game 3-0 behind a complete-game shutout from Rand Thygeson was almost secondary. Same with the fireworks show. No, this was a night highlighted by a post-game proposal on the field.

Long-time Crofton outfielder Kyle Mueller had been planning for weeks a creative way to propose to his girlfriend, Lakyn Schmidt. He eventually figured out — with some help — a way to set up a ‘surprise’ raffle drawing in which Schmidt would be the winner, and would have to come out to home plate after the game.

“I thought I was winning some money,” she joked later. Instead, she was presented with a ring by Mueller, and though Schmidt joked she didn't remember actually saying ‘yes,’ the large crowd in attendance showered them with applause.

With the idea that every Crofton vs. Wynot amateur baseball game is more of an event than an actual sporting contest, the *Press & Dakotan* sports staff decided to take its readers behind the scenes. We wanted to spend a few minutes with various people at the ballpark, from the managers and players, to fans, to concession stand volunteers, to ticket takers (a mother and daughter) at the front entrance, to umpires and everyone in between.

What follows is a kind of running diary during the night:

5:30 p.m. — Two hours before the game, there are two Crofton players in the dugout. Other than that, the park is empty.

5:35 p.m. — The real action this early before the game is at the hitting cage, behind the left field fence. Ben Hegge is throwing to cousin Brandon Hegge, but Ben won't be doing more than that on this night. He pitched eight innings against Akron (Iowa) on Wednesday night. “No, I probably won't play at all tonight,” Ben said.

5:49 p.m. — Bob Hegge is walking through the park, cleaning the trash from the bleachers. He's



ABOVE: Crofton pitcher Rand Thygeson sends the ball home against Wynot leadoff hitter Chase Rolles during their South Central League amateur baseball matchup on July 3 in Crofton. The two teams are traditional powers in the league and in South Dakota amateur baseball circles, and their meetings seem to bring out the best in both teams, as when journalist commented. BELOW: Two youngsters peek into the Crofton dugout during the game. LEFT: The baseball fireworks did not limit themselves to the field of play last week, as Crofton held its fireworks display after the baseball game — a national ritual that is repeated in many communities across the country.

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