



ABOVE: Former Kansas City Royals pitcher Dennis Leonard, standing, answers kids' questions during the Royals' "Pass It On" youth baseball clinic on Tuesday at Yankton's Riverside Field. The sixth annual clinic continues to be one of the largest youth clinics the Royals put on, this year drawing 163 young baseball and softball players. BELOW: A young player speeds around first base during a base-running drill at the end of the clinic.

Clinic Turns Riverside Field Blue



Former Royals Return To Yankton To Teach Young Players In Sixth Annual Event

BY JEREMY HOECK
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For one day, at least, Yankton's Riverside Field was filled with Kansas City Royals blue. A group of 163 area youth took part in the sixth annual "Pass It On" baseball clinic featuring four former Royals players on Tuesday morning. The lineup of pros for the 3-hour session included Dennis Leonard, John Mayberry, Brian McRae and Les Norman. Aside from the tutorials and autograph session, the main theme of the day proved to be Yankton's place among the Royals' many regional clinics. "These guys always tell us that a big reason why they keep coming back is that we're one of the biggest," said Curt Dykstra, general manager of Riverfront Broadcasting. KYNT, which has been a Royals affiliate for 23 years, is one of two affiliates in South Dakota — Belle Fourche (also 1450 AM) is the other. "They know they'll have a bunch of kids and they know they'll get treated right," Dykstra added. "As long as they want to keep coming, we'll keep doing this." That shouldn't be a problem, given the turnout, said Norman, who played with the Royals for two seasons (1995-96). "Yankton is one of the absolute biggest clinics we do," he said after signing auto-

graphs. "The response from the community, from KYNT and all the sponsors is amazing. This is our favorite place to come to." The response from surrounding towns such as Bloomfield, Gayville, Hartington, Irene, Menno, Ponca, Tabor, Volin, Wausa and Wynot has continued to grow, as well, according to Keith Sudbeck of Wynot, Neb. Sudbeck traveled to Yankton with his 10-year-old twins, son Skyler and daughter Mackenzie. "We came last year and they really enjoyed it," Keith said. "They get a lot of techniques. My son plays on a 9-10 year-old team, and his batting really improved after we came up here. He remembered everything he learned up here." That's the idea, McRae said. McRae played for five teams over his 10-year major league career, including five seasons playing for his father, Hal, with the Royals. McRae later served as analyst for the Chicago Cubs on WGN, on MLB.com radio and on ESPN's "Baseball Tonight." "We always have a good turnout, and they do a good job promoting it; getting the community involved in it," he said. "This is one of our better attended camps that the Royals put on. "There a lot of people from here that go to Royals games and get down to Kansas City,

so it's a good fit." Not only did the area youth develop a connection with the players, so too may have Mount Marty College. McRae, who is in his second year as an assistant coach with Park University (an NAIA Division I school in Parkville, Mo.), said there is a possibility that his program could schedule future games with Mount Marty. "We've talked about maybe lining something up," he said. "If they come down to Topeka for a tournament, we could maybe play a game or two." Aside from baseball, Norman hosts his own syndicated sports talk show called "Breakin' The Norm," which airs out of Kansas City. His interviews with such notable names as Bob Costas, Greg Louganis and Gary Player are available for download online at lesnorman.com. Norman said he got the idea for his own show after he and his wife got "tired of controversy." "I wanted to bring a human element to sports," he said. "All these heroes I saw and watched growing up, I wanted to hear their stories; to share them with others." You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck

SCL Notebook: New Legion Eligibility Rule Has Little Effect On League

BY JEREMY HOECK
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A new statewide rule regarding American Legion players is having little impact on the area amateur baseball league. In past years, amateur teams could only add legion players to their roster once the legion season had ended, and then on through the district and state tournament. This year, however, the South Dakota Amateur Baseball Association ruled that amateur teams could have those legion players on the rosters all summer. Between the 10 teams in the South Central League, there are six legion-aged players on the rosters. Tabor leads the way with four legion members (Ross Kortan, Blase Vanecek, Kodi Larson and Nathan Bares), while Menno's Dylan Lehr is on the Mad Frogs' roster but plays legion ball for Parkston. Freeman's Jason Prouty is eligible but is not playing for a legion team. The two Nebraska teams in the SCL,

Crofton and Wynot, cannot use legion players because of a Nebraska state rule. The remaining South Dakota teams in the SCL, Irene, Lesterville, Scotland and Yankton do not boast legion players on their roster, but Yankton could potentially add players once Post 12 finishes its season, co-manager Ross Heine said. District 6 commissioner Larry Andersen said the new rule is a 1-year "trial" by the state, which later adopted a SCL idea to prohibit legion players from pitching until their legion season has ended. To apply for eligibility, amateur teams need to get approval from the legion coach, their district commissioner and the state legion commander, and must be 16 years old by June 1 and must sign an amateur contract. "Legion has priority, though," Andersen said. "If there's a legion game and an amateur game on the same night, legion takes precedence." Tabor, which needed legion players to patch holes left by departing veterans after last summer, benefits from the additions, according to first-year man-

ager Jon Vavruska. "It allows the legion players to gain experience at another level of baseball," Vavruska said. "Small town baseball is about having a mixture of rookies and veterans, and trying to keep that program on the field." Others, however, across the league said they were not huge fans of the new rule. A team like the Avon Bards, for example, is not affected by the option to add legion players, because there is no legion team in either Avon, Wagner or Tyndall — the three towns where Avon gets its amateur players. Kids from Tyndall go to Tabor to play legion ball during the summer. Avon co-manager Dan Bures said he believes teams should have to apply for the right to use legion players "based on a short roster situation." "I know the rule was put in place to help teams stay on the field but unfortunately I think it will not be used in the manner," he said.



P&D FILE PHOTO
Tabor Bluebirds shortstop Ross Kortan, left, tries to slap down a tag on Freeman Black Sox runner Chris Wollmann during their June 7 South Central League amateur game in Tabor. Kortan is one of four American Legion players to join the amateur team this summer under a new state rule.

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Track & Field: Parker Mentor Honored By Fellow Coaches



P&D FILE PHOTO
The Parker track and field team won the Class B combined state title at the S.D. State Track and Field Meet in May. Parker finished second in the girls' division and third in the boys' division, helping earn head coach Phil Bjorneberg (second row, second from left, with hat and sunglasses) earn the "Coaches Winners Circle" Coach of the Year honor from the South Dakota Cross Country and Track and Field Coaches Association.

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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PARKER — Phil Bjorneberg has always been one to enjoy his time coaching student-athletes at Parker High School. So when he calls a weekend "the most fun he's ever had" in 27 years of coaching, it had to have been a special couple of days. The Pheasants had exactly that at the state track meet last month, with the Parker girls finishing second and the boys placing third in Class B, earning the Pheasants the Combined Team Title. That effort also saw Bjorneberg recognized by the South Dakota Cross Country and Track & Field Coaches Association as its "Coaches Winners Circle" Coach of the Year. "Whenever you get an honor like this, it's great because it gives a little more attention to the team and the kids," Bjorneberg said. "This is a pretty special one." With the majority of the squads that finished fifth in the boys' division and in a tie for ninth in the girls' division a year ago, Parker was in position for a strong showing at state, Bjorneberg said.

"On the guys' side, we felt really good about being in the top four. We felt we were in the hunt with Viborg-Hurley (second) and Irene-Wakonda (fourth)," he said. "With our girls, we felt pretty good as well. We had everyone back but Anna (Leloux, playing basketball at Minn. State-Mankato). "We wanted to be in the top four with both teams." Despite a crazy season weather-wise, the Pheasants prepared well for state due to strong in-season competition. "If we're not seeing region teams, we're still running against (Big East) Conference teams or some other tough Class A teams," Bjorneberg said. Teams from Region 4B — Parker's region — claimed four of the top five spots in Class B boys and three of the top eight spots in Class B girls. "When you look at the finishes over the past five six years, this has been a really competitive area." While Parker had areas in which it was expected to score big points at state — the distance events for the boys and the sprints for the girls — there were

some surprises along the way. "For us to score in the field events really mattered," Bjorneberg said. "When Tristen (Erickson) and Zach (Anderson) pulled four-and-a-half points in the high jump, it was a nice start. It was the same with the girls, with Hannah (Herlyn) scoring us one-and-a-half points (also in the high jump)." The "surprises" continued throughout the meet for Parker, as Jenny Smith proved to be a valuable member of two state championship and three place-winning relays overall, and Erik Hunstad earned a spot in the finals of the boys' 300-meter hurdles. "In 27 years, both days of the meet were the most fun I've ever had coaching," Bjorneberg said. "Everything went the way we wanted it to, and we even had some bonuses. Everyone handled the pressure well and did their best. "It was just a riot." You can follow James D. Cimburek on Twitter at twitter.com/JCimburek