

Baseball | South Central League Notebook

Fan Support Brings Berndt Back

BY JEREMY HOECK

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MENNO — The allure of small-town support eventually persuaded Josh Berndt to return to Menno.

Berndt, a 27-year-old second baseman for the Mad Frogs, came back to his former squad this summer after a two-year stint with the Tea Toros, a now defunct amateur team.

"I missed playing here; missed playing with these guys," Berndt said before a home game last week. "I liked it a lot more up here."

A resident of Sioux Falls, Berndt is indeed sacrificing time to play with his long-time friends. Every game with Tea was closer than the games in the South Central League (SCL), but eventually the lack of crowd support played a role, he said.

"We were lucky to get four or five fans a game up there, and two of those were usually my parents," said Berndt, who had been persuaded to play for Tea by his cousin, Kent, another player.

"There's just something about a small town," Berndt added. "People care more about baseball and they come out to watch you."

Eventually, Berndt talked with another cousin, Tom Sattler of the Mad Frogs, about potentially rejoining the roster this summer. The response was quick, manager Ryan Liebl said.

"He always had a lot of fun with us before, and the only reason he left was he because he was closer to home," Liebl said. "We had a good team before when he was here."

Although Menno is off to a 2-7 start in the SCL, Berndt said the team is not far off from competing with the

SCL STANDINGS			
	W	L	Per GB
Crofton	9	1	.900 —
Yankton	6	2	.750 2
Wynot	6	2	.750 2
Irene	5	3	.625 3
Avon	4	3	.571 3.5
Lesterville	3	5	.375 5
Tabor	3	5	.375 5
Freeman	2	5	.286 5.5
Scotland	1	6	.143 6.5
Menno	1	7	.125 7

Sunday, June 23
Tabor 12, Menno 3
Wynot 3, Lesterville 2
Avon 13, Scotland 5
Irene 10, Freeman 0

Monday, June 24
Crofton 5, Yankton 0

Tuesday, June 25
Freeman at Avon

Thursday, June 27
Crofton at Scotland
Lesterville at Menno
Yankton at Wynot

league's best. "We have a lot of talent, but we just can't put it all together," he said.

Calling Berndt one of the team's best hitters, Liebl said Berndt is also a steady presence in the field — just as he is in the dugout with younger players.

The manager also said he understands Berndt's desire to want to play for Menno.

"I've been to a couple Cornbelt (League) games, and they don't get near the support we do," Liebl said. "Baseball is more important to small towns."

Former SCL Official Devine Is Remembered

Dan Devine, a former South Central League secretary and treasurer, died last week after a battle with cancer.

The 57-year-old, whose son Travis used to play in the league, died last Tuesday at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls. Devine's funeral was held Monday at St. Benedict Catholic Church in Yankton.



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Menno Mad Frogs second baseman Josh Berndt is back with the team this summer after spending two seasons with an amateur team in Tea. Berndt, who lives in Sioux Falls, said he came back to the Mad Frogs because he enjoyed the team.

ton. "He did a lot of things behind the scenes; he was my right hand man," District 6 commissioner Larry Andersen said Monday. "He started doing some paper work and other things the same year I assumed my position (five years ago)."

Devine, a 1974 Yankton High School graduate, married his wife, Jeanne, in 1981 and they raised two sons, Jesse and Travis. Dan Devine was also a long-time supporter of the Yankton Baseball Association.

Andersen, who said there was a near capacity crowd at Monday's funeral, said Devine will be missed.

"He did so much for our league and for amateur baseball," Andersen said. "He was a great friend."

Andersen said. "He was a great friend."

Crofton's Pitching

After blanking Yankton 5-0 on Monday night, the Crofton Bluejays have still not allowed more than three runs in a SCL game this season. First-place Crofton (9-1)

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Blackhawks Win Stanley Cup Crown

BOSTON (AP) — The hard hit that kept Jonathan Toews off the ice for the third period of Game 5 couldn't stop Chicago's captain from leading the Blackhawks to their second Stanley Cup championship in four seasons.

Toews scored Chicago's first goal Monday night and set up the tying goal with 1:16 left in the third period as the Blackhawks rallied with two goals in a span of 17 seconds to beat the Boston Bruins 3-2 in Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final.

Mo. Valley Hoops In Transition

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Wichita State finished last season with a stirring run to the Final Four that was a point of pride for Missouri Valley Conference.

Yet like many leagues around the country, the Valley is dealing with realignment-induced change that could alter its future.

League cornerstone Creighton, arguably the MVC's top program in recent years, is off to the reconfigured Big East in 2013-14.

The Valley quickly added Loyola (Ill.) University of the Horizon League to take Creighton's place. But while the Chicago-based Ramblers have a chance to someday flourish in the more prominent Valley, losing the Bluejays stings.

"Obviously, not having Creighton is something that, collectively, we're going to have to do a great job of covering up," Northern Iowa coach Ben Jacobson said Monday. "I think we're in very good position to cover up for Creighton."

The Bluejays, behind two-time All-American Doug McDermott, are expected to contend immediately in the new Big East after winning the MVC last winter.

It could take much longer for the Ramblers to find their footing in the Valley.

The Ramblers, who haven't reached the NCAA tournament since 1985, finished just 5-11 in the Horizon League a year ago. Loyola beat Mississippi State and DePaul, but it was just the first time in 21 years the Ramblers defeated more than one BCS-level school.

There are indications that Loyola is getting better, though.

Coach Porter Moser — who coached at Illinois State from 2003-07 and played at Creighton from 1986-90 — led the Ramblers to an eight-win improvement in 2012-13. That was the biggest jump by a second-year coach in school history.

Loyola returns five players with starting experience, including star forward Christian Thomas, from a roster that was the sixth-youngest in the nation last season. But even Moser said Monday that it's tough to predict how Loyola will fare in its first season in the MVC.

"We are preparing guys, to let them know how good (the Valley) is. The coaching, the atmosphere, the level of players," Moser said. "There's really good teams. There are some teams in some other leagues that can be really talented, but I think the Valley is talented and has great teams."

Loyola's biggest selling point to the Valley was its presence in a major media market. Most of the league teams already recruit heavily in Chicago, and Moser said he's already begun to notice Loyola resonating more with recruits in the classes of 2014 and 2015.

"The Valley has such a strong name, and it's been a very, very positive reception," Moser said. "It's now going to be an even bigger stage. The TV package in the Valley is very exciting ... almost every game that (we'll) be playing will be on some type of TV. That's just exposure. That's such a different level, and we're excited to be a part of that."

The Valley's national buzz will undoubtedly take a dip next season by losing the Bluejays, especially considering that McDermott is one of the most recognizable stars in the country.

Crofton Blanks Yankton 5-0 In SCL Showdown



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Crofton Bluejays runner Alex Mueller, left, tries to break a double play as Yankton Tappers second baseman Jared Miller throws to first during their South Central League amateur game Monday night at Riverside Field.

In a battle between the top two teams in the South Central League, the Crofton Bluejays showed why they are in front.

Behind a dominant pitching performance from ace Scot Donner, Crofton blanked the Yankton Tappers 5-0 in an amateur baseball showdown Monday night at Riverside Field.

The victory was the ninth straight for Crofton (9-1), which has not lost since a season-opening loss to Yankton last month.

Yankton drops to 6-2 on the season and travels to Wynot, Neb. on Thursday — the Expos are also 6-2. No other information was reported for Monday night's game.

Avon 13, Scotland 5

SCOTLAND — Three different players had three hits and Nate Harrington went the distance as Avon rolled past Scotland 13-5 in South Central League action Sunday night.

Jeff Haefner doubled twice and drove in four runs for Avon (4-4), while Dan Bures doubled twice, and Jesse Hajek added two singles and a double. Nick Honke chipped in with four RBI and Jeff Sand added a pair of hits.

Harrington scattered 14 hits and struck out seven batters.

In the loss for the Highlanders (1-7), Michael Kronaizl, Paul Plante, Blake Gomer and Joe Kronaizl all had three hits, while Mike Pietz doubled. Plante pitched four innings to take the loss.

Avon hosts Freeman tonight (Tuesday) and Scotland hosts Crofton on Thursday.

AVON (4-4)001 323 202 — 13 18 2
SCOTLAND (1-7)300 000 020 — 5 14 3
Nate Harrington and Joey Cuka; Paul Plante, Mike Kronaizl (5) and Casey Comstock

Wynot 3, Lesterville 2

WYNOT, Neb. — Lee Heimes struck out five in a complete-game effort as the Wynot Expos edged Lesterville 3-2 in Sunday night South Central League action.

Heimes was also 2-3 at the plate with an RBI, while Eric Hames added a pair of hits. Chase Rolles, Lance Heine and Ryan Heimes all had one hit, while Heine and Ryan Heimes both had one RBI.

Jason Bierle struck out four batters in a complete-game loss, while Cody Ulmer went 3-4 and Ian Powell hit a solo home run. Mike Pavel and Tyler Edler both added one hit.

Both teams return to action Thursday, with Yankton visiting Wynot and Lesterville at Menno.

LESTERVILLE (3-5)100 100 000 — 2 6 3
WYNOT (6-2)100 000 11X — 3 7 1
Jason Bierle and Ian Powell; Lee Heimes and Steve Heimes, Scott Heine (8)

Royals' Brett Still Finding Groove As Coach

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — George Brett likes to say that hitting was always easier for him to do than say.

After all, he was one of the best of his generation — of any generation, really. His pursuit of the near-mythical .400 mark during his MVP season of 1980 came up just 10 points short, and to this day remains one of the most spirited cracks at it since Ted Williams reached it in 1941.

But for Brett, stepping into the batter's box, peering back at a pitcher and then putting the right swing on the ball came naturally. He worked his tail off, of course, but when someone would ask him to explain his sweet swing, he would usually just shrug.

It was easier to do than say. Well, now he's getting paid to say rather than do. He's three weeks into a monthlong experiment as the Kansas City Royals' hitting coach, and just like Williams and scores of other greats who have tried to become coaches, Brett is finding results maddeningly slow to show.

"I've seen results in batting practice. I want to see them in games," Brett said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I've seen some guys alter their swings a bit, their stances a little bit, and they've had a little success, which is good. Some guys are working



JOHN SLEEZER/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT

Kansas City Royals hitting coach George Brett (5) introduced the teams first round draft pick Hunter Dozier, right, to Detroit Tigers manager Jim Leyland before Monday's baseball game on June 10 at Kauffman Stadium in Kansas City, Mo. Dozier signed on Monday.

on it and it looks good in BP but it hasn't carried over to a game yet.

"When it carries over to a game," he added, "we'll be OK."

The question that will soon face Brett is whether he'll be around to witness it.

The Hall of Fame third baseman turned down numerous opportunities to coach over the years, mostly because he

didn't want to deal with the daily grind. But he also didn't know whether he'd be any good at it, a hard admission for someone who has always excelled in baseball.

So even when the Royals re-assigned hitting coaches Jack Maloof and Andre David and came calling once more, Brett accepted the interim job with reservations. He told manager Ned Yost and general manager

Dayton Moore he would give it a month and see how things were working out.

That month is quickly approaching an end and the results so far — at least in black-and-white terms — have been modest at best and a humbling disappointment at worst.

The Royals were hitting .261 when Brett put on the old No. 5. They were averaging

four runs a game, and ranked near the bottom of the American League in just about every statistical category.

Since he took over, the team is batting just .247 and scoring about 3.7 runs per game.

Their walk rate has improved ever-so slightly, but their power numbers have declined. They're hitting fewer home runs and extra-base hits, which is hard to imagine given the lack of power they were already demonstrating during the early part of the season.

"As an offensive group, we haven't come together as a team," Yost acknowledged. "We're still trying to take on too much responsibility individually instead of just doing whatever it takes."

But that old adage that numbers never lie? Well, Yost believes they can.

In just about every relative statistic, the Royals have regressed under Brett, but there are plenty of reasons to explain it. It takes time for changes to take hold. Subtle tweaks to a swing and, more important, a mindset can sometimes take months to reflect in the numbers.

In some cases, players have simply reverted to their expected mean.

Alex Gordon was hitting

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