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Very competitive field of seven teams set for the 25th Annual Bill Newhouse Tournament

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Six teams from around the country, as well as the Miles City Mavericks, will invade Denton Field and Miles City beginning on July 5 in the 25th Annual Blue Rock Distributing Pepsi-Cola Bill Newhouse Invitational Tournament.

The teams are coming from: Las Vegas, Nevada; Canby, Oregon; Tri-City, Minn.; Rapid City, S.D.; Great Falls and Shepherd, Montana.

Games will begin on Tuesday afternoon at 12:30 with the Rapid City Post 320 Stars and the Sierra Vista (Las Vegas) Lions facing off. Each team will have at least five games guaranteed, with two more possible in the championship round. Four teams will move on to the semi-finals, which will be played on July 10, with the winners playing in the championship game at 6 p.m., on the 10th.

Here is a preview of all seven teams that will be playing in the 25th Annual Newhouse tournament, including players to watch for. All season records are as reported at press time. Most teams are playing over the weekend prior to the Newhouse tournament.

MILES CITY MAVERICKS

The Mavericks have had a rocky 2005 to this point in the season, en route to a 11-22 record.

"We have had a lot of ups and downs," Mavs Head Coach Bryan Larson said. "We are on kind of an up note right now and hopefully we can keep things going through the tournament. We are looking to compete and get into the semi-finals and go from there."

In the last few weeks, the Mavs have received excellent pitching performances and the defense has played well.

But the Mavs have struggled at the plate, especially with hitting with runners on base.

"We have to hit the ball," Larson said. "We're expecting these teams to come in and hit the ball. We've been pitching and playing defense well enough to keep us in games, so if we hit the ball, we can take some pressure off our pitching."

The Mavs don't have great power in their line-up, but they do have good team speed.

Speedsters, Pat Regan, Craig Parry, Tanner Crevier and Brandon Sandau can tear things up on the base paths when on base.

Parry, coming off an All-Conference performance at Miles Community College, has been the most consistent performer at the plate.

Brian Laney has provided power from the middle part of the order, and 15-year old Chris Bogner has come up with countless clutch hits this season.

The Mavs strength is in their pitching staff. Laney, Jesse Haidle, Seth Crawford and Nate Dunning provide a daunting four-some.

Crawford, Laney and Haidle have been the horses lately for the Mavs.

And Dunning has been consistently solid all season long.

The Mavs won the Newhouse Tournament in 2001, and have reached the semi-finals 10 times in the 24 previous Newhouse Tournaments.

The Mavs will look to improve on their 0-5 record in last year's tournament.

SIERRA VISTA LIONS (Las Vegas, Nevada)

The Sierra Vista Lions come into the Newhouse tournament with a record of 13-7 as an American Legion team.

The Lions are made up of 16 players from Sierra Vista High School, and two players that graduated from Sierra Vista in 2004.

This years' Sierra Vista High School team won the Nevada Class 4A, the largest class in Nevada, state baseball championship, compiling a record of 35-5 on the high school season.

"We're a decent team. When we play ok, we're ok," Lions coach Levi Gill said. "So far the season has gone all right. We got beat up a bit when we went to Oregon. We didn't go up there with our full staff of pitchers. We've been struggling a bit on defense. Our pitching has carried us, as it has all year."

Scott Berke and Thomas Miller have led the Lions offense so far this season. Berke, the center fielder and lead-off hitter, will be a senior this year, and was named All-League in high school as a junior.

Miller graduated in 2004 from Sierra Vista, and is the Lions first baseman.

The Lions rely heavily on their pitching staff. Their big guns on the mound are: Justin Garcia, Andrew Leary, Justin Mettalka and Matt Klein.

"Pitching is the backbone of our team," Gill said. "We can swing it a little as well, but if you had to pick one thing it would be our pitching.

We don't have anybody that throws 100 mph, but everybody can throw strikes and locate pitches."

This will be the second year that the Sierra Vista team has played in the Newhouse Tournament.

In 2003, the team traveled to Miles City and played good ball, finishing with a 3-3 record. Current assistant coach for the Lions, Austin Stout, was named to the All-Tournament team that year.

RAPID CITY POST 320 STARS (Rapid City, S.D.)

The Rapid City Stars come into their third straight Bill Newhouse Tournament with a 28-9 record.

"We're doing pretty good right now," Stars coach Mick Mitzell said. "We've done fairly well. We're a young team, only four 18-year-olds, most of our kids are 16 and 17. We're holding our own anyway."

The Stars rely on the strength of their top two pitchers, Travis Burhans and AJ Butt.

"Our number one and number two chuckers are pretty good," Mitzell said. "After that it falls off pretty good. But they keep up in the games. I think we are pretty strong there."

Butt showed the Mavericks that he was for real in a game earlier in the season. Butt pitched 5 2/3 innings, and had 13 strike outs.

Burhans has been a force in the previous two Bill Newhouse Tournaments. He has been named to the All-Tournament team both years.

Other players to watch in the tournament are: Zane Roduner, third baseman; Nick Miessner, outfield; and Kyle Starkey a 16-year old shortstop that has been playing well this season.

Miles City fans have seen plenty of the Stars over the past few years.

The team routinely travels to Miles City to play the Mavericks early in the season, and have been to the previous two Bill Newhouse Tournaments.

In 2003 the Stars won the 23rd Annual Bill Newhouse Tournament and in 2004, the Stars finished second behind Bozeman.

"We really enjoy coming up there," Mitzell said. "It's a lot of fun and we love playing the different teams."

GREAT FALLS BLACK SOX (Great Falls, Montana)

The Great Falls Black Sox, a Senior Babe Ruth team in their third year of existence, will be making their first appearance in the Bill Newhouse Tournament.

"It's our third year of existence and word is starting to get out about us," Head Coach Ron Reichelt said. "I think it is a great opportunity to be able to come out and play in this tournament."

The Black Sox come into the tournament with an impressive 23-3 record on the year.

The Black Sox is a program geared more for the players that want to work during the season, and can't commit to playing all the games that an American Legion team plays.

"Our program is for kids that work," Reichelt said. "Ninety-five percent of our kids work. I haven't seen my catcher all week, and I won't until we leave. But that's the way it works."

The Black Sox will rely on their defense and deep pitching staff.

"We are very strong defensively," Reichelt said. "We have good depth at pitching. Obviously it starts and stops with pitching. IF you have good pitching and strong defense you are going to win some games. The offense takes care of itself, but pitching and defense carry us."

Jake Wichman, Kyle Johnson, Tyler Whitaker, Kevin Kolve and Brian Bollwitt have all seen time on the mound this season for the Black Sox.

"There are quite a few guys I can go to," Reichelt said. "But Kyle and Jake are the two I rely on the most."

For the second year in a row, the Bill Newhouse will be using wood bats exclusively.

And for the Black Sox it will be the first time they have used wood bats.

"This will be the first wood bat tournament we have played in," Reichelt said. "It's a challenge for us and we look forward to that."

TRI-CITY REDS (Tri-City, Minn.)

The Tri-City Reds will be making their second appearance in the Bill Newhouse Tournament.

The team was here in 2003, and while the team was young then, they wanted to come back.

"We really liked the tournament," Reds coach Jeff Larson said. "We really wanted to come back when the team got a little older."

The Reds are having a very good year, sitting at 16-3 overall.

"Pitching and defense have been pretty good this year," Larson said. "We've got five kids in the mix on the mound and the defense has been solid."

Larson said that Derek McCallum, a shortstop and pitcher for the Reds, will be the player to watch on the Reds for the tournament.

The Reds are in Dickinson, N.D., for a wood bat tournament over the weekend before the Newhouse. And they hope that prepares them for the Newhouse.

"We've been practicing with wood bats," Larson said. "And in Dickinson all the games are wood bats, so we'll have some experience with them."

SHEPHERD BABE RUTH BULLETS (Shepherd, Mont.)

The Bullets, in their first year of existence, are sitting with a record of 11-15 on the season, but they feel that is starting to turn around.

"Things are starting to work for us," Head Coach Scott Morris said. "We've got some pretty good ball players. We're a young team, so things are starting to come around for us."

The Bullets finished in second place in a wood bat tournament in Gillette, Wyo., and have done well in Powell, Wyo., as well.

Morris said that Ross Hudson is a "Lights out pitcher who threw a no-hitter against Douglas, Wyo."

Morris also expects young Colton Cornwell to do well.

Cornwell is the youngest player on the Bullets, at 15. The left handed shortstop is hitting .507 for the Bullets thus far.

Morris expects their team speed to be key for them in the tournament.

"We are a team that is very fast on their feet," Morris said. "And we play aggressively according to that. We'll run all over the top of you. This is our first tournament at the "AA" level, but in playing against "A" Legion teams, we haven't found a catcher that can catch us yet.

"We'll pilfer bases on you left and right if we get guys on base," Morris added.

CANBY COUGARS (Canby, Oregon)

While the 12-7 record as an American Legion team isn't the most impressive record in the tournament. The Canby Cougars are most definitely a good team.

As a high school team, the Cougars finished 22-6 and were the Portland Metro League Champions, and were ranked fourth in Oregon.

"We didn't make it as far as we would have liked to," Cougars coach Bob Hammitt said. The Cougars, like the Great Falls Black Sox, have never used wood bats.

"We have never been to a wood bat tournament," Hammitt said. "So we are going to let some of the kids swing them at the games over the weekend."

Like a lot of players and teams coming to the Bill Newhouse Tournament, most of the Cougars have never been to Montana.

"The kids are very excited about coming over to Montana especially," Hammitt said. "Once we get to Miles City and Denton Field, we'll settle in and play baseball."

Hammitt believes that his outfield will be the strength of the team.

"We have a good outfield," Hammitt said. "They can really cover some ground, which is good within the large confines of Denton Field."

The Cougars do have some other good players that fans, and the opposition, will need to keep tabs on.

Jefre Johnson, a junior catcher, was named second team All-State in Oregon, and Josh Strong was named third team All-State as a pitcher.

Strong had impressive numbers at Canby High School. He was 8-0 on the year with a sparkling 0.97 ERA.

While this may be the first time that Canby has been in the Bill Newhouse Tournament. Their coach, Bob Hammitt, has made "eight or nine trips."

The last time Hammitt was here was with the Sierra Vista Lions as an assistant coach. He played for the Eugene, Oregon team that has played in 11 Newhouse Tournaments, with a record of 41-23.