



American Legion Minnesota Division I Tournament

Gazette



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Eagan pitcher pursues perfection

By John Sherman

It isn't often that a pitcher has a perfect season, but Neal Kunik may be on his way to the ultimate perfect season – a perfect spring followed by a perfect summer.

In the spring, he was 7-0 on the mound for Eagan High. Thursday in the first game of the State American Legion Baseball Tournament, he improved to 5-0 this summer, as his team defeated Owatonna 9-3.

Kunik's teammates appreciate what

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12 teams carry on into second day of tourney

The field at the Minnesota Division I American Legion Baseball Tournament was pared to 12 teams after the first day's action.

Host Hibbing, St. Cloud Chutes, Lakeville North and Minneapolis Post #1 lost twice in the double-elimination tournament and went home.

Coming through the winners' bracket with two wins were Excelsior, Fergus Falls, Eden Prairie and Eagan.

Entering the second day in the losers' bracket with one and one records were North St. Paul, Mankato National, Coon Rapids, Duluth Lakeview, Alexandria, Eastview, Maple Grove, and Owatonna.

Play will continue today with four games each at fields at Hibbing and

Nashwauk.

The losers' bracket will begin with North St. Paul taking on Mankato, Coon Rapids facing Duluth Lakeview, Alexandria taking on Eastview and Maple Grove playing Owatonna.

In the two winners' bracket games at the Hibbing's Al Nyberg Field, Excelsior will play Fergus Falls and Eden Prairie will face Eagan.

Action will continue through Sunday with the final games at Al Nyberg Field in Hibbing. The semi-final will be at 10:30 a.m. with the state championship game at 1 p.m.

The two finalists will advance to the National Regional tournaments being held at Blue Springs, Missouri, and Mattoon, Illinois.

Minnesota's representatives in last year's Regionals were the state-champion Rochester Patriots and the runner-up Apple Valley 76ers.

The World Series will be held in Spokane, Washington. Eight Regional champions will vie for the World Series championship.

Play will begin today in the Division II State American Legion Baseball Tournament at Dilworth.

The eight finalists in the single-elimination tourney are LaCrescent, Ely, Ada, BOLD (Olivia), Holdingford, Jordan, Wells United South Central, and host Dilworth.

The Division II Tournament will conclude with the championship game at 2 p.m. on Sunday.



Helmet bump

Eagan catcher J.D. Dorgan is greeted by teammates after a first game home run.

Owatonna battle cry: Remember 1955

It has been 55 years since Owatonna has had a team in the State American Legion Baseball Tournament.

Players on the 2010 squad have heard stories about the 1955 squad, and they are happy to revive the town's baseball tradition. The revival has been a two-year process, starting with a state high school tourney appearance in 2009, which was the first in 21 years. A Big Nine Conference title, Owatonna's first in 22 years, followed this spring.

"Playing in the State Legion Tournament has always been our goal," said Quinn Christenson, a 2010 graduate who is Owatonna's leading hitter through two state tournament games. "We're bringing the honor back to Owatonna."

Christenson went three-for-three with a sacrifice fly in a 9-3 first-round loss to Eagan. He followed up with a two-for-two effort and four walks in a 19-10 win over Hibbing.

While Christenson has been swinging with authority in the tourney, two other 2010 grads have had incredible statistics this summer. Tyler Smith, a pitcher-infielder, is hitting .525 and Sheridan Skala, an outfielder, is hitting .513. Sam Zappa, who hit a three-run homer against Hibbing Thursday, is batting .421. Neil Eddie is batting .404, Josh Zeman checks in with a .395 average and Derek Schwab is batting .392.

What's the secret to the team's hitting prowess?

"It's important to come focused every single day," said Smith. "Then you have to be ready on every pitch."

"I try to stay relaxed, try not to over-think," said Skala.

The Owatonna squad has only had three official practices this summer, but the players often work out on their own.

"In Owatonna, the ballpark is always



A mighty swing

Matt Simon of Owatonna takes a big cut in a 19-10 win over Hibbing.

unlocked," said Christenson.

"Baseball is more relaxed in the summer," said Smith. "We come out and have fun playing. There is no pressure."

In getting to state, Owatonna had to get past three strong teams from Rochester – the A's, the Redhawks and the Patriots.

"Ever since we were young, we've been working for this," said Skala. "Now that we're here, we're hoping to make some noise in Hibbing."

Seeking perfection

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he's done this year.

"Neal gave Eden Prairie its only loss during the high school season," said second baseman Louie LaChapelle.

Kunik cruised through Thursday's game, striking out seven and allowing one run in seven innings.

"We keep it loose, we keep it fun," he said.

That fun was apparent when the team broke into a song after scoring a run in the seventh inning.

"The singing gets us going," said LaChapelle, who was three-for-four with three stolen bases and a home run.

LaChapelle was on third base when catcher J.D. Dorgan homered to give Eagan a 2-0 lead in the top of the first inning. Dorgan went on to have a big

game, going three-for-four with a homer, double and single.

"I had a flaw in my swing earlier this season," said Dorgan. "I was popping up instead of driving the ball. My dad worked on it with me, and now I'm hitting better."

His home run traveled approximately 380 feet on the fly, and it took the ball shagger about half an inning to track it down. It was Dorgan's eighth home run of the season and he leads the Patriots in hitting with a .417 average.

"We tend to play our best baseball when the competition is tough," said Dorgan.

LaChapelle agreed.

"Playing through the Third District Tournament was a good test for us," he said. "That got us ready for state."

Stars of the Day

Brett Meger of Owatonna went five-for-six in his team's 19-10 victory over Hibbing.

Ian Andrews of Coon Rapids was the winning pitcher against Hibbing. He struck out 10 in five innings.

Louie LaChapelle of Eagan's went three-for-four with a home run vs. Owatonna.

Rob Deutsch of North St. Paul pitched six-hit ball over eight innings as the 39ers defeated Eastview 4-3.

Brian Joe of Excelsior vs. Mankato National hit a double and a home run, he stole home.

Spencer Kidder of Fergus Falls vs. Duluth Lakeview. He finished four-for-six with a home run.

Dalton Leuschke of Alexandria hit a three-run homer in the bottom of the ninth beat Lakeville North 6-3.

Tony Skjefte of Eden Prairie finished a triple short of the cycle in an 8-6 victory over Minneapolis Post #1.

Quinn Christenson of Owatonna had a perfect day at the plate with five hits, four walks, a hit by pitch and a sacrifice fly in two games.

Cody Groskreutz of Eastview went four-for-four in a 13-3 victory over Minneapolis Post #1.

Line scores, summaries from Thursday

Game 1

Mankato National 000 000 010 1 7 2

Excelsior Fire Club 001 010 20x 4 7 1

Anderson and Kleist. Dzurak, Miller (9) and Twenge. WP Dzurak. LP Anderson. Home run: Brian Joe, Excelsior.

Anders Dzurak, the ace of the Excelsior pitching staff, posted his eighth win of the season against one loss. Brian Joe, Excelsior's ninth hitter, sparked the offense with a double and a home run, while teammate Andrew Weber also had two hits. Excelsior improved to 31-15 with the victory. First baseman Derek Quame had two hits for Mankato National.

Game 2

Lakeville North 011 001 000 3 6 2

Alexandria 000 210 003 6 10 4

Yetzer and Braun. Erickson and Beireis. WP Erickson. LP Yetzer. Home run: Leuschke, Alexandria.

In the most dramatic finish of the day, Dalton Leuschke's walk-off home run gave Alexandria a 6-3 victory over Lakeville North at Nashwauk. Leuschke finished with four RBI. Parker Giroux also had a good day for the winners with three hits. Colin Erickson pitched a six-hitter to get the win on the mound. Gordon Kappers and Jake Berg each had two hits for Lakeville North.

Game 3

Maple Grove 000 002 030 5 5 0

St. Cloud Chutes 000 010 011 3 8 0

Horton, Sperl (9) and Enger. Maiers, Thome (8), Ellingson (8), Giambruno (9) and Janzen. WP Horton. LP Maiers. Home runs: Andrew Thome, St. Cloud Chutes and Adam Sperl, St. Cloud Chutes.

Alec Horton scattered 10 hits over eight innings to lead Maple Grove to a 5-3 win over St. Cloud Chutes in a first-round game at Legion Field in Grand Rapids Thursday morning. Anthony Croft led Maple Grove's offense with a two-run single in the top of the eighth. Teammate Alex Naasz also had two RBI. Adam Sperl and Andrew Thome hit home runs for St. Cloud.

Game 4

Fergus Falls 111 000 064 13 17 1

Duluth Lakeview 000 000 302 5 13 3

Stanislawski, Rengel (7) and Lee. Kenning, Grandson (8), Lewis (9) and Walsh. WP Stanislawski. LP Kenning. Home runs: Kidder, Fergus Falls.

Fergus Falls scored six runs in the top of the eighth and four more in the top of the ninth to pull away from Duluth Lakeview, 13-6, in a first-round game at Legion Field in Grand Rapids. Spencer Kidder was the top gun for Fergus Falls, as he went four-for-six with a homer and three RBI. Dan Revering was three-for-four for the Otters. Parker Olson and Brody Olson each had three hits for Duluth Lakeview.

Game 5

North St. Paul 010 110 010 4 11 4

Eastview Thunder 000 100 011 3 7 0

Deutsch, Ewald (9) and Bruchu. Moorse and Decovich. WP Deutsch. LP Moorse.

In a high-profile first-round match-up Thursday at Cohasset, the state's third-ranked American Legion team, North St. Paul (27-6), defeated second-ranked Eastview 4-3. Joe Larson went three-for-four at the plate for North St. Paul. Ty Groskreutz led the Eastview offense with a double and a triple in four at-bats. Matt Larson added two hits for Eastview.

Game 6

Mpls. Post #1 030 030 000 6 11 2

Eden Prairie 201 022 01x 8 14 3

Warren, Trelstad (5) and Clark. T. Miller, Soderberg (5) and Halloran. WP T. Miller. LP Warren. Home runs: Borquez, Mpls. Post #1, Halloran, Eden Prairie, Skjefte, Eden Prairie.

Minneapolis Post #1 gave top-ranked Eden Prairie a scare before losing 8-6 in a first-round game at Cohasset. Matt Halloran and Tony Skjefte connected for home runs to spark the Eden Prairie attack as the Tenth District champs boosted their season record to 26-6.

Game 7

Eagan Patriots 202 010 400 9 9 1

Owatonna 001 000 002 3 8 2

Kunik, Gibis (7) and Dorgan. Homeier, Smith (7), Meyer (8) and Eddie. WP Kunik. LP Homeier. Home runs: Dorgan, Eagan and LaChapelle, Eagan.

Eagan Patriots catcher J.D. Dorgan hit a home run in the first inning Thursday at Al Nyberg Field in Hibbing. His 380-foot blast over the left-field wall gave Eagan a 2-0 lead. Pitcher Neal Kunik pitched seven innings to record the win. Dorgan and teammate Louie LaChapelle each went three-for-four with a home run as Eagan improved to 20-15.

Game 8

Hibbing 001 000 0 1 6 3

Coon Rapids 006 005 x 11 9 0

Erickson, Coleman (3) and Kritz. Andrews, Williams (6) and Latta. WP Andrews. LP Erickson. Home runs: Mike Latta, Coon

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Rapids, Brandon Flippen, Coon Rapids.

Home runs by Mike Latta and Brandon Flippen propelled Coon Rapids to an 11-1 win over the host team, Hibbing, at Al Nyberg Field. Coon Rapids had two big innings with six runs in the third inning and five runs in the sixth inning. Winning pitcher Ian Andrews had 10 strikeouts in five innings as Coon Rapids improved to 22-15.

Game 9

Lakeville North 100 101 010 4 9 3

Mankato National 000 120 02x 5 11 3

Moore and Braun. Luke Weber and Kleist. WP Luke Weber. LP Moore. Home run: Drew Weber, Mankato National.

Luke Weber pitched a complete game to get the victory for Mankato National and his brother Drew hit a two-run homer in the fifth inning. Drew added an RBI single in the eighth. Nick Kaus, Jack Mages and Drew Weber each had two hits for Mankato National. Lakeville North finished 22-8.

Game 10

Excelsior 002 025 100 10 14 2

Alexandria 000 000 150 6 12 2

Ulrich, Glennon (7), Sand (8), Miller (8) and Burger, Twenge (6). Krueger, Carlson (6) and Beireis. WP Ulrich. LP Krueger. Home runs: Brady Williams, Excelsior.

Brian Joe continued to swing a hot bat with a triple and a double as the Fire Club advanced in the winners' bracket at Nashwauk. Matt Moes added three hits for Excelsior. Colin Erickson had three hits for Alexandria. Excelsior reliever Robb Miller struck out four of the five batters he faced.

Game 11

St. Cloud Chutes 004 000 010 5 10 3

Duluth Lakeview 105 000 30x 9 8 1

Thome, Ellingson (8) and Janzen. Zwak and Walsh. WP Zwak. LP Thome. Home run: Thome, St. Cloud Chutes.

Adam Zwak pitched a complete game for Duluth Lakeview. Brody Olson hit a three-run double to lead Lakeview's attack. Andrew Thome provided the bulk of St. Cloud's offense with a three-run homer in the fifth inning.

Game 12

Fergus Falls 000 520 110 9 13 2

Maple Grove 302 210 000 8 17 1

Gaustad, Rengel (5) and Lee. Aaron Sperl, Bartels (6) and Enger. WP Rengel. LP Bartels. Home runs: Gaustad, Fergus Falls, Kidder, Fergus Falls, Eric Anderson, Fergus Falls and Sorensen, Maple Grove.

Fergus Falls got a power boost with three home runs in its one-run victory over Maple Grove. Peter Gaustad went three-for-five for Fergus Falls and teammate Spencer Kidder was two-for-four with a homer and two RBI. Karl Sorensen went four-for-five for Maple Grove and leadoff man Jake Paulson was three-for-six.

Game 13

Eastview 200 400 52 13 18 0

Mpls. Post #1 100 000 11 3 6 1

T. McDevitt, Voss (5), Beattie (7), Jerle (7), Larson (8) and Decovich, Branstad (7). Clark, Westrich (5), Oslund (7), Vandeneysel (8) and Gregorson. WP McDevitt. LP Clark.

Eastview came back strong in the losers' bracket Thursday night at Cohasset. Cody Groskreutz led Eastview with a four-for-four performance and teammate Alec DesLauriers-Knop went four-for-five. Stu Daly and Matt Larson each added three hits.

Game 14

Eden Prairie 005 001 46 16 20 1

North St. Paul 001 000 00 1 4 4

Bray and Halloran. Youngdahl, Conners (7), Toninato (8) and Bruchu. WP Bray. LP Youngdahl.

Adam Bray pitched Eden Prairie to a decisive win over North St. Paul in a game at Cohasset. Tim Miller went three-for-five at the plate for EP. Teammate Tony Skjefte had five RBI with a two-for-five performance. Brian Athey had three hits for the winners.

Game 15

Owatonna 533 200 231 19 16 1

Hibbing 112 220 020 10 10 3

Zappa, Zimmermann (3), Christenson (5), Hager (9) and Eddie. Ellefson, Schafer (3), Stross (5) and Kritz. WP Christenson. LP Ellefson. Home runs: Simon, Owatonna, Zappa, Owatonna.

Owatonna stayed alive in the losers' bracket by pounding 16 hits in a victory over Hibbing. Brett Meger had five of those hits and scored four runs. Sam Zappa and Matt Simon hit home runs for the winners, who improved to 17-10.

Game 16

Coon Rapids 020 100

Eagan Patriots 205 01

Pouliot, Heiser (4), Rosseth (8) and Latta. Conkel, Walker (7) and Dorgan. WP Conkel. LP Pouliot. Home run: Oakley, Coon Rapids.

Eagan advanced the winners' bracket semifinal behind the pitching of Charlie Conkel and Brad Walker, who combined on a seven-hitter. Conkel struck out 11 in six innings. Louie LaChapelle, Zach Zenner and Derek Wilson each had two hits for Eagan. Jeremy Oakley and Trevor Daniels each had two hits for Coon Rapids.