



American Legion Minnesota Division I Tournament

Gazette



Volume 14, No. 3

Hibbing, Minnesota

Friday, July 31, 2010

The Super Six still in hunt for title

With eight more games under its belt, the 2010 Minnesota American Legion Division I Baseball Tournament became a contest of six survivors Friday.

Eden Prairie and Excelsior remained unbeaten in the tourney. Eden Prairie outlasted Eagan 16-11 and Excelsior edged Fergus Falls with a walk-off hit in the bottom of the ninth to win 6-5.

In the losers' bracket, North St. Paul advanced with wins over Mankato National 14-7 and Duluth Lakeview 15-2. Eastview defeated Alexandria 17-15 and Maple Grove 6-4 to advance.

Lakeview topped Coon Rapids 9-7 before bowing out to North St. Paul in the

double-elimination tourney. Maple Grove beat Owatonna 8-4 before losing to Eastview.

In action today, North St. Paul will play Fergus Falls in the 10 a.m. game and Eastview will play Eagan in the 1 p.m. game. The winners will play at 4:30.

In the featured match-up at 7:30 p.m., Excelsior will take on Eden Prairie. All games will be at Al Nyberg Field in Hibbing.

Eden Prairie (28-6) is ranked No. 1 in the State Legion Baseball poll and Excelsior (33-15) is ranked fifth. The South Hennepin League rivals have played twice this summer and split.

"We know Excelsior pretty well," said EP head coach Scott Hackett. "The No. 1 state ranking has never bothered our kids. I think most of them like it."

Mike Halloran, Eden Prairie High School's coach, who assists Hackett with the Legion team, was not surprised to see EP defeat Eagan in the winners' bracket semi after falling behind 8-3 early.

"It's amazing how we can come back, especially in a nine-inning game," he said.

In the Division II tournament at Dilworth, LaCrescent defeated Ely 4-0, Ada topped BOLD 6-2, Jordan beat Holdingford 1-0, and host Dilworth beat Wells United South Central 13-0.

Scouts flock to state Legion tournament

By John Sherman

With summer winding down, college baseball coaches are making the City of Hibbing the final stop on their recruiting calendar.

NCAA Division I recruiters in town this week include University of Minnesota Associate Head Coach Rob Fornasiero and North Dakota State University Head Coach Tod Brown.

Division II coaches viewing the action include Head Coach Paul Blanchard of Southwest State and Head Coach Chris Vito of the University of Minnesota-Crookston. Before becoming the Crookston coach, Vito was involved with the American Legion Baseball programs in Mt. Iron and Hibbing.

Pro scouts have been watching the State Tournament as well. Les Pajari is



Meeting of the minds

College coaches Paul Blanchard, left, of Southwest State, and Chris Vito of Minnesota-Crookston confer with American Legion field director Jim Peck during a game Friday.

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Eastview Thunder outlasts Alex 17-15

For fans who love offense, there was no better place to be Friday than Al Nyberg Field in Hibbing.

Eastview (32-4) came out swinging and never stopped in a 17-15 victory over Alexandria. The game featured 31 hits and plenty of big swings.

The key juncture of the game for Eastview was the bottom of the eighth inning after Alex's Dalton Leuschke had tied the score 12-12 with a three-run homer in the top of the inning.

Eastview put runners to second and third with no one out, and then executed a double-suicide squeeze bunt for a 14-12 lead.

"Our kids can score a lot of different ways," said Eastview head coach Bob Klefsaas. "Going into the bottom of the eighth we needed to get our momentum back."

The half inning started with a hit batsmen, and then Alec DesLauriers-Knop followed with a double. Jack McDevitt laid down the squeeze bunt that brought two runs home. Three more runs were scored in the half inning. Alex came back with three runs in the top of the ninth and had Leuschke at the plate with a chance to tie the score before he drew a base on balls.

"Our suicide squeeze kind of deflated them," said Klefsaas. "That was the key to the game ... it's a play we've used a number of times this summer."

DesLauriers-Knop was the big hitter for Eastview with a four-for-five perfor-



That run-down feeling

North St. Paul's Andrew Bestler is trapped in the hotbox by third baseman Adam Geiger of Mankato National during North St. Paul's victory Friday morning.

mance. Taylor Branstad and McDevitt each had two RBI. Stu Daly hit a home run.

Coach Klefsaas is no stranger to State Legion Tournament play. In 2008, he guided Eastview to a state championship. His assistant coach then and now is his son Evan.

"Evan and I started the team four years ago," said Klefsaas. "One of the greatest joys of my life is the chance to coach with my son."

Evan is one of a handful of individuals in Minnesota Legion history to play on a

state-championship team and coach a state-championship team. In 2002, he was the starting catcher when the Apple Valley 76ers won the state title in Marshall. Of course, his dad was in attendance when the 76ers upended Excelsior in the finals.

"Win or lose going forward, we've had a great season," said Klefsaas. "Our goal all season has been to get everyone involved. Today, 16 of our 18 players got into the game. We have a very young team with all but two of our players eligible to return next season. One of the keys this summer is that everyone is on the same page."

Dave Bruchu of North St. Paul hit a home run and went three-for-five in a 16-7 victory over Mankato National. He went three-for-three in the 39ers second game of the day, a 15-2 victory over Duluth Lakeview.

Ty Olin of Duluth Lakeview went three-for-five with two singles and a double as his team defeated Coon Rapids 9-7.

Josh Mensch of Excelsior had a key two-run single in a five-run seventh inning as the Fire Club defeated Fergus Falls 6-5 Friday afternoon.

Robb Miller pitched two scoreless innings of relief in Excelsior's winners' bracket victory over Fergus Falls.

Joe Larson of North St. Paul swung a hot bat in his team's 15-2 win over

Stars of the Day

Duluth Lakeview. He hit a home run and went two-for-three with three runs scored.

Garrison Harris of Eagan hit a grand-slam homer in his team's 16-11 loss to Eden Prairie Friday night at Hibbing's Al Nyberg Field.

Matt Halloran, Eden Prairie's star catcher, had three hits and three RBI in a 16-11 winners' bracket victory over Eagan.

Peter Gaustad of Fergus Falls hit a double and a single as his team built an early 5-0 lead against Excelsior. The Fire Club came back with six unanswered runs to win the game 6-5.

Tim Miller of Eden Prairie went three-for-five in his team's victory over Eagan.

Nick Burger had the game-winning single in the bottom of the ninth as Excelsior claimed a come-from-behind win over Fergus Falls.

Zach Rengel, Fergus Falls' first baseman, went three-for-four at the plate against Excelsior.

Connor McCallum of North St. Paul went three-for-five in a 15-2 victory over Duluth Lakeview.

Andrew Bestler, pitcher for the North St. Paul 39ers, picked up the win as his team eliminated Duluth Lakeview Friday in Nashwauk.

The grounds crews at both Hibbing and Nashwauk for getting the fields back in shape in record time after a Friday evening downpour

Tonka Fire Club gets hot vs. Fergus Falls

Through six innings Friday, Fergus Falls pitcher Spencer Kidder had the Excelsior Fire Club baffled, handcuffed and scoreless.

However, that all changed in the bottom of the seventh when a steady rain started to fall and Excelsior's bats got hot. A four-hit, five-run inning pulled the Fire Club even at 5-5. Josh Mensch's two-run single was the key blow, but the best was yet to come.

With the score still even in the bottom of the ninth, Excelsior loaded the bases on Brady Williams' double, Mark Ulrich's bunt single and an intentional walk to Mensch. On the first pitch of his at-bat, catcher Nick Burger delivered the game-winning hit, a sharp single to left.

"I knew if we held Fergus Falls in the top of the ninth, we'd find a way to score," said Excelsior head coach Rob Hager.

Hager advised Burger to "hit the first good one you see," and that's just what Burger did.

"Given the situation and looking at it from a team standpoint, this is my biggest hit this season," said Burger. "I knew they weren't going to give Josh [Mensch] anything good to hit, so I had to be ready."

"You can't overlook any team in the

state tournament," said Mensch. "Fergus Falls is a very good team, but at crunch time, we came through."

There were a number of heroes for the Fire Club. Williams certainly came through on cue, leading off the bottom of the ninth with an opposite-field double that fell just inside the left-field chalk line.

"Coach [Hager] told me to expect a first-pitch fastball, and that's what it was," he said. "I could see the left fielder wasn't going to get there quickly, so I went to second."

Williams' job was not done. He had to get to third on Ulrich's bunt, which was dropped close to the third base line. Kidder fielded the ball and Ulrich beat the throw to first.

"In that situation, you wait to see that the bunt is down," said Williams. "It was nice placement on Mark's part."

The win would not have been possible without Excelsior's clutch relief pitching, Hager said. Alex Glennon and Stu Martin got some big outs backing up starter Matt Moes. At the end of the night it was relief ace Robb Miller on the hill.

"I've said it over and over this summer ... Robb thrives under pressure," said Hager. "He came through again tonight. I

am proud of all our guys. It's a testament to what they have done all season."

With Friday's win, Excelsior improved to 33-15 overall and earned a berth in the winners' bracket final Saturday night at 7:30 p.m. at Al Nyberg Field.



Walk-off hit

Nick Burger of Excelsior is congratulated by teammates after delivering a bases-loaded single in the bottom of the ninth against Fergus Falls.

Scouts look at 'projectability' in a player

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here representing the Cleveland Indians and Mark Wilson of the Minnesota Twins is also studying talent at the park.

Other college coaches in Hibbing are Jerry Haugen of St. John's, Bob Rients of Minnesota-Duluth, Corey Kemp of St. Scholastica, Luke Olin of Wisconsin-Superior and Dwight Kotila of Century College.

Coach Fornasiere and Gopher Head Coach John Anderson have already signed one Minnesota Legion player for 2010, Eden Prairie catcher Matt Halloran.

"One thing I like about the State Legion Tournament is that we can see the best players from different sections of the state," said Fornasiere as he watched North St. Paul play Mankato National Friday morning at Hibbing's Al Nyberg Field.

What does Fornasiere look for in a prospect?

"First, we're looking at a player's overall athleticism," he said. "We try to assess his throwing arm and running speed. Hitting ability is also critical."

Fornasiere said a prospect's ability on the field is only part of the equation.

"Attitude, character and academic performance are very important," he said. "We talk to coaches, teachers and athletic

directors when we have an interest in a player."

The Gophers, Big Ten champions five of the last 10 seasons, have relied heavily on talent within Minnesota, and that is by design.

"John [Anderson] has always said that if there's a kid in Minnesota who can help us, we want to recruit him first," said Fornasiere.

Coach Brown of North Dakota State said he covets "five-tool" players.

"The five tools are hitting, hitting for power, running, throwing and fielding," said Brown. "We look for kids who are way above average in two or more of those skills. It could be running and hitting, it could be fielding and hitting for power."

What about pitchers?

"I look for composure, command, size, velocity and projectability," said Brown.

Brown said a head coach has to determine a pitcher's potential; how he will perform two or three years down the road.

"When I watch someone pitch, it's not about how he did that day," Brown noted. "When you look to the future, you have to hope you're psychic."

Coach Blanchard from Southwest State already has one prized recruit from this year's State Legion Tournament, pitcher Aaron Sperl of Maple Grove.

"I don't know if we have a player on our roster that didn't play American Legion Baseball," he said.

What does Blanchard look for in a player?

"A prospect needs to have a level of talent that will allow him to play Division II baseball," he said. "After that, I look for the intangibles - Does he back up bases? Does he run out every ball? What kind of teammate is he?"

"I am looking for players who will be quality teammates and players who are willing to learn."

Coach Vito of Minnesota-Crookston competes against Blanchard in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. Sometimes they compete for the same players during the summer recruiting season.

"I am still looking for a kid or two in the 2010 class," said Vito. "The State Legion Tournament is an opportunity for me to see a lot of players. There is some great talent here. I'm looking for the athlete who stands out, whether it's on the hill or playing a position."

What is important other than talent?

"I want guys who respect the game, guys who run on and off the field, guys who get along with their teammates," said Vito.

Line scores, summaries from Friday

Game 17

North St. Paul 002 370 112 16 18 2
Mankato National 010 101 220 7 8 5

Felhaber, Conners (8), Toninato (8) and Joe Larson. Teachout, Allan (5) and Kleist. WP Felhaber. LP Teachout. Home runs: Bruchu, North St. Paul, McCallum, North St. Paul.

North St. Paul stayed alive in the losers' bracket Friday morning at Al Nyberg Field in Hibbing. A big seven-run fifth inning boosted the 39ers to victory in the elimination game. North St. Paul had 18 hits, including three each by Dave Bruchu, John Ewald and Rob Youngdahl. Jack Mages had three hits for Mankato National, which finished the season 21-5.

Game 18

Duluth Lakeview 020 321 000 9 15 2
Coon Rapids 100 401 010 7 12 1

Grandson, Zwak (7) and Walsh. Brinda, Williams (5) and Latta. WP Grandson. LP Brinda.

Duluth East eliminated Coon Rapids from the State Tournament Friday morning at Nashwauk. There were 27 hits in the contest, 15 by Duluth Lakeview. Ty Olin of Lakeview had three hits, including a double. He and Matt Johnson each had three RBI. Kirk Funfar, Bo Daniels Tony Remund and Mike Latta each had two hits for Coon Rapids.

Game 19

Alexandria 002 042 133 15 13 4
Eastview 503 300 15x 17 18 4

Nelson, Hirsch (2), C. Larson (5) and Beireis. Voss, E. Decovich (5), Jerle (8), McDevitt (9) and M. Decovich, Branstad (6). WP Jerle. LP C. Larson. Home runs: Daly, Eastview, Leuschke, Alexandria.

Eastview's 18-hit attack was enough to fend off a gallant comeback by Alexandria Friday afternoon at Hibbing's Al Nyberg Field. Alec DesLauriers-Knop led the winners with a four-for-five performance at the plate. Stu Daly homered for Eastview.

Game 20

Owatonna 002 200 000 4 7 3
Maple Grove 204 011 00x 8 9 3

Sebring, T. Smith (6) and Eddie. Wenker, Croft (6) and Naasz. WP Wenker. LP Sebring.

Maple Grove stayed alive in a losers' bracket game Friday at Nashwauk. Anthony Croft of Maple Grove allowed just one hit in four innings in relief of starter Peter Wenker. Shortstop Max Ditty led the Maple Grove attack with three hits. Teammate Travis Enger added a single and a double. Matt Simon had two hits for Owatonna.

Game 21

North St. Paul 401 145 0 15 15 2
Duluth Lakeview 000 010 1 2 8 6

Bestler, Orme (7) and Bruchu. Ty Olin, Grandson (5), Lewis (6) and Walsh. WP Bestler. LP Ty Olin. Home run: Joe Larson, North St. Paul.

Connor McCallum and Dave Bruchu each had three hits for North St. Paul and John Ewald, batting in the ninth spot, had four hits.

Game 22

Eastview 050 100 000 6 7 1
Maple Grove 000 002 101 4 9 2

DesLauriers-Knop, Nelson (6), Jerle (9) and M. Decovich. Croft, Bartels (5) and Naasz. WP DesLauriers-Knop. LP Croft. Home run: Sorensen, Maple Grove.

Eastview scored five times in the second inning on the way to an elimination victory over Maple Grove in a game played Friday evening at Nashwauk. There were two rain delays in the game, totaling almost an hour and a half. Ty Groskreutz led the Thunder with two hits and two RBI.

Game 23

Fergus Falls 020 111 000 5 12 0
Excelsior Fire Club 000 000 501 6 11 3

Kidder and Lee. Moes, Glennon (6), Martin (7), Miller (8) and Burger. WP Miller. LP Kidder.

Excelsior rallied from a five-run deficit to defeat Fergus Falls in a winners' bracket game Friday at Al Nyberg Field. The Fire Club tied the score with five runs in the bottom of the seventh, and then won the game on Nick Burger's bases-loaded single in the ninth. Robb Miller was the winner in relief as he threw two scoreless innings.

Game 24

Egan Patriots 070 010 120 11 12 6
Eden Prairie 300 025 60x 16 13 3

Harris, Walker (6), LaChapelle (7), Dietrich (8) and Dorgan. Lintner, Ruemmele (7), Thonvold (8) and Halloran. Home run: Harris, Egan.

In a game delayed 48 minutes by heavy rain, Eden Prairie rallied from an 8-3 deficit to win 16-11. Garrison Harris hit a grand-slam homer to stake Egan to its early lead. Tim Miller and Mike Halloran led Eden Prairie with two hits apiece.