

Fourth District Playoff Tournament Coverage (Game 2)

Red Rallies Past Rival North St. Paul

By Greg Schmidt

July 29, 2005

Maybe it was the voice of former Red killer Jay Horner that boomed over the public address system. Maybe it was because they were playing at their own park. Maybe it was the fact that the teams are rivals and the three previous games were decided by three runs or less. Whatever the reason, fourth-seeded North St. Paul (19-21) took top seed Tri-City Red (36-8), ranked fifth in the state, to the brink July 28 in the critical third round of the Fourth District playoffs.

But even all that wasn't enough to stop the Red from advancing to the championship game with an amazing 11-10 victory.

The Red did what they do best. Apply pressure . . . plenty of pressure including the ninth inning as pinch hitter Matt Frakes put a bunt down with Adam Weber at first and Joe Colwell at second and nobody out. North St. Paul starter Ryan Sepion scooped the bunt and opted to catch Colwell at third base. The throw to third was rushed and mishandled allowing Colwell to race home with the game winner. It was the first advantage the Red had enjoyed all night.

That's because North St. Paul had accomplished what no other team had done this summer. They made Red starter Sam Weber look mortal. The 39ers chalked up seven earned runs against the Red's top winner (9-2) and ended his night with one out in the fifth.

"You could tell it was a struggle," said Red first baseman Adam Weber. "I think it was kind of scary how well they were hitting the ball early on in the game."

Reliever Mark Ries bridged the innings gap by keeping the Red close the next three innings. Two miscues in his final inning of work, the top of the seventh, gave North St. Paul a 9-6 advantage.

But the Red remained determined. "We knew that we're a good enough team . . . that we can hang with a team like this. It was just a matter of picking the right moments to get big hits," said Adam Weber.

Like the bottom of the seventh as Weber (2 for 4, SF, HR, 3-RBI) blasted a two-run rocket over the left field fence.

"I've been struggling," said Weber, who was faced with an 0-2 count. "I can't believe he threw a fastball. It was the right pitch and luckily it went over the fence."

Luckily? The moon shot continued its upward trajectory after exiting the park and reportedly ricocheted off the space station.

The heroics weren't done yet.

After a Red error led to a two-run deficit in the eighth, Derek McCallum (2 for 5, 2B, 2-RBI) answered the call with a two-run double to the centerfield track making the score even for the first time since the first inning.

“That was the biggest hit of the game I think,” Adam Weber said. “We knew that was a big inning with only one left and there were two outs.

Added McCallum: “I don't know if my hit did it. I think we just kept building as the game went on and showed a lot as a team. We didn't play our greatest game and we still won and [North St. Paul] is a great team.”

That timely stroke got the Red bench even more pumped — if that was even possible. The Red players had begun making plenty of noise after falling behind 7-3 in the fifth inning.

“Blake Searles was the leader of that,” said Adam Weber. “Every time we get loud on the bench, we put up some runs.”

But the question remained: the game was tied, but could the Red keep North St. Paul down for a chance to win in the bottom of the ninth.

Seth Rosin returned for his second inning of relief and the youngster stood tall both literally and figuratively by retiring North St. Paul 1-2-3.

“I had a lot of pressure on me, but it was fun,” said Rosin, who had played three hours of hoops earlier in the day. “I still had some energy left.”

Apparently enough for extra innings.

Said manager Jeff Larsen: “[Rosin] came up to me after [the top of the ninth] and he's going, ‘I'm ready to go the next inning coach,’ and I go, ‘there isn't going to be a next inning. We're going to win this.’”

Larsen, in his eighth season at the helm, was proven right in a hurry. Joe Colwell laced the first pitch from Sepion to centerfield for a leadoff single. Adam Weber followed by slapping an 0-2 pitch for a hit to left. At this point it was inevitable as Frakes put the ball in play and let North St. Paul seal their own fate.

Larsen wasn't surprised by the close-knit affair. “Playoffs do this. Arcade almost played on [lost 5-4 to Hamline in knockout game],” he said. “I knew they'd come to play. Sepion did great for them, but our kids hung in there.”

The Red finished with 17 hits for the third consecutive game. Justin Hemauer (2B, SB, RBI) was right on with his prediction before the game that he and Chase Traeger (SB) would deliver from the one and two spot in the order. They each went 3 for 5 and scored three runs. Clean up hitter Billy Gazich (HBP, SF, 3-RBI) went 2 for 3 with two runs scored. The Red will meet the winner of the North St. Paul/Hamline game in the championship game, Saturday, July 30 at North St. Paul. First pitch is 5 p.m.

**Fourth District third round July 28 (Game 44)
Tri-City Red 11, North St. Paul 10**

NSP 202 120 210 — 10 9 3

TCR 201 030 221 — 11 17 3

Sepion and Adams; S. Weber, Ries (5), Rosin (8) and Field. W-Rosin (7-4). L-Sepion (3-4). HR-NSP, Wilms (3), Adams (4); TCR, A. Weber (3).