

Hamline's 'complete roster' to much for Red Hamchucks making first state visit since 2001

By Greg Schmidt

There was only one team that defeated Tri-City Red (30-10) during the Fourth District regular season and that team, Hamline (21-17), accomplished the same feat in the postseason not once, but twice. The second was a one-sided 6-1 decision in the district championship July 29 at North St. Paul that halted a chance for the Red's fifth consecutive state berth and ninth in 10 seasons.

The Red out-hit Hamline 8-7, but it was the latter, who made the key plays nearly everywhere else. Tri-City escaped a bases-loaded jam in the third, but their luck ran out or more appropriately, was stolen in the fourth. After a sacrifice fly to break the scoreless tie, Hamline registered a rare double-double — that is, a pair of double steals to take a 'commanding' 3-0 lead. Not the biggest advantage ever, but more than enough as the Red (17-1 in the district) went empty in the bottom of the frame to extend their hard luck scoreless streak to 13 innings in the postseason against Hamline. The fourth-seeded Hamchucks (7-11 in the district) defeated the top seeded Red 1-0 in the winners' bracket final 48 hours earlier.

Tri-City finally broke through in the fifth on a two-out error that scored Chase Traeger (1 for 4). But before any momentum could really change hands, Hamline quickly answered with two runs in the sixth with the help of two Red errors. The Red finished with four miscues.

"I don't think they played tight . . . but they made up for a lot of them too," manager Jeff Larsen said. "And we have to remember they're just kids too. It wasn't for lack of effort and sometimes that ball bounces a funny way. It just wasn't their day."

Indeed.

Down 6-1, the Red loaded the bases in each of the final two innings, but failed to plate a run. But again, they did log more hits than the eventual champ. Brian Marshik and Bjorn Anderson each had two hits. Along with Traeger, Billy Gazich (1 for 4, BB), Brady Field (1 for 3, BB) and Joe Colwell (1 for 4) also had one hit apiece.

"We just didn't get that key hit," Larsen said. "The better team won today that's for sure."

Certainly the more veteran team.

Nine of the 16 players on the Hamline roster graduated in '05. The Red has two '05 grads.

But maybe it was simply that Hamline had the Red's number this year.

"I think you might say that," Larsen said. "Sometimes teams get that way . . . but I would

have loved to have had one more day of rest for [starting pitcher Seth Rosin]. He did a great job, but just needed that one-more-day.”

Maybe it wasn't just having the Red's number, but rather having the numbers. A full bench and arsenal of pitchers wasn't always the case for Hamline this summer. In the Red's case, they lost two of their top pitchers due to a Division I football scholarship for Adam Weber (understandable) and a broken hand for Sam Weber (unfortunate).

Meanwhile, Hamline's throwing crew was boosted during the playoffs by the surprise return of Sam Kinne. The full-time amateur player surprised everybody (including the Hamline coaches) with his availability just prior to the winners' bracket game against the Red.

He pitched a shutout over seven innings. That nearly doubled his total innings pitched for Hamline this summer. None of the previous work was against the Red. He was — an ace in the hole, so to speak.

Said Larsen on the free-wheeling movement from amateur to Legion: “Like I told [Fourth District Director George Bodlovick], it's a loophole in the rule that has to be tightened up . . . None of this was in writing before this season and I don't think it's ethical. If you read the [national rules] it says that — to stay dedicated to one team.”

He continued: “What we're really saying is you don't have to make a choice in life . . . do whatever you want and show up whenever you want.”

Unlike most Legion programs, the Red has an agreement with the area's local amateur team, the Shoreview Shark.

“Gazich and [Adam Weber] and [Brady Field] — they could have played amateur,” Larsen said. “I told them they could and I'll honor the choice, but not both. We will not do that. In life you have to make choices.”

For Hamline, some did during the regular season. So much so, that the team was left to forfeit one of their district games. “Where were they?” asked Larsen. “They were playing amateur or their arms were sore.”

That left the Red and fellow district teams without a chance to see what Hamline was really made of.

The playoffs offered up a whole new look. More importantly, said Larsen, was the fact that some of the Hamline players that did show up for every game were now stuck on the bench “wondering what they did wrong,” he said.

The answer?

“I think you have to honor the [the team you choose],” Larsen said. “You can’t play up and then back down — no back and forth.”

For the time being, Larsen and other district coaches have voiced concern about which ‘team’ Hamline will take to the state tournament.

“I support Hamline,” said Larsen. “They’re a good team and there’s no sour grapes here, but they [better all show up]. They’re representing the Fourth District, representing all of us.”

That includes, of course, the six that had their Legion careers extinguished by Hamline.

“The two four-year guys [Field and Gazich] and Colwell and Traeger . . . Bjorn Anderson and Sam Weber . . . it’s a real good class leaving,” said Larsen, “but it’s also a good class staying. It’s not like you pick the cupboards bare.”

The cupboard is stocked with pitching (Seth Rosin, Brandon Porten, Blake Searles, Erik Fiegel and Brett Cleveringa).

Red fans also hope shortstop extraordinaire Derek McCallum exercises his final year of eligibility. McCallum was crowned Fourth District player of the year for the second straight year. The U of M signee and Twins draft pick is the first repeat winner in 13 years. Mike Maslowski (former Red player and ’99 assistant coach) won it back-to-back in ’1992-’93.

Opening day is only 10 months away.

**Fourth District Championship, July 29, 2006
Hamline 6, Tri-City Red 1 (Game 40)**

Hamline	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	0	—	6	7	3
TCR	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	—	6	8	4

Shrewsbury, Berg (8) and Kelly; Rosin, Fiegel (8) and Field.
W-Shrewsbury (7-3). L-Rosin (6-2).