

## Red walks away with playoff win

By Greg Schmidt

August 5, 2007

It was a fitting end to a night filled with patience by Tri-City (29-10), as the top seed in the Fourth District cruised past White Bear Lake 13-3 in seven innings of a postseason game that was slated to go nine. The remarkable patience was shown in the incredible plate discipline by Red batters, including the final at bat, in which a base on balls to Luke Ross (0 for 0, BB, RBI), the Red's 17th of the game, invoked the 10-run rule. It was the fourth consecutive walk of the inning and marked the second time in the game that a White Bear pitcher had begun an inning by surrendering a flurry of free passes. The first time was under much different circumstances, as White Bear led 3-2 heading into the bottom of fourth. Tommy Thompson (1 for 2, SB, 2-BB), Brian Marshik (0 for 0, 5-BB, 4-R, SB) and Brandon Porten (1 for 3, BB, HBP) were each left with very little to swing at. The same thing happened to Nick Colwell (2 for 4, BB, 3-RBI), and his walk knotted the score at 3-3. A pitching change by White Bear (25-22) failed to make a difference, as Erik Anderson (1 for 3, 2B, 2-BB, 2-RBI) drew another free pass to score Marshik and, ultimately, the game-winning run. "He was up to 80 pitches and we worked him and were patient," Larsen said. "Then they just didn't have anything left after that."

Also occupying the bases for the Red: Blake Searles (1 for 2, 2-SF, BB, 2-RBI), Brett Cleveringa (1 for 2, 2-HBP, RBI), Dan Reichert (1 for 3, 2B, 2-BB, 2-RBI), Jake Lechner (BB) and Jack Ries (BB).

In the early going, it appeared sixth-seeded White Bear Lake was riding high after their upset win over third-seeded Rosetown. Against Tri-City, White Bear tapped Red ace Seth Rosin for five hits and three walks that led to three early runs. That success was short-lived though, as Rosin settled into a groove and faced just 10 batters over the final three innings. In the sixth, he fanned three, but it took about 30 minutes to do it. Not because of any trouble on the field, but rather above it – when a 'lightning delay' prompted the umpires to demand a stoppage with two out in the sixth.

Larsen wasn't concerned and joked later, "It doesn't rain on Red, so we won't get lightning on Red either."

Rosin returned after the stoppage to notch his eighth strikeout. "I was hoping [Rosin] wouldn't have to go more than six and he didn't. Now he's available [for future games in the tournament]," Larsen said. Reliever Erik Fiegel gave the Red a chance to close it out early, by facing the minimum in the seventh.

### Second round

**Tri-City Red 13, White Bear Lake 3, 7 inn.**

**(Game 39, Aug. 1, 2007)**

White Bear	0	0	2	1	0	0	—	3	6	1	
Tri-City Red	1	0	1	3	5	2	1	—	13	8	1

Jensen, Letourneau (4), Docken (7) and Bircher; Rosin, Fiegel (7) and Anderson. W-Rosin (5-1). L-Jensen (3-3).

## **Red pulls out win against Puhl**

By Greg Schmidt

August 5, 2007

It was a battle of unbeaten, with Tri-City Red (30-10) and host North St. Paul (25-12) meeting in the winner's bracket final Aug. 2.

For the Red, Brandon Porten got the call and entered the game with a perfect mark of 6-0. North St. Paul, despite playing their third game in the tourney (the Red earned a bye in the first round), was also sitting well with Matt Puhl (4-0). Not only was he the 39ers' only undefeated pitcher, he also is the team's defensive anchor at shortstop not to mention the closer (7-saves). Need more: Puhl was recently named Most Valuable Player for the Fourth District.

But none of that mattered to the Red, as they grabbed the first lead on a bloop single to left field by Nick Colwell (2 for 4, BB, 2-RBI) in the third. The 39ers tied it in the fifth, but the Red came right back with a deuce in the bottom of the frame, beginning with a sacrifice fly by Tommy Thompson (1 for 3, SF, BB, RBI). He scored two batters later on a single to left-center from Erik Anderson (1 for 3, BB, 2-RBI) to make it 3-1. The momentum had clearly shifted. It moved completely into the Red's dugout, when Porten set the 39ers down 1-2-3 in the sixth.

Meanwhile, Puhl's pitch count was reaching the century mark for the first time this summer and the Red not only took notice — they took advantage — but not right away.

After Blake Searles drew a leadoff walk to start the sixth, Puhl retired the next two and looked to be out of the inning. But that critical third out never came — for what might have seemed like an eternity for North St. Paul.

Porten sensed a rally was drawing near.

"I don't know if [Puhl] just fatigued a little, 'cause he's not used to that, but I definitely felt that we knew our time would come into play," Porten said. "We were showing great discipline at the plate and had a lot of walks against White Bear (the night before)."

And once again, the Red's patience paid off, as the base-on-balls scenario returned. With two out and a runner on, Erik Fiegel and Brian Marshik received back-to-back walks. An error on a hard-hit grounder from Thompson pushed Searles (1 for 3, BB, SB, RBI) home and marked the end for Puhl, who had passed 100 pitches.

"We had him up their in [pitches] and again, like last night, it's what you got behind you in relief," manager Jeff Larsen said.

Like the night before in the Red's win against White Bear Lake, the 39ers didn't have an answer in relief, and once again it would lead to a Red run-scoring riptide. Consecutive free passes to Colwell and Anderson, with the bases jammed, put the Red in front 6-1 in the bottom of the sixth. Dan Reichert (2 for 4, 2-RBI) brought two more back to the dugout with a solid base rap up the middle, and Searles reached safely for the second

time in the inning with an RBI single to left-center. The outcome was a formality, but the game was still not complete.

Not until the seventh when walks to Jack Ries and Thompson were followed up by Nick Colwell, who ripped a grounder to second that was misplayed, allowing him to reach and both base runners to trot home and prompt the 10-run rule for the second straight night.

For Porten, the amazing part isn't simply his latest performance, but the fact that he'd done it before this summer against North St. Paul. It was the third time he started on the mound in four meetings. In the previous two, he went five and seven innings, earning a victory and no decision.

He knew the 39ers weren't going to be fooled the third time around. His game plan: "I just try to go out there and do the same thing every game — throw strikes, change speeds and give them different looks. They've seen me so much I don't know what else I could do to prepare."

The only minor obstacle for Porten wasn't the hitters, but rather the excitement of the game. "Once the game gets started and butterflies settle down . . . I was a lot more relaxed, but once we got the breathing room [3-1 advantage], I really settled down," he said.

At that point, Porten did what he always does: keep the ball over the plate and keep the free base coupons to a minimum. "'Port' — he always keeps us in the game," Larsen said.

Along with the solid pitching performance, Larsen also attributed the Red's success to the superb defense.

"The big thing was the zero in the error column and [North St. Paul] had five. It didn't kill them really bad, but it didn't help their morale," Larsen said.

Morale was at an all-time high for the 39ers prior to the first pitch. They clearly had revenge on their mind after being swept in the three-game regular season series.

"You know it's tough when you face somebody four times. One team thinks they got it and the other one is trying to prove something," said Larsen, who dedicated the victory to assistant coach, Eric Helgason, a survivor of the 35W bridge collapse. "He's been in our thoughts all night," Larsen said.

**Winners' bracket final  
Tri-City Red 11, North St. Paul 1, 7 inn.  
(Game 40, Aug. 2, 2007)**

NSP	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	—	1	6	4
TCR	0	0	1	0	2	6	2	—	11	7	0

Puhl, Gunderson (6), Adams (7) and Adams, House (7); Porten and Anderson.  
W-Porten (7-0). L-Puhl (4-1).

## **Tri-City dismisses rain, returns to State Team gets one for the thumb against NSP**

By Greg Schmidt

August 5, 2007

Two things are usually guaranteed when Tri-City Red plays a Fourth District playoff game: it doesn't rain, and more importantly, they win the game. Luckily for players and fans, it was just the former that didn't hold true as the Red (31-10) wrapped up their eighth district playoff championship in the last 11 , with a convincing 9-3 rout of second-seed and host North St. Paul Aug. 4. After collecting four wins in as many games with the 39ers (26-13) this summer, the Red wasn't about to let the all-important fifth meeting slip away.

Said Blake Searles, who had three hits: "It's hard enough to beat a team three times, but five times . . ."

Not an easy task, but one the Red needed in order to make a trip to the State Tournament, after a stunning and controversial defeat in the championship last year.

Searles and his teammates left no chance for North St. Paul to gain any momentum by going on the attack right from the first pitch and scoring a pair in the first inning. "We scored those runs and got a little more relaxed and confident," Searles said.

The confidence continued to grow.

Single runs in subsequent at bats — one via error and the other on a single to center by Jack Ries — gave the Red a commanding 4-0 advantage; commanding, because they had their ace Seth Rosin on the mound. It was the third appearance for Rosin against the 39ers. He had a complete game shutout earlier this summer (July 10, 5-0), and he also picked up a win with two innings of relief in a 1-0, extra-inning affair less than a week later.

Although the Red had a day off to prepare and wait for the losers' bracket final to be completed, nobody knew who would take the mound for the championship game.

"I didn't know, and got there, and coach asked if I was ready," Rosin said. "I was kind of confused about what he meant by that and he told me there was a game ball in the bucket." Rosin figured it out and couldn't wait to get started. "I was excited to get out there again . . . I wanted to pitch," he said. Rosin, who tossed six innings in the playoff opener to earn his fifth win this season, looked sharp despite only two days rest while having complete command of a variety of pitches.

"I just tried to keep it down today — make them put it in play," Rosin said.

He was running his string of scoreless innings to 13 this summer against the 39ers, when he was stopped one-out shy in the fourth, after a line drive screamer ricocheted off his left calf. He'd faced the minimum up to that point, but the massive bruise left him unable to continue. North St. Paul appeared to get a boost in momentum after his departure, but Rosin wasn't worried.

“I was confident in all of [our relievers] and with our defense too,” he said.

Rosin’s confidence was supported by a trifecta of primetime relief appearances from Paul Myers, Erik Fiegel, and David Norgard. Myers entered with two out and a runner on in the fourth, and Fiegel with two out and two on in the sixth. Both retired the next batter.

Norgard was faced with an even tougher assignment. He was called on with the bases full and nobody out in the eighth. He got the first batter he faced to swing at the first pitch and ground into a double play to end the chance of a major rally.

Said manager Jeff Larsen: “I think we had four [runs] when Rosin went down. Then we didn’t miss a beat. That’s where all your depth comes in. Myers, Fiegel and Norgard got us some big outs. That’s just great to see and [North St. Paul] couldn’t do that.” The 39ers’ pitching staff had tossed nearly 35 innings heading into the fifth and final day of the tourney while the Red — they earned a bye in the first round, as a result of claiming the regular season league title, and followed that up with 10-run victories in their first two playoff games, leaving them with only 14 innings pitched.

The end result: Tri-City finished with 13 hits, a playoff-high in the final, led by Nick Colwell (3 for 5, RBI), Searles (3 for 4, 2B, HBP, RBI, 3-R) and Brian Marshik (2 for 4, BB, 2B, RBI). Ries (1 for 3, HBP, SAC, 2-RBI), Erik Anderson (1 for 3, HBP, BB), Tommy Thompson (1 for 4, BB, RBI) and Brandon Porten (1 for 3, 2-SAC, RBI) had one apiece.

“I’m happy for them. It’s a great accomplishment, a great feeling for them,” Larsen said.

And the rain?

“If God showers us a bit that’s okay,” Larsen joked. “We got the game in and that’s the main thing.”

And with it, a return to the State’s grand stage.

Getting back to the ‘show’ wasn’t appreciated more than by the team’s third-year veterans, including Searles.

“It’s really big because last year we were expecting to go there and didn’t, and I think right now we’re playing good ball and showing other teams we’re a good team and deserve to be there.”

This year’s trip is the Red’s 11th overall and ninth out of the last 11 seasons. They’ve won five state titles with the last coming in 2000.

### **Championship**

**Tri-City Red 9, North St. Paul 3**

**(Game 41, Aug. 4, 2007)**

NSP	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	—	3	9	3	
TCR	2	1	1	0	1	0	3	1	x	—	9	13	1

Hubbard, Metcalf (8) and Adams; Rosin, Myers (4), Fiegel (6), Norgard (8) and Anderson. W-Myers (5-1). L-Hubbard (4-1).