

Gopher Classic Tournament Coverage

Painful loss to Rapid City puts Red in Gopher hole

Team drops four straight

By Greg Schmidt

July 24, 2007

The Red's run through the prestigious and nationally recognized Gopher Classic tournament July 13-15 started off on a solid note with a 6-2 victory over Adrian (Mich.), but a tough 1-0, eight-inning loss to Rapid City sent the squad into a tailspin.

After falling to the Rochester Patriots 5-3 the following day, Tri-City closed out pool play with losses to Richfield, 6-5, and host Excelsior, 8-4.

The finale against long-time cross-district rival Excelsior wasn't quite 'final' as the game was stopped due to light restrictions at Veterans' Field (Minnetonka High School). This followed even more unforeseen oddities.

"I've seen some bizarre endings, but this was different," said manager Jeff Larsen, referring to the alarming number of breaks in the action prompted by the Excelsior coaches. "If they cut the number of trips down [to the mound, etc.], we could have played seven [innings]," joked Larsen.

It was a fitting end to an all-together unpredictable tourney showing for the Red.

All seemed well two days earlier in the opener as the Red continued their strong surge following the midseason break getting past Adrian (20-10) after falling behind by a run in the early going. In the second the Red's bats came alive with five consecutive singles by Erik Anderson, Dan Reichert, Blake Searles, Tommy Thompson and Jack Ries (RBI) to put the Red in front for good 3-1. Clinging to a one-run lead in the seventh, Thompson (3-RBI) pushed another run across on a bases-loaded walk and Erik Fiegel (2-RBI) completed the scoring with a two-run single. Red starting pitcher Brandon Porten tossed another solid five innings to boost his team-leading pitching mark to 6-0. David Norgard entered in the sixth and held Adrian in check after a leadoff single. In the seventh, Seth Rosin put down Adrian in order including two strikeouts to lock up the Red's 21st victory.

Tri-City Red 6, Adrian (Mich.) 2, (Game 24, July 13, 2007)

Tri-City Red	0	3	0	0	0	3	—	6	15	3
Adrian MI	1	0	0	0	1	0	—	2	5	0

Porten, Norgard (6), Rosin (7) and Anderson; Haynes, Augustine (7) and Hill. W-Porten (6-0). L-Haynes.

Red ghosts of '93 and 2000 stir as Rapid City wins again

Indeed Friday the 13th started out well, but as the sun began its daily downward turn, so did the Red's luck. Of course, what better day for the Red to meet up with long-time cross-state archrival Rapid City, right? As usual it was expected that the favorite of the Excelsior pool would be fundamentally tough and that's what led to the extra inning defeat for the Red.

It was as if ghosts from years past for both teams descended on the recently anointed artificial Field of Dreams as the game ended in regulation with no score. Next was overtime and the Red appeared on track to break the scoreless tie immediately in the top of the eighth. But with runners at the corners, Rapid City reliever Alex Niemann struck out the next two. It was another unfortunate missed opportunity. The Red stranded six and had another two base runners picked off.

Rapid City (38-16) had also blown plenty of chances. They stranded nine in the first seven innings. But in the bottom of the eighth, manager Dave Ploof opted for a suicide squeeze with bases loaded and one out. Pinch hitter Jordan Mette came through by dropping one down the first base line that left no play as Zach Vlietstra raced home with the game-ender.

"It was a good game . . . it just came down to they could bunt and we couldn't," Larsen said. "Other than that I thought it was a straight up game. Great pitching on both sides and [starter Tommy Thompson] did a great job. That was the bright spot of the game. The down side was too many strikeouts when we had runners in position to score."

A one-run battle is nothing new for these teams. Seven years before the latest tilt, Rapid City stopped the Red's chance to repeat as World Series champions with a 7-6 season-ending loss at the 2000 Central Plains Regional in Rapid City. Also, seven years before that, Post #22 stopped the Red by the same score in the 1993 Regional.

"We've been playing each other for a long time and the games have really come down to probably one run with both ball clubs really competing tough . . . it was another one of those ball games," said Rapid City manager Dave Ploof, in his 43rd season.

It's also another triumph for Rapid City. "It's fun to win," Ploof said. The last time Tri-City defeated Post #22 was July 2, 2000. Pitching the 7-0 victory was the legendary Steve Grasley.

The latest clash sent both teams in different directions. Rapid City went on to win the pool and reach the semifinals of the 48-team tourney before falling to Billings (Mont.) — by one run, 5-4.

The Red (21-7) dropped their next three to finish 1-4 — their worst ever showing in the tournament.

**Rapid City 1, Tri-City Red 0, 8 inn.
(Game 25, July 13, 2007)**

Tri-City Red	2	5	0	0	0	2	0	—	9	9	2
Rapid City Post #22	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	—	4	10	5

Thompson, Norgard (8) and Anderson; Vlietstra, Niemann (8) and Sawyer. W-Niemann (4-0). L-Norgard (0-1).

Red vs. Excelsior:

