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A grand slam breaks tie in Burnsville's 6-2 win



Jacob Neutz celebrates with Burnsville Cobras teammates and coaches after his grand slam breaks a 2-2 tie with the Duluth Troops on Thursday afternoon at Gleason Fields in Maple Grove in the eighth inning.

Neutz sends a 365-foot message

By John Sherman

In two of his first three plate appearances against Duluth Thursday at Gleason Field, Burnsville's Jacob Neutz was walked and hit by a pitch.

No wonder he was eager to swing in his fourth at-bat of the day — and swing he did. His 365-foot grand-slam home run in the top of the eighth inning lifted the Cobras to a 6-2 victory over Duluth.

As he rounded the bases, Neutz looked toward Burnsville's dug-out and saw teammates racing out to congratulate him. He slowed down to hear the cheers and build anticipation for the celebration.

After crossing home plate, he jumped in the air and pumped his fist.

When Burnsville retired Duluth batters 1-2-3 in the bottom of the eighth, another Cobra celebration ensued.

Once the noise died down, Neutz talked about his heroic moment.

"I was down in the count and was looking for the ball up and down instead of in or out," he said.

When Neutz saw a change-up coming, his eyes lit up and he blasted the ball into deep center field. As he watched the flight of the ball, Neutz was apprehensive.

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Maple Grove finds its groove in the Thursday rain

While teams in three of the Div. I State Tournament fields sat through rain delays on Thursday morning, Maple Grove and Burnsville were able to play on the artificial turf at Gleason Fields in Maple Grove.

Maple Grove held an 8-2 lead going into the top of the seventh inning, but just then, a hard rain began to fall. Burnsville drew four walks and had a couple base hits before relief pitcher Edwin Conlon, Maple Grove's youngest player, came out of the bullpen to record the final two outs.

After the game, Maple Grove head coach Scott Ross said, "You can't win them all if you don't win the first one."

Pitching with a wet ball posed problems in the last inning, but Conlon found the right approach to throw strikes.

"In warm-ups I was pitching high," he said. "On the mound, I



Half-brothers Vann Olson and Edwin Conlon were instrumental in Maple Grove's 8-6 rain-soaked victory over Burnsville on Thursday at Gleason Fields in Maple Grove.

was able to get out front and focus down."

What was it like for the pitcher from the class of 2027 to pitch out of a bases-loaded jam to earn the

save?

"It was a flow of happiness, a flow of relief," he said.

Maple Grove center fielder Vann Olson hit the only home run

— a solo in the bottom of the sixth inning. He tagged a 350-foot shot that cleared the fence in right field. As it turned out, the blast provided an insurance run that Maple Grove almost needed to secure victory.

"It was like a dream," Olson said. "I got ahold of one in my home park in the State Tournament."

What could be better?

The fact that Olson and Conlon are half-brothers.

This is the first year that Olson and Conlon have been Legion teammates because of their age difference. Maple Grove coach Ross had the foresight to bring a young freshman (Conlon) onto his team, and it paid off at just the right time.

"Edwin is a pitcher who throws strikes," coach Ross said of his relief choice.

Evan O'Dwyer, who allowed

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Here are recaps of the first 8 games on Aug. 1

GAME 1

Burnsville 000 020 4 6 6 1
Maple Grove 520 000 1 8 7 0
Neutz, Johnson (1) and Woelfel. O'Dwyer, Johnson (7), Conlon (7) and Hagen. WP O'Dwyer. LP Neutz.

Maple Grove stormed out of the gate with five runs in the first inning and two in the second in a win over Burnsville at Gleason Field. Burnsville made the game interesting with four runs in the seventh frame. Burnsville first baseman Luke McHugh, the tallest player in the tournament had two hits and two RBIs. Vann Olson hit a solo homer for Maple Grove and teammate Connor Johnson went two-for-three.

GAME 2

Hastings 300 00 3 2 1
Mankato 105 25 13 12 0
DeNoyer, Karnick (4), McKnight (4) and Teigland. Benson and Timm. WP Benson, LP DeNoyer.

Hastings started fast with Eric Nelson hitting a three run homer in the top of the first, but Mankato National scored the next 13 runs to win by the 10-run rule in five innings Thurs-

day at St. Michael Lowe Field. Zach Benson went two-for-two and scored three runs for Mankato National and Jayden Knutson went two-for-three.

GAME 3

Farmington 300 002 0 5 8 2
Osseo 000 020 0 3 5 2
Bombardier, Carlson (7) and Sullivan. McHugo, Skoy (7) and Krzoska. WP Bombardier. LP McHugo.

Farmington used a strong pitching performance from Ethan Bombardier in a 5-3 win over Osseo Thursday at Osseo High School. Bombardier had 10 strikeouts to post the win. First baseman Tanner Renzy led the Tigers with a three-for-four day. Jorda Sivoravong had two of Osseo's five hits

GAME 4

Rochester 202 102 0 8 12 0
Shakopee 100 000 0 1 9 1
Sadowy, Dahl (2), Condon (4) and Johnson (7) and Ryan. Schroeder, Sauer (5), Hutson (6) and Olson. WP Dahl, LP Schroeder.

Chase Gasner sung a big bat for the Rochester Redhawks with three RBIs on a home run

and a double. Carter Funk and Michael Johnson added two hits each. Logan Krosch led Shakopee with three hits.

GAME 5

Burnsville 001 000 4 6 7 5
Duluth 200 000 0 2 2 6
McHugh, Hager (7) and Neutz. Marsolek, Lind (3), Cole (5) and Berrisford.. WP McHugh. LP Cole.

A grand-slam homer in the top of the seventh inning lifted Burnsville to a 6-2 victory over Duluth in a suspenseful game at a Maple Grove's Gleason Field. That home run, estimated at 365 feet, cleared the fence in dead center field. Neutz finished with three hits and five RBIs. Burnsville pitching limited Duluth to two hits.

GAME 6

Mankato 002 011 1 4 7 0
Forest Lake 000 001 0 2 4 0
DuRose and Timm. Bjork, Lee (6) and Mueller. WP DuRose. LP Bjork.

In a well-played game at St. Michael's Lowe Field, Mankato National and Forest Lake both played errorless games in the field with Mankato National winning 4-2. Wilson Magers hit a double for the winners. Catcher Logan Mueller went two-for-three to lead Forest Lake. Tucker Sibbald hit a

home run for Forest Lake. Wilson Magers had two hits for Mankato National.

GAME 8

Fridley Gold 100 100 0 2 4 1
Rochester 000 010 0 1 4 2
Rantz and Hand. Thorson, Labrash (5) and Ryan. WP Rantz. LP Labrash.

A pitchers' duel between Fridley Gold and the Rochester Redhaks ended in a complete-game 2-1 victory for righthander James Rantz, who allowed four hits. Fifty of Rantz's 70 pitches were strikes. Kellen Westphal had two of Fridley Gold's four hits in a well-played game.

GAME 9

Eden Prairie 200 020 2 6 11 1
Duluth 000 000 0 0 2 2
Macheledt, Dykstra (6) and Miller. Nick, DeRosier (5) and Berti. WP Macheledt, LP Nick, DeRosier (5) and Berti.

Eden Prairie pitcher Nick Macheledt starred in a 6-0 win over Duluth at Maple Grove's Gleason Field Thursday afternoon. Macheledt combined with reliever Vinny Dykstra on a two-hitter. Hawken Hedlund had a three-for-four with three RBIs to lead the Eden Prairie attack. Haddon Anderson and Joey Goetze added two hits each.

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"I had a feeling the center fielder might reach over the fence and pull it back," he said. "Then I saw the umpire's hand go up, signaling a home run."

The Div. I State Tournament home run was the first Legion home run for Neutz this summer. However, he hit two others while playing town ball for the Class C Hampton Cardinals.

Neutz fills several roles for the Cobras and has a number of different gloves in his bag for pitching, catching and playing infield or first base.

"After losing to Maple Grove [8-6] in our first game today, I knew we would have a good game this afternoon," Neutz said. "We weren't ourselves the first game, but we rallied at the end to close the gap. This is a close-knit team and we keep each other accountable."

Neutz is a big athlete at 6-3 and 215 pounds, who batted .361 during the regular season with 17 RBIs. The four that he had in the win over Duluth put him over 20, of course.

Neutz said he is thoroughly impressed with the hospitality at state. "Our team ate last at the banquet, but it was worth the wait. The barbecue and the macaroni and cheese were amazing."

The ballplayers heard from two great speakers at the banquet — WCCO sports anchor Mike Max and former Minnesota Vikings linebacker Chad Greenway.



Burnsville Association 191 Director Robert Weber comes to the rescue, providing an umbrella for Burnsville fans who attended a rainy game on Thursday morning. The Cobras rallied in an 8-6 loss to Maple Grove.

Continued from front

two runs in the first six innings was Maple Grove's winning pitcher. O'Dwyer is also a pitcher who throws a lot of strikes, Sam Hagen hit a two-run single to key a 5-run first inning for the Crimson.

Luke McHugh hit a two-run single for Burnsville to key the seventh-inning comeback.

Father and son watch over Field 3's action

By Tim Engstrom

Wes Thompson has been baseball director for the 6th District of the Minnesota American Legion for 17 years. He lives in Sartell and has been an American Legion member for 50 years with Waite Park Post 428.

Every year, at the Div. I State Tournament, he helps with lodging players and supervising one of the four ballfields.

This year, Tournament Director Bruce Young called him and said he lacked a volunteer to help him with field supervision. He asked whether Thompson knew anyone.

The 79-year-old replied, "I

think I know someone."

That someone was his son, 48-year-old Lonnie Thompson, a lover of baseball, too, and a member of the Sons of The American Legion out of Holdingford.

He has coached youth baseball for seven years, since his son was in third grade. Lonnie has been to the Div. I State Tournament before, but it has been many years.

"It's great to spend time together watching baseball," he said.

They are the field supervisors at Osseo Memorial Field this week. Find them somewhere between the backstop, the bleachers and the concession stand.



Father-son duo Wes Thompson of Sartell and Lonnie Thompson of Holdingford supervise Osseo Memorial Field during the Minnesota American Legion Div. I State Tournament. You know the old saying: If you want something done, just ask a son.

The art of hitting .400 in American Legion Baseball

By John Sherman

The gold standard for a Major League baseball player is a .300 batting average. Do that consistently over a long period of time, and you are destined for the Hall of Fame, just like former Minnesota Legion Baseball star Joe Mauer, who spent his entire Major League career with the Twins.

For players in this summer's State American Legion Baseball Division 1 Tournament, the gold standard is a .400 batting average.

And some have exceeded that goal with .500 averages for the regular season. Wilson Magers, the three-year Legion veteran from Mankato National, entered state play Thursday with a .554 batting average. That's 31-for-56 by the way.

Evan Nelson of Hastings is

knocking the cover off the ball with his .548 average. Jack Seleski of Hastings and Landon Hanson of Bemidji were swinging sweet with .521 averages. Hanson's sample size looms large – an impressive 50-for-96.

Dylan Cole of Duluth is also in the .500 club, entering state play with a 30-for-60 slate.

Magers talked about the keys to his .554 average: "Consistency is a big thing. And not swinging at bad pitches. You also have to have confidence in yourself."

Seleki from Hastings said, "Every time, I am looking to right-center field, no matter how hard the pitcher throws. I go the other way with outside pitches and can still pull inside pitches. For me, 40 percent of hitting is talent and the other 60 percent is being

ready, timing, practice and getting my front foot down early."

Eden Prairie second baseman Nick Thompson, a lead-off batter, likes to use the entire field. He has a large sample size with 41 hits in 90 at-bats for a .467 average. "The main thing I want to do is find my pitch," he said. "I like it when I see a first-pitch fastball. Ever since Little League, I have hit the ball to all fields. For sure, this year has been my best year."

Carson Beavers, the leading hitter for the Rochester Redhawks with a .436 average, said, "I want to stay within my game and my approach. It's all about the middle of the field. If it's an inside pitch, I can pull it. If it's outside, I try to hit the ball the other way."

Tommy Heifort of Fridley Gold is a tall player with a big strike

zone, but thrives with ins .449 batting average. "I work on hitting strikes," he said. "And I don't worry about making outs."

Ryan Vosper leads Shakopee with a .424 average. "You have to concentrate on controlling the things you can control," he said. "I believe in myself and trust my training. I want to make good contact and keep a good attitude."

Another tall player with a big strike zone, Burnsville pitcher and first baseman Luke McHugh, is hitting a solid .467 with 21 hits in 45 at-bats.

Also riding high as members of the .400 Club are Eden Prairie's Zach Peta .456, Farmington's Dillon Carlson .434, Hastings' Johnny Teigland .415, Eden Prairie's Hawken Hedlund .413 and Forest Lake's Logan Mueller .412.



Tommy Heifort



Carson Beavers



Wilson Magers



Ryan Vosper



Jack Seleski



Nick Thompson

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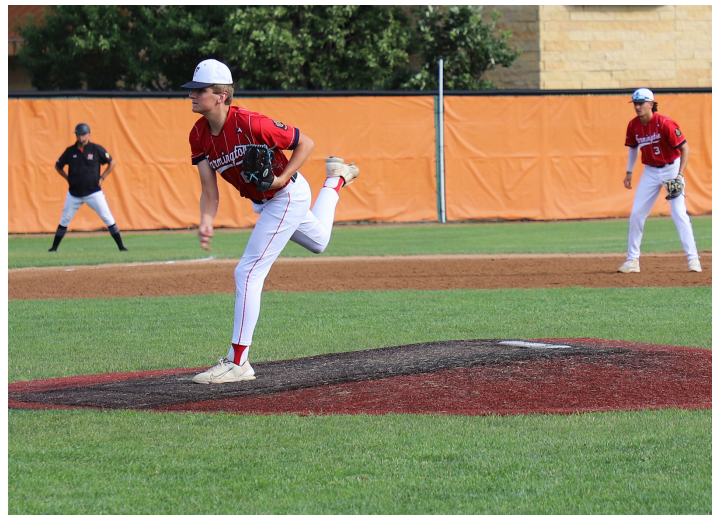
American Legion Department of Minnesota Commander Carl Moon of Zimmerman Post 560 reads the Code of Sportsmanship on Thursday morning at Gleason Fields to kick off the state tournament. He also threw the first pitch.



The Rudolph Priebe American Legion Post 172 Color Guard of Osseo-Maple Grove presented the U.S. flag for the national anthem to begin the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Div. I State Tournament at Gleason Fields in Maple Grove.



Second baseman Bjorn Lind of the Duluth Tropics makes a save on a wide throw as Josh Kelley of the Eden Prairie Eagles slides underneath with a stolen base during EP's 6-0 victory Thursday at Gleason Fields in Maple Grove.



Ethan Bombardier of the Farmington Tigers struck out 10 hitters as his team notched a 5-3 victory over the Osseo Orioles at Osseo Memorial Field on Thursday afternoon. Games at the field didn't get started on time because of the heavy rain.



Eden Prairie American Legion Baseball founder Harry Bongard revels in the Eagles success as they win their first two games at state.



As a lawyer and baseball coach, Mike O'Brian is known in the Eden Prairie community as the Legal Eagle. He is in his second year as head coach for EP Legion Baseball.