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Hopkins walks to championship game

By John Sherman

Foley found one way to stop Hopkins' Legion Baseball star Jake Perry Saturday night at Dick Putz Field.

Perry hit a 420-foot home run in the first inning. The next three times he came to the plate, Foley pitchers passed him intentionally.

That gave other Hopkins hitters a chance to show their skills. Jack Mausser hit singles in this first three at-bats and then drew a walk to end a perfect day. Brock Zimmer had three hits and four RBIs as Hopkins won the game 16-1 in five innings.

Flyers' pitcher Gabe Olson pitched three-hit ball over four innings before Aaron Aune finished the game.

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Hopkins teammates celebrate with Jake Perry after he belts a home run over the American Legion Baseball Tournament sign in right center at Dick Putz Field.

Miller inducted into Legion Baseball Hall of Fame

By Tim Engstrom

Past Minnesota American Legion Commander Mark Dvorak surprised Jeff "Slick" Miller on Friday by handing him his plaque for being a 2021 inductee in the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Hall of Fame.

Miller thought it would come later, at a banquet in 2022. Instead, he received it on the field in Sacred Heart at the Div. II Baseball Tournament.

Miller, from Ottertail, has served on the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee since 2013 and is presently one of two vice directors.

He started playing Legion Baseball in 1978 with Moorhead Post 21. He ran the scoreboard and announced games for Post 21 from 1981 to 1983. In 1988, he became



Minnesota American Legion Immediate Past Commander Mark Dvorak congratulates Jeff "Slick" Miller on his induction into the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Hall of Fame.

an assistant coach for Fargo Post 2, and that including two World Series appearances: 1989 and 1992.

Miller was an assistant coach with the Moorhead Blues in 1996, then delved into youth baseball and Babe Ruth in Moorhead from 1997 to 2006. He was Babe Ruth president for two years and chaired a committee to upgrade the Moorhead ballpark.

In 2007, he was named head coach of the Moorhead Blues and held the job through 2013. He coached at Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Post 397 in 2014.

"Baseball is the best sport because it is the best combination of brains and brawn," he said.

Miller, a veteran who is retired from a career with the North Dakota National Guard, was thankful for the honor.

'Pitching Coach' stays on top of the statistics

By John Sherman

At American Legion headquarters in St. Cloud, 28-year-old Matt Baker from Moorhead is known as the "Pitching Coach."

Baker is responsible for keeping track of State Tournament pitching records. It is a big responsibility, especially on a day like Thursday, July 29, when 16 games were played at four sites. "I have always been pretty good with numbers," Baker said. "And that makes the job easier."

In 2016, former State Baseball Director Mike Perry asked Baker to take the job of pitching coordinator. He makes sure:

- That no one exceeds the pitch count.
- That pitchers get the mandatory rest period based on the number of pitches they throw.
- That coaches know the status of all members of the pitching staff before each ball game.

"There isn't as much running around as there was when I started doing this in 2016," Baker said. "Now, it's basically a click of the button to get the information to the coaches."

Pitchers are limited to 105 pitches in any appearance. The only exception is that a pitcher who is under 105 pitches can finish the last batter he faces.

"I remember when The American Legion pitching rule was no more than 12 innings or three appearances in the State Tournament," Baker said.

"The pitch-count system protects arms much better," the Pitching Coach assured *The Gazette*.

What are the keys to keeping a pitch count low?

"It's simple," Baker said. "Just throw strikes. In quite a few games I watched this year, pitchers got through seven innings with 60-some or 70-some pitches. They were able to avoid long counts."



Matt Baker has the important job of tracking pitch counts, but he makes his work enjoyable, too.



Jack Preimesberger hits the ball twice, first with his bat, then with his face.

Perry excites the crowds

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At the start of the game, we got on for Jake and he hit a three-run homer," Mausser said. "When we get on for him, he does the damage."

Zimmer, who hits behind Perry in the batting order, saw Perry's walks as another chance for RBIs.

"Winning state tomorrow would be awesome, especially with the

way out high school season ended [an 11-1 loss to Andover], Zimmer said.

"We are looking forward to represent Minnesota in the regionals," Mausser said.

Perry is a great hitter, but so are Mausser and Zimmer. Perry brought a .495 batting average to state and is now well over .500. Zimmer was hitting .400 and Mausser checked in at .398.

Willmar's Jett flies high

By John Sherman

Center fielder and lead-off hitter Jett Salonek of the Willmar American Legion Baseball team is making great catches and flying around the base paths in St. Cloud this week.

Saturday morning at Joe Faber Field, Salonek helped his team advance to the semifinals with an 8-2 victory over Tri-City Red. He hit a double, drew a walk and scored two runs. Teammate Andrew Baumgart went three-for-four

"It is a lot of fun to compete against a team like that — Tri-City Red is a top program in Minnesota," Salonek said. "I'm just looking to get a base hit here and there. We take pride in moving around the bases."

Salonek does his share of moving with 15 stolen bases this summer. He seldom strikes out and is a good situational hitter, which are good characteristics for a lead-off batter.

At one time during the high school season, Willmar was ranked first in state, so making the final four at the State Legion Tournament isn't a big surprise.

"We have basically the same



Jeff Salonek

team for Legion that we had in high school," Salonek said. "A lot of us play extra baseball, and baseball was my only high school sport."

Willmar's pitching has been notable this week. "We have a lot of arms," Salonek said.

Sam Etterman was the winning pitcher against Tri-City Red. He threw strikes and mixed his pitches.

"Next season I plan to play for Valley City State [in North Dakota]," Salonek said. "I hope to play center field, but I could adjust to left."

Osseo Legion thrives behind John Klein's drives

By John Sherman

Big John Klein went on a hitting spree Saturday afternoon as Osseo clinched a berth in the Central Plains Region Tournament.

Klein hit a pair of base-clearing doubles for six RBIs in Osseo's 10-5 win over Willmar. In the bottom of the first, Osseo loaded the bases and Klein drove three teammates home to tie the score 3-3. The same scenario unfolded in the bottom of the fourth, and once again, Klein made it a clean sweep for his fourth, fifth and sixth RBIs.

"John came up with the clutch hits, but it wasn't just him," Osseo head coach Ben Johnson said.

"Other guys got on base for him."

Prior to the State Tournament, Klein established himself as a .400 hitter. Wyatt Doubler has been hot at state for Osseo and went two-for-three against Willmar.

Osseo's pitching staff gutted out a win with Sam Wolkerstorfer pitching the first four innings and Spencer Pederson taking over for the last three frames.

"They made so many clutch pitches," Coach Johnson said.

"Hitting goes up and down, and



Noah Thompson hugs Spencer Pederson after he closes the game against Willmar on Saturday.

we live on pitching and defense. We throw strikes and make plays."

Osseo is 23-7 for the season. Doubler leads the pitching staff with seven victories. Matthew Kitz-

man, Matt Holien, Jake Contreras, Wolkerstorfer and Pederson have pitched effectively and Rylee Kara was impressive Friday in her State Tournament debut as a reliever.

Prior to this year, Osseo's last State Tournament appearance was in 2011. For longtime fans of Post 172 victory, the thrill of going to regionals is a dream come true.

Foley Falcons are Cinderella crashing the ball

By Tim Engstrom

Foley's Charlie Hackett was pitching a game with a comfortable 6-1 lead over Mankato American. Suddenly, Kato bats came alive.

They scored 4 runs in the sixth inning, to make it 6-5. Hackett didn't sweat it.

Foley scored two more runs in the sixth, then Hackett sealed the 8-5 victory in the seventh by throwing strikes.

Hackett's father, Jay, said Charlie loved watching the Minnesota Twins and was into all things baseball.

"He's been pitching since he was 8 or 9, his entire baseball career," he said.

Charlie is the No. 3 pitcher. He usually plays shortstop.

"We were able to pull that one out with just depth," he said.

The depth comes because the Foley Falcons take every opportunity to teach players how to pitch, said coach Mike Beier.

He said he uses his VFW team to improve his Legion team. He lets players develop pitching, even if it means losing VFW games. It's



Charlie Hackett winds up in the final inning during Foley's victory over Mankato American on Saturday.

about development.

"There's a lot of walks, but then the next game or two, they get it," Beier said.

In the Div. I State Tournament, Foley has defeated Mankato American, Apple Valley's Eastview, Moorhead and Blaine-Ham Lake. They were in the tournament's final four with the likes of

Osseo, Willmar and Hopkins.

Foley comes from a community with a high school enrollment of 458. Does the team feel like Cinderella?

"Yes, absolutely," Beier said.

When Foley won Substate 12 and punched its ticket to state, Beier wondered how things would turn out.

"I thought, 'Wow, I just hope we can win a game,'" he said.

Foley didn't lose a game until facing Hopkins in the semifinal.

Some Div. II teams facing school enrollment growth don't like moving up to Div. I.

"I was OK with moving up. It takes our kids to the next level," Beier said.

Host committee hits home run for Legion Ball

By John Sherman

For almost two years, the St. Cloud host committee has been working to make sure there would be no glitches at the State Division 1 Baseball Tournament.

Emmit Keenan, the Athletic Director at St. Cloud Cathedral High School since 1998, heads the host committee, serving alongside Dana Randt, Sports and Special Events Manager for the City of St. Cloud, and Todd Bissett, Manager of St. Cloud's Municipal Athletic Complex (MAC). Emily Bertram has been instrumental as the expert for social media and marketing.

Paul Bruns and Tim Kuhl head the grounds-keeping crew that includes many others who are skilled in field maintenance.

The tournament's main sponsor is Scheels. Randt said the committee has enjoyed working with Scheels' events and sponsorships



Emmit Keenan and Dana Randt with the St. Cloud host committee stand outside HQ at Dick Putz Field on Saturday.

coordinator, Jamie Mortland. "Scheels is a fabulous sponsor," Randt said.

"The financial piece of a State Tournament is always the most tenuous," Keenan said.

Luck can play a part in financial success.

"The teams you get can determine the size of the crowds," Keenan said. In this year's tournament, Foley and Willmar are attracting

big crowds. And the success of the host team, St. Cloud Chutes, was also a box office bonus.

"It is a great honor to make it to the tournament," Randt said. "And we want the teams to feel special."

Master of ceremonies Dick "The Polish Eagle" Jonckowski was a hit at the banquet, which also included Hall of Fame and Post of the Year Awards.

At opening ceremonies Thursday morning at Joe Faber Field, American Legion Department Commander Tom Fernlund didn't need a bullpen session before throwing a strike on the ceremonial first pitch.

After the State Tournament ends Sunday afternoon, Randt will take a short break before St. Cloud hosts a state robotics tournament. For Keenan, it's back to Cathedral High School, where football practice begins two weeks from now.

Best in the Bracket

Saturday was a big day for Legion hometown heroes

Andrew Baumgart of Willmar had three hits in four at-bats and scored two runs in an 8-2 victory over Tri-City Red.

Paul Deikoff of Tri-City Red homered in the second inning of his team's 8-2 loss to Willmar.

Wyatt Doubler of Osseo went two-for-three with a walk and scored three runs in a 10-5 victory over Willmar.

Sam Etterman, Willmar's starting pitcher, was one out short in his bid for a complete game in the 8-2 Willmar victory over Tri-City Red.

Charlie Hackett of Foley was the winning pitcher and also hit a double in the Falcons' 8-5 victory over Mankato American.

John Klein, Osseo's shortstop, had six RBIs with a pair of bases-loaded doubles as the Orioles stopped Willmar 10-5.

Ryan McGie of Hopkins pitched a three-hitter to beat Grand Rapids 11-2.

Jake Perry homered for Hopkins in three consecutive at-bats in the Flyers' 11-2 win over Grand Rapids. Perry added another homer, giving him four for the day, as Hopkins defeated Foley in the final game of the day.

Spencer Pederson pitched three scoreless relief innings as Osseo defeated Willmar 10-5.

Josiah Peterson of Foley hit a triple and a single as the Falcons won their fourth straight game of the State Tournament 8-5 over Mankato American.

Matthew Werk of Mankato American hit a pair of doubles and scored a run in an 8-5 loss to Foley.

There's no trophy for bat-tapping, but Ren Morque of Grand Rapids displays his skills before the game against Hopkins on Saturday.



Ren Morque of Grand Rapids plays bat tap with a baseball on Saturday before the Hopkins-Grand Rapids game at Dick Putz Field. He kept the ball in the air at least 200 taps