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Pool play featured at 2021 Div. I Tournament

The 16 participating teams will get to play more games

By John Sherman

For the first time in the history of the State Division I American Legion Baseball Tournament, pool play will be included in the format.

State Junior Legion Director Jim Peck introduced the idea of pool play for several reasons.

“With pool play, each team gets at least three games, instead of the two-game guarantee we had before,” Peck said. “Another advantage of pool play is that if a team loses in the first or second round, it can now win the tournament in six games instead of eight.”

Peck added that no team will have more than six games, and in the pitch-count era that puts less strain on a pitching staff.

“The only negative of pool play is that it is an increased cost for the host because teams will be staying longer,” Peck said.

How does pool play work?

“The top two finishers in each of four pools will advance to the championship bracket,” Peck said. “Then, it is single elimination for the eight teams that advance.”

The first- and second-place teams in Minnesota will advance to the Central Plains Regional next week.

Generally, the reaction to pool play has been positive from Minnesota American Legion coaches. The chance to play more than two games at state seems to be the greatest appeal.

There is not a defending state champion this year because there was no State Tournament

in 2020 and the 2019 state champion Excelsior was eliminated in the Sub-State 4 Tournament last week. The 2019 runner-up, Edina, was eliminated from the Sub-state 3 Tournament by the champion, Eden Prairie.

Fans of Minnesota American Legion Baseball are anxious to see how pool play unfolds. There are tie-breakers in place. Head-to-head if two teams are tied. In case of a three-way tie, secondary tie-breakers are in place.



Jim Peck

Who will be this year's individual award winners?

By John Sherman

Each year since 1960, one baseball player has won the Fred Wannamaker Award as the State Division I American Legion Tournament's most outstanding player.

The first boy to win the award was Barry Johnson of Fergus Falls. The last to win it was Excelsior's Nick Thimsen in 2019.

Several winners of the Wannamaker Award have gone on to fame and fortune in Major League Baseball.

Hall-of-Famer Dave Winfield was the winner in 1968, when he pitched and played shortstop for St. Paul Attucks-Brooks. Terry Steinbach, the former Minnesota Twins and Oakland A's catcher, won the coveted award for his performance with New Ulm Gold in the 1978 State Tournament.

In 1963, Dennis Denning the former Cretin-Derham Hall High and St. Thomas College baseball coach, won the Wannamaker



Nick Thimsen with Excelsior won the Fred Wannamaker Award at the last State Legion Tournament in 2019

Award. Then in 1990, his son Wes was the Wannamaker winner.

Robert Wassenaar is the only player to win two Wannamaker Awards in 1982 and 1983. He went on to Stanford University

and helped pitch the Cardinal to the College World Series title. Wassenaar played in the Twins organization, but did not make it to the Majors.

St. Cloud area fans may remem-

ber that catcher Jeremy Mendel of Waite Park won the Wannamaker Award in 1986, when he played for the Post 428 team.

Between 2004 and 2008, four different players from Eden Prairie won Wannamaker Awards. They were Justin Milo in 2004, Nate Hansen in 2005, Danny Miller in 2007 and Scott Lindner in 2008. Matt Halloran, also from Eden Prairie, won the award in 2010. His dad Mike Halloran, the former Eden Prairie High baseball coach, was the American Legion World Series MVP in 1983.

PITCHING AWARD

The Aforementioned Robert Wassenaar was one of the great American Legion pitchers in Minnesota history and was the winning pitcher in the 1983 World Series title game when Edina beat Boyertown, Pennsylvania.

The most outstanding pitcher in the State Division I American Legion Tournament collects the Robert Wassenaar Award.

Tournament begins, championship is Sunday

Where is your favorite team playing next?

By John Sherman

Luck of the draw determined pool assignments for the 2021 State Division I American Legion Baseball Tournament.

"Substate team match-ups were randomly picked out of a hat, as were home-team designations," Third District Baseball Director Bruce Young noted.

All of the pools are tough with 15 Substate champions participating along with a competitive host team, the St. Cloud Chutes.

Favorites coming into the tournament appear to be Tri-City Red in Pool 1, Hopkins in Pool 2 and Mankato American in Pool 3. In Pool 4, it is harder to identify a favorite. Eastview, Ham Lake and the Moorhead Blues are three teams with strong traditions in state play.

POOL ASSIGNMENTS

Pool 1 – Grand Rapids, Rosemount, St. Cloud Chutes and Tri-City Red.

Pool 2 – Fridley Gold, Hopkins, Minneapolis Gopher Post and Willmar.

Pool 3 – Austin, Eden Prairie, Mankato American and Osseo.

Pool 4 – Eastview, Foley, Ham

Lake and Moorhead Blues.

Each team has two pool games on Thursday, July 29, and one game Friday, July 30, and then the top two finishers in each pool will advance to the championship bracket.

POOL PLAY SCHEDULE

POOL 1 – all games at Dick Putz Field

10:30 a.m. Thursday – Grand Rapids vs. Rosemount

1 p.m. Thursday – Tri-City Red vs. St. Cloud Chutes

3:30 p.m. Thursday – Grand Rapids vs. Tri-City Red

6 p.m. Thursday – Rosemount vs. St. Cloud Chutes

10:30 a.m. Friday – Grand Rapids vs. St. Cloud Chutes

1 p.m. Friday – Rosemount vs. Tri-City Red

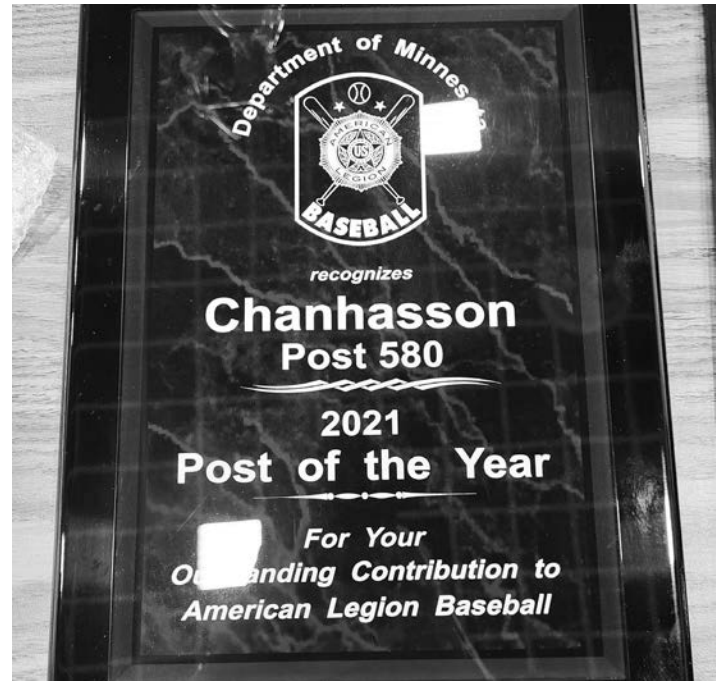
POOL 2 – Please note field locations

10 a.m. Thursday – Fridley Gold vs. Hopkins – Joe Faber Field

12:30 p.m. Thursday – Minneapolis Gopher Post vs. Hopkins – Joe Faber Field

4 p.m. Thursday – Fridley Gold vs. Minneapolis Gopher Post – St. Cloud Tech

6:30 p.m. Thursday – Hopkins



Chanhasson Post 580 was named 2021 Post of the Year at the tournament banquet on Wednesday in recognition of its financial support not merely for local teams but for sizable donations to the State Baseball Committee to help offset expenses of running seasons and postseasons across Minnesota.

vs. Willmar – St. Cloud Tech

Field (Sartell)

6 p.m. Friday – Eastview vs. Foley – St. Cloud Ortho Field (Sartell)

POOL 3 – Please note field locations

10 a.m. Thursday – Austin vs. Mankato American – St. Cloud Ortho Field (Sartell)

12:30 p.m. Thursday – Eden Prairie vs. Osseo – St. Cloud Ortho Field (Sartell)

3 p.m. Thursday – Austin vs. Eden Prairie – St. Cloud Ortho Field (Sartell)

5:30 p.m. Thursday – Mankato American vs. Osseo – St. Cloud Ortho Field (Sartell)

3:30 p.m. Friday – Austin vs. Osseo – Dick Putz Field

6 p.m. Friday – Mankato American vs. Eden Prairie – Dick Putz Field

POOL 4 – Please note field locations

10:30 a.m. Thursday – Ham Lake vs. Eastview – Bob Cross Park in Sartell

1 p.m. Thursday – Foley vs. Moorhead Blues – Bob Cross Park in Sartell

3:30 p.m. Thursday – Foley vs. Ham Lake – Bob Cross Park in Sartell

6 p.m. Thursday – Eastview vs. Moorhead Blues – Bob Cross Park in Sartell

3:30 p.m. Friday – Ham Lake vs. Moorhead Blues – St. Cloud Ortho

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND

Pool play will be followed by a single-elimination championship round Saturday and Sunday.

UPPER BRACKET

10:30 a.m. Saturday – Pool 1 champion vs. Pool 2 runner-up – Joe Faber Field

11 a.m. Saturday – Pool 3 champion vs. Pool 4 runner-up – Dick Putz Field

LOWER BRACKET

1 p.m. Saturday – Pool 2 champion vs. Pool 1 runner-up – Joe Faber Field

1:30 p.m. Saturday – Pool 4 champion vs. Pool runner-up – Dick Putz Field

SEMIFINALS

UPPER BRACKET

4:30 p.m. Saturday – Dick Putz Field

LOWER BRACKET

7 P.M. Saturday – Dick Putz Field

CHAMPIONSHIP

10:30 a.m. Sunday – Third-place game – Dick Putz Field

1 p.m. Sunday – Championship game – Dick Putz Field



Best known for his years as the public address announcer for Minnesota Gophers men's basketball and baseball games, and for being a Gophers football announcer, Dick Jonckowski, had the players and parents laughing during the banquet of 500 people on Wednesday to start the tournament.