



The Gazette

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College freshman help propel Hopkins' success

Flyers have No. 1 ranking in Scheels poll starting tourney

By John Sherman

When college freshmen Ryder Lane, Americo Sculati and Jackson View found out they could return for another season of Hopkins American Legion baseball, they jumped at the chance.

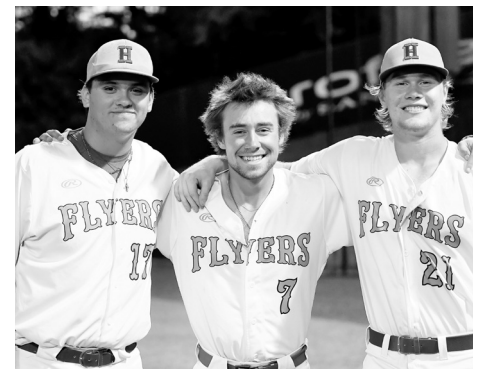
Their leadership and performance between the lines helped the Flyers finish first in the final regular-season Scheels' American Legion Baseball Rankings. All three have pitched effectively this summer, and they also take turns in the field. Lane is often at first base, while Sculati plays first or in the outfield and View plays center field or second base.

Sculati stood out in last week's Sub-State 4 Tournament at Minnetonka's Veterans Field. He was the winning pitcher and had a no-hit-

ter going for 4 and 2/3 innings as Hopkins beat Chaska 9-3 in the championship game July 23. The night before, his towering, 420-foot home run over the left field fence eliminated Excelsior 4-2.

Last summer was a dream come true for this Hopkins trio, as they led the Flyers to second place in the State Legion Tournament (behind Osseo) and second place in the Central Plains Regional (behind Fargo ND Post 400). They came back this season looking for more. The No. 1 ranking in the Scheels' poll was a nice start. And going 5-0 in sub-state game accelerated the Flyers' momentum.

"Everyone one on this team has worked hard and has the dedication to be successful," said Sculati, who plays NCAA Division II baseball for the University of Minnesota-Crookston.



This trio of college players has helped the Hopkins American Legion baseball team to the No. 1 state ranking. From left are: Ryder Lane (St. Scholastica), Jackson View (St. John's) and Americo Sculati (Minnesota-Crookston).

Kitzberger, McCready and Schmitz receive honors

By Tim Engstrom

Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee member Vern Kitzberger was inducted into the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Hall of Fame on Wednesday evening at the annual Div. I State Tournament banquet.

"American Legion Baseball is community-oriented, and that is one of the great things about the program," he said.

Kitzberger is a member of the Sons of The American Legion Squadron 132 in New Ulm. He became a member of New Ulm's baseball committee in 2002 and remains in that role, serving as president for the last 11 years.

He co-chaired the 2009 Minnesota Div. I Baseball Tournament hosted by New Ulm, and he became the baseball director for the Minnesota American Legion's 2nd District in 2013. The role places him on the Minnesota American Legion Baseball



Minnesota American Legion Immediate Past Commander Tom Fernlund stands with Hall of Fame recipient Vern Kitzberger and Minnesota American Legion Baseball Director Randy Schaub.

Committee.

The banquet, held at Brackett's Crossing Country Club in Lakeville, also featured presentations for two coaches of the year.

One went to Scott McCready,

the Legion's 1st District director and, as such, a part of the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee. He is an activities director for St. Charles High School, 33-year head baseball

coach and a math teacher. He was the recipient of the Minnesota Baseball Coaches Association's Craig Anderson Ethics in Coaching Award in 2015.

St. Charles Post 190 and the local community hosted Junior Legion Baseball tournaments in 2019 and 2024.

The other Coach of the Year is Cory Schmitz, who has coached and managed Lewiston Post 90's baseball team for 24 years. From 1998 to 2014, he was B-squad coach for Lewiston-Altura High School under Head Coach Jerry Stensgard. Schmitz became head coach in 2015 and led teams to state in 2015 and 2016.

He played college baseball at Winona State and was a member of the 1988 NAIA World Series team under Coach Gary Grob and Pitching Coach Todd Oakes.

Schmitz began a coaching career in Ontario, Wis.

See their photos on the other side of The Gazette.

Prospect Series returns to Red Haddock Field

By John Sherman

Directors Mike Perry and Bruce Barron have made several adjustments for the second year of the Minnesota Legion Prospects All-Star Series, which will be Saturday, Aug. 6, at Red Haddock Field in Bloomington.

The biggest adjustment is more participation as the number of players expands from 45 to 60 and the number of teams expands from three to four.

“The 60 players represent 43 high schools,” said Barron, who coached Edina Legion to the World Series championship in 1983.

How are the teams formed? “High school and American Legion coaches stepped up and recommended players,” Barron said. “Our three questions to them were: “Does your player want to compete at the next level? Can he compete at the next level? And does he have the work ethic to make it happen? Most kids would love to be an all-star and receive a jersey and a cap as mementos.”

“Last year, the players were younger than they are this year as a group,” Perry, the former State American Legion Baseball director, said. “This year, the all-star series is open to players in the 2023, 2024 and 2025 graduating classes. We had mainly 16-year-old Legion and Junior Legion players last year.”

Perry added, “The players don’t pay a nickel to participate in our

event.”

Scheels All Sports sponsors the all-star series with additional donations provided by the State American Legion Baseball committee and the American Legion posts in Apple Valley, Bloomington and Chanhassen.

There are four teams in the series this year, and one criteria for selecting the coaches was their baseball experience.

Former Stanford University pitcher Rob Wassenaar and Hopkins Legion assistant coach Max Weesner have been selected to coach Team Red. Former Concordia University-St. Paul coach Mark “Lunch” McKenzie and Excelsior Legion coach Rob Hager head Team Blue. Minnesota Gophers assistant coaching staff veterans Rob Fornasier and Tanner Oakes direct Team Gold. Former Legion coaches Todd Jahnke from Hopkins and Adam “Gator” Goethke of Wayzata are in charge of Team White.

Behind the scenes, Omar Navarro, working from statistics and spread sheets, assigned the all-stars to teams so that each squad had comparable pitchers and enough players for each positions.

Players of interest to Twin Cities west suburban area fans include St. Michael catcher Drew Luster and Osseo pitcher-infielder Spencer Pederson for Team Red, Hopkins pitcher Olin Lysne, Westphal Armstrong first baseman Dylan Franke and Osseo outfielder Davis Wick for Team Blue, Maple Grove pitcher-



Righthander Jack Kochevar of Excelsior is one of the pitchers selected to play in the American Legion Baseball All-Star Series Aug. 6 at Red Haddock Field in Bloomington.

er Sam Kliber, Excelsior outfielder Braden Storts and Eden Prairie catcher-infielder Dawson Miller for Team Gold and Excelsior pitcher Jack Kochevar for Team White.

Players come to the all-star event from Legion posts all over the state. Outstate prospects come from every corner. Among those from far-away places are Dylan Cole from Duluth Lakeview, Cody Wichmann from Russell-Tyler-Ruthton, Alex Longoria from Crookston, Cody Joslyn from International Falls and Stephan Schultz from Lanesboro.

All-star series rosters have been sent to college coaches throughout the state and beyond.

“Mike and I and the other guys on our committee are the producers,” said Barron, who coached Edina to the Legion World Series title in 1983. “The coaches are the ones talking to the players, and our coaches are coming in very pre-

pared. They will give the kids tips about how to play and tips on staying in the game. As producers, we will sit back on Saturday and watch some good baseball.”

Activities begin with practices sessions for all teams on Friday, Aug. 5. There will be four games on Saturday at Red Haddock Field. Admission is \$8 at the gate.

All-Star Series Game Schedule
Saturday, Aug. 6
Red Haddock Field
in Bloomington

11 a.m.:
Team Red vs. Team White
2 p.m.:
Team Blue vs. Team Gold
4:30 p.m.:
Third-Place Game
7 p.m.:
Championship Game



Minnesota American Legion Immediate Past Commander Tom Fernlund stands with Hall of Fame recipient Vern Kitzberger-Coaches of the Year Cory Schmitz and Scott McCready and Minnesota American Legion Baseball Director Randy Schaub.



At the Div. I banquet in Lakeville, players and parents alike were moved by the words of Iraq War veteran John Kriesel of Cottage Grove. His message was: “Life is good. Attitude is a choice.” Introducing him and serving as the emcee was WCCO Sports Anchor Mike Max, on the right.