



American Legion Minnesota Division I Tournament

Gazette



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Three teams advance to the final day

After 27 games over three days, three teams have survived into the final day of the Minnesota American Legion Division I Baseball Tournament.

Burnsville and Eden Prairie fought their way back through the losers' bracket to face each other in the 11 a.m. semi-final game at Chaska Athletic Park.

The winner of that game will face Edina, the lone undefeated team, in the tournament finale at 2 p.m.

Edina, as one of the two finalists, is already guaranteed a spot in the Central Plains Regional in Dickinson, N.D., beginning Aug. 9.

Burnsville lost to Edina 5-1 in the battle of unbeaten earlier in the day. Burnsville was

able to move on, though, with a win over Grand Rapids 11-1.

Grand Rapids won an early game over Waite Park 5-0. New Ulm Gold defeated Lakeville North 12-10.

Eden Prairie got to the semi-finals by topping New Ulm Gold 5-3 and Tri-City Red 12-11 in ten innings.

The winner of the semi-final game will also advance to the national regionals.

The winner of the eight-team regional will advance to the World Series in Shelby, N.C., on Aug. 17.

In championship action at the Division II Tournament in Sacred Heart, Plato defeated Ely 4-3. Both teams will advance to the regionals at Wahpeton, N.D.

Earlier, Ely had defeated Stewartville, 7-5. Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton had reached the tourney finals, but was disqualified.

Ethan Maas of Plato was the tournament's outstanding player.

Peck named to Minnesota HOF

By John Sherman

When Jim Peck moved to the Lake Minnetonka area in 1962, he was anxious to put down roots in the community.

One way he did that was by volunteering to work with youth in the East Tonka Babe Ruth Baseball program. Fifty years later, he is still working with youth as general manager of the Excelsior American Legion Baseball team. He is also Minnesota's 16-Year-Old Legion Baseball Director.

In recognition of his 50 seasons in the game, Peck has been elected to the Minnesota Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame. He will be inducted during a banquet Sept. 15 in St. Cloud.

"It is certainly a great honor, especially for someone who has primarily been involved in the American Legion program," said Peck. "Most of the members of the Hall of Fame are connected with town team baseball."

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Jim Peck, the state's junior Legion director, was elected to the state's Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame.

Stars of the Day

Kevin Larson of New Ulm Gold went four-for-five during a 12-10 victory over Lakeville North.

Erik Rutt of Lakeville North went four-for-four as his team lost to New Ulm Gold. Rutt is the hitting leader in the tournament with a .538 average.

Brett Guba of Eden Prairie hit a grand-slam home run to help his team beat Tri-City Red 12-11.

Mitchell Larson of Edina pitched eight innings in a 5-1 win over Burnsville in the winners' bracket final.

Danny Baer, Edina's center fielder, hit a three-run triple to lift his team over Burnsville 5-1.

Mark Handberg, Edina's third baseman, had two hits and two RBIs in a win over Burnsville and also started a double play for the second straight game.

Bo Hellquist of the Burnsville Cobras went two-for-three with four RBIs in an 11-1 victory over Grand Rapids.

Luke Chinn pitched Burnsville to an 11-1, seven inning victory over Grand Rapids.

Cody Wetmore had three of Eden Prairie's nine hits in a 5-3 win over New Ulm Gold.

Luke Hoffmann, first baseman and pitcher for New Ulm Gold, is the only state tourney participant with two home runs. Five others have hit one.

New bats mean return to old fashioned baseball

By Al Zdon

Does Legion Baseball look a little different to you this year? That's because it is.

The change from the previously allowed BESR metal bats to the new, softer BBCOR bats has resulted less hitting, and, some would say, more baseball.

"I think it brought baseball back to what it used to be," said State Director Darwin Berg. "I think it's for the better of the game."

The American Legion this year made the switch to BBCOR bats, following the lead of the college ranks which switched this past year.

The statistical change has been stunning. Last year, 25 home runs were hit in the tournament. This year, though, the first 28 games, there have been seven, and none at the Chaska Athletic Field, the tournament's main field.

Over the past five years, the teams hit a combined .317 in the tournament. This year,

the teams are hitting .267. The pitcher's earned run average this year is 3.59, while historically it has been about six and one-half runs per nine innings.

Slugging percentage in the past five years was .434, while this year with the quieter bats, it's .321.

"The change to the new bats may have been based on the safety of the players," said Dave Petrov, the Legion's official scorer for the tournament, "but secondarily, it has changed the game."

Petrov said the new bats have a much smaller "sweet spot," much like that of a wooden bat. Some observers used to say that the old BESR bats were all sweet spot. Even when a batter connected with the handle or the end of the bat, the result often was a rocket through the infield.

"It's easier to determine the really talented

hitters now, the ones who put the barrel of the bat on the ball. The cheap types of base hits are much more rare now."

Petrov thinks the new bats have made the pitchers better. "With a young pitcher facing those BESR bats, it got to the point where there was no advantage to throw a pitch inside, because a connection off the handle often resulted in a hit anyway. Now they're relearning that inside pitch."

Bill Franzen, a coach with the amateur Chaska Cubs team, said the new bats favor the old style of baseball. "Base running has become much more important. It's great for the old-style coaches."

Petrov said the change in bats has been long needed. "It's put pitching and hitting back into balance."

Berg said, "They even sound like wood bats."

Darwin Berg completes nine-year run at the top

By John Sherman

After nine years as Minnesota's State American Legion Baseball Director, Darwin Berg announced he will not return to the position next year.

"These have been nine great years," Berg said in an interview Sunday afternoon. During Berg's tenure, two Minnesota teams, the Rochester A's (2003) and Eden Prairie (2011)

won American Legion World Series titles. In 2007 and 2010, Eden Prairie was the World Series runner-up.

"Those high national finishes were nothing that I did," said Berg. "The competition in Minnesota has improved. I would like to challenge any other state to prove they have a better program than ours."

Berg presides over 320 teams in the Legion

and Junior Legion programs.

The decision to step down was a hard one for Berg.

"It is a three-year commitment," he said. "I have four grandchildren, two in Maple Grove and two in Preston, Minn. I would like to be able to watch them play ball."

Berg, a U.S. Army veteran, who now lives

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Peck enters state amateur baseball hall

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Other volunteers who have worked closely with Peck appreciate his dedication and his vision for Legion Baseball.

"You won't find anyone who has put more time into the Legion program than Jim," said South Hennepin Legion League Director Gene Berg of St. Louis Park. "He is dedicated to helping kids at the local, state and national levels."

"The Hall of Fame is a richly deserved honor for Jim," said Tenth District American Legion Baseball Director Mike Perry. "It is absolutely amazing the hours that Jim puts into the program. He's one of a kind: Jimmy Baseball."

State American Legion Baseball Director Darwin Berg said, "If we didn't have people like Jim Peck, the program would not be where it is today. He has put his heart and soul into American Legion Baseball and is always willing to do things the right way."

Peck's love for the sport began in his hometown of Deer River, Minn. The high school didn't have a varsity baseball team until Peck's sophomore year, and he was a track letterman before that. Once he got involved in baseball, he was a mainstay, playing every inning of every game for three years. He had the first hit and the first RBI in school history. At the same time he was competing in high school ball, he played for the Deer River town team.

Peck continued his athletic career in track

and basketball at Itasca Community College. He earned his associate's degree and then graduated from the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy.

Peck, 72, owned Deeplaven Drug in the Lake Minnetonka Area from June of 1976 through December of 1999. Since selling the business he has continued to work in pharmacy and is now with Omnicare, working primarily with patients in nursing homes.

"I always wanted to be a pharmacist," he said. "I wanted to own my own business, and I wanted to have a career based on helping the public."

Peck said he had many highlights during his 39 years with the Excelsior American Legion Baseball program. Legion World Series appearances in 1998 and 2002 were obvious benchmarks. In 2002, Excelsior was the national runner-up to West Point, Miss.

"We had a great group of pitchers that year with Marcus McKenzie, Geoff Bray and Zach Peterson," said Peck. "Apple Valley beat us for the state title that year, but we won the region title and went on to the World Series in Danville, Va. We got 10-run by Rapid City, S.D. in our first game, and then we beat Medford, Ore. 9-8, Las Vegas 3-2 and Dothan, Ala. 7-3 before we lost to West Point."

While memories of state and national tournament success are nice, Peck said his best memories are of time spent with his players and their families.

He is one of the most recognizable people in the Lake Minnetonka Area.

"Jim has helped a lot of young people over the years," said Excelsior Legion's super fan, Jerry Schmidt. "Former players in all walks of life have used Jim as a reference on their resumes."

Peck retired as Excelsior's field manager after the 2003 season after winning two state championships (1991 and 1998). Prior to entering the Legion ranks, he coached East Tonka teams to two state Babe Ruth titles.

"There are times when I miss being on the field," he said. "But there is still plenty to do. We were the first team in Minnesota to do a lot of traveling, and to do that we have to fund raise."

Most of the phone books in the Lake Minnetonka Area were delivered by Excelsior Legion players for many years, but the program's major fundraising is done through the Diamond Classic, an annual wintertime banquet that has featured Major League Baseball Hall-of-Famers such as Bob Feller, Lefty Gomez, Harmon Killebrew and Brooks Robinson.

"We have a successful program in Excelsior because many people have been willing to put in the time," said Peck. "No one does it alone. We have had a lot of talented players over the years, who have been trained by some very good coaches in our youth program. It has been fun to be a part of this for all these years."

Complete stats from tourney's first three days

Batting avg

1. Erik Rutt-LN	.538
2. Jason Shaul-NUG	.529
3. Cody Wetmore-EP	.526
4. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	.500
Luke Lind-EP	.500
Bryan Benson-WP	.500
Andrew Whitacre-MPLSGV	.500
8. Matt Pryor-MPLSGV	.455
Zach Benson-WINONA	.455
10. Derek Soderberg-EP	.444

Slugging pct

1. Matt Sinderson-HOP	1.000
2. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	.900
3. Erik Rutt-LN	.846
4. Jason Shaul-NUG	.824
5. Luke Lind-EP	.786
6. Reid Holum-GR	.750
7. Bo Hellquist-BURN	.733
8. TJ Evanson-LN	.688
9. Andrew Whitacre-GV	.600
10. Cody Wetmore-EP	.579

On base pct

1. Jason Shaul-NUG	.692
2. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	.630
3. Bryan Benson-WP	.625
4. Luke Lind-EP	.611
Zach Creighton-LN	.611
6. Erik Rutt-LN	.600
7. Andrew Whitacre-GV	.583
8. Cody Wetmore-EP	.565
9. Zach Benson-WINONA	.563
10. Reid Holum-GR	.550

Runs scored

1. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	10
2. Cody Wetmore-EP	7
Michael Blauert-EP	7
4. Luke Lind-EP	6
Erik Rutt-LN	6
Grant Carlisle-GR	6
Kevin Larson-NUG	6
8. 7 tied at ...	5

Hits

1. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	10
Cody Wetmore-EP	10
3. Michael Blauert-EP	9
Kevin Larson-NUG	9
Jason Shaul-NUG	9
6. Billy Hammann-GR	8
Derek Soderberg-EP	8
Grant Carlisle-GR	8
9. 6 tied at ...	7

Runs batted in

1. Brett Guba-EP	9
Jason Shaul-NUG	9
3. Dan Blackstad-NUG	7
4. Cody Wetmore-EP	6
Max Knutson-TCR	6
Dalton Lehnen-LN	6
Danny Baer-EDINA	6
8. 9 tied at ...	5

Doubles

1. TJ Evanson-LN	5
2. Bo Hellquist-BURN	3
Reid Holum-GR	3
4. 9 tied at ...	2

Triples

1. Danny Baer-EDINA	2
2. Brandon Morgan-LN	1
Erik Rutt-LN	1
Reid Holum-GR	1
Sam Hentges-TCR	1
Tyler Hanson-BURN	1
Bo Hellquist-BURN	1
Drew Pfaff-NUG	1
Matt Sinderson-HOPKINS	1

Home runs

1. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	2
2. Sam Hentges-TCR	1
Jason Shaul-NUG	1
Brett Guba-EP	1
Matt Sinderson-HOPKINS	1
Luke Lind-EP	1

Total bases

1. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	18
2. Jason Shaul-NUG	14
3. Reid Holum-GR	12
4. Bo Hellquist-BURN	11
Luke Lind-EP	11
Erik Rutt-LN	11
TJ Evanson-LN	11
Cody Wetmore-EP	11
9. 4 tied at ...	10

Walks

1. Zach Hoffmann-NUG	7
2. Jason Shaul-NUG	6
Zach Creighton-LN	6
4. Kevin Larson-NUG	5
5. 10 tied at ...	4

Stolen bases

1. Roger Brosnahan-WINONA	4
Nick Omodt-EDINA	4
Skyler Marks-WINONA	4
4. Ben Mezzenga-TCR	3
Cody Wetmore-EP	3
Dan Kronebusch-WINONA	3
Danny Baer-EDINA	3
Matt Pryor-MPLSGV	3
Kevin Larson-NUG	3
10. 7 tied at ...	2

Earned run avg

1. Bo Hellquist-BURN	0.00
John Pryor-MPLSGV	0.00
Colin Wendinger-NUG	0.00
Tyler Hanson-BURN	0.00
Jake Hanzalik-TCR	0.00
Alex Lampert-EDINA	0.00
Dean Rinnan-CHASKA	0.00
Brian Vanderwoude-BURN	0.00
Bryan Rhode-WINONA	0.00
10. Mitchell Larson-EDINA	0.77

Innings pitched

1. Jordan Jacobson-LN	12.0
Joel Klinkhammer-LN	12.0
3. Mitchell Larson-EDINA	11.2
4. Luke Chinn-BURN	11.0
5. Grant Carlisle-GR	10.2
Reed Bender-GR	10.2
7. Jory Dove-NUG	9.2
Osha Brewer-GR	9.2
9. 6 tied at ...	9.0

Batters struck out

1. Joel Klinkhammer-LN	14
Grant Carlisle-GR	14
3. Mitchell Larson-EDINA	12
4. John Pryor-MPLSGV	9
Osha Brewer-GR	9
Luke Chinn-BURN	9
7. 5 tied at ...	8

Wins

1. Jake Bischoff-GR	2
Luke Chinn-BURN	2
3. 24 tied at ...	1

Saves

1. Matt Herringshaw-TCR	1
Nick Knoblach-ALEX	1
Mitchell Larson-EDINA	1
Dan Loats-EP	1
Cody Wetmore-EP	1
Nate Ellis-HOPKINS	1

Team Batting avg

1. Eden Prairie	.354
2. Lakeville North	.328
3. Grand Rapids	.317
4. New Ulm Gold	.313
5. Burnsville	.289
6. Eastview	.282
7. Waite Park	.269
8. Edina	.265
9. Tri-City Red	.262
10. Winona	.259

Team Earned Run Average

1. Edina	0.79
2. Burnsville	1.29
3. Alexandria	2.42
4. Hopkins	2.52
5. Waite Park	3.09
6. Grand Rapids	3.30
7. Tri-City Red	4.00
8. Chaska	4.24
9. Eden Prairie	4.30
10. New Ulm Gold	5.02

Team Fielding Percentage

1. Edina	.979
2. Eastview	.975
3. Burnsville	.968
4. Tri-City Red	.963
5. Mpls. Giantvalley	.962
6. Waite Park	.955
7. Eden Prairie	.950
8. New Ulm Gold	.942
9. Lakeville North	.942
10. Grand Rapids	.940

Game summaries for Day Three

Game 23

New Ulm Gold 302 112 012 12 15 2

Lakeville North 110 321 020 10 14 2

Prokosch, Bergmann (5), Guggisberg (7) and Shaul. Moore, Jacobson (1), Klinkhammer (6) and Petrick (9). WP Guggisberg. LP Petrick.

Two runs in the top of the ninth led to New Ulm Gold's 12-10 win over Lakeville North in an elimination game at Chaska Athletic Park. Matt Bergman had the game-winning single in the ninth. Kevin Larson had a big day for New Ulm Gold, going four-for-five with three RBIs. Tim Lebron was three-for-five with a double and T.J. Evanson hit a pair of doubles. Eric Rutt had a perfect day for Lakeville North, going four-for-four with a double and a triple.

Game 24

Eden Prairie 020 045 000 1 12 14 2

Tri-City Red 000 142 220 0 11 15 1

Binger, Nablo (6), Wetmore (8) and Halloran. Herringshaw, Smestad (6), DeCaster (6) and Anderson.

Tri-City Red and Eden Prairie combined for 29 hits in an elimination game at Chanhassen High School. EP took advantage of the long ball with Brett Guba hitting a grand-slam homer and Luke Lind also hitting a home run. Cody Wetmore was the winning pitcher in relief. The time of the game was 3 hours, 25 minutes.

Game 25

Grand Rapids 010 020 002 5 11 0

Waite Park 000 000 000 0 7 4

Bender and Bischoff. Jarosch, Mueller (6) and Alvord, Jarosch (7). WP Bender. LP Jarosch.

Grand Rapids eliminated Waite Park with Reed Bender allowing seven hits in a complete game. Osha Brewer and David Liebe each had three hits for the winners while Reid Holum and Billy Hammann each had two. Ethan Carlson had two hits for Waite Park.

Game 26

Burnsville 000 001 000 1 9 2

Edina 003 001 10x 5 11 1

Bosshart, Smith (6), Jackson (8) and Threlkeld. Larson, Hopfner (9) and Denn. WP Larson. LP Bosshart.

Edina's 40th win of the season was the best so far because it gave Post 471 a berth at the Central Plains Regional in Dickinson, N.D. Center fielder Danny Baer supplied all the offense Edina needed with a three-run triple in the bottom of the seventh inning. Third baseman Mark Handberg had two hits for the other two RBIs. Mitchell Larson pitched eight innings for Edina and Matthew Hopfner closed it out in the ninth. Brian VanderWoude and Matt Stemper had two hits each for Burnsville (32-6).

Game 27

New Ulm Gold 300 000 000 3 9 3

Eden Prairie 010 030 01x 5 9 1

Pfaff, Bergmann (5), Kehren (8), Dove (8) and Shaul. Lind, Loats (9) and Halloran. WP Lind. LP Bergmann. Save Loats

Eden Prairie eliminated New Ulm Gold in a 5-3 game at Chaska Athletic Park. Luke Lind pitched well for the winners, who had three hits from first baseman Cody Wetmore. Catcher Jason Shaul had three hits for New Ulm Gold.

Game 28

Grand Rapids 000 100 0 1 5 2

Burnsville 020 222 3 11 12 1

Hammann, Bender (2), Carlisle (3) and Bischoff, Frazier (5). Chinn and Bloomquist. WP Chinn. LP Hammann.

Burnsville used the 10-run rule to beat Grand Rapids 11-1 in seven innings Sunday night at Chaska Athletic Park. Luke Chinn pitched a complete game, allowing five hits and striking out five. Bo Hellquist had two hits and four RBIs to lead Burnsville's attack. Hunter Shepard had two hits for Grand Rapids, which finished the season 23-12.

Darwin Berg

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in Chaska, has spent 17 seasons as one of three directors who run Legion Baseball state-wide. Before becoming State Director, he served eight years as State Division II Baseball Director.

"My first Division I tournament in Rochester in 2003 was a rude awakening," he said. "I didn't realize how much planning goes into a tournament like this. I was running by the seat of my pants."

"Darwin is a class act," said Apple Valley Legion coach and Third District Director Bruce Young. "He is a mild-mannered leader who is great under pressure when decisions have to be made. It will be very difficult to replace him."

Minnesota's Junior Legion State Director Jim Peck of Excelsior said it has been a pleasure to work with Berg.

"Darwin is such a great person to work with and so great with people," said Peck. "I've been doing this for 40 years, and Darwin is the best State Director we've ever had."

Edina scores its 40th victory

By John Sherman

When the players on the Edina American Legion Baseball team were 9 and 10-year olds, youth coach Brad Burley sat down with them and said, "Someday, you'll win a state championship."

Burley's prediction could come true Monday afternoon when the Hornets play for the State Legion title at 2 p.m. at Chaska Athletic Park.

In the period between Edina's last state Legion championship (1983) and the 2012 season, some of Edina's best athletes have drifted out of baseball into year-round hockey. Burley decided that he had to change that.

"We were a baseball town before we were a hockey town," Burley said in reference to Edina's State American Legion baseball title in 1955. Leaders of that team included Edina Hall-of-Famers Tom Moe and Bob "Rocky" Johnson and ace left-handed pitcher George Walters. The original "Rocky" played in the Major Leagues for 12 seasons and still follows

Edina Legion Baseball. The height of Edina's success came with a Legion World Series title in 1983.

Edina reached the championship game with a 5-1 victory over Burnsville Saturday. The victory assured Edina a berth in the Central Plains Regional. The win lifted Edina's season record to 40-6.

Mitchell "Moose" Larson and Danny Baer were Edina's heroes in the victory over Burnsville. Larson pitched eight innings. Baer hit a three-run triple in the third inning. His big hit came with two outs and a 3-2 count.

"Coming into today's game, I was 0-for-9 in the tournament," said Baer. "On 3-2, I knew a fastball was coming. When I hit second I was hyped up on adrenaline, so I decided to go to third. I barely made it."

Larson said, "Burnsville is a good hitting team. I tried to keep the ball low and mix in some curves and splitters with my fastball. It feels great to win and go on to play in Regionals."