

Miner-McCook defeats Post 1 at state

By Parker Knox
Sportswriter

In a season which had so many highlights, the way Post 1's season ended at the state "B" Legion tournament in Milbank Sunday may unfortunately be what the players remember most.

Miner-McCook rallied from a 5-1 deficit after 5 1/2 innings and a 5-3 deficit in the bottom of the ninth with three unearned runs to oust Vermillion from the tournament with an excruciating 6-5 loss. In both that game and in the previous day's 7-6 loss to Groton, the winning team's tying and winning runs either reached base or scored because of Post 1 errors. The team for whom defense has been such a strong point all season committed 13 errors in their three games, winning first, then losing twice.

Post 1 finished a 22-15 campaign which included a 10-1 record against South Dakota Class "B" Legion teams, a 4-0 sweep through South Sioux City's tournament in June and a dominating 3-0 sweep through the Region 3 tournament. All season long the team played short-handed with players absent for a variety of good and bad reasons, necessitating Coach Jason Gault's sometimes placing players in unfamiliar positions. At Milbank only nine regulars were available with one regular-season reserve and two players brought up from Teener ball in the dugout in case of injuries.

But not one to make excuses, Coach Jason Gault said in a post-game interview Sunday, "Baseball mirrors life, and this is one of those difficult situations to get over. We had opportunities again, but it just didn't happen."

Vermillion's pitching was excellent in its three games. Its hitting, though some of the team's hitters endured a tough weekend, was adequate enough to win in most situations. But the errors couldn't be overcome.

"These players played well all season," Gault said. "We have a great group of kids who play ball the right way." He added how tough it will be to replace seniors Caleb Miller, Nile Morecraft and Stormy Mirtz as well as Chayse Meierkort, who is moving away with his parents. Nate Garrett, who wasn't available at the state tourney, was another valuable senior all season. "But we'll be back next year," Gault concluded, and with some promising ballplayers moving up through the two Teeners ranks, he just may be right.

POST 1 - 5, CORSICA 1

Taking advantage of first-inning control problems by Corsica starter Aaron Groeneweg in Friday's first round, Vermillion jumped out 3-0 in its first at-bat. As it turned out, it was a good thing they did because Groeneweg pitched admirably the rest of the way. Meanwhile, Collin Bertram was on the mound for Post 1, and a three-run lead for him is usually enough.

Two walks, two hit batters and a bases-loaded walk by Stormy Mirtz put Post 1 on the board. Jayce Huska came through with a mammoth two-run single for a 3-0 lead in the first. Vermillion made it 4-0 in the fourth when Tanner Settles led off with a single, Bertram advanced him to third with a two-out single and Caleb Miller produced an RBI hit.

Corsica managed only six hits in the game off Bertram, but two of them led off the bottom of the fourth. The next man's fly ball to center was caught by Huska, whose strike back to the infield kept a runner at third from scoring. A foul pop-up was caught by catcher Chayse Meierkort. Then, one pitch after Corsica's Dustin Bultje smoked a line drive just foul down the left-field line, he hit a sharp come-backer to Bertram on the mound, and the threat was averted.

Corsica also had runners at first and second in the fifth but could not score.

Meanwhile, however, Vermillion stranded seven runners through five innings at the same time Corsica was leaving seven men on base through eight.

Post 1 added a run in the top of the ninth. Given new life when the Corsica catcher dropped a foul pop-up, Bertram single, Miller sacrificed, and Meierkort laced a run-scoring single.

Corsica got its only run with two out in the bottom of the ninth when a rundown between third and home went awry. It didn't matter, but had it not been for that three-run first inning, it

otherwise might have.

Bertram allowed no walks and struck out eight in getting his win, but his walks total was nothing new. Coming into the tournament, he had walked only 15 batters in a season in which he was 6-1 with two saves.

Groeneweg also fanned eight but walked seven. Bertram had two hits among the seven Groeneweg allowed.

The Vermillion defense had some shining moments in helping the Bertram cause. Huska made a diving catch in center in the sixth after Corsica opened its at-bat with a hit. Right-fielder Joe Mazour earlier in the game made a diving catch of his own. Third-baseman Tanner Anderson ended the fifth inning with a barehanded pickup of a slowly-hit ground ball and fired a strike to first for the out.

GROTON 7, POST 1 - 6

In a game of 13 runs, 21 hits, six errors and 21 stranded baserunners Groton prevailed in a second-round winners' bracket game, 7-6, on an unearned run in the bottom of the eighth inning Saturday.

An error on third-baseman Tanner Anderson with one out in a 6-6 game put Groton's potential winning run on base, an infield out moved him to second and a hit by Jamie Jorgenson scored the run. Post 1 then had a one-out hit in the ninth from Jayce Huska, but the next two batters were retired to end the game with Vermillion a run short.

Post 1 had broken a 3-3 tie

with a two-run fifth on a double by Stormy Mirtz, a walk earned by Huska, and a two-run error at shortstop, but after Vermillion stranded two runners in scoring position in the top of the sixth, Groton cashed in the bottom of that inning. Two doubles and a sacrifice fly tied the game, and a single followed by a three-base infield throwing error by Anderson scored the lead run.

Vermillion tied the game again in the seventh on singles by Huska and Nile Morecraft with a sacrifice bunt by Tanner Settles in between them.

Morecraft pitched six innings, allowing seven hits, striking out four, walking one and hitting four batters, but he wiggled out of several jams, stranding eight Groton men on base during his tenure. Caleb Miller pitched the final two innings, striking out three.

Huska had three of Vermillion's 12 hits, and Mazour and Morecraft had two each. Kalen Kjellen had three hits and two RBIs for Groton whose winning pitcher was Matt Thorson, who took over from starter Ryan Delzer to start the fifth inning. In the fourth inning against Delzer, Post 1 left the bases loaded. In the next three innings against Thorson, Vermillion stranded four more men in scoring position.

MINER-MCCOOK 6, POST 1 - 5

After taking a 5-1 lead in the top of the sixth, Vermillion was shut down by Miner-McCook starter Gavin Gassman in its final three at-bats. Meanwhile, starter Chayse Meierkort labored furiously with his pitch count

reaching well past 100 in the late innings. The winners rallied with two runs in their half of the sixth to creep to within 5-3.

Twice in the middle innings Vermillion had double-play opportunities to get out of jams, but in each case the error bug crept in. In a tight game every mistake is magnified, and in this contest that was really the case.

Meanwhile, after M-McC went ahead 1-0 in the fourth, Post 1 answered with a three-run fifth. Leadoff hits by Joe Mazour, Collin Bertram and Caleb Miller were followed with a grounder by Tanner Anderson to score one and a Stormy Mirtz single that plated two runs.

The lead grew to 5-1 in the sixth. Tanner Settles singled, and Nile Morecraft walked to start that rally. Bertram's ground-out scored one, and an error let in a second run.

Catcher Jayce Huska nailed a baserunner at third base to end the seventh inning. In the bottom of the eighth Miner-McCook nearly got the runs it needed after the first two batters walked and with two out a hit batter loaded the bases. But Meierkort slipped a called third strike past the next batter to escape into the ninth. Post 1 went down quickly in order, with Greg Mehlbrech relieving Gassman to get the final two outs, and then came disaster.

The first Miner-McCook batter reached on a single that took shortstop Tanner Settles deep into the hole at shortstop from where he had no chance of throwing out the runner. Meierkort, after his 147th pitch, was relieved by Collin Bertram, who got a fly to the outfield for the first out. But batter after batter, Miner-McCook bats were on fire in this inning. A laser shot caromed off the glove of second baseman Stormy Mirtz, and the tying runs were aboard. The next batter singled to left to score one run, but the ball rolled past left-fielder Caleb Miller, tying the game and sending the winning run to second base. With two out, Settles at shortstop couldn't make the play on a seeing-eye ball to end the game painfully.

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