

# Grey Sox record is 1-1 early in season

By Parker Knox  
Sportswriter

Vermillion's Grey Sox claimed a 1-1 record after the first two games of the amateur baseball season, heading into a game at Beresford on Wednesday of this week.

The Grey Sox will conclude a four-game road swing against the Renner Oldtimers at 2 p.m. Sunday before hosting the Akron Rebels in the home opener at Prentis Park at 7:30 p.m. next Thursday.

The Sox opened the season and State Line League play with a 6-2 win over the defending league champion Garretson Bluejays.

Garretson struck first, scoring a run in the first inning, but Vermillion scored six unanswered runs in the middle innings. The offense was led by Brooks Little, who went 2-for-4 with a solo home run, and Mitch Schwartz, who had a 2-for-5 day including a double and two runs batted in.

Grey Sox starter Cody Schreiber settled down after the first inning and handcuffed Garretson the rest of the way with the assistance of a stout defense led by Jason Rasmussen at shortstop. Schreiber allowed only two runs while striking out 10 in his complete-game performance.

The Irene Cardinals took it to the Grey Sox in Irene last Wednesday to the tune of 16-1. Simon Healy doubled, homered and was the starting and winning pitcher, and Wes Robertson also homered for the Cardinals. Little had a single and one RBI for the Grey Sox. Tim Ross took the pitching loss.

The Sox were within 4-1 after scoring their run in the top of the fourth, but Irene put up 12 runs in the final three innings to pull away. The game was called due to a 15-run mercy rule after just a few minutes before rain inundated the ballpark.

# Tanager spring medley relay wins title at state meet

By Parker Knox  
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Four Vermillion High School athletes can call themselves "state champs," and they would be right!

Aaron Ruhaak, J.T. Sorensen, Colin Olson and Austin Krier steamed to victory in a thrilling down-to-the-wire race to win the sprint medley relay at the state track meet in Rapid City Saturday, bringing home a state championship plaque in their event.

The Tanager foursome was timed in 3:39.05, edging runner-up Winner's 3:40.75 time by 1.75 seconds.

The same four runners very nearly had a second state title to their credit. As Vermillion's 4x400-meter relay team, they placed second in 3:26.19, just behind winning Mobridge-Pollock's 3:24.07 by 2.12 seconds. Ruhaak ran the opening leg, Krier took the second, Sorensen the third quarter and Olson the anchor leg.

These four men accounted for 18 team points in their two races as the Tanagers accumulated a total of 22 for 10th place among Class "A" boys teams. The other four Vermillion points came from Nick Jensen, who threw the shot put 53 feet in placing fifth.

Ruhaak, Sorensen, Olson and Krier had

also posted the best time in the medley relay preliminary round on Friday at 3:40.51. In the 4x400 relay they had the second-best qualifying time of 3:27.94. Ruhaak is the only graduating senior among the foursome.

Fellow Big 8 Conference member Madison won the "A" boys team title with 91 points. Custer was second at 75, and another Big 8 member, West Central, was sixth.

Meanwhile, the Tanager girls scored 16 team points to place 17th in the "A" girls state meet standings. Two Big 8 teams, West Central and Madison, finished a close one-two at the top with 65 and 63 points, respectively, and another Big 8 school, Harrisburg, was seventh.

Mackenzie Huber had Vermillion's highest finish in girls' events, soaring 9'3" in the pole vault for six team points.

The medley relay quartet of Courtney Johnson, Sydney Peters, Paige Olson and Megan Olson had the eighth and last best qualifying time of 4:32.13 in the prelims, but in the finals they reduced their time by more than four seconds to place fifth in 4:27.70 for four more team points.

Val Moos added three to the VHS total with a sixth-place time of :48.83 in the 300-meter hurdles finals. She ran :48.41 in the

prelims, getting the eighth and last best qualifying time.

Beth Szymonski ended her great season in field events with a seventh-place throw of 36'7 1/4" in the shot put for two team points. She added another point by placing eighth in the discus at 115'4".

In other girls' events Moos ran a :16.35 time in the prelims of the 100-meter hurdles but did not advance. Stacy Hirsch was 16th in the discus in 103'6". The Tanager 4x400 relay team placed 13th in the prelims in 4:20.59.

In other boys' events Jensen was ninth and Will Mart 10th in the discus with respective distances of 147'3" and 147'0". In the 200-meter dash prelims Ruhaak ran :24.28, Olson :23.70 and Sorensen :24.19, but none of them qualified for the finals. Andrew Kost was timed in :17.90 in the 110-meter hurdles prelims but did not advance. Nathan Ford placed 19th in the 3200-meter run in 11:02.01. The 4x100-meter relay team of Josh Manning, Kyle Weiss, Alex Robertson and Miguel Piper ran :50.55 in their preliminary heat but did not advance.

Dylan Fischbach was timed in :20.55 in the wheelchair 100-meter dash and earned a well-deserved salute atop the winner's podium.

## CHAMP

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Landon Kudrna came into pitch from his second-base position, needing only one out to finish off the Tanagers, perhaps a force at any base.

But glory be! Stormy Mirtz, on a 2-1 pitch, drove a gapper to the wall in left-center, scoring Meierkort and Anderson, and sending a large Vermillion contingent of fans into spasms of hysteria. Colin Olson was inserted to run for Mirtz, and it was up to Collin Bertram.

He was supposed to take the first pitch, but thankfully he didn't. He strategically placed a bloop hit over third base into no-man's-land, and Olson sped home to tie the game. As he soared around the bases, Bertram was the only one to notice that all of STM's defenders were either in left field chasing the ball or gathering at home plate. No one was covering third, so he reached there uncontested. The winning run was on third base, but Tanner Settles struck out to send the game to extra innings. But not to worry! He would have his moment two innings later.

As the rainbow appeared, reliever Meierkort, who had pitched since the sixth, walked two men after two were out in the STM eighth, but he got the third out on a line drive to Anderson's glove at third base. In the bottom of that inning VHS again threatened to win it as Jayce Huska walked with one out, stole second and went to third on Fore's grounder to shortstop. Again the winning run was 90 feet away, but Miller's ground ball to second ended that stanza.

The top of the ninth began ominously as STM got a leadoff single and a sacrifice bunt. But Meierkort came down off the mound to pounce on a come-backer to him, so quickly that he was able to catch the baserunner between second and third. He was tagged out in a rundown. But still more drama!

A single and a hit batter loaded the bases. STM had a chance to blow it open, but batter Feist hit the ball weakly into fair territory less than halfway to the mound. Meierkort fielded the ball, flipped to catcher Huska for the force at home plate to end the potential disaster.

Credit Meierkort with igniting the hitless - but victorious - rally in the bottom of the ninth. He fought off several potential third strikes with foul balls, and on the 10th pitch from Kudrna, he drew a walk.

Bunting is a key element in the VHS offensive scheme of things, and it fell upon Anderson to come through. He did, sacrificing Meierkort to second base. A passed ball moved him on to third, and there for the third straight inning stood the winning run, waiting, begging, pleading to be brought home.

Options were few for STM, so the Cavaliers chose to walk Mirtz intentionally. The drama level increased as STM made another pitching change, and the new hurler never had a chance to locate home plate because he was forced to throw four bad pitches as Bertram was also walked intentionally to load the bases.

Here came Settles with another chance to win it, and this time he did so without lifting the

bat from his shoulder. Ball 1. Ball 2. Ball 3. The next pitch was almost surely to be called an automatic Strike 1, but instead it was Ball 4. Meierkort gleefully skipped down the line and jumped onto home plate. The Tanagers surrounded him for a state championship dogpile.

STM scored three times in the first off starter Nate Garrett and once more in the second before Nile Morecraft relieved. He gave up a lone run in the third but then kept STM scoreless until surrendering three hits in the sixth. Meierkort came in to pitch. His first pitch was wild, allowing a second Cavalier run to score in that stanza, but then he successfully maneuvered his way out of trouble, stranding a runner there, two more in the seventh, two in the eighth and three in the ninth. Living dangerously? Yes. But getting the job done? Yes.

Meanwhile, VHS got a first-inning run on an RBI single by Meierkort and a second-inning tally when Joe Mazour was hit with the bases loaded. A gift run in the third came when Miller scored from second base when Feist tried to pick him off that bag but threw when nobody was covering the base. Mazour was hit again in the fourth and eventually scored on an RBI hit by Fore. At that point VHS was within 5-4, but STM's two runs in the sixth made it a three-run deficit yet again, and as the game wore on, hope dwindled until the seventh-inning two-out miracle.

STM had 12 hits but stranded 15 men on base. Vermillion's pitching committee worked its way into several crisis situations but weasled out most times with minimal damage, keeping their team within striking distance. Morecraft, for example, during his four innings of work, fielded his position beautifully. Twice he threw out advancing runners, once at third base, once at second. Meierkort also secured outs on three plays he fielded.

The Tanagers managed only seven hits, two of them by Bertram, but found numerous other ways to score runs. As the big trophy proves, each run counts, whether earned or unearned, pretty or dirty. And one other thing it proves is that the only time it really matters whether you're ahead is at the end of the game.

Vermillion players and fans can relive the whole experience - the three hours of agony and the

30 minutes of ecstasy - when Midco Sports Net broadcasts the game on television from 2:30 to about 5:45 p.m. Sunday. We guarantee the result will be the same, and here is another certainty - it will be just as unbelievable the second time around.

### VHS 2, MILBANK 0

It's a strategy that has worked before - give Collin Bertram the ball, send him to the mound and get out of his way.

Realizing that they couldn't compete in the state championship game without first winning their semifinal, that's what the Tanagers did Monday morning. On the biggest stage of the season, Bertram once again was equal to the challenge. He hurled a one-hit gem as he and VHS took only 80 minutes to defeat Milbank, 2-0.

Bertram accounted for 11 of the 21 Milbank outs through strikeouts, and he walked none.

Momentum swung in Vermillion's direction in the very first inning. Milbank's Jesse Peschong appeared to have doubled up the gap in left-center and reached third as the return throw got away in the infield. But the Tanagers appealed that Peschong had missed the bag as he rounded first base, and they were right. Inning over. Threat over.

Bertram cruised through the second, third and fourth innings, retiring Milbank in order.

With VHS leading 1-0, Milbank's Matt Steffen led off the fifth with a double, his team's lone hit of the game. With two out he advanced to third base on a deep outfield fly. But Bertram struck out the next batter to end that threat. He then retired Milbank in order the rest of the way.

There are occasions when Bertram pitches that some of his teammates on defense never touch the baseball. However, on this day everybody except shortstop Tanner Settles had to make at least one play on defense. Left-fielder Nate Garrett and right-fielder Joe Mazour each had to corral fly balls with which a stiff northwest breeze was playing tricks. Third-baseman Tanner Anderson and second-baseman Stormy Mirtz each had a pop fly and a grounder to take care of. First-baseman Caleb Miller also had to circle under a pop fly on the infield as well as handle the throws on the two infield



Tanagers celebrate their State B Championship after an 8-7 victory over St. Thomas More at the Sioux Falls Stadium.

(Photo By James D. Cimburek)

grounders. Behind the plate Chayse Meierkort had the best view of it all, catching everything Bertram threw his way.

And then there was D'Andre Fore in center field. Minutes after the Tanagers had put an insurance run on the board in the bottom of the sixth, Milbank came up for its last at-bat, and Bertram had to face the meat of the batting order - positions 2, 3 and 4. Adam Jones drove his ball toward right-center. It had "two-base-hit" written all over it except that Fore sped to his left, dived and caught the ball.

A fly to Garrett in left and a pop fly behind second base that Fore caught ended the game.

The Tanagers had a two-out first-inning hit from Meierkort,

who stole second but was stranded there.

The first run was one the Tanagers manufactured once leadoff man Mirtz was hit soundly in his back with a pitch from Steffen. He was wild-pitched to second base. Bertram himself laid down a gorgeous bunt to sacrifice Mirtz on to third, and Settles put the ball in play on a grounder to second base that scored Mirtz.

Vermillion had a two-out single from Miller in the third, and Mirtz was safe on an infield error with one out in the fourth, but neither could score.

The sixth-inning insurance run was scored by Miller, who singled with one out and went to second on a wild pitch. With two

out Anderson drove a ball high off the left-field wall to make it 2-0. This hit by Anderson, Meierkort's hit earlier, and Miller's two base knocks were the only four off Steffen, who struck out three and also walked none.

In the three postseason games Bertram pitched - 2-1 over Dakota Valley and 1-0 over Bon Homme/Scotland in the regional and this game - he allowed one run, five hits and two walks while striking out 24. His team scored only five times in the three games, but that was enough because not only was Bertram on the mound doing his thing but also the Tanager defense played error-free ball in all three contests.

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