

The North Star League

Spectator

Big Hurt edition

Injury bug ravages Maple Plain

The pain of sprain falls mainly in Maple Plain. Laying waste to their claims to fame....

Optimism abounds in Maple Plain this season. Just ask manager John Timpe. How's the team doing this year, John?

"Well, if any of our walking wounded can ever make it back, we'll be okay."

Unfortunately, Maple Plain's disabled list reads like a lineup card. Jay Homuth, stress fracture. Jason Stephenhagen, pitching elbow trouble. Joe Wood, more of the same. And just this past weekend, Reed Rose may have been lost for the season—if not beyond. Rose slapped a double at the Red Wing tournament, rounded first base, and fell into a heap. Early indications? Torn ACL.

Said Timpe: "Out of my 25-man roster, I was only able to bring 11 to Red Wing—and I had to coax Troy Schliinz out of retirement to do that."

It's not all gloom and doom for our favorite nicknameless team. Maple Plain has reasons for optimism that go well beyond the quality of local health care.

A couple of recent Orono High grads, Andy Ketting and Craig Hawkinson, are proving their value in the outfield and infield, respectively. Pitching has been adequate, and the defense "fairly decent" in the skipper's words. The latter point is a biggie, because their defense resembled the Vikings' last year.

More good news: Matt Duenwald is back at 3B after spending the last couple years at college in Missouri. Friends Pat McPherson and Paul Kunz return from a month in Europe—their prize for finishing college at UMD. And if Brad Mazer comes back once and for all (a distinct possibility)...well, maybe these guys had better not make too many travel plans in August.

Ties league record

Maple Quake

Lakers' Marty Johnson rocks Loretto with pair of slams

The term "behind the shed" has a distinctly negative connotation. Most kids shudder at the mere mention of being taken out behind the shed.

Imagine the pain endured by Loretto hurler Jeremy Meintsma last Wednesday night. Meintsma didn't just get taken out behind the shed...he was taken *over* the shed. Twice.

Maple Lake laid a 12-2 hurt on Loretto, and nobody applied more hurt than the Lakers' Marty Johnson. Among Johnson's three hits that night, two were grand slams.

That tied a league record set just last season by Mike Jaunich of Delano.

Johnson got the Lakers rolling in the second inning, sending his first shot over the shed in right-center field—one of Irish Stadium's most distinguishing features. That gave Maple Lake an early 5-0 lead.

The game was quiet until the eighth, when Johnson effectively put the game out of reach with one more slam over the shed. The Lakers manufactured one more run to dispatch the Larks after eight.

"Marty just hit the ball solidly that night," said the Lakers' Chad Raiche. "He's been hitting the ball pretty well overall."

Maple Lake has staked a fine 6-1 record to open the season, keeping pace with D-C and Hutch in the Central. It should be stated, though, that the Lakers have once again saved

the best for last, stockpiling their more-meaningful Central division (Class B) games toward the end of the season. So although they're clinging toward the top of their division, they've feasted mostly on a steady diet of Class C teams.

The same strategy nearly worked last season, but the Lakers finally ran out of steam in the final week, finishing two games out of first.

While Maple Lake is known as a dangerous team with the sticks, its success this year is largely dependent on its pitching. Through the first month of the season, the Lakers are pleased. Staff ace Aaron Desmarais has yet to record a solid outing in the league, but several other throwers have stepped up. Troy Schwartz, Todd Fuller, Bob Fobbe, and Todd Desmarais are keeping opponents at bay, giving the Lakers as much flexibility on the mound as they could have expected.

"Our second through fourth starters are really holding us up right now," noted Raiche. "If this keeps up, we should be right there [at the end of the season]."

A lot can happen between now and August, including more than a little intradivisional bloodshed. But if manager Gary Porter designed the schedule to build some confidence on his staff, it looks like it worked. Obviously the bats are there, providing their own brand of punishment.

Divisional updates from around the league

North Star West

With several players, including top hurler Rod Schroeder, retiring, nobody expected the world out of Litchfield. Nobody expected Litchfield's world to turn upside-down, either.

That may be a little hyperbole, but the fact remains that, at 4-6, the Blues have already racked up as many losses as the previous two years combined. Not only is their ERA up, but their batting average is down—in fact, at .294, it's the first time their average has dipped below .300 since they joined the league in 1998. To say nothing of their remarkable power outage, punctuated by twin sluggers Ed and Dan Estrada's mere 3 HRs so far.

Litchfield's issues all joined in chorus this past Sunday, when they were throttled by Monticello 15-7 and became Mound's first victim of the year. Mound's Ben Hogg held

the Blues to just seven hits in a complete game performance, and the Mallards put up three HRs in his support.

Howard Lake has seized the opportunity to grab a one-game lead in the division, while Kingston continues to give up runs by the truckload. Hopefully the Kings will string together a few wins in the coming weeks.

North Star Central

As expected, this year's first Clash of the Saints was a battle to the death. St. Michael nabbed a 5-4 win at D-C, scoring once in the ninth on a ground-ball error to win it. D-C's defense remains one of its cornerstones, but it's not impervious to a little seepage...

That win helped St. Michael create a little distance in the North Star Central. The Saints

now hold a familiar two-game lead, but it's not an entirely comfortable edge. They clung to a similar advantage a year ago, yet a couple of late losses settled them back into second place.

St. Michael's pitching looked thin at the outset, but Aaron Cook has developed into a fine #2 starter behind the always-reliable Grant Ketel. Not that pitching is a major concern right now. The Saints have ten-run four of their past five opponents.

The Central division enjoyed a rare divisional sweep of the East on Wednesday night. Delano beat Maple Plain, Hutch zapped Loretto, D-C tipped Monticello, and St. Michael got the better of Albertville.

North Star East

The Polecat came back. And they're already saying the division is locked up.

Monticello's Josh Holthaus has returned to the Polecat lineup and is wreaking havoc to the tune of a .522 batting average with 6 HRs. Holthaus, a star catcher for the Gophers, has used up his eligibility in the wood-bat leagues and was not snatched up by the pros. The Polecats couldn't be happier. The rest of the division could. Joe VanCulin also continues to swing the hot bat. What's perhaps most encouraging for the Polecats is that they're playing very well against the tougher opponents in the league.

Albertville's Paul Schumacher is already up to 43 innings pitched in NSL play. There's still a chance he could break Rick Habeck's single-season record of 98.2 innings, set in 1988. Not that he really wants to...but the Villains do seem to fare better when he pitches.



Marie Timpe named NSL Fan of the Year

The North Star League honors an outstanding fan every season, and this year that award goes to Marie Timpe of Maple Plain.

Marie has been a fixture at Maple Plain ballgames for decades, and it's no secret why. The ballpark is now named for her husband, her son is the longtime manager of the squad, and her grandson is a veteran ballplayer himself. Through it all, her support and baseball knowledge has remained a constant. Marie Timpe is a most fitting NSL Fan of the Year, and we're grateful for her support.

Alumni update

From the wood-bat ranks, word comes down that former Loretto Lark Reed Pawelk,

who pitches at the University of Iowa, is playing for the Anchorage Pilots and has staked a fine 2.55 ERA thus far.

Hutchinson and U of M star pitcher Mike Kobow was drafted in the 27th round by the Detroit Tigers. Kobow opted not to sign, however, and he will return for his senior season at the U next year.

Boxscore Line of the Week

Since the obvious one made the front page, this Line of the Week is an honorable mention. Let's make that a very honorable mention. In a game when Howard Lake's bats were pretty quiet, Orphans pitcher Shane Heber put an absolute silencer on Hutch's. The usually-powerful Huskies fell 5-2, with Heber collecting a fine line: 9 IP, 6 H, 0 ER, 6 K, 2 BB.

The **North Star League Spectator** and **Spectator Online** are provided free of charge to fans of North Star League baseball. Please contact Erik Lien at eclien@mninter.net if you have any questions or suggestions.

| NSL Team Stats | Eastern Division | | | Central Division | | | Western Division | | |
|----------------|------------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|------------------|------|-------|
| | | BA | ERA | | BA | ERA | | BA | ERA |
| | Monticello | .364 | 5.99 | Maple Lake | .381 | 4.23 | Litchfield | .294 | 6.62 |
| | Albertville | .325 | 5.95 | St. Michael | .367 | 2.49 | Howard Lake | .289 | 4.78 |
| | Loretto | .306 | 9.56 | Delano | .318 | 4.99 | Kingston | .275 | 13.07 |
| | Maple Plain | .293 | 6.63 | Dassel-Cokato | .302 | 3.00 | Mound | .215 | 12.50 |
| | | | | Hutchinson | .293 | 4.90 | | | |