

The North Star League

Spectator

Can't Beat the Heat edition

54th Year

North Star Standings

West

	W	L	GB
Howard Lake	11	5	--
Monticello	10	6	1
Buffalo	7	9	4
Kingston	0	16	11

Central

	W	L	GB
Dassel-Cokato	13	4	--
Delano	11	6	2
Maple Lake	10	7	3
St. Michael	10	7	3
Hutchinson	8	9	5

East

	W	L	GB
Maple Plain	12	5	--
Loretto	9	8	3
Mound	9	8	3
Albertville	6	11	6
Rockford	1	16	10

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Horsehyde

Stretch drive marked by surprises

All right, why don't *you* handicap the upcoming playoffs? We geniuses in the Spectator office give up.

By July 1, fans usually have a pretty good idea how the league is going to turn out. Teams still do a little jockeying for playoff positions, but for the most part July is used for sharpening up and getting in the zone.

And this July has been no different. Some North Star teams have gotten into their own special zone: the Twilight Zone.

How else can you explain...
...Powerhouse **St. Michael**, traditionally a great late-season finisher, beating division leader D-C but getting dumped by Delano twice and squandering third place to Maple Lake in the last game of the season?

...**D-C** clinching the Central by the all-star break, then letting the rest of the division play catch-up? The Saints lost their last two games of the season and also frittered away a 3-1 loss to Howard Lake in front of nearly 500 hometown fans.

...**Monticello**, neck-and-neck with How-

ard Lake in the West, falling to Buffalo on July 11...and seeing the pennant essentially vanish when the Orphans clubbed the same Buffalo team three days later?

...And **Hutchinson**...oh, Hutchinson. Last year's darlings have been alternately brilliant and baffling this season. In July alone, the Huskies beat D-C and Maple Plain but got smoked by Maple Lake and Loretto. They'll be dangerous in the playoffs, for sure...but the question is, to whom? Their opponents or themselves?

As for the Eastern division, **Loretto** got hot, and everything mostly went according to form until the playoffs began Wednesday. That's when **Rockford** seized its fresh start and dispatched **Albertville** 4-2. League observers will tell you the Villains haven't had much playoff luck in the past, but when your opponent finishes 1-16...that should be all the luck you need.

Enjoy the playoffs! We've had a fun season, especially if you're not much for following the script.

Parity of Five

This graphic (right) illustrates how evenly matched the NSL Central Division was this year. Fifteen of 20 games were won by the home team, with only Delano sporting a winning record on the road. This trend, marred only by a sweep from D-C, bodes well for the Athletics' chances in the playoffs.

	at D-C	at Delano	at Hutchinson	at Maple Lake	at St. Michael
D-C		←	↑	↑	↑
Delano	↑		←	←	←
Hutchinson	↑	↑		↑	↑
Maple Lake	↑	↑	↑		←
St. Michael	↑	↑	↑	↑	

Who brings the playoff heat?

Everyone's hot in July, but some teams are hotter than others. In the playoffs, June doesn't matter and May is a distant memory. July is the month that shows what you're made of. Here's who's hot and who's not right now—not necessarily based on which teams are the best, but which teams enter the playoffs with a full head of steam.

Maple Plain

Stomped through the regular season. Walk-off win over Monti on July 18 makes them look bulletproof. Prohibitive favorite among the Cs.

Delano

Fun season in Delano capped off by 6-1 stretch against division foes. Should have enough pitching to keep it going.

Maple Lake

Passed St. Michael for #3 seed in final game; is playing Hamel a reward? Solid record for a rebuilding year, and there are plenty of arms to go around.

Mound

First winning season in its NSL history. Good vibes all around, but Mallards must blot last week's 16-0 loss to Loretto (ouch!) out of their memory.

St. Michael

Hottest team going a year ago, Saints stumbled a bit through July. This team is still loaded—nobody looks forward to playing them this time of year—but they do need to catch an updraft ASAP.

Hutchinson

Good pitching, good hitting, just not always in the same game. Inconsistent squad can't be overlooked in August.

Rockford

1-16 in the regular season, 1-0 when it counts? Beats us, but we're happy to see the Bandits enjoy this success.

Albertville

Now *that's* no way to start the playoffs...

Howard Lake

Losing Heber didn't hurt that much after all, eh? Orphans need pitching depth for playoffs but finished on a four-game win streak.

Loretto

Fended off mid-season doldrums to finish strong. 5-2 July record was enough to pass Mound for #2 seed.

Dassel-Cokato

Earns a mid-level rating on talent alone. Saints came out flat after clinching Central, though 5-1 win at Jordan showed the damage they're capable of on a playoff level.

Buffalo

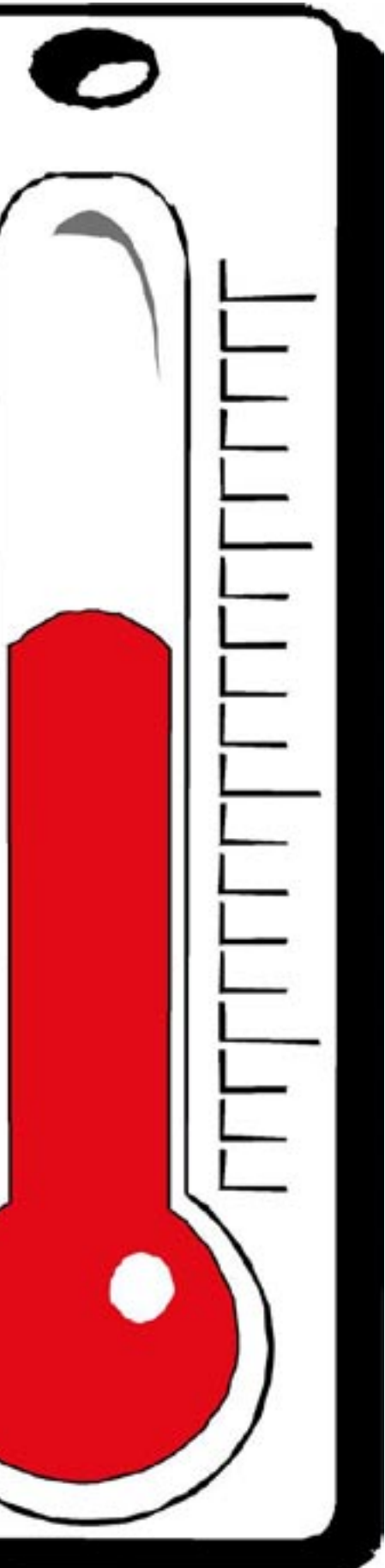
Here's a team ready to take the next step—how 'bout now? Bulldogs have plenty of talent, and Monticello is suddenly vulnerable.

Monticello

Would have rated higher if not for season-ending arm injury to P Josh Loegering. Loegering's absence leaves a huge hole in the Monti rotation. If they get out of divisionals, this team could benefit more than anyone else from a couple draftees. Still, Polecats have had a solid campaign for a rebuilding year.

Kingston

Still seeking first victory, though their offense got things going toward the end.



Sign me up for Couch Potato Night

D-C finds innovative ways to fill stands

Is there something about the name "Saints" that brings out the wacky in a manager? Mike Veeck put the St. Paul Saints on the map with his wild promotions and entertaining announcers, and now his counterpart at Dassel-Cokato seems to be doing the same.

D-C manager Mark Forsman has gone on the offensive over the past couple years to attract fans to the ballpark. The Saints have had the highest gate receipts and concession sales in the league this season, and it's no secret why.

"You gotta do something to attract fans of all ages," Forsman said. "We want them to know we appreciate them coming down to the park."

With assistance from Mike Wick, Forsman has tied an occasion to just about every home game of the season. Many of them are targeted fan-appreciation nights (Youth Night, Hero Night, Senior Citizen Day, etc.), while others are just a time to go crazy (D-C City Council Night). One

night was brilliant in its simplicity: on Couch Potato Night, the PA booth drew names for fans to sit on a couch for two innings apiece, giving them all the free food they could stomach.

What ingredient has been the most successful? Meat. Saints fans are clearly a carnivorous bunch, because the annual Pork Chop Feed attracted 485 fans...and on "Butterburger for a Buck" Night, all 200 hamburgers were gone by the 2nd inning.

Gimmicks aren't all the show, Forsman admits. "We're fortunate we have a nice facility and bathrooms and play a pretty good brand of ball. What's been most disappointing is that we're not playing our best ball at home. I don't know...maybe all these promotions have been a little distracting to my team!"

Forsman was also quick to credit the young guys in his PA booth. Andy Bohnsack and Brad Opsahl, he said, "do just an outstanding job. Everything's upbeat and alive, and they just have so much fun up there."

Fun is good! It could be good all over the league, too.

Harby knows all and sees...some?

You've heard of Generation X and Generation Y? Well, Harby Dicks dates back to Generation H, but nevertheless he stumbled into the Spectator offices with his 2004 playoff predictions.

Maple Plain. Hands down the favorite as they have balanced hitting and pitching. Having three pitchers of their own could even make them the region favorite. #1 from the East.

Loretto. Relying too much on one pitcher, they need to find more balance. Loretto has an excellent veteran hitting team that could be the edge to make them the runner-up. Should be the #2 team from the East.

Mound. The team made long strides this season but hitting and pitching still inconsistent. If they stop making errors at the wrong time and their pitchers stopping walking batters in quantity Mound could be a spoiler in the playoffs.

Albertville. Looks like pitching and hitting was better than last season, but still not enough of both to do any damage to the top three teams.

Rockford. Wait until next year.

Howard Lake. Hats off to the Orphans for finishing first without #1 pitcher Shane Heber. Orphans should have enough gas to make the regions but not sure if it will be as the #1 team. Their hitting seems to be light and Streich's arm might be getting tired. Orphans should be the #1 team from the West into regions.

Monticello. Strong hitting once again in Polecat lineup but injury to their #1 pitcher might doom this powerful team. They face Buffalo in first round and Bulldogs are always tough on Monti. Should be in region but not positive. Polecats have enough to be the #2 team.

Buffalo. Bulldogs once again proved to be good spoilers knocking off Monti late in the season. Can lighting strike twice. Last year Buffalo defeated Howard Lake twice in the playoffs maybe this year it's Monti's turn. Not sure if Buffalo has pitching to make region but they have proven us wrong before.

Kingston. Love to see them spoil someone, but next year looks better.

D-C. The Saintry ones once again had a great season but seem to be running out of gas again with late season losses. Saints have all the ingredients for another state tournament run, but do they have the gas for it? Saints should make the state.

Delano. The A's left the bottom of the Central behind this year, but did the second place finish leave ace pitcher Janzen with tired arm. A's hitting has been great this year it will be how far Janzen can pitch them. A's should be the second team into the state.

St. Michael. The Saints had an up and down year with hitting and pitching, but watch out this club always puts on a strong finish. Never count them out.

Maple Lake. Rebuilding year for the Lakers and a fine job they did at that. Top three teams have more pitching and hitting so Lakers will have to wait until next year.

Hutchinson. The Huskies are the league's mystery team. They can play good and they can not. Central teams will be beat if they take the Huskies too lightly.

North Star statistics, not quite final*

North Star East

North Star Central

North Star West

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
T Klaers Alb	54	9	27	.500
P Harrell Md	47	13	21	.447
S Mauricio Roc	62	7	25	.403
A Gregg MP	72	18	28	.389
P Schumacher Alb	39	2	15	.385
P Sycks Md	66	15	25	.379
A Snyder Md	62	9	23	.371
H Koch Lor	44	6	16	.364
Br Scanlon Lor	61	20	22	.361
A Engebretson MP	65	12	23	.354
M Goodwald MP	44	21	15	.341
E Schutte Lor	66	12	23	.348
D Kerber Alb	57	14	19	.333
J Juntunen Alb	28	4	9	.321
B Schliinz MP	54	13	17	.315
S McLaughlin Alb	48	9	15	.313
J Scherber Alb	23	2	7	.304

2B Leader

A Engebretson MP 9

3B Leaders

B Fontana Roc 2

B Schliinz MP 2

HR Leaders

E Schutte Lor 3

A Engebretson MP 3

RBI Leader

A Gregg MP 23

GWRBI Leader

T Klaers Alb 4

TEAM PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
M Ricke Lor	36	2	1	20	2.25
P McPherson MP	59	2	2	31	2.28
P Schumacher Alb	33	3	1	18	2.45
J Utech Md	51	5	0	29	2.65
B Fontana Roc	35	0	4	19	4.79

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
D Birkholz DC	64	16	29	.453
N Johnson ML	42	14	19	.452
J Olson Del	51	14	22	.431
T Johnson Hut	35	10	15	.429
C Volkman St M	56	18	22	.393
J Riewer DC	44	7	17	.386
B Pokornowski DC	40	9	15	.375
K Jaunich Del	52	14	19	.365
T Fuller ML	50	7	18	.360
C Raiche ML	67	17	24	.358
M Marquardt Hut	53	8	19	.358
B Kneefe St M	59	11	20	.339
R Eull StM	31	8	10	.323
D Decker ML	53	12	17	.321
M Bergstrom DC	50	14	16	.320
M Peterson Del	67	9	21	.313
B Opsahl DC	67	9	21	.313
D Falde Del	62	10	19	.306
M Freske StM	56	7	17	.304
J McKinley DC	46	10	14	.304

2B Leader

J Schwarze Hut 8

3B Leader

C Volkman StM 2

HR Leader

C Raiche ML 5

RBI Leader

C Raiche ML 19

GWRBI Leader

T Fuller ML 5

TEAM PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
K Messner Hut	30	2	0	47	0.59
J Janzen Del	69	7	2	53	1.04
D Birkholz DC	50	5	0	57	1.07
R Klingelhofer ML	38	0	2	25	2.11
P Schumm StM	49	2	3	29	3.49

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
J Van Culin Mon	63	15	30	.476
G Holker Mon	60	17	25	.417
J Berg HL	48	11	19	.396
B Geelan Buf	54	14	21	.389
K Nygaard Buf	35	6	12	.343
M Salter Mon	42	7	14	.333
E Schreifels Mon	53	8	17	.321
N Hill Buf	47	2	15	.319
J Opsal Buf	45	6	14	.311
K Holker Mon	29	8	9	.310
A West Kin	23	5	7	.304

2B Leader

J Van Culin Mon 9

3B Leader

K Kraska Mon 2

HR Leader

B Dietz Kin 2

D Decker Mon 2

RBI Leader

J Van Culin Mon 19

GWRBI Leader

J Van Culin Mon 3

TEAM PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
M Loegering Mon	60	5	0	49	1.65
J Streich HL	53	4	1	55	1.70
R Bethke Buf	30	4	1	27	2.93
C Picken Kin	31	0	3	9	4.06

* - All stats final except D-C, St. Michael, Maple Lake, Maple Plain, and Hutchinson.