

The North Star League

Spectator

55th Year

North Star Standings

West

	W	L	GB
Monticello	11	5	--
Howard Lake	10	6	1
Buffalo	6	10	5
Kingston	3	13	8

Central

	W	L	GB
Maple Lake	12	5	--
Delano	12	5	--
Dassel-Cokato	12	5	--
St. Michael	9	8	3
Hutchinson	7	10	5

East

	W	L	GB
Maple Plain	13	4	--
Loretto	9	8	4
Albertville	6	11	7
Mound	4	13	9
Rockford	3	14	10

Third tiebreaker's the charm

Single run helps Maple Lake break three-way tie

In what was surely the best down-to-the-wire finish North Star League fans have witnessed in decades, the Maple Lake Lakers emerged as Central division champions by the narrowest of margins. Not one game. Not a half-game. Nope, they won the pennant by a *single run*. Grab a motion-sickness pill and we'll explain....

When all the regular-season dust settled, the Central was left with a three-way tie at the top. Delano, Dassel-Cokato, and Maple Lake all finished with a 12-5 mark. Tie-breakers would determine playoff seeding.

The NSL's first tiebreaker is head-to-head record. That eliminated Delano—somewhat paradoxically, really, when you consider the A's were the only team that didn't lose to a Class C team all year.

The next tiebreaker was intradivision record, with Maple Lake and D-C dead even in that category as well. And so it went on to the third tiebreaker: total runs scored in head-to-head action. D-C handily beat Maple Lake 5-0 on July 10—but back on May 29, the Lakers swatted the Saints by a 7-1 count. That 7-6 edge gave Maple Lake the pennant and left Mark Forsman wondering if his team couldn't have squeezed out one more run. (Which would have brought us to the fourth tiebreaker: managerial rock, paper, scissors.)

Given such a narrow margin, it's somewhat comforting that the difference between playoff seeds 1 and 2 is pretty minimal. Both get a first-round bye. The difference between second and third is more significant (see page 3), though you know D-C doesn't exactly relish the idea of facing a teed-up Delano team in round two.

How did we get here? Well, when the *Spectator* last left off, Maple Lake held a

tenuous half-game lead over Delano with D-C lurking a game out. Yet the Saints were in potentially the cushiest position, with just two home games remaining.

Maple Lake faced the roughest road. A rain reschedule against Loretto left the Lakers with three games in three days. They plugged Hutchinson at home on July 15, 10-3, but stumbled the next day while hosting Loretto, 5-2. Facing their third key game in three days, the visiting Lakers didn't quite have enough to shake off Delano (which had lost two days earlier at D-C), falling 7-6 in a tense contest.

That left St. Michael in the uncommon role of spoiler, as both Delano and Maple Lake finished the regular season with midweek games at St. Michael. The potent Saints weren't up to the task this time. Delano shut them down 4-0, and Maple Lake glued the Saints to fourth place with a 12-7 win. These wins left both the A's and Lakers with identical 12-5 records.

As for the other Saints, D-C took care of its business down the stretch. After shutting out Delano on July 15, the Saints waited an entire week to beat Hutch 3-1 and claim their share of the title.

Of course, this is only the appetizer to what shapes up as a tremendously entertaining Sectional playoff. D-C is the hottest of the six teams right now, having shaken off some odd midseason doldrums. Delano's loose and not far behind. Maple Lake stumbled down the stretch, but the Lakers still earned their top seed and get a home-field bump for Sections. As we saw last year, nobody can overlook a determined St. Michael squad, and we know Hutch would desperately love to compete in the state tourney it's hosting.

Maple Plain, Monticello rumble into regions

With the NSL's Class C playoff card half-filled, it's time to look back on the predictions we made in the last *Spectator*. Maple Plain unbeaten? Check. Howard Lake looking vulnerable? Well, somewhat. Albertville playing the spoiler? Uhh...hope you didn't take that one to Vegas.

So far, the North Star East and West divisionals have gone pretty much according to plan. We have yet to see a major upset, but that doesn't mean they've been boring in the least.

As mentioned earlier, our prediction about Albertville pretty much honked. In 10 years as an organized team, the Villains have won just two playoff games. So they're due, right? Maybe next year. Unfortunately for Albertville, a rested Paul Schumacher didn't have his best stuff in their first-round game against second-seeded Loretto. The Larks took control and defeated Albertville 11-4. Seeking atonement against Mound, the Villains instead gave up another 11 spot and saw their season come to an all-too-familiar end.

Loretto, meanwhile, looks entirely fired up for a playoff run. Even though they fell in the second round to powerhouse Maple Plain 6-2, the game was nip-and-tuck until the late innings. The Diamond Devils struck for three runs in the bottom of the eighth, until which point it was anyone's game. Tempers got pretty heated as both teams jawed back and forth throughout, and underdog Loretto might have won that particular battle. Barring an upset or two by Mound, these two rivals might still have a couple 10-round bouts left in them.

Out West, Howard Lake suffered a very painful defeat at the hands of division-champ Monticello. The Orphans' Shane Heber pitched eight strong innings, leaving the game tied at 3 in the middle of the ninth. Heber yielded to the bullpen, and the Polecats would not need to swing another bat. Monti's first batter walked, followed by a hit batsman. The next two hitters drew bases on balls, and Monticello made its reservation for Cold Spring.

Howard Lake can still advance with a win over Buffalo tonight (a repeat of Game 2, a 6-1 Orphan victory), but the Bulldogs will come in hungry for a regional berth as well. As for Monticello, their squad just needs to remain focused on baseball. A

recent bout of softball-itis left the Polecats' lineup in flux down the stretch. However, Monticello's team batting average dropped over .150 points over the last half of the season, and you can't just point your finger

at softball. If the Polecats can play focused, fundamental baseball, they still might book a trip for state. Right now they're a borderline candidate, hoping to regain some of their first-half mojo.

Hutch, D-C ready to host state

After five long years of arduous preparation, the big month is almost here. And it's a good thing the details are in place, because right this moment Hutchinson and Dassel-Cokato would rather worry about playing baseball.

Half a decade after being awarded the 2005 state tournament, Dassel and Hutch are ready to roll out the red carpet. The food is ordered, and the ballparks have never looked better.

"Our playing surface is top-notch right now, thanks to our head groundskeeper, Dave Mooney," said Huskies manager Lee Kuhl. "We have a different type of surface material now that might not have helped us at the start of the season—it was kind of loose early on—but it takes rain a little better, which should help us stay on top of the elements."

Over the past couple years, the area surrounding Hutch's Veterans Memorial Park received some significant upgrades, includ-

ing a better entrance and parking area as well as a new picnic facility and playground. Kuhl said these improvements had been in the works for years, but hosting state "probably got things rolling a year or two sooner."

Dassel's ballpark got even more significant upgrades (and needed to, according to tournament stipulations). Dassel built an entirely new grandstand and PA booth over the past couple years, and the entire park received a facelift over the past several years.

The entire process has fostered a great partnership between the two baseball communities—Bruce Rosenow & Ralph Johnson from Hutch and Mark Forsman & Brian Larson from D-C in particular.

"We've built a very good working relationship with Dassel, starting from the time we first put together our proposals," Kuhl noted. "There's been nothing but good things said by our guys after the meetings. It's a well-organized group."



around the horn

A basket of goose eggs

This news isn't specifically North Star League-related, just noteworthy for any baseball fan. This past Saturday the Region 8C qualifying game between Pierz and Lastrup lasted 28 innings. What's more, the game was scoreless until the bottom of the 28th (which is surely the first time you've seen those five words together), when a Lastrup batter singled, stole second, and scored on a game-winning single. Lastrup's top two pitchers went the first 25 innings, leaving casual observers to wonder if they'll have anything left for regions.

Orphan Twins

Howard Lake set a remarkable "first" in league play this year. In an unprecedented display of, shall we say, focus on the hill, the Orphans' pitching staff finished with the best numbers in the entire North Star League...while their hitters finished last in offense.

Calling all scribes

After eight years of producing the *Spectator*, newsletter writer/editor Erik Lien is stepping down to focus on developing and expanding the league website. If you enjoy writing and would like to get plugged into the league's inner workings, please contact Brian Larson at brian.larson@holidaycompagnies.com.

Section, region playoff brackets

Section 8B

All games played at Maple Lake.
Double elimination.
Final two advance to state.

#4 St. Michael

G1: 8/3, 7:30

#5 Hutchinson

G3: 8/6, 4:00

#1 Maple Lake

G8: 8/11,
7:30

#3 Delano

G2: 8/4, 7:30

#6 Hamel

G4: 8/6, 6:30

#2 D-C

G10: 8/13,
4:00

G11 (if
nec.)
directly
following

G1 loser

G5: 8/7,
4:00

G4 loser

G7: 8/10,
7:30

G2 loser

G6: 8/7,
6:30

G3 loser

G9: 8/12,
7:30

G8 loser

Loser G1

G5: 8/6, 6:00

Loser G2

G9: 8/11,
8:00

Loser G8

G12: 8/13,
3:30

Loser G3

G6: 8/7, 1:00

Loser G4

G10: 8/12,
8:00

Loser G8

G13: 8/13,
6:00

Loser G11

G14: 8/14, 1:00

G15 (if nec.):
directly following

G11: 8/13, 1:00

NS West #1

G1: 8/5, 6:00

CV North #2

G7: 8/7, 3:30

CV South #1

G2: 8/5, 8:30

NS East #2

CV North #1

G3: 8/6, 1:00

NS West #2

G8: 8/7, 6:00

NS East #1

G4: 8/6: 3:30

CV South #2

Region 11C

All games played at Cold Spring.
Double elimination.
Final two advance to state.

Final 2005 North Star League statistics

North Star East

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
Br Scanlon Lor	61	17	29	.475
A Engebretson MP	58	18	26	.448
A Gregg MP	64	19	28	.438
Jo Juntunen Alb	44	11	19	.432
E Schutte Lor	63	18	27	.429
N Lewin Roc	67	10	26	.388
K Rogers Alb	39	11	15	.385
B Mazer MP	35	12	13	.371
R Rassatt Roc	41	1	15	.366
J Lesser Roc	60	4	21	.350
D Trnka Md	29	3	10	.345
B Schliinz MP	35	7	12	.343
P Harrell Md	50	12	17	.340
S McLaughlin Alb	62	17	21	.339
K Koch Lor	56	9	19	.339
T Traen Lor	48	5	16	.333
J Utech Md	52	8	17	.327
R Schaust Lor	40	8	13	.325
M Goodwald MP	66	10	21	.318
D Littlefield Roc	57	13	18	.316
Bn Scanlon Lor	55	10	17	.309
P Sycks Md	60	7	18	.300

2B Leader

A Gregg MP9

3B Leaders

B Fontana Roc.....2

E Schutte Lor2

A Gregg MP2

HR Leaders

S McLaughlin Alb.....4

A Engebretson MP.....4

RBI Leader

A Engebretson MP24

TEAM PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
A Gregg MP	40	6	0	21	0.90
P Schumacher Alb	54	3	3	35	2.48
S Mauricio Roc	32	1	3	16	3.58
M Ricke Lor	60	4	3	29	3.58
J Utech Md	35	1	4	33	3.86

North Star Central

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
C Raiche ML	71	19	31	.437
M Bergstrom DC	51	15	22	.431
J Wilson Del	57	9	24	.421
C Volkman StM	43	12	16	.372
J Barbeln StM	66	10	24	.364
M Freske StM	64	7	23	.359
A Dammann Hut	64	11	22	.344
J Olson Del	44	11	15	.341
D Birkholz DC	50	12	17	.340
P Burkstrand DC	53	9	18	.340
B Muckenhirn Del	27	2	9	.333
N Johnson ML	76	13	25	.329
K Jerpseth ML	71	13	23	.324
D Falde Del	56	5	18	.321
J Janzen Del	63	11	19	.302

2B Leaders

C Raiche ML.....8

K Jerpseth ML.....8

3B Leaders

P Burkstrand DC.....2

N Volkmann StM.....2

T Carlson StM.....2

HR Leader

J Wilson Del.....5

RBI Leader

C Raiche ML.....27

TEAM PITCHING LEADERS*

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
J Janzen Del	53	4	1	30	0.51
D Birkholz DC	55	4	2	36	1.46
J Farenbaugh Hut	38	2	1	25	2.33
P Schumm St M	30	2	1	14	2.05
R Klingelhofer ML	59	8	0	27	2.12

* - Corrected July 30.

North Star West

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
J Kennedy Mon	28	12	15	.536
D Burkholder Mon	24	7	11	.458
J Stueven HL	29	6	12	.414
M Enerson Kin	47	11	19	.404
K Holker Mon	22	4	8	.364
J Holthaus Mon	56	9	20	.357
N Hill Buf	61	5	21	.344
E Smolenski Buf	45	7	14	.311
L Gagnon HL	50	10	15	.300
J Van Culin Mon	60	8	18	.300

2B Leader

Al Hendrickson Kin.....5

3B Leaders

B Borrell HL1

N Forga Kin1

B Aho Kin1

J Van Culin Mon1

R Brown Mon1

HR Leaders

B Weber Buf.....2

A DesMarais HL2

RBI Leader

Al Hendrickson Kin.....13

TEAM PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
A Koch HL	55	6	1	51	1.14
C Hardie Mon	38	3	2	22	1.18
B Paulson Kin	32	2	2	20	2.25
N Hill Buf	54	1	5	45	3.13