

Joe Harmala elected to state Hall of Fame

Those who know Joe Harmala—there are a few around these parts, I've heard—know he's not an easy guy to leave speechless. But that pretty well sums up his reaction last week upon hearing he was elected into the State Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame.

Harmala, of Cokato, is a charter member of the NSL's own Hall. He's been involved in baseball for 41 years, playing mostly for Dassel-Cokato but also at Cloquet and Maple Lake. In his pitching career at D-C, he amassed a 116-31 record with a 2.31 ERA. He also posted a lifetime BA of .312.

Harmala went on to manage the Saints for eight years, compiling a 216-80 record, and has served as Region 11C commissioner since 1988.

Be sure to congratulate the affable Harmala if you see him this weekend. His shock has surely given way to glee by now....

D-C pulls away in Central

As the last *Spectator* went to press, the NSL Central was a closely knotted mess. Maple Lake held a half-game lead over Dassel-Cokato, but only two games separated first and fourth. At that point, D-C made like Lance Armstrong, broke away from the pack, and left little suspense for the end.

The Saints, winners of five straight at the time, continued by reeling off victories against Maple Lake, Buffalo, Hutch, and Delano. In the meantime, Maple Lake dropped costly games to St. Michael and Maple Plain. Hutch went 2-3 down the stretch to fall out of contention. Delano was relegated to the role of spoiler—disappointing for a state tournament team in '01.

And St. Michael proved to be a shell of its former self. With no proven #2 starter and without prior-year stalwarts P.J. Hanson and Dave Ditty, the Saints have all but resigned themselves to a rebuilding year. (They went on to underscore that with an agonizing first-round playoff loss to Delano.)

D-C dropped its undramatic finale to Maple Lake, 7-5, but had already established itself as the team to beat in Section 8B. The Saints' southpaw-heavy pitching, led by Dan Birkholz, John Riewer, Andrew Carlson, and newcomer Travis Johnson (who'd foundered last year, buried in Litchfield's rotation), serve as the foundation, but their .289 team batting average was also second-best in the league.

...around the horn

Maple Plain loses Mazer

Maple Plain, fresh off clinching the NSL East pennant, demoted catch Brad Mazer to Fargo-Moorhead in the Northern League. Mazer, who finished the season with 14 RBIs and a .400 BA, is almost always a candidate to be sent down to some minor league club. Nevertheless, Maple Plain will miss his contributions in the playoffs. He still might find himself playing teams called the Saints, but in this case they'll be of the St. Paul variety.

Blues' Ed Estrada suspended

Litchfield's Ed Estrada earned a rare one-game suspension following the Blues' July 14 lovefest against Monticello.

The festivities began in the top of the 11th inning, just after Litchfield had staked its winning lead. The Blues' Dan Estrada, Ed's brother, was tagged out on a close play at second base. Monti catcher Joe VanCulin and Dan Estrada began jawing at each other, spurring Ed Estrada to leave the dugout. Ed charged VanCulin and landed a punch in the

face. Umpire Neil Grewe tossed Estrada out of the park, and there were no more incidents.

The suspension handed down barred Estrada from playing in Litchfield's following game, which was a first-round playoff matchup against Buffalo. Estrada—and the Blues—were fairly lucky. Had Litchfield lost the game, Monticello would have won the West, and the Blues' next game would have been against rival Howard Lake.

North Star West playoffs: Monticello gets early exit

One of the entertainment industry's best-known pieces of advice is to "exit laughing." That, of course, is where sports and entertainment diverge. The way sports is set up, nearly every team exits with a loss. It's no laughing matter—especially in the case of Monticello.

All season long, fans of the three NSL West powers had said, "It's a shame one of these teams won't even make it to regions." Nobody could predict whether it would be Litchfield, Howard Lake, or Monticello who'd be hanging up the spikes by August. They just hoped it wouldn't be them.

The answer to that mystery came in rather surprising fashion—and earlier than predicted, too. Powerful Monticello, who'd scored 34 runs in their previous two games, tallied but one run in two playoff matches. Howard Lake opened the postseason by shutting down

the Polecats 1-0, before Buffalo delivered Monticello its knockout punch by a 3-1 count.

Surging Buffalo became the playoff surprise. The first-year Bulldogs easily dispatched Kingston 8-2 in the play-in before dropping a tough 10-inning affair to Litchfield. That game propelled the Blues into regions.

In wrestlebacks, Howard Lake fought off Buffalo 5-0 and earned a return trip to regions—as well as yet another game against Litchfield (their 11th tilt in two years). The Blues went on to nip Howard Lake 5-2, earning the West's top seed.

North Star East playoffs: Loretto atones for collapse

It was easier to poke a little fun at Loretto on the front page because of how the Larks opened the postseason. Despite losing out on the pennant, the Larks made quick work of Albertville and Mound and became the East's first regional qualifier.

They'll be joined by Maple Plain in regions. Fourth-seeded Mound surprised Maple Plain with an 8-4 win in the first round, knocking top-seeded Maple Plain into the loser's bracket. However, Maple Plain went on to dump Albertville and continue the Villains' unfortunate string of early-playoff exits.

Loretto eventually nabbed the East's top seed by shutting down Maple Plain 6-0, extending its mastery over the Larks' neighbors to the south this season.

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.

East

Statistics

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
A Hanson Lor	36	8	15	.417
B Valerius A	51	6	21	.412
B Mazer MP	50	12	20	.400
J Jacobson MP	57	12	22	.386
J Wood MP	35	4	13	.371
E Schutte Lor	54	8	19	.352
D Kerber A	53	5	18	.340
K Danielson Lor	30	2	10	.333
P Sycks Md	47	8	15	.319
R Wilkens A	46	7	14	.304

2B Leaders

J Jacobson MP 7

3B Leaders

E Schutte Lor 1
 A Hanson Lor 1

HR Leaders

Ben Scanlon Lor 2
 B Mazer MP 2
 A Snyder Md 2

RBI Leaders

B Mazer MP 14

GWRBI Leaders

B Schliinz MP 3

Hits Leaders

J Jacobson MP 22

Runs Leaders

B Schliinz MP 14

PITCHING

Most Innings Pitched

N Koch Lor 63

Wins

P Schumacher A 4

Strikeouts

P Schumacher A 64

ERA

P Schumacher A 1.02

Central

Statistics

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
C Volkman St M	34	8	16	.471
C Henke Hut	60	9	22	.367
P Burkstrand DC	71	13	26	.366
D Piechowski Hut	52	11	19	.365
J Riewer DC	58	11	21	.362
J Janzen Del	67	10	24	.358
J Martin Hut	34	7	12	.353
M Marquardt Hut	66	9	22	.333
E Kolles St M	45	6	15	.333
J Barbeln St M	73	9	23	.315

2B Leaders

P Burkstrand DC 8

3B Leaders

T Fuller ML 3

HR Leaders

T Thode Hut 2
 C Volkman St M 2

RBI Leaders

B Opsahl DC 17

GWRBI Leaders

P Burkstrand DC 4

Hits Leaders

P Burkstrand DC 26

Runs Leaders

D Birkholz DC 16

PITCHING

Most Innings Pitched

J Janzen Del 74.7

Wins

G Ketel St M 6

Strikeouts

J Janzen Del 55

ERA

K Messner Hut 0.73

West

Statistics

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
J Holthaus Mon	64	17	32	.500
T Tessmar Mon	47	10	21	.447
J Van Culin Mon	77	19	32	.416
T Urdahl Lit	50	13	20	.400
M Gagnon HL	40	5	16	.400
T Reuter Lit	63	9	24	.381
E Cox Bf	61	6	23	.377
A Koch HL	62	7	22	.355
T Hoaglund Mon	62	11	21	.339
K Kraska Mon	70	19	23	.329

2B Leaders

J VanCulin Mon 10
 J Holthaus Mon 10

3B Leaders

9 tied at 1

HR Leaders

T Tessmar Mon 5

RBI Leaders

T Reuter Lit 20

GWRBI Leaders

A Koch HL 4

Hits Leaders

J VanCulin Mon 32
 J Holthaus Mon 32

PITCHING

Most Innings Pitched

J Wollin Lit 70

Wins

S Heber HL 6

Strikeouts

S Heber HL 51

ERA

S Heber HL 0.65