

The North Star League Spectator

Pennant Fever edition

53rd Year

North Star Standings

West

	W	L	GB
Howard Lake	13	3	-
Kingston	6	10	7
Buffalo	6	10	7
Rockford	2	14	11

Central

	W	L	GB
Dassel-Cokato	14	3	-
Maple Lake	10	7	4
Hutchinson	10	7	4
St. Michael	10	7	4
Delano	6	11	8

East

	W	L	GB
Monticello	13	4	-
Maple Plain	11	6	2
Loretto	6	11	7
Mound	5	12	8
Albertville	5	12	8

North squares series at 1-1

Villains sweep All-Star honors

Did we predict fireworks on the Fourth of July? Our bad. The only pyrotechnics that showed up in Maple Lake for the NSL All-Star Game were the bottle rockets that zipped through the strike zone, because this one was a showcase of league pitching.

The North team, made up of representatives from Loretto, St. Michael, Maple Lake, Monticello, Buffalo, Albertville, and Kingston, pulled down a 7-2 victory in this year's classic, evening up the series at 1-1.

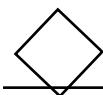
The Albertville Villains had one of their best performances of the season, incidentally. Starting pitcher Paul Schumacher pulled down the victory by giving up just one run in the first two innings. Rob Wilkens knocked in the game-winning RBI, and shortstop Shane McLaughlin was

named MVP with his two-run, two-steal performance.

Team North staked an early lead, scoring four quick runs in the first off Dassel-Cokato's Dan Birkholz. Keith Jerpseth (Maple Lake), Ben Scanlon (Loretto), Chris Volkmann (St. Michael), and Wilkens strung together back-to-back hits in roughing up Birkholz, who settled down to pitch a perfect second.

For the next five innings, the score stood 4-1. The South squad loaded the bases in the fifth against Kingston's Kyle Evenski but failed to do any damage.

The *Spectator* claims no credit for reporting the score as "Larson All-Stars 7, Traen All-Stars 2" in the *StarTribune*. The *Spectator* does tip its hat to whomever did it....



around the horn

A triple for Holthaus

Josh Holthaus of Monticello won his third division batting title in a row. A rarity, you think? Try this out: it's the first time anyone's done that in league history.

In fact, only two players have won back-to-back titles before Holthaus last year: Dave Borg of D-C (1974-75) and Steve Brower of Monticello (1977-78). Holthaus also won the triple crown in the NSL East, finishing first in BA, HRs, and RBIs. Only four players have won the triple crown.

As if that weren't enough, Holthaus and Joe Van Culin of Monticello finished first and second in the NSL East batting race. This is the 12th time in league history that teammates finished 1-2.

Streich-outs keep on coming

Howard Lake co-ace Jake Streich won his third league ERA title this year. He also teamed up with fellow Orphan ace Shane Heber to finish first and second in ERA—only the third time in league history that's happened.

Box score line of the week

The D-C Saints squandered a golden opportunity to clinch the Central on July 11 when Hutchinson rallied with three runs in the ninth. So when the Saints went to Hutch two days later, they were hungry to bounce back. And so they did, shutting down the Huskies 9-0 behind Dan Birkholz's fine line: 9 IP, 5 H, 0 R, 9 K, 1 BB.

North Star East champ: Monticello

The Devils almost did it

Making it out of the East was supposed to be the easy part for Monticello. After all, the only winning team the East had produced in this millenium was Monti in '01, and the Polecats had spent all last year cutting their teeth on the likes of Litchfield and Howard Lake.

Three of the Eastern teams held to form, finishing 6-11 or below.

But a certain scrappy unit in Maple Plain had other ideas...and nearly had the horses to pull it off.

Maple Plain—they of the Devilish new nickname this year—were nip and tuck with Monti all season long. They won the games they were supposed to win, and even some they weren't (Hutchinson, at Maple Lake). Hurler Brandon Schliinz was stout down the stretch, finishing with a 5-0 record and a Gibson-esque ERA of 1.15.

So, surprisingly, the East was the only

division that had anything resembling a pennant race. Monticello held a one-game lead heading into its tilt at Maple Plain on July 13. The Diamond Devils jumped out to an early 4-0 lead on Monti hurler Josh Holthaus, but the Polecats stormed back with four in the fifth inning against Schliinz. The game remained tied 4-4 through nine.

Drama built in the 10th, as Maple Plain loaded the bases with one out against erratic reliever Tony Hoaglund. Just one run separated the Diamond Devils from a tie for first. But Joe VanCulin played the part of the stopper and got the final two outs.

Having messed up their karma, the Devils gave up a run in the top of the 11th. Monti won, extending its division lead to two games. And that is where things finished, with both teams winning out the rest of the way.

Sitting ducks

Mound had a unique season of its own.

From innings 1 through 7, the Mallards were nearly unbeatable. After that point, they were nearly unwatchable. Here are the makings of a memorable final month:

- On June 30, in a 3-3 ballgame, Hutch scored the winning run on an error—its first of three ninth-inning runs.
- Two days later, the Mallards stunned host Monticello with a five-run seventh to tie their divisional game at 7. It was too good to last. Monti trotted home with the winning run in the bottom of the ninth.
- Mound took Loretto to extra innings on July 11 and even scored a run in the top of the 10th. Hooray, right? Not so fast. Loretto put two across in the bottom of the inning.

And we won't even get into how their divisional play-in game finished...other than to say it will be a long off-season in Mound.

North Star West champ: Howard Lake

Orphans run away

There's really no way to sugar-coat this one. Howard Lake left the rest of the Western division in the dust this year. The Orphans won not only all their divisional games but all their *Class C* games en route to the seven-game runaway.

The Orphans, a team forever built on pitching (see front page), got enough offense from the likes of Ben Borrell and Andy Gagnon to coast through the regular season.

Three cheers and a monkey for Kingston! The Kings had their most successful season since joining the league, garnering six wins (albeit two by forfeit). Tim Dahl's power stroke (4 HRs) and Trent Morgan's consistency (.471) give the Kings reason to look even higher in 2004.

Here's the '03 season, in a nutshell: On July 6, Kingston and Howard Lake held a home-and-home doubleheader. The Kings led by at least five runs going into the sixth inning of both games. But a 10-run seventh in one game and a 12-run sixth in the other told one and all that the Orphans were the real kings this year.

If there's one team in the NSL that might have disappointed a few folks, it was Buffalo. The Bulldogs came in with major optimism after a reorganizational year last season, but a forfeit here and a hiccup there left Buffalo in the unique position of traveling to Kingston to open the playoffs.

As for Rockford, the River Bandits were a welcome addition to the league. They'll need to find a home for next year, but of greater importance is their need to find home plate. A several-game scoreless stretch in late June effectively ended their season.

North Star Central champ: Dassel-Cokato

D-C makes it a dozen

Consistency was key in the NSL Central this year, and Dassel-Cokato was the keyholder almost all season long. The Saints won their 12th division championship, which is the most of any team in the league, and also finished with the best W-L record in the league for the eighth time.

Most of the drama had disappeared by the Fourth of July. Maple Lake was actually the last unbeaten team in the division, but another second-half Laker swoon left the door wide open for D-C. It truly was a tale of two seasons for Maple Lake. They looked unbeatable through mid-June, but after they lost to Maple Plain on June 18, the wheels fell off the wagon. The Lakers went on to lose six of their next seven games, Loretto and Delano among them.

Despite slightly limping to the finish, Hutchinson enjoyed a second-straight solid year. The Huskies held onto second place for most of the season and secured the #2 seed at Sections.

As much as was said about St. Michael not having a "St. Michael kind of year," the Saints pulled together and had a stronger finish than a good glass of scotch. The Saints, left for dead in June, enjoyed a 4-1 July with nary a creampuff on the schedule. Veteran pitcher Grant Ketel also extended his league record for career wins to 78 (total record: 78-27).

As for Delano, this was going to be a rebuilding year all along. New manager Steve Eilen had a fine rookie season in the saddle, but he didn't quite have the horses to keep up with the rest of the Central. The A's return to the familiar position of playoff spoiler, a role they played to perfection two years ago.

Final North Star League leaders

North Star East

North Star Central

North Star West

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
J Holthaus, Mon	65	20	29	.446
J Van Culin, Mon	79	18	31	.392
E Schutte, Lor	66	18	25	.379
Br Scanlon, Lor	74	19	28	.378
J Scherber, Alb	32	2	12	.375
J Jacobson, Md	44	7	16	.364
G Holker, Mon	51	13	18	.353
B Valerius, Alb	34	6	12	.353
T Klaers, Alb	56	7	19	.339
D Trnka, Md	54	6	18	.333
A Van Culin, Mon	67	15	22	.328
A Engebretson, MP	58	6	19	.328
Bn Scanlon, Lor	59	3	19	.322
R Wilkens, Alb	49	5	15	.306
D Boisclair, MP	22	6	7	.318
T Klaers, Alb	36	3	11	.306
J Wood, MP	50	3	15	.300

2B Leaders

J Holthaus Mon	10
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3B Leader

E Schutte Lor	2
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HR Leaders

A Schutte Lor	2
J Holthaus Mon	2

RBI Leaders

Br Scanlon Lor	13
J Holthaus Mon	13

GWRBI Leader

Br Scanlon Lor	4
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TEAM PITCHER LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
B Schliinz MP	47	5	0	28	1.15
P Schumacher Alb	45.2	2	3	28	1.77
J Jacobson Md	48	2	2	45	2.63
N Koch Lor	75.2	4	4	34	3.09
J Van Culin Mon	42	2	1	23	3.64

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
M Bergstrom, DC	61	24	26	.426
D Falde, Del	50	2	21	.420
B Kneefe, St M	71	15	29	.408
D Van Dehey, ML	42	8	17	.405
K Jerpseth, ML	62	13	25	.403
P Goodfellow, ML	38	11	15	.395
C Volkman, St M	64	10	25	.391
N Johnson, DC	42	11	16	.381
B Fobbe, ML	42	8	15	.357
D Brant, StM	65	13	23	.354
T Decker, ML	41	9	14	.341
B Opsahl, DC	62	21	21	.339
M Freske, StM	57	9	19	.333
M Peterson, Del	57	5	19	.333
D Piechowski, Hut	45	9	15	.333

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVG.
T Morgan, Kin	34	7	16	.471
B Geelan, Buf	47	5	19	.404
E Cox, Buf	56	11	20	.357
B Borrell, HL	63	18	22	.349
S Isaacson, Kin	49	12	16	.327
B Dietz, Kin	46	3	15	.326
K Werner, HL	32	5	10	.313
S Mauricio, Roc	61	8	19	.311
N Lewin, Roc	58	6	18	.310
R Rassatt, Roc	52	5	16	.308
C Burau, HL	50	8	15	.300
A Gagnon, HL	50	15	15	.300
B Wynnemer, HL	30	6	9	.300
2B Leaders				
B Borrell HL				8

2B Leaders

B Kneefe StM	7
M Bergstrom DC	7

3B Leader

C Volkman StM	2
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3B Leaders

A Gagnon HL	2
E Cox Buf	2

HR Leader

T Dahl Kin	4
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HR Leader

K Jerpseth ML	4
C Raiche ML	4

RBI Leader

T Dahl Kin	16
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RBI Leaders

P Burkstrand DC	18
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GWRBI Leader

B Borrell	7
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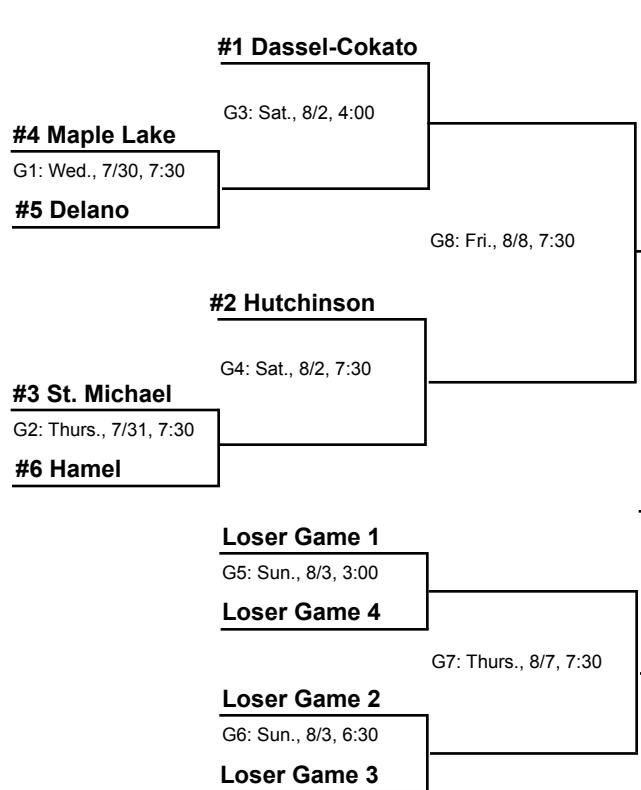
TEAM PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
J Streich, HL	35	5	0	25	1.80
S Mauricio, Roc	52.2	1	6	42	2.56
B Paulson, Kin	39.2	2	2	29	3.40
A Demaris, Buf	53	4	3	32	3.57
D Birkholz DC	38	4	1	41	1.66
D Brant StM	32	2	1	22	1.67
J Janzen Del	77.7	3	5	65	1.97
K Messner Hut	62	6	2	50	2.90
R Klingelhofer ML	45.7	4	1	22	2.96



Region 11C Playoffs

July 31-August 10
Joe Faber Field, St. Cloud



Section 8B Playoffs

July 30-August 3, August 7-10
All games played at Delano