

## EAGLETS

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Mark Sisson brought in another with a sacrifice fly.

In the seventh, Larson moved down the Cougars in order to put the finishing touch on St. Mary's championship.

## Winners for life

St. Mary's fans stood up it up from the stands while the players and coaches jumped up and down in glee on the field. "It's incredible and I don't think it's sunk in yet," said freshman catcher Jon Castine, who went 3-for-3 against CC's pitchers Brent Serba and Danny Patterson. "I just can't believe I can call myself a state champion from now until the end of my life."

Larson, a junior who endured some early struggles before settling down and shutting out the Cougars (34-5) in the final three innings, had little difficulty summing up his feelings: "It feels awesome; it's a rush."

"We just kept our intensity throughout the whole game and it was great," said senior Mark McDaniel, who pitched the quarterfinal and semifinal victories. "Everybody was up in the dugout the whole game cheering everybody on, and that's what makes a good team."

Of course, teams that score 17 runs in a game, as the Eaglets did Friday, usually have fun. The feeling of relaxed confidence carried over to Saturday.

According to Willis, Friday's rout gave his players extra confidence when it came time to face Serba less

than 24 hours later.

Yet, Willis stressed what really helped the Eaglets was having stayed alive during the hard-fought district and regional rounds when St. Mary's scored one-run victories over Orionville-Brandon, Auburn Hills Avondale and Pontiac Notre Dame Prep.

The latter victory came after the Eaglets were down to their last strike.

"I kept telling the kids all along, those are the games that build character," Willis said. "Stuff like that, you take it and keep running with it."

"And then (there was) that 10-inning game in the regional

semifinal against Bloomfield Hills Andover. I don't think we came up for breath until the regional final."

Willis said his team's resiliency actually started in the 2002 tourney, when the Eaglets saw

a 13-0 lead evaporate against Avondale, losing 17-13.

"That's been our motivation all season - 'Don't give up until they call the last out,'" he said.

The course did straighten out a bit in the final week. Behind the stout pitching of McDaniel, the Eaglets blanked defending state champion Monroe Jefferson in the June 10 quarterfinal and blitzed Comstock Park in the semifinal.

Everything that helped get St. Mary's to the championship game enabled the young squad to remain focused when CC went ahead, 6-4, in the top of the fourth against Larson, a junior who gave up 12 hits and dodged trouble most of the way.

The Cougars, who committed seven errors, scored three runs after two were out to take a 6-4 lead. A single to left by Patterson scored Ross Westdorp, beating the throw

from Joel Schering to Castine. Castine, thinking he had called time out, watched in disbelief as Serba raced around to score the lead run.

Willis argued vehemently but in vain about the umpire's decision to let the extra run stand. The play seemed to fire up the Eaglets, however.

After the first two batters were easily retired, Larson drew a walk. Courtesy runner OJ Cathey went to third after a single by Castine (his third hit of the game).

Miller's looping drive to shallow center fell in front of the outfielder to bring home Cathey and Michael Rachfal, a courtesy runner for Castine, to deadlock the score at 6-6.

## Eaglets bounce back

According to Castine, the quick response turned the game in St. Mary's favor.

"That showed we weren't going to stop," Castine said. "As a team, we wanted to win so badly. And nobody, I mean nobody, picked us along the way. All year long."

Then came the winning run in the bottom of the fifth. Wilkins walked and went to third after McDaniel singled and Chris Rachfal walked.

Wilkins was caught in a run-down between third and home after Sisson misread on a suicide squeeze bunt. But Wilkins scored anyway. Nobody for CC covered home after the catcher moved down the third-base line.

"After the fifth inning, when all chaos broke loose there, I just got hyped and started firing the ball," Larson said.

"And then defensively we started doing really well."

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## ALL-STARS

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reached base against him, with one getting picked off first and the other thrown out attempting to steal.

Garden City coach Steve Herman, who has helped guide DiMichele through his up-and-down high school career, was beaming with pride after he was named MVP.

"This is just the nicest thing I've been to," Herman said.

"He could have thrown in the towel and decided all this wasn't worth it. But he came back this year with a chip on his shoulder and had something to prove. And, by him being here, you can see he has proved it."

DiMichele, who will play at Kent State University, had an outstanding season for the Cougars. He went 11-2 with a 1.01 earned-run average. He also set a school record with 146 strikeouts and batted .440 with 31 runs scored.

Four other *Observer & Eccentric*-area players were also on the East squad, and each contributed to the team's win.



Dan Lentz of Farmington Hills and Brother Rice High School started at shortstop and scored a run for the victorious East all-stars.

Derek Ranek represented the Clarkston Wolves and was joined by his coach, Phil Price.

Dan Lentz, from Division I state runner-up Birmingham Brother Rice, started at shortstop, while Andy Wingert (Farmington Harrison) and Kevin Lamb (West Bloomfield)

also had pitching stints.

Harrison coach John Herrington said Wingert used his work ethic and baseball savvy to play in the ultimate prep game. Wingert pitched the top of the fourth inning and recorded two strikeouts in an effective out-

ing.

"It's the culmination of a great career for him," Herrington said. "He started three years for us and was a very steady performer."

Wingert is headed to Central Michigan University on a combination baseball and academ-

ic scholarship. He's a 3.8 GPA student who had an 8-3 record and 1.99 ERA.

Lentz, another Farmington Hills resident, finished a 48-hour roller coaster ride with his participation in the game.

He and his Brother Rice teammates suffered a 5-2 upset loss to Holland West Ottawa in the state final Saturday. But he was a catalyst in the East's victory, stealing two bases and scoring the team's first run.

"It's nice to really end things on a winning note," Lentz said, "although I'd trade this for us winning on Saturday anytime. It's hard not to think about our loss, but this game helped. This ride has just been the best time of my life."

Lentz had played at America Park three previous times, winning the 2002 Catholic League championship there. He will play at the University of Michigan next year.

Clarkson was the best represented of the area schools with a player and a coach. Ranek, who will play at Wayne State University, helped put the Wolves on the baseball map the past two seasons, leading them to a semifinal

berth in 2002 and a league title this year.

Price, who just completed his fifth season as varsity coach, said the whole experience made him feel like a kid again.

"What a great Father's Day present," Price said, referring also to the annual banquet Sunday night for everyone involved in the game.

"I felt like a kid in a candy store, like it was Christmas in June."

"The coaches were arguing over who would get to coach third base and who would go out to the mound, just so we could say we walked out to the mound here. But our pitchers played excellent."

"I've always had a lot of confidence in Derek, and he just had a great year. He improved his defense; he hit .470 and was a great team leader."

Ranek smacked 54 hits in 30 games, stole 16 bases and had 39 RBI in helping the Wolves to their first outright league title.

Lamb also saw the completion of a successful career for himself and his Laker teammates.

He pitched the sixth inning and struck out one while issuing one walk.

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