

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 1992

SPORTS

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C.J. RISAK

New playoff plans worth a thought

Here's something for your calendar. In fewer than seven weeks, the opening bout will be administered to officially open the prep football season. Or maybe, considering the game in question is the 12th annual Michigan High School All-Star Classic — with teams consisting of already graduated players — it should be considered the final game of last season.

Whatever. The game is scheduled for Aug. 1 at Michigan State's Spartan Stadium, as usual. Among those selected to coach the East team is Tom Moshimer of Plymouth Salem, who will serve as the head coach. He will be assisted by Jim Jorvey, one of his Salem assistants, and John Walker, Troy Athens' head coach.

It's an honor for all three, to be sure — particularly for Moshimer, who will begin his 34th year of prep coaching this fall, his 26th at Salem (his record with the Rocks is 139-81-35).

Coaching in the all-star game is an honor because the game has proved successful. No, the stadium doesn't sell out, and no, the play is what one might expect in an all-star game — a bit rigged. But it's a good idea, one the state's football coaches' association has made work.

More for playoffs

Which brings us to another topic. . . . The powerful MHSFCA (officially, that's Michigan High School Football Coaches Association) is rethinking its state playoff format — again. It was just two years ago the association pushed through an expansion doubling the number of classes, from four to eight. The new revision would not change that. What would change are the number of teams in the playoffs and number of regular-season games per team.

There are two plans being discussed. Plan A would divide the eight classes evenly, putting about 77 schools in each. There would be four regions per class — about 19 schools apiece. Playoff points would be accumulated the same way, by computer, but the regular season would last just seven games.

The top 16 teams in each region after the seven-game season would qualify for the playoffs. To reach the state final, a team would have to win five games.

What about league champs?

Plan B is much the same, the exception being the number of playoff qualifiers. Only one regular-season game would be lost; eight teams per region would qualify (instead of Plan A's 16), and a team would have to win four playoff games (instead of five) to reach the state final.

The MHSFCA's object is to get as many teams into the playoffs as possible. Plan A would certainly do that; only three of 19 teams per region would be left out. They could, if they so desired, schedule games against other non-qualifiers for those final two dates.

Neither plan is bad, really. I like both more than doubling the classes (I'll give a nickel to anyone who can name all eight '91 state champs).

But I do have reservations.

First, the state playoffs would be all that mattered. League championships be damned. Indeed, in Plan A nearly half a championship team's season would consist of playoff games (seven regular season, six playoff).

Good idea, but . . .

Leagues that feature championship games might have to consider making revisions. Non-league games will be forgotten completely — perhaps eliminating some cross-town rivalries.

And, although more teams would be involved in the state tournament, in Plan A 11 of 19 teams per region would be on the sidelines after eight weeks instead of nine.

Those are negatives I think are worth weighing. Still, the sport is changing; coaches and athletic directors are having problems filling the non-league slots in their schedules. This would eliminate the need. And I would assume a team need only a 3-4 (or, in Plan B, 5-3) record to qualify for the state tournament.

I have nothing against getting more teams involved in the playoffs. But I would miss those end-of-the-season clashes between non-league city rivals like Wayne Memorial and Westland John Glenn, Birmingham's Seaholm and Groves, Southfield and Southfield-Lathrup, and Troy and Troy Athens.

If they could be saved — and, in examining past schedules, I believe with a bit of juggling, many could — then I have to support the expanded format. Why not? After all, it's often said, the more the merrier.

Rice holds on to claim 'A' crown

Behind a finals record five hits and two solid innings of relief from senior Derek Fox, Brother Rice emerged Class A baseball champions for 1992 with a slugfest win over Lapeer West.

By JIM TOTH
STAFF WRITER



The battle plan was quite simple — score early, score often, score late and score any way possible. The result was the first state championship in the history of Birmingham Brother Rice baseball.

The Warriors earned the coveted Class A crown Saturday as they pushed across five runs in the first inning, added single runs in five middle innings and tallied five more runs in the decisive ninth inning to outlast Lapeer West 15-11 at C.O. Brown Stadium in Battle Creek. The combined 26 runs set a Class A mark for scoring in the title game.

"There were no losers out there today," said an emotionally drained Warriors senior Derek Fox, who not only set a finals record with five hits in the game, but also came on in relief in the final two innings and got credit for the win. "Both teams just kept coming at each other."

"This is just tremendous," beamed Rice head coach Ron Kalczyński, who evicted his finals record at 1-1 with the victory. "You have to give these kids a lot of credit because it has been a tough and emotional four years for them. But they hung in there during the bad times, and now the good times."

From the opening pitch to the final out some three and a half hours later, the Warriors and the Panthers did their best to keep those in attendance on the edge of their seats.

The Warriors (30-8) roughed up West starter Mike Thayer for five hits and five runs in the first inning. Following consecutive singles from Charles



BILL BRIDGES/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Slap happy: Warriors Matt Green (19) and Derek Fox celebrate the Class A baseball crown belonging to Brother Rice. The duo combined for eight of the Warriors' 17 hits on the day.

Goode, Brian Kalczyński and Fox, senior Matt Green cracked a two-run triple to set the tone for this wild affair.

Before the half inning was over, the Warriors would score runs courtesy of a sacrifice fly, a wild pitch and a throwing error.

But the Panthers, who entered play with a 3-7 record and on the heels of a 2-1 semifinal triumph over Westland John Glenn, were not about to roll over. They chipped away at the Rice lead by touching junior right-hander Jason Wiehe for two runs in the first inning and six more in the second.

The Warriors, who banged out 17 hits on the day, responded with single runs in the second, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh frames to take a two-run lead into the bottom of the seventh.

With Warriors ace Chris Smolky on in relief in his third inning of work, the Panthers managed to score two runs without the benefit of a hit. Smolky, who hurled the seven-inning semifinal victory Friday over Jenison, walked five in the inning. He walked a total of 11 batters and hit another.

"We came to the dance with him and we were going to go to the end with

him," Kalczyński said of his decision to stay with Smolky.

With Smolky's 10 innings of work over two days having expired, Kalczyński said he took the advice of assistant coach Robert Riker and called on Fox to throw the eighth inning.

Fox responded by getting out of a two-on, two-out jam by forcing Thayer to ground out.

In the ninth, the Warriors hammered Ron Johnson, the third of the Panther hurlers, for three hits and five runs.

See WARRIORS, 2C

Smolky sparks semifinal victory

By BILL PARKER
STAFF WRITER

If there was any doubt that Birmingham Brother Rice belonged in the Michigan High School Athletic Association Class A baseball championships, it was erased Friday afternoon. The Warriors capped junior Chris Smolky's three-hit pitching performance with errorless defense as they posted a 5-1 victory over Jenison.

Rice, at 29-8, managed only a third-place finish in the Catholic League Central Division and entered the finals with more losses than any of the other three teams. But the Warrior's first appearance in the state finals since 1986 was certainly no fluke, as was evident by the way the they handled a very good Jenison squad. The Wildcats, champions of the Ottawa Kent-Red Division, bowed out of the state tournament with a 3-6 record.

"It's a heck of a comeback," said winning pitcher Smolky, referring to Rice's

rebound from a third-place finish in the league. "It's a tough league. With teams like CC (Catholic Central), (Class B finalist) Harper Woods' Notre Dame and (Warren) DeLaSalle, there's always a battle, but it helps you become a better team in the long run."

Friday, the Warriors were unquestionably the better team.

Smolky got off to a shaky start in the top of the first, walking three of the first four batters he faced. When Jenison lead-off hitter Brian Baerman (.400) scored on a wild pitch, it appeared Smolky's first appearance in the state finals may be in jeopardy.

"This is a great experience for us," Smolky said. "It's our first time here and our first experience in anything like this. I was nervous at first, but I just needed to find my groove."

And find the groove he did as the hard-throwing southpaw fanned the next two batters on eight pitches to end the Wildcat threat. Smolky controlled Jenison the rest of the way as he struck out

five batters and gave up just two walks and three hits in the final six innings.

Defensively, the Warriors played a perfect halfgame as the senior-laden infield sparked. Senior second baseman Charlie Goode sparked the defense with three assists including a couple diving catches. He also had two put outs. "Charlie is a scrapper," said Rice coach Ron Kalczyński. "You can always find him after the game because he's the one with the dirty uniform."

Senior third baseman Tim McKean finished with two assists. Smolky and sophomore shortstop Brad Kalczyński had one each and senior catcher Matt Fleury threw out a base runner at attempting to steal second and ended the fifth inning.

The Warriors responded to Jenison's first-inning tally run with a run of their own in the bottom of the inning. Goode (.369) led off with a double to rightfield. He moved to third a sacrifice bunt by Kalczyński (.263) and scored on a triple to leftfield by Kalczyński (.319).



BILL BRIDGES/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Iron Mike: Mike Tucci of Brother Rice rounds third and heads for home during Saturday's championship game.

Canton falls short in 9-inning softball final

By DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

Couch Jim Arnold will get a haircut this week, but it will be just a "light trim" and not the complete buzz job he would have received had Plymouth Canton won the state softball title.

Arnold had agreed to let his players shave his head (and mustache) if Canton was successful; thus, the Chiefs were twice disappointed despite a fine performance at Battle Creek.

The Chiefs battled top-ranked Jenison for nine innings Saturday as pitchers Kelly Holmes of Canton and Betty Morse engaged in a suspenseful duel while the Wildcats prevailed 1-0.

Jenison (36-5) won its fourth title in six seasons, while sixth-ranked Canton (32-4) is the third straight Observerland team to finish as runner-up in Class A. Garden City lost to Waterford Kettering last year and Livonia Franklin to Jenison in 1990.

"We played them tough — and it could have gone either way," Arnold said. "We can play with any team in the state of Michigan, and we proved it today."

Unfortunately for the Chiefs, the game ended with an error, which Jenison used to score the only run in the bottom of the ninth.

With runners at first and second, Jenison's Tracy Taylor hit a grounder to shortstop Dani Mortiere, who looked to third and saw who had no play,

turned and threw to second. But nobody was covering the bag, allowing Kelly Reagan to score.

"I told the girls 'You're too serious; you gotta have some fun; you gotta create something,'" Jenison coach Jerry Hong said. "It was a matter of creating something to get a break."

Such breaks were otherwise non-existent, as Holmes and Morse showed why they are two of the best pitchers in the state.

Holmes (23-3) gave up six hits, four in the last three innings. She struck out 12 and walked one in 8 1/3 official innings. Morse allowed just three hits in nine full frames, struck out 13 and issued one walk.

Every one of the nine hits was a single. Mortiere, Renee Dorey and Holly Miller had the Canton hits, while Reagan had two for the Wildcats.

"I didn't like the 3-0 counts I sometimes had to come back on," Holmes said, "but I like to pitch in tight games."

With neither team able to string together a series of solid hits, both tried hunting to move base runners. That resulted in more frustration when they were unsuccessful at that, too.

"If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't have called so many bunts," Arnold said. "I made some mistakes and that was one of them. I took the bat away from them."

"(Holmes) was throwing it high and we were

hunting high," Hong said. "If someone wants to hunt, put it up in their eyes and make them pop it up. It became such a mental thing. I told them to stay off the high one, just put the ball in play."

Morse walked Mortiere to start the game but retired the next 15 in a row before Miller began the sixth with a hit. Lisa Nicastri, running for Miller, gave Canton its best scoring chance by reaching third on a wild pitch and a strikeout/dropped ball, but was stranded there.

Holmes pitched 3 1/3 innings before Jenison got a hit, but the Wildcats didn't get a runner past second until the eighth.

Keri Hess led with a single, stole second and took third when the play let in an error. Holmes retired the next two and Mortiere kept the Chiefs alive with a just-in-time throw from short for the third out.

While unhappy with the outcome, the Canton players were pleased to be in the final — and with their performance.

"We took them to nine innings, so we don't feel too bad because we played a good game," Holmes said.

"We were just happy we made it this far," Mortiere said. "It was kinda disappointing, but it was nice to get here and we had a lot of fun," senior catcher Renee Dorey added.