

Concealed wins NABF regional title

Not even a Major League team can top this.

Concealed Security's 12-year-old travel baseball team will make two World Series appearances this summer.

Concealed won the National Amateur Baseball Federation regional in Toledo last weekend to earn a berth in the NABF World Series, which starts today in Sylvania, Ohio.

Concealed already had locked up an appearance in the Continental Amateur Baseball Association World Series, starting later this month, in Omaha, Neb. Concealed earned that invitation by placing fourth at last year's CABA World Series.

The regional championship didn't come without some bad news as starting catcher Eric Vojtkofsky (Wayne) broke a finger in the semifinals and will miss the rest of the season. Concealed beat New Lenox, Ill., 15-3, in Saturday's championship game, which ended after four innings because of the eight-run mercy rule.

"He played the entire game in pain, just sucked it up, because he's that kind of kid," Concealed coach Lou Pirronello said of Vojtkofsky. "There is no way we can replace him. Vojt was huge for us, a big, strong kid, blocks well, receives well, is intelligent and our number four or five hitter in the lineup."

Concealed will play catcher by committee the remainder of the season with Ryan Shay (Garden City), Alan Hagedorn (Westland),

BASEBALL

Andrew Stefford and Steve Karcheske able to play 1.e position.

Jeff Richard (West Bloomfield) was the winning pitcher in the championship, throwing three scoreless innings before allowing three runs in the fourth. He allowed four hits, struck out one and walked two.

Pirronello gave him a new nickname, Rocket, because he's a hard thrower and because of his last name. New York Yankees' pitcher Roger Clemens and retired hockey star Maurice Richard also were nicknamed Rocket.

Pirronello is the only one affiliated with Concealed old enough to remember the hockey playing Rocket.

"Jeff throws hard, has a nice curve and a straight change-up," Pirronello said of his pitcher with a 6-0 record.

Concealed opens the NABF World Series with a game against Baltimore, Md. at 6 p.m. Thursday followed by an 8:30 start against New Lenox. On Friday, Concealed has a game scheduled with Mansfield, Ohio, at 6 p.m.

There are eight teams in the NABF World Series divided in two groups. The top two teams in each group after the first three games make up the Final Four.

Concealed gave Richard a nice cushion, scoring 13 runs in the

first inning.

Chris Russin (Canton) hit a grand slam and Scott Szpyrka (Orchard Lake) had a single and triple in the first inning.

Russin "sat on a curve ball and one-hopped it to the fence," Pirronello said.

Richard helped his cause, going 3-for-3 at the plate, scoring two runs.

"I think you've got to be good but you've also got to be lucky to win it all," Pirronello said. "We're playing well and have played over injured all year. We just have to do it again."

Rounding out the Concealed roster are Eric Drieselman (Garden City), Matt Rodeghier (Farmington), Mark Pirronello (Livonia), Joey Putlevic (Rochester Hills) and Lance Lotkiewicz. Bat Boys are Tyler Russin (Canton) and Jeremy Shay (Garden City).

Assistant coaches are Pat Russin (Canton), Larry Vojtkofsky (Wayne) and Al Shay (Garden City).

Livonia defeats Bulls

Dave Lusky's three-run homer Tuesday sparked host Livonia Travel to an 8-3 victory over the Michigan Bulls in a Connie Mack baseball game at Ford Field.

The game was scoreless through four innings. The Bulls took the lead with a run in the top of the fifth, but Travel never trailed after Lusky's shot in the bottom of the inning.

Livonia added five more runs

in the sixth. Bob Malek's bases-loaded triple was the key hit in that inning.

Mark Flanchbaum, Charlie Avery and Mike Barnett had RBI singles for the Bulls, who suffered their second loss in 30 games.

Kevin Lantzy had a pair of doubles and scored a run for the Bulls. Barnett and Malek also had two hits apiece.

Anthony Tomey pitched the first four innings for Livonia, but the win went to reliever Mark Duff.

Bulls starter A.J. Rowe left with two runners aboard in the fifth and took the loss. Kevin Tomasitis finished the game on the mound.

The Bulls, who were runners-up in the Welland (Ontario) Invitational last weekend, leave today for the AAU national championships and a nine-day stay in Orlando, Fla.

Post 346 drops pair

Farmington American Legion Post 346 dropped a doubleheader Sunday at Berkley, losing 6-3 and 7-2.

Post 346 lost the first game despite outpitching Berkley, 8-4. Zach Burton pitched a complete game for Farmington, and Brad Baker went 2-for-3 with one RBI.

Berkley pounded 12 hits in the nightcap. Post 346 didn't help its cause with four errors.

Farmington's John Waisanen went the distance on the mound. Burton's two-run homer was one of four hits for Post 346.

Besco progresses in Tigers' system

By BRAD ECKHART
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The confidence level is building for Derek Besco.

Lakeland still is a long way from Comerica Park, but the 23-year-old Westland John Glenn High product win the University of Michigan is starting to make the climb.

Besco, who has made the switch from right to left field, is putting together an outstanding season with the Tigers' Class A affiliate.

Through 60 games, the 6-foot-2, 200-pound Besco is batting .304 (through July 8) with three homers and 41 RBI, ranking among the team's top offensive leaders.

"Basically, I'm getting a chance to play every day, and things are looking up this year," Besco said. "The season is a long grind. We still have 64 games left and some days you're dragging, but overall I've loved every minute of it."

The Tigers took Besco in the 25th round in 1998 and sent him to their rookie league affiliate in Jamestown, N.Y., where he batted .235 with six homers and 18 RBI in 49 games.

During the off-season, he returned to Ann Arbor and continued to work out with his brother Bryan (who just recently finished his career at U-M).

"The extra year experience helps," Besco said. "My first year in pro ball was something new and different. I didn't know what to expect, but now I have the confidence and I know what to expect."

Besco, who bats third in the order, has become a dangerous hitter in the Florida State League.

"I have about 55 strikeouts,

I definitely got my hacks," he said. "I really didn't make any adjustments from last year to this year. I never thought I had a bad swing."

Even an 8-for-4 night Thursday against Dunes didn't get the former All-State football player from Glenn down.

"Right now I feel I'm swinging the bat well," he said. "I hit the ball hard, but we have guys in this league that can track a ball down."

The center fielders are so quick. You balls you hit up the middle that you think are going for base hit, but the shortstop snags it and throws you out by two steps."

"And every guy (pitcher) we face throws in the 90s (MPH) it seems. This is a good league. There are some really good players."

Besco has crossed paths with Michigan quarterback Drew Henson, who plays for the Yankees' Class A team in Tampa.

"We've talked; he's a good-size kid," Besco said. "I really don't know how he does both (sports). That's got to be tough, but I'm not going to feel sorry for him. He's not burning for money."

Lakeland finished the first half of the season 33-36, but now stands in first place during the early stages of the second half (9-7).

For the time being, Besco is trying to turn himself into a legitimate Major League prospect. He has had several game-winning hits for Lakeland this season and has become comfortable defensively in left field.

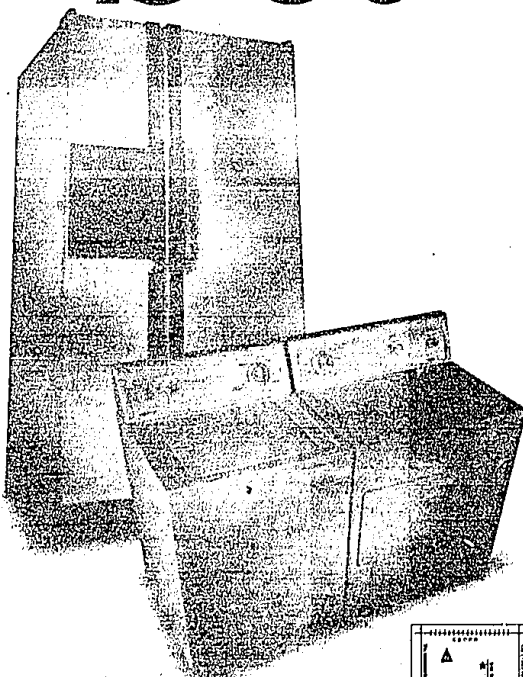
"It's a matter of confidence," Derek said.

And if he continues to progress, Comerica Park might be only a stone's throw away.

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Cobras

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way."

The Cobras began the week with a 13-1 win over the Birmingham Braves on July 6. Neil Sternberg struck out eight batters while allowing only three hits.

Matt Clark helped power the offense by going 3-for-4 with three RBI. Vitanis, Graham and Sternberg pounded out two hits apiece.

The other members of the Cobras team are Dan Lentz, Bryan Smith, Sam Grossman, Kevin Zerbo, Matt Petry, Ben Dargo, Evan Rodriguez and Andy Wingert.

The Cobras carry a 37-3 record into the USSSA World Series, which begins Tuesday, July 20, in Sterling Heights. Thirty-six teams across the country will be participating.

The Cobras are sponsored by Leo's Coney Island and Ford Motor Company.



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