

Baseball

North makes case for ECIC as strongest league

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

Which baseball league is better, the Erie County Interscholastic Conference or the Monsignor Martin Association? Williamsville North made its case for the ECIC as the Spartans defeated MMA schools St. Mary's of Lancaster, 7-5, on April 27 and Bishop Timon-St. Jude, 6-4, on April 29 to advance to the finals of the second annual Robert E. Rich Memorial Baseball Classic. The tournament, held at Dunn Tire Park, pits teams from the ECIC against the MMA.

The Spartans (2-1, 5-2) will face ECIC Division I rival Clarence, which has already beaten North this season, in the final at a yet-to-be determined date under the lights at Dunn Tire Park.

"It's nice for the kids," said North coach Jerry Scarcella. "We lost our Florida (spring break) trip (because of vacation days lost from the October storm) so it's something different for them to get excited over."

North outthit their MMA opponents, 25-7, including 12-3 against St. Mary's. It's an impressive feat considering it was an all-wooden bat tournament, and the Spartans normally use aluminum bats.

"We thought it would be a big disadvantage, but we stroked the ball well," said Scarcella. "I still think we all should use wooden bats. You don't get any of the cheap hits."

North's wins came in different fashions. The Spartans led St. Mary's the entire game but had to hold them off at the end, and had to come back from a 4-2 deficit to defeat Timon.

"It was great how we came back against a tough opponent," said Scarcella. "We did a really nice job."

North took a 1-0 over Timon in the top of the first inning when Nick Fronczak



Williamsville North's Pat Dwyer tries to beat St. Mary's of Lancaster catcher Brad Gibson to home plate during the Spartans' 7-5 win in the second annual Robert E. Rich Memorial Baseball Classic held at Dunn Tire Park

singled in Austin Benschadle, who singled and was moved to third after a Max Zimmerman single. Timon responded with three runs in the bottom of the first.

The score stayed 3-1 until the fifth when Fronczak singled in Alex Calderon, who got on base with a walk and was moved to second by a Zimmerman single.

After Timon tacked on a run in the fifth to make it 4-2, the Spartans scored four runs in the top of the seventh. John Ticco singled in Zimmerman and Fronczak. Garrett Crage then scored Ticco and himself on a squeeze play.

"They threw it to the catcher, but before the catcher got the ball, he blocked the plate and Ticco collided with him just

on Friday, April 27. North will face Clarence in the tournament final at a yet-to-be determined date at Dunn Tire Park.

Photo by Joe Eberle
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enough for the ball to get by," said Scarcella. "The Timon infield moved in to question the umpire about the call, and Crage, who moved all the way to third, ran home."

Zimmerman finished with four singles and two RBIs. Benschadle was 3 for 5 and stole three bases.

Eric Dahlman pitched 2.2 innings and allowed one hit and struck out four to pick up the win for the Spartans. Mike Koch retired the St. Mary's batters in the seventh 1-2-3 to record the save.

North built a 6-1 lead against St. Mary's. Benschadle scored in the first after a Zimmerman sacrifice fly. Pat Dwyer, who led off the second with a double, made it 2-0 after a Calderon sacrifice flied him

home. The Spartans scored four times in the fourth. Crage singled and scored Taylor Gahagen, Dwyer singled in Crage and Benschadle drove in Jared Fabian and Dwyer.

St. Mary's made it a ball game with four runs in the sixth to cut the deficit to 6-5, but Crage singled in Gahagen, who tripled, for an insurance run with two outs in the seventh.

Crage finished 2 for 4 with two RBIs. It was his first hits of the season.

"He has started every game and has been really struggling, but he broke out at the right time," said Scarcella.

Gahagen was 2 for 3 with a triple. Calderon hit 2 for 2 with a double. Dwyer was 2 for 3.

Kevin Hughes pitched the first five innings and allowed one hit, struck out five and gave up one earned run to earn his first varsity win. Koch earned the save, striking out two.

Scarcella was impressed with Hughes and Koch.

"I haven't been able to see much out of Mike Koch but he came in and immediately threw strikes and good, hard pitches that moved," said Scarcella. "He had a

presence. I felt like we picked up a new pitcher ... Hughes was in complete command against St. Mary's."

North plays every day this week, which began at Frontier on Monday and on Tuesday against West Seneca West. Results were unavailable before The Bee went to press.

The Spartans host Clarence on Wednesday, May 2, Frontier on Thursday, May 3, are at West Seneca West on Friday, May 4 and return home on Saturday afternoon, May 5 against Lancaster. The Wednesday through Friday games start at 4:45 p.m., and the Lancaster game will start at noon.

e-mail: pnagy@beenews.com

Hockey

DeSimone surprised by Player of the Year honor

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

In the back of Phil DeSimone's mind, he thought maybe there was a chance he could win United States Hockey League Player of the Year, but when the former East Amherst resident heard the news, he was surprised.

"I wasn't even really thinking about it. In the back of my mind, I thought maybe I was in the running for it but I didn't expect to win it by any means," said DeSimone, who centers the top line for the Sioux City Musketeers in Sioux City, Iowa.

The USHL is the top junior hockey league in the country.

DeSimone, who also earned USHL Offensive Player of the Year honors, finished the regular season second in the league in scoring with 26 goals and 47 assists for 73 points. He was also a plus-13. He is the third Musketeer

to earn Player of the Year and top forward honors.

DeSimone is also the leading scorer in the USHL in the postseason with six goals and five assists. Sioux City was eliminated on Monday by Tri-City four games to three in a best of seven series in the first round of the West Division Clark Cup.

DeSimone credits gaining 15 pounds of muscle in the offseason — he now weighs 193 pounds — and being mentally focused for his success. He's also had good linemates. Linemate Max Pacioretty earned the league's Rookie of the Year honors with 21 goals and 42 assists for 63 points.

"Max is a great player and is probably going to be a first-round NHL draft pick," said DeSimone. "The chemistry with Max and Blake Martin since August has been there. They're probably the best wingers I've ever played with."



Phil DeSimone

DeSimone, 20, finished his three-year career with Sioux City with 56 goals and 92 assists for 135 points. He will be headed this fall on a full scholarship to play for the University of New Hampshire.

DeSimone said the University of New Hampshire coaching staff expects him to come in and play a big role, which is fine by him.

"I'm an older freshman and I think the experience from playing in the USHL should really make it a more easier adjustment than if I was coming right out of high school," said DeSimone. "It's made me more mature on and off the ice."

DeSimone has played hockey since age 6 and played travel hockey with the Amherst Knights and Buffalo Regals. He attended

Nichols his freshman and sophomore years of high school, lived in Canada for the first half of his junior year, playing in the Western Junior "B" league of the Ontario Hockey Association, and transferred to Williamsville South for the second half of his junior year. Between his junior and senior year, DeSimone was drafted 21st out of 200 players to Sioux City.

— Phil DeSimone

His ultimate goal is to play in the NHL. This is his last year of eligibility to get drafted.

"I can't worry about it, but if it happens, it happens," he said.