

Tough trip to Holdrege for Norton Legion

By DICK BOYD

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The Norton American Legion baseball team ventured across the state line into Holdrege, Neb. last weekend and discovered a different umpiring technique which, along with a shortage of players, left them bewildered and winless in the three day tournament.

Norton lost their opener with the home team Holdrege by a 13-0 score on Friday, lost to Grand Island 10-1 and to St. Paul 15-4 on Saturday and was outscored 15-3 by McCook on Sunday.

"Playing short handed at the beginning due to sickness and other commitments, we had only 10 players available for the opener," said Norton head coach Joe Durham.

"From the start we were plagued by questionable calls. In the first inning, umpires called Garrett Tacha out on a pick-off move that clearly was not the right call. Then, in the bottom of the first, the same umpire called the opposing runner safe when he was clearly out by over a step. This one call caused a snowball effect that our team was not able to recover from before Holdrege had scored 13 runs.

"Jordan Durham started the game on the mound for us and pitched better than the outcome showed. Not able to get strike calls from the home plate umpire when our catcher Brian Spooner would not even move the glove, it became a straight down the middle pitched game.

"I was trying to keep my start-

ing pitchers on a very strict pitch count. Durham threw 50 pitches in the first inning before I relieved him with Garrett Tacha to finish the inning. Without the questionable call at first, the score would have been 0-0 and Durham would have thrown only 17 pitches. There is not much you can do when the calls go against you except get thrown out, which would not have helped our team.

"Give credit to Holdrege. They took advantage of every opportunity and capitalized on our mistakes and scored their runs. Their pitching shut out our team the first two innings before another questionable call by the same umpire killed a strong rally in the third inning. With bases loaded and only one out in the top of the third, Todd Zink slid into the second baseman to avoid a double play and was called for an illegal slide, which caused Matt Stanley to be called out as he was the runner going to first."

"I have played over 10 years of professional baseball and that was one of the best slides I have seen," said Norton assistant coach Steve Jeltz.

"Our team would have scored two runs on the play and Matt would have been on first and, without the questionable call in the first winning, we would have been ahead," said assistant coach Aaron Daniels.

"As a coach, you try to never say anything bad about the umpiring or any other type of officiating as it is a very hard job but not know-

ing the rules is not acceptable," said coach Durham. "They always say umpiring never causes you to lose a game but, in my mind, I might question that on this game. The blown call in the first inning destroyed our whole outlook on how we could use our pitching staff, which we never recovered from.

"All those schools in Nebraska we played in the tournament had high school baseball and had more pitchers than we did," said assistant coach Chris Davis.

"After that bad first inning, we played Holdrege even and did not allow another runner to reach base," said coach Durham.

Norton had just two hits in the game, one by Andrew Soderlund and another by Jacob Riedel. One Blue Jay walked and five struck out. Winning pitcher was Beachler.

Holdrege had seven hits, five batters walked and six struck out. The losing pitcher was Durham.

In the first game on Saturday versus Grand Island, Norton took a 1-0 lead in the first inning when Todd Zink walked and Brian Ulmer singled him home. Grand Island responded in the bottom of the inning, however, with three runs to take a 3-1 advantage.

"We started the second game with Garrett Tacha on the mound. He pitched into the third inning until Todd Zink relieved him. Todd pitched good, allowing no runs in the fourth and, with the score 3-1 going into the fifth inning, things looked good for us but errors and

hit batters allowed Grand Island to score seven runs.

"Being hit by a ball is a science to these players in Nebraska. You can tell they had been coached to turn into the ball and take the hit while we have coached our players to turn away from the ball and avoid being hit."

Five Grand Island players took first base after being hit by Norton pitchers.

Norton had three hits, one each by Ulmer, Tacha and Soderlund. One Norton batter walked and five struck out. Losing pitcher was Tacha.

Grand Island had five hits, six batters struck out and 11 walked. Winning pitcher was Kcolikowski.

The Blue Jays' second game on Saturday was versus St. Paul and coach Durham was forced to use four pitchers.

Umpiring caused some issues again, according to coach Durham. "Usually umpires switch home and bases so they don't get cross eyed behind the plate but, for some reason, this didn't happen in game three," said coach Durham. "Brian Spooner started for us as pitcher and pitched a lot better than the score showed. Nine times out of ten when a catcher doesn't move his glove, the umpire will call it a strike but, for some reason, the umpire had a different strike zone. Unless the ball was right down the center of the plate, Spooner couldn't get a strike."

Coach Durham relieved Spooner with Tacha. "This was probably

one of the dumbest things I have ever done," said coach Durham. "Garrett pitched so much in the other two games that he was worn down. He threw a breaking ball and immediately felt pain in his elbow. This isn't a good sign for a pitcher. With only nine players available, I put Durham in to pitch and Tacha took first, a position he usually doesn't play. Durham was pitching well until he felt pain in his bicep. We were down to no man's land and I brought in Andy Horesky, who hadn't pitched since K-18 baseball five years ago."

"Andy can be a pitcher but he needs some work," said Norton pitching coach Chris Davis.

St. Paul tallied 13 runs in the first inning and did not score again until the fourth stanza when they ran across two more runs.

Norton scored one run in the first inning when Logan Runnion and Tacha both walked and Runnion scored. The Blue Jays ran one more run across home plate in the second inning when Soderlund walked and Ulmer drove him home with a single.

Norton's final two runs came in the fifth inning when Ulmer slammed a home run, Cody Callaway was hit by a pitch and walked and Durham singled him home.

The Blue Jays had four hits, four walks, and six batters struck out. Ulmer was leading hitter for Norton with 2 hits in 2 times at the plate. Durham went 2 for 3. Winning pitcher was T. Hansa.

St. Paul had 10 hits, 11 walks and six batters struck out. Spooner was the losing pitcher.

In Norton's only game on Sunday, the Blue Jays had 12 players available. Landon Hamel, who had missed the previous games due to his sister's wedding, was the starting pitcher. For the first time in the tournament, Norton took the lead. In the second inning, Durham hit a double, followed by Stanley walking and Soderlund getting on base on an error, which

allowed Durham and Stanley to score. Spooner was hit by a pitch and Runnion hit into a fielder's choice, allowing Soderlund to score and put Norton ahead 3-2.

"Spooner did a perfect take out at second base to allow the fielder to make a play at first," said coach Durham. "Hamel went into the third inning with the lead, something we weren't able to hold onto," said coach Durham.

McCook tallied five runs in the inning to move ahead 7-3. "Landon hasn't played a lot this year and just needs to build up his arm strength," said coach Davis.

Durham relieved Hamel on the mound. "He had to throw only fast balls as, again, the umpire wouldn't give a corner to any of his pitches," said coach Durham. "Errors in the field were costly, too."

McCook scored eight more runs in the fourth inning and Norton was scoreless after scoring three in the second.

Norton had just two hits in the game, one double each by Durham and Hamel. Three Blue Jays walked and ten struck out. Winning pitcher was Grabowski.

McCook had nine hits, eight walks and five batters struck out. Losing pitcher was Hamel.

"A baseball team is like a family," said coach Durham. "You have your differences and you get mad but, at the end of the day, you hug each other and get ready for the next day. That is what we will do as we play Smith Center next."

Next action

The Norton Legion nine will travel to Smith Center this evening for a double header, beginning at 6 p.m.

On Friday, Norton will travel into Nebraska once again. This time they will play Minden.

The Norton Legion's next home games will be this Sunday when they host Scott City in contests

LeClair inks with Colby College

By DICK BOYD

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Courtney LeClair, a 2008 graduate of Norton Community High School, has signed a letter of intent to compete on the track and field team at Colby Community College.

A four-year letter winner for the Lady Blue Jays, Courtney competed in the state track meet her last three years in school.

Her freshman season, she placed fifth in the 100 meter hurdles, sixth in the 300 meter hurdles and fifth in the triple jump in the Mid-Continent League track meet.

She was the MCL track champion in the 100 meter and 300 meter hurdles and fourth in the triple jump her sophomore year. She also placed second in the 100 meter hurdles and fourth in the 300 meter hurdles in the regional meet and finished eighth in the 100 meter hurdles and tenth in the 300 meter hurdles at the state meet.

Her junior season, Courtney repeated as the MCL champion in the 100 meter hurdles, placed second in the 300 meter hurdles, was a member of the 4 x 400 meter relay team which placed second and a member of the 4 x 100 meter relay team which finished third. In the regional meet, she was second in both the 100 meter hurdles and 300 meter hurdles and a member of the second place 4 x 100 meter



Gold medal performance

Norton senior Courtney LeClair cleared the final hurdle to win the 100 meter hurdles in the Goldsmith Relays at WaKeeney on April 25. She was also the gold medal winner in the 300 meter hurdles and was a member of the Lady Jays' first place 4 x 400 meter relay team in the meet.

— Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

relay team. In the state meet, she placed eighth in the 100 meter high hurdles, 11th in the 300 meter hurdles and was on the tenth place 4 x 100 meter relay team.

This season, Courtney became a three-time winner of the 100 meter hurdles in the MCL and placed third in the 300 meter hurdles. She was also a member of the third place 4 x 100 meter relay team and member of the fourth place 4 x 400 meter relay team. In the regional meet this season, she was a double gold medal winner, crossing the finish line first in the 100 meter and 300 meter hurdles. She won a third gold medal as a member of the 4 x 400 meter relay team and was a member of the 4 x 100 meter relay team which placed second.

At the state meet this year, Courtney placed eighth in the 100 meter hurdles, seventh in the 300 meter hurdles, was a member of the sev-

enth place 4 x 100 meter relay team and also a member of the fourth place 4 x 400 meter relay team.

Courtney was also a participant in the Kansas Relays in Lawrence in 2007 and 2008.

"I am very happy for Courtney and the opportunity that her continued commitment to track and field has created for her!" said Norton head track coach, Jason Jones.

"She is a very talented athlete and she has always worked very hard in practice day in and day out. These sustained sacrifices, along with her desire to work to improve, have not only led to her success at the high school level but they have also now given her the chance to continue to compete in a sport that she loves as she works to further her education.

"This is the best situation for which a high school student-athlete can hope!"

"I believe that Courtney will do very well at the next level and become an integral part of the Colby Community College Track and Field Team.

"Again, I am happy for her; I know that she will both take full advantage of and enjoy this experience."

Crystal Berndt, Colby Community College women's track and field and cross country coach, feels fortunate to have recruited Courtney to run for them. "I am very excited to have Courtney join the Colby Community College Track and Field team," she said.

"She did very well at the state meet this year and I see her doing some amazing things this coming season at Colby.

"We look to have a strong team coming in this year and I believe she will be a great asset to the 2008-2009 track team!"

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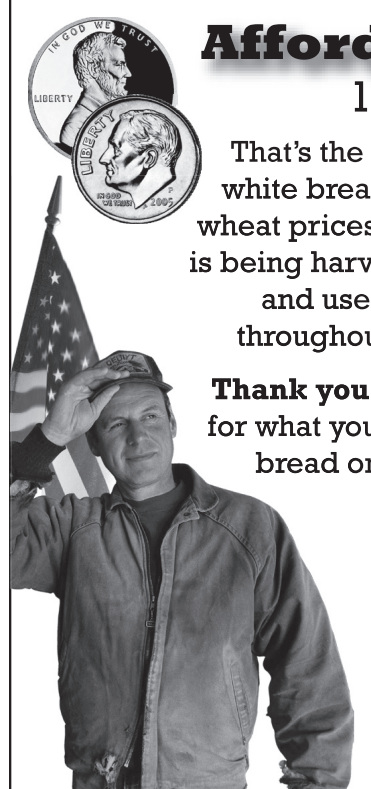
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