

K-18 baseball team wins regional championship

By DICK BOYD

nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

The Norton K-18 baseball team played tremendous ball on both Saturday and Sunday to win the championship of the K-18 Western Regional Tournament held in Hays.

After defeating WaKeeney-Quinter 12-2 on Saturday, they outscored defending state champion Victoria 11-4 on Sunday morning, then handed Ellis their first defeat of the season by a 9-3 score in late afternoon on Sunday.

WaKeeney-Quinter

In the opener on Saturday, the Norton Blue Jays assured themselves of a spot in this season's K-18 State Tournament in Lucas when they broke open a 2-2 tied game to defeat WaKeeney-Quinter 12-2.

The top four teams in the tournament qualified and they were the first day's winners.

Norton was designated the home team and took a 2-0 lead in the bottom of the first inning. Jacob Green doubled and Collyn Auker blasted a home run over the fence!

After the first inning, Norton got some scattered hits but did not score again until the bottom of the fifth stanza. Meanwhile, WaKeeney tied the score at 2-all with runs in the top of the fifth.

Norton had the top of the batting order with their half of the fifth inning and they put the game away with eight straight singles by Riley Sides, Josh VanLaeys, Jacob Green, Collyn Auker, Trenton Wright, Will Ellis, Jace Ruder and Hayden Wiltfong. Ross Cole walked and Sides came up for the second time in the inning. He promptly singled again as did VanLaeys. All except Wright scored and Sides and VanLaeys scored twice; however, Wright drove in the final two runs by Sides and VanLaeys to end the game with the 10-run lead rule after five innings.

Norton had a total of 17 hits, 2 walks and 1 strike out. Seven batters had at least two hits in the game. Leading the way was Riley Sides, who was 4 for 4, followed by Josh VanLaeys, 2 for 4; Jacob Green, 2 for 4; Collyn Auker, 2 for 4; Trenton Wright, 2 for 4, Will Ellis, 2 for 3; Jace Ruder, 2 for 3.

Jace Ruder was the winning pitcher. He hurled four innings, giving up no hits, walking 4 and striking out 9 batters. He was relieved in the top of the fifth by Trenton Wright. He gave up 1 hit, walked 1 and struck out 2 batters.

"It was a really strange game because it seemed like we were knocking the cover off the ball but weren't able to score any runs. We lost three runners to base running mistakes and it kept the game relatively close," said head coach Rick Green.

"Thanks to Collyn's home run, we had a two run lead going into the fifth inning. Then, we allowed a walk, their only base hit and an error and the next thing we knew, it was tied at 2-all. I was really frustrated and I challenged our boys to break the game open. I have always told them that the longer you let an opponent hang around, the momentum and pressure switches dugouts. Our boys responded better than I could have dreamed. We scored 10 runs with only two outs in the bottom of the fifth to end the game. That inning will be one of my favorite all-time innings for the rest of my life. I was beyond proud of them!"

Victoria

Norton got a great start in the win over Victoria, scoring seven runs in the bottom of the first inning. Sides walked, Green singled, Auker singled, Ellis walked, Ruder got on base on a fielder's choice, Wiltfong walked and Johnson walked. In his second time up in the inning, Sides singled, VanLaeys walked in his second time up and Green



Norton's Jacob Green fires the baseball to an Ellis batter during the Blue Jays win over previously unbeaten Ellis on Sunday afternoon to win the Western Regional championship. In addition to pitching an outstanding game against Ellis, Jacob was an excellent hitter during all three tournament games. For his play, he was chosen the "Most Valuable Player" in the tournament.

-Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

was hit by a pitch in his second at-bat and advanced. All who got on base the first time around scored to make it a 7-0 early lead.

Norton extended the lead with one more run in the bottom of the second inning when Wright singled, Ruder walked and Wiltfong singled him home. Johnson singled later in the inning but did not score.

Victoria scored twice in the

top of the third inning to cut the Norton lead to 8-2 and two more times in the top of the sixth to make it 8-4.

Norton answered with three more runs in the bottom of the sixth. VanLaeys singled, Green walked and Auker blasted a home run over the fence to tally all three runs and stretch the lead to 11-4 with one swing of the bat!

Norton had 12 hits, 9 walks

and 2 strike outs. Leading hitters for Norton were Green, 2 for 2; Auker, 2 for 3; Wright, 2 for 4 and Wiltfong, 2 for 3.

Winning pitcher was Josh VanLaeys. He allowed 12 hits, walked 5 and struck out 6 batters.

The win over Victoria advanced Norton to the championship game versus undefeated Ellis later in the afternoon.

"We knew coming in that Victoria would be a well coached and fundamentally sound team since they are the returning state champions," said coach Green.

"We jumped on them for seven runs in the first inning and never really felt threatened.

"They did have some scoring opportunities but Josh VanLaeys did a great job of getting the big out when we needed it.

"Collyn Auker hitting his second home run in as many games was big for us because our lead went from four runs to seven runs."

Ellis

Norton was designated the home team as they had been in the first two games. The Blue Jays took an early 2-0 lead in the bottom of the first inning. Sides led off with a single, VanLaeys walked and Wright singled and both Sides and VanLaeys scored.

Ellis was able to score one run in the top of the second to make it 2-1. In the top of the third stanza, Ellis took a 3-2 advantage with two runs scored.

The Railroaders did not score again and Norton took the lead for good with two runs in the bottom of the fifth inning. Auker and Wright both took advantage of errors to get on base and Will Ellis singled and both scored to make it 4-3.

The Blue Jays put the final touches on the championship win with five more runs in the bottom of the sixth inning. Johnson singled, Sides walked, VanLaeys singled, Green singled, Auker singled and Ruder tripled

and Johnson, Sides, VanLaeys, Green and Auker all scored to make the final 9-3 and hand Ellis their first loss of the season!

Norton had 10 hits, 6 walks and 4 strike outs. Leading hitters for Norton were Wright and Ellis, each was 2 for 4 with the bat.

Winning pitcher was Jacob Green. He gave up 5 hits, walked 5 and struck out 15 batters!

"Ellis was undefeated coming in so we knew we were in for a battle," said coach Green.

"We led 2-0 after the first inning and were just pounding the ball but, unfortunately, we were hitting it right at them. At one time, we had four consecutive line drive outs on hard hit balls.

"Ellis hung tough with us and took a 3-2 lead but, once again, our boys responded and took a 4-3 lead. Then, in the bottom of the sixth, we had another good inning and increased the lead to the final score of 9-3.

"Jacob pitched a great game on a hot, humid day. For his performance in the tournament, it was good to see him voted the most outstanding player.

"We will next play in the State Tournament in Lucas.

"I am really proud of our boys and their accomplishment in winning the regional championship and feel we will fare well next weekend."

During the trophy presentation following the championship win, Jacob Green was named the "Most Valuable Player" in the tournament!

With the victory, Norton extended their season record to 20-3. Ellis fell to 22-1.

Victoria defeated Colby 23-13 to place third.

Next action

All four teams qualified to compete in the Kansas State K-18 Tournament in Lucas on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday, July 25-29 in Lucas.

American Legion to play in Zone Tourney

The Norton American Legion baseball team has completed the regular season and will now play in the Zone Tournament in Colby, which will be held Tuesday, July 22 through Sunday,

July 27.

Norton's first game will be today, Tuesday, July 22 versus Oakley, beginning at 6 p.m.

Other teams in the tournament will be Goodland, Plainville and

Ellis in addition to home team Colby.

The winner of the tournament will advance to the State Legion Baseball Tournament.

Norton runner to compete for West in Shrine Run

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Marc Miller, outstanding track and cross country runner from Norton Community High School, will be a contestant for the West squad in the Open Two Mile Charity Road Race which will be run in conjunction with the 41st annual Kansas Shrine Bowl Football Game this Saturday, July 26 in Pittsburg.

The Road Race will be run at 8 a.m. on Saturday and will feature West runners versus East runners.

The Shrine Bowl Banquet

for players and coaches will be held Friday night at 6 p.m. at the Pittsburg High School.

Also on Saturday morning, the Shrine Bowl Parade will be held in downtown Pittsburg, beginning at 10 a.m.

There will also be a Kansas Masonic All-State High School Marching Band Camp, beginning the Tuesday before the game on Saturday. The Band will lead the Saturday morning parade.

A Cheerleading Camp is also planned.

Members of the West Team

in the Shrine Bowl Football Game include Bryce Black, Beloit; Warren Kropp, Scott City; Greyson Tempel, Garden City; Kenton Ubelaker, Osborne; Dalton Walker, Sharon Springs and Preston Weigel, Hays High.



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Western Regional Tournament Champions!

The Norton K-18 baseball team is pictured following their championship win in the Western Regional Tournament in Hays on Sunday. They are, from left, front row: Trenton Wright, Dallas Gosselin, Braden Smith, Ryan Johnson, Ross Cole, Riley Sides; back row: Head Coach Rick Green, Jacob Green, Jace Ruder, Collyn Auker, Hayden Wiltfong, Josh VanLaeys, Will Ellis, Ryan Lively, Assistant Coach Robert Wiltfong. The Blue Jays will now compete for the K-18 Kansas State Championship in Lucas on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday, July 25-29.

-Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

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