

The North Star League

Spectator

2001 Season Preview Issue

51st Year

Back to 13 teams**Mound joins
North Star League**

The roadmap of the NSL is changing once again this season, and it brings back some characteristically goofy geography.

The Mound Mallards are joining the league for 2001, bringing the total back to a NSL-record 13 teams. Mound, which is moving west from the Eastern Minny Metro League, comes in as a Class C team and will play in the North Star West.

"The team is very excited about joining the league," said skipper Andy Snyder, who brings a team that's slightly more established than the league's most recent 13th squad, the ragtag Wayzata operation.

One reason Mound is happy to join the NSL is that the Eastern Minny is composed entirely of Class B teams. As a Class B, the Mallards (Mudcats at the time) were never able to forge a winning record. That discouragement, along with the driving distances to Coon Rapids and Blaine through rush hour, made the switch to the NSL almost a no-brainer.

You may be asking why Mound, a fourth-ring suburb, is assigned to the Western division. You see, last season, when Buffalo dropped out in April due to a lack of players, it created a problem because the West was left with three teams—an official state no-no. Since word came so late, the state board granted the NSL a one-year injunction to operate a division with three teams.

Had Mound not joined, the North Star would have had to realign into two divisions, possibly breaking up some solid rivalries that have developed in the three-division format.

Fortunately, the Mallards arrived in time to round out Class C. Someone had to go west to take Buffalo's place, and the rookies drew the short straw.

2001: A Race Odyssey**How to beat the repeaters?***Despite a competitive 2000, all four state entrants made repeat trips*

If you're looking for a sign of optimism in the North Star League this season, look no further than Albertville, where the hometown Villains scheduled an April 22 game back when there was still a foot and a half of snow on the ground.

By late March, even the most winter-hardy Minnesotans had gotten their fill of the white stuff and were ready for a fresh, if brief, spring. Pardon the local ballclubs if they were even antsy than that. Everyone—not just Albertville—had work to do. Four teams wanted to pick up where they left off, and the others just needed to pick up some ground.

Last season was more competitive, top to bottom, than most other recent chapters. But in the end, the NSL sent precisely the same teams to state as in 1999: Litchfield and Monticello in Class C, St. Michael and Dassel-Cokato in Class B. In fact, all but Monticello had made at least three consecutive prior appearances.

Everyone loves a winner...but is this good?

Perhaps this deserves a closer look.

Up until two years ago, Monticello was no more a contender than Harold Stassen. Indeed, their Polecat nickname sprang from their odoriferous style of play, and when they finally broke through for a state appearance in

'99, nobody could take issue with that.

On the other hand, Litchfield has pretty much had its way ever since joining the league in 1998. The Blues are Class C in name only, and many NSL managers have rooted for Litchfield to win a state title, if only so they could move up to Class B once and for all. In particular, Howard Lake's quality teams have been thwarted by Litchfield's big, blue 800-lb. gorilla constantly sitting in their way.

And while our Class B teams are all remarkably competitive, the two Saintry squads have a knack for showing up in August and even winning a few games at state. It sets up some fine regional rivalries, most notably the annual D-C/Maple Lake playoff battles, but Delano, Hutch, and Maple Lake can't seem to break through.

So are these traditional powers healthy for the league? Of course. People love seeing the NSL dynasties roll into town, and the other squads tend to raise their game a notch.

Still, getting other teams some state exposure would only help the league. Why not put those bullseyes on a few other backs?

They have a tough road ahead, as the four state-tested squads have girded for more, but at least we can all enjoy the ride.

...around the horn **League history book on sale**

This season, the North Star League 50th Anniversary Record Book hits the shelves of your favorite ballpark concession stand.

The book, painstakingly compiled by NSL secretary Brian Larson, features standings and stories from each season along with individual records and historic photos & posters.

Be sure to ask for a copy—the books are on sale at most NSL parks this summer.

Larson receives state award

League secretary Brian Larson recently received the Minnesota Baseball Association's highest honor, the Michael Downs Award for outstanding service to Minnesota baseball.

In addition to league duties, Larson faithfully served on the state board from 1988-1997 and has worked at many state tournaments.

This is a double honor for the league, as NSL president Dick Traen received it in 1999.

Loretto Larks

Manager: Herb Koch, Sr.

Key Losses: None so far, possibly Jason Brenny & Mike Dornsbach

1	Herb Koch, Jr.	
2	Kevin Danielson	
3	Eric Schutte	
4	Brandon Scanlon	
5	Jason Vieau	
6	Kyle Knisley	
7	Steve Heesen	
8	Mike Dornsbach	P
9	Adam Schutte	
10	Jay Schutte	
11	Shawn Danielson	P
14	Herb Koch, Sr.	SS
15	Jon Schutte	
18	Jeremy Meintsma	P
21	Rich Schumacher	RF
24	Ben Scanlon	1B
33	Nick Koch	
34	Jason Brenny	

Monticello Polecats

Manager: Dale Harris

Key Acquisitions: Jeremy Matuska, Scott Gibson, Bill Affeldt

Key Losses: Eric Nelson, Jamie Houselog

3	David Nelson	1B,OF
4	Brad Ibs	IF
5	Rick Iano	IF
6	Matt Salter	OF,P
7	Eric Mayer	IF
8	Tony Hoaglund	3B
9	Darin Brant	P,Util.
10	Joe VanCulin	C,IF
11	Chris Price	P,1B,OF
12	Jeff Kaczmarczyk	OF
14	Al Clark	P,OF
18	John Royalty	IF
19	Luke Biegler	P,IF
22	Rick Habeck	P,1B
24	Scott Weisbrod	IF,OF
25	Kyle Kraska	IF,C,P
26	Aaron Holthaus	P,IF,OF
29	Dusty Decker	P,IF
44	Mark Opatz	OF
45	Chris Rodriguez	1B,P

Albertville Villains

Manager: Paul Schumacher

Key Acquisitions: Jim Litzau, Corey Paulson, Nate Helgeson

Key Loss: Cody Martin

1	Shane McLaughlin	2B
5	Tom Wines	LF
9	Ed Shult	Util,P
11	Jesse Hackenmueller	CF
13	Troy Loomis	IF
15	Nick Carlson	OF
16	Paul Schumacher	P
18	Todd Klaers	1B
19	Andy Croteau	
22	Shane Nelson	C
23	Nate Helgeson	OF,P
31	Rob Wilkins	IF
33	Keith Nygaard	SS
34	Ramon Vega	RF
36	Jason Opsal	OF
41	Dan Anonen	
44	Jim Litzau	OF/P
47	Mike Fleischer	P
	Corey Paulson	OF/P

NSL East Class C

2000 Standings

Albertville	5	9
Monticello	5	9
Loretto	4	10
Maple Plain	1	13

Legend has it that in 1935, a certain Mr. Sianis brought his goat to a Cubs game at Wrigley Field. Mr. Sianis was turned away at the gate, and as he left the premises he placed a hex on the Cubs that they would never win the World Series. Sixty-six years later, the Billy Goat Sianis curse still has a hold on the Cubbies.

Which begs the question: anyone seen a goat around here?

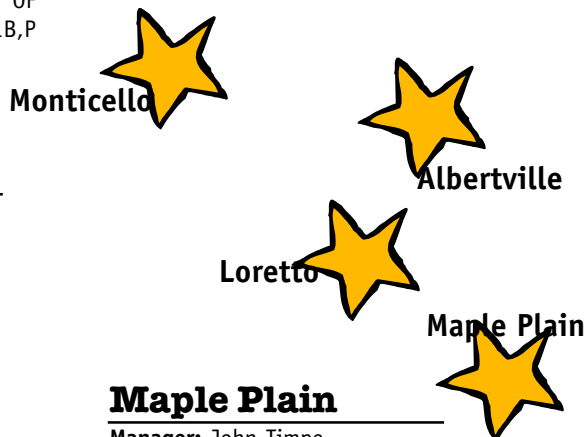
The NSL East had a Sisyphean year in 2000, winning just two games outside the division. That's why the division champs were four games below .500—and on the flip side, the last-place Central team finished a game above .500.

So...where do we start? Monticello, that's where. The Polecats had a disappointing regular season coming off their first state visit ever as a member of the NSL. They regrouped for a fine playoff run and hope to build on that. Their pitching may be a little thin as they lose Eric Nelson to hockey, but a couple players return from several-year layoffs to bolster an already solid defense. Look for better results in '01.

Albertville never really got off the schnide last year, picking up a couple late wins to tie for the division crown before the wheels fell off in the playoffs. Manager Paul Schumacher says the Villains' pitching depth will be a major concern, especially after the loss of LHP Cody Martin, but offense and defense should be basically solid.

The one thing you can say about Loretto's 2000 is that they saw it coming. Several retirements left the cupboard relatively bare, and as a result the Larks were playing catchup in virtually every game. Fortunately, they might not lose anyone in '01.

But the hard-luck story of the year was Maple Plain, whose infield got a full-scale facelift last year. They lose Pat McPherson and Paul Kunz for June, and if Brad Mazer, a star catcher at Gustavus, can't return, it might be a long summer for John Timpe's squad.



Maple Plain

Manager: John Timpe

Key Returnee: possibly Matt Duenwald

Key Losses: Pat McPherson & Paul Kunz (June), Brian Hawkinson, possibly Neil Johnson, Brad Mazer.

2	Brad Mazer	C
4	Neil Johnson	OF
6	Joe Wood	OF
7	Jason Micke	IF
8	Vince Reuter	LF
9	Paul Kunz	P,OF
10	Jay Homuth	P
11	Cory Nichols	OF
13	Chad Edworthy	1B,P
17	Andy Timpe	1B
18	Pete Dingman	
21	Jason Stephenhagen	
22	Brandon Schliinz	IF,P
23	Pat McPherson	P,OF
24	Reed Rose	P,OF
26	Mike Hokanson	C,1B
41	Mike Rippberger	P

Maple Lake Lakers

Manager: Gary Porter
Key Acquisitions: None
Key Losses: None

1	Tony Wurm	RF
2	Troy Schwartz	P
3	Pete Goodfellow	CF
4	Bill Porter	LF
5	Todd Fuller	P
6	Ryan Klingelhofer	Util.
8	Pat Meuwissen	3B
9	Bob Fobbe	P
20	Todd Demarais	P
21	Marty Johnson	1B
24	Chad Raiche	SS
43	Eric Raisanen	C
47	Dan Vandehey	2B
	Aaron Demarais	P
	Keith Jerpseth	C
	Nathan Johnson	SS

NSL Central Class B

If the rest of the NSL Central wants to break into the postseason dance, they'll have to bring a battering ram, because last year's state participants aren't opening any doors. St. Michael and Dassel-Cokato have held a firm grip on the Central, and neither one loses much in 2001.

Thanks in part to a late-season St. Michael swoon, **D-C** snuck up and grabbed the Central with a 12-3 record. The Saints have put together a strong defense and a deep pitching staff. Their legion of lefties combined for a league-leading 3.71 ERA. D-C's biggest loss, 3B Mark Raisanen, is softened by the return of Scott Bakeberg.

St. Michael bounced back to win the region and then four wild games at state. The Saints remain loaded at every position, losing only Ross Weber, and P Grant Ketel returns after a remarkable two-walk 2000.

Hutchinson and **Maple Lake** stand to vie for most potent offense. Maple Lake, which loses nobody this year, led the league with 30 HRs, while Hutch's 182 runs beat out the next-closest team by 44. The X factor for the Huskies is whether Mike Kobow returns. Kyle Messner's back, but Kobow, the indisputed ace, may be drafted into the majors.

The biggest mystery is **Delano**. The A's lose a bunch of players, and shoddy fielding cost them a few last year, but chemistry could be as good as ever.

St. Michael Saints

Manager: Roger Ketel
Key Acquisition: Jesse Scherber
Key Loss: Ross Weber

1	Kelly Hulting	IF
3	Grant Ketel	P,IF
4	Jeff Jeremiason	OF
6	P.J. Hanson	1B
8	Joe Barbeln	IF
9	Paul Schumm	P,IF,C
10	Mike Barthel	P,IF
13	Scott Lekatz	OF
14	Dave Ditty	IF
16	Joe Pope	OF
17	Chris Volkmann	OF
18	Rod Litzau	P,OF
19	Derek Brant	C
20	Billy Dehmer	1B
24	Aaron Cook	P,1B,OF
27	Scott Schulte	IF
32	Mike Freske	C,1B
	Jesse Scherber	P

Dassel-Cokato

Maple Lake

Hutchinson

St. Michael

Delano

Hutchinson Huskies

Manager: Lee Kuhl
Key Acquisitions: Chad Elston, Anthony Hanson, Brian Blomer, Jake Roepke
Key Losses: Mike Kobow (likely), Chris Henke, Mark Lickfelt, Nate Brown

3	Tony Fischer	P	R/L
4	Ed Cox	2B	L/R
5	Dale Eng	P	R/R
8	Tim Johnson	3B,1B	R/R
10	Dave Schaefer	OF	R/R
11	Pat Schommer	C,OF	S/R
13	Nick DeVries	P	R/R
21	Pete Moran	3B,1B	R/R
22	Mike Marquardt	OF,DH	R/R
23	Kyle Messner	P,DH	L/R
27	Tim Thode	IF,C	R/R
29	Dennis Piechowski	1B	R/R
34	Matt Pulkrabek	OF,P	R/R
33	Jim Farenbaugh	P	R/R
40	Isaiah Brown	Util.	R/R
44	Ryan Kaping	OF	R/R
	Chad Elston	OF	
	Anthony Hanson	OF	
	Brian Blomer	P	
	Jake Roepke	P	

Dassel-Cokato Saints

Manager: Mark Forsman
Key Acquisitions: Chris Strinmoen, Billy Aho.
Key Returnee: Scott Bakeberg
Key Losses: Mark Raisanen, Justin McKinley (Kingston)

1	Brent Opsahl	2B
3	Andrew Carlson	P,OF
6	Jeff Neutzling	DH
7	Eric Pokornowski	P,Util.
8	Noah Johnson	CF
10	Brad Salmen	LF
11	Pete Burkstrand	SS
16	John Riewer	P,1B
17	Kevin Nelson	P,OF
20	Mark Forsman	Mgr.
21	Cole Flick	Util.
22	Perry Thinesen	P
23	Matt Bergstrom	C
24	Chris Strinmoen	P
25	Jerome Lindquist	Asst.Mgr.
26	Nick Corbin	C,IF
27	Brent Pokornowski	RF

2000 Standings

Dassel-Cok.	12	3
St. Michael	11	4
Hutchinson	11	4
Maple Lake	10	5
Delano	8	7

Delano Athletics

Manager: Jack Lynch
Key Acquisitions: Mike Levins, Zach Johnson, Andy Peterson
Key Losses: Derek Falde, Andy Guden, perhaps Mike Jaunich, Paul Jaunich, Garrett Litfin

3	Kevin Jaunich	SS,OF	R/R
5	Jeff Olson	IF,OF	R/R
6	Mark Peterson	P,1B,OF	R/R
7	Mike Elsen	OF	R/R
10	Andy Petersen	P,Util.	/L
13	Dan Paulson	C,1B	R/R
15	Brent Muckenhirn	P,Ut.	R/R
19	Garret Janzen	IF,OF	R/R
21	Rob Jaunich	2B	R/R
22	Jeff Janzen	P,Util.	R/R
34	Steve Eilen	C,Util.	R/R
	Zach Johnson	IF,OF,P	R/R
	Mike Levins	1B,3B	R/R

Kingston Kings

Manager: Seth Isaacson

Key Acquisitions: Justin McKinley (D-C), Kevin Carlson, Aaron Wessman, Ryan Lundeen, Trent Morgan

Key Losses: Chris Day, Doug Nelson, Matt Penke

1	Dan Birkholz	P,OF	R/R
2	Justin McKinley	IF	
4	Trent Morgan		
5	Tom Borrell		
6	Rob Swendra	3B,1B	R/R
7	Nick Krebsbach	IF	R/R
8	Seth Isaacson	SS,P	R/R
9	Tim Dahl	C	R/R
10	Kevin Carlson		
11	Mitch Diers	2B,SS	R/R
12	Brian Peterson	P,DH	R/R
13	Craig Miller	C,3B	R/R
14	Ryan Lundeen		
15	Aaron Wessman		
16	Rick Dalen	1B,P	R/R
18	Aaron Lien	1B	R/R

Another day, another dollar, another Litchfield and a couple of followers.

The good working-class folks of the North Star West have basically lived by that saying for several years now, resigned to watching the Blue-bloods eat cake and fighting for the leftovers. Time for a revolution?

Maybe, maybe not. Litchfield has lost some firepower this year, but it remains to be seen whether the runners-up can make up the ground.

Litchfield comes back from a strong state tournament in 2000. The Blues are not just a perennial favorite in the NSL but also among all Class Cs in the state, so anything less than a title is something of a disappointment. Most of the Litch roster returns for another run, but a few departures leave major gaps.

Chief among the losses is Greg Nathe, an outfield stalwart who turned into a reliable hurler as well.

Another big departure is ace pitcher Rod Schroeder, though according to manager Rube Nathe, "We're hoping warm weather will change his mind."

Howard Lake had a chance to catch Litchfield last year but fell just short. The Orphans lose a big bat in Nick Main, and their hopes now hinge on defensive improvements and also how well inning-eating hurler Jake Streich bounces back from offseason shoulder surgery.

Kingston continues to make strides, plucking a player here and a player there from D-C and Howard Lake. The Kings should only build on last year's strong finish in the playoffs, but it all comes back to pitching. Kingston's staff badly needs to bring down its soaring 8.17 ERA in 2000. Bringing up its league-low .227 BA wouldn't hurt, either.

As for **Mound**, wait and see...but the Mallards are too established to be taken lightly.

2000 Standings		
Litchfield	9	4
Howard Lake	7	6
Kingston	2	11



Litchfield Blues

Manager: Rube Nathe

Key Acquisition: Nate Turck

Key Losses: Greg Nathe, Rod Schroeder, possibly Andy Johnson

2	Jeff Wollin	P,1B	
3	Ryan Anderson	OF	
5	Jeff Gillespie	2B	
8	Troy Urdahl	OF,P	
9	Darrin Rothstein	3B,OF	
11	Brandon Stall	P	
12	Kyle Smith	OF	
14	Russ Nathe	C,OF	
15	Dallas Stoffel	1B	
20	Matt Lehrer	OF	
22	Andy Johnson	SS	
23	Travis Johnson	P	
34	Dalen Jones	2B	
36	Daniel Estrada	CF	
38	Ed Estrada	CF	
44	Mike Lehrer	SS,IF	
	Nate Turck	SS	
	Scott Jones	OF	
	Jarmie Davis	OF	
	Kyle Sachs		

Howard Lake

Orphans

Manager: Mike Gagnon

Acquisitions: John Hanson, Derek Fogarty, Tim Sonnek

Key Losses: Nick Main, Chad Williamson

2	John Stueven	IF
4	Dan Gruenhagen	IF
7	Mark Stueven	OF
8	Dean Gagnon	P,OF
10	Mike Gagnon	2B
11	Jesse Berg	IF
12	Ben Borrell	OF,P
14	Kevin Gruenhagen	DH
16	Kevin Werner	C,OF
20	Shane Heber	P,OF
21	Jake Streich	P,OF
23	Russ Green	IF
24	Chad Gagnon	P,OF
33	Chad Burau	C,OF
34	Tom Herda	OF
35	Jay Reddemann	IF
	John Hanson	C
	Derek Fogarty	IF,OF
	Tim Sonnek	IF

Mound Mallards

Manager: Andy Snyder

2	Mike Briggs
7	Ryan Kirtz
10	Jeremy Smith
11	Jeff Harrison
15	T.J. Skinner
16	Jason Sheehy
17	Chad Brenchley
18	Jason Garvais
21	Paul Kimbler
22	Mike Bill
23	Rob Moynaugh
25	Matt Egberg
30	Joe Anderson
31	Darik Trnka
33	Andy Snyder
34	Jesse Roitenberg
37	Josh Miller
38	Chad Nelson