

The North Star League

# Spectator

Splendid Splinters edition

**Snap, crackle, pop**

## Bat-busters!

**Wood bats debut, changing the league landscape**

The old, familiar *ping* of the bat has given way to a strange, foreign *crack*. It's back to the future in the North Star League, as teams have dumped their high-tech aluminum bats for the decidedly low-tech ash and maple jobbies. Almost makes you want to fire up the old eight-track, doesn't it?

The early returns are in, and sentiment around the league pretty much echoes what NSL president Dick Traen had to say: "I'm not giddy about it, but in general I like the wood bat."

Here's what we've seen so far:

### Lower scores

To this point, teams have scored 10 or more runs in league games just 10 times—and only twice have both teams in a game hit double figures. That's a positive change for baseball, because good, entertaining baseball is maybe a 6-5 game. A game when you can remember all the individual runs being scored.

Venture a guess at how many times teams had hit double-digits by this point last year? Twenty seven.

### Fewer extra-base hits

In a related development, sheer drops in extra-base hits have been reported all over the league. A new day has dawned in the "small ball" era.

To illustrate this phenomenon, we point to the North Star Central, where there has been one triple and three homers so far. In the entire division. Or how about out

East, where they have yet to see a triple, and the division leaders in doubles have two. For further proof, refer to the table on page 2.

### Pretenders exposed

Although the switch to wood took power out of many players' hands, others have hardly missed a beat. Take the heart of the Hutchinson batting order, for example. The Huskies have a reputation for punishing the ball, and they've done nothing to damage that rep so far. Tim Thode is off to a monster start, hitting at a .636 clip with a boatload of extra-baggers. Teammates Justin Martin and Mike Marquardt are also off to predictably strong starts, as are guys like Monticello's Tony Hoaglund and Josh Holthaus and Maple Plain's Brad Mazer. In other words, the hickory stick is not enough to neutralize players like these.

### Level playing field

On an individual level, wood bats have separated the better players out. On a team level, they're more closely bunched. How else can you explain this past Sunday, when Kingston won, Mound won, St. Michael lost, and Loretto doubled up Delano? Every team in the NSL Central has two losses, and that wasn't the case at any point last year. Parity is alive and well.

### New approaches for pitchers

Wood bats have been a saving grace for



pitchers all over the league, with ERAs dropping like rocks. Not only do hurlers feel somewhat safer, they also feel more free to pitch inside—a no-no in the aluminum era. In essence, wood bats extend teams' rotations because now they might have a few more guys who can take the hill without necessarily getting clocked. Of course, we can all fear the day pitchers are instructed not to throw inside because it's getting too....

### Expensive?

What's so expensive about a wood bat, compared to these \$250 metal boomers? Not much—when you're talking one bat. But one inside pitch easily turns into one broken bat handle, which means one wood bat easily turns into a whole bunch. Apparently Howard Lake is leading the league in broken bats so far, with Maple Lake not far behind in this dubious race.

The solution to these budget-busting tendencies is to use a wood-composite bat, which is perfectly legal but virtually indestructible.

But until teams switch to those, the "old" high-tech howitzers put out by Easton are going to seem surprisingly comparatively economical.

**Three decades as Maple Plain's zookeeper**

# Timpe celebrates 30 years at the helm

Year in and year out, John Timpe mows the grass, grades the infield, and manages the ballclub in Maple Plain. It's not easy work, and it takes up most of his summer.

He might consider retiring...but his family would have nothing of it.

Just kidding, of course. Timpe, 51, is celebrating his 30th year as Maple Plain's manager—longest coaching tenure in area town-team history—and there's no way he'd want to spend his summers doing anything else. It's in his blood. "I don't think I've missed a summer at the ballpark since April of '51," he figures.

Saying Timpe was born into a baseball family is like saying Joe Buck was born into a broadcasting family, or Tyrel Ventura was born into a goofy family. Timpe's father, Don, played ball for Maple Plain and Loretto for years and eventually became president of the league. His mother, Marie, has been "about as worked up about baseball as anyone," current NSL president Dick Traen joked.

Timpe's brothers were good ballplayers, too. His wife, Nettie, is enough a part of Maple Plain baseball to be a second coach. His son, Andy, has been a catalyst for the team for a

decade and a half and just started another generation of Timpes to bring to the ballpark this past December.

You've probably already done the math. Yes, Timpe started managing at 21—and no, that doesn't make him entirely unique in the North Star League. There have been other young managers...but do they have 30 years in their tanks? Timpe says it hasn't felt like three decades for him, and he means it.

When he first started managing in 1972, the ballclub played at Orono High School and was selling its beer out of a cooler in an unattended pickup truck. Being it was school property, they had to be creative and go on the honor system. That worked for nearly two decades, but by 1989 John and his dad had teamed up with the city of Maple Plain to open a ballpark of their own. Last year, that park was named Don Timpe Field.

Today his family still runs the concessions (a new stand is under construction), but he's caretaker for everything else at the park. "I think he'd just as soon nobody else touched it," Traen said.

So John, has 30 years changed you? "Ah, I don't get as mad as I used to," he quipped. "I've calmed down since I was 21. I haven't picked up an umpire in years." Timpe continues to promote having fun at the ballpark, and that's one reason Maple Plain is never scraping for ballplayers. All the same, he also preaches the importance of his players focusing and devoting the few hours they're at the ballpark to baseball.

But that's no surprise. You spend decades creating something of a sanctuary, you do what you can to share the experience. And that's why Timpe's players come back to play for him year after year.

## ...around the horn

### Streich one...Streich two...

**Jake Streich** and **Shane Heber** of Howard Lake have made names for themselves as the best one-two punch in the league. But this year, they're just plain mean. Heber's gotten off to a preposterous start, going 4-0 with 27 Ks and a 0.87 ERA. When he's teamed up with Streich, however, the combo has proved deadly. Manager Mike Gagnon has been using Streich out of the bullpen, and the duo combined to give up just six hits and two runs against powerhouse Maple Lake on May 19. They then welcomed Buffalo back to the division with a fine six-hit 13-strikeout performance on May 31.

### ...Streich three

Word out of Howard Lake is that a few locals weren't too happy the NSL West set up so much stronger than the East.

Think they've clammed up a little now that the Orphans' first two losses came to Albertville and Kingstons?

### But that's not all

Fine pitching performances—an endangered species in previous years—have cropped up all over the league this year. Here are a few of the standouts:

- **Jeff Wollin**, Litchfield—2 runs, 9 Ks, and 1 walk in a Jack Morris-like 11-inning win at St. Michael.
- **Paul Schumacher**, Albertville—9 innings, 1 hit, 14 Ks at Howard Lake.
- **Josh Holthaus**, Monticello—6 innings, 0 earned runs as Polecats 10-runned St. Michael.

### Mound madness

Mound is off to another slow start this year, but it's not all the Mallards' fault. They've drawn ace starters Grant Ketel (St. Michael) and Jeff Wollin (Litchfield) already this year. It's a nice sign of respect, sure...but they'd prefer the wins.

### Box score line of the week

On June 2 against Maple Plain, Mound's Peter Sycks had 1 run, 5 hits, and 3 RBIs...including the game-winner.

### Swingin' singles

**Need more proof that wood bats are acting as a leaguewide sedative? Look at these surprisingly meager numbers of extra-base hits—simply not '01 statistics.**

Team	Date	Hits	2B	3B	HR
Howard Lk.	5/5	13	1	0	0
Delano	5/18	11	0	0	0
St. Michael	5/19	13	1	0	0
Albertville	5/26	13	1	0	0
D-C	5/26	17	1	1	0
Buffalo	5/26	10	0	0	0
Loretto	6/2	10	0	0	0
Monticello	6/2	12	1	0	0

The North Star League Spectator and Spectator Online are provided free of charge to fans of North Star League baseball. Please contact Erik Lien at eclien@mninter.net if you have any questions or suggestions.

# League Statistics

updated through June 3

## West

### BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
J Holthaus Mon	20	8	13	.650
J Gillespie Lit	14	3	7	.500
T Urdahl Lit	13	5	6	.462
K Werner HL	28	5	12	.429
R Vega Buf	12	2	5	.417
K Kraska Mon	22	5	9	.409
T Hoaglund Mon	20	7	8	.400
T Reuter Lit	15	1	6	.400
M Salter Mon	18	8	7	.389
G Clairmont Buf	13	2	5	.385
R Nathe Lit	22	3	8	.364
M Holman Buf	17	3	6	.353
B Bragg Lit	18	3	6	.333
C Bureau HL	25	4	8	.320
Mk Lehrer Lit	19	6	6	.316
W Olsen Buf	19	3	6	.316
K Carlson Kin	32	6	10	.313
T Herda	13	1	4	.308
M Olson Buf	13	1	4	.308
J Van Culin Mon	23	7	7	.304

### 2B Leaders

J Holthaus Mon	4
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### 3B Leaders

J VanCulin Mon	1
J Holthaus Mon	1

### HR Leaders

T Hoaglund Mon	2
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### RBI Leaders

J Holthaus Mon	9
T Hoaglund Mon	8

### TEAM Bat Ave.

Monticello	.339
Litchfield	.293
Buffalo	.280
Howard Lake	.206
Kingston	.198

### PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
S Heber HL	31	4	0	27	0.87
D Decker Mon	11	1	0	5	1.64
J Wollin Lit	27	2	0	22	1.98
S Trigg Buf	11	0	1	8	2.39
L Niemela Kin	18	0	3	4	3.37

## Central

### BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
T Thode Hut	11	3	7	.636
P Burkstrand DC	11	4	6	.545
S Eilen Del	11	1	6	.545
J Martin Hut	17	3	8	.471
C Henke Hut	15	2	7	.467
M Marquardt Hut	11	3	5	.455
M Freske StM	11	2	5	.455
E Kolles StM	19	4	8	.421
M Bergstrom DC	12	0	5	.417
R Kaping Hut	18	3	7	.389
K Krzmarzick StM	21	3	8	.381
J Janzen Del	16	3	6	.375
K Kinsely Del	16	0	6	.375
C Bammert StM	11	1	4	.364
K Paulson StM	12	2	4	.333
J Burns ML	10	2	3	.300

### 2B Leaders

T Thode Hut	11
J Martin Hut	6

### 3B Leaders

T Johnson Hut	1
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### HR Leaders

T Thode Hut	1
K Krzmarzick St M	1
K Jerpseth ML	1

### RBI Leaders

E Kolles StM	4
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### TEAM Bat Ave.

Hutchinson	.336
Delano	.289
Dassel-Cokato	.269
St Michael	.267
Maple Lake	.170

### PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
G Ketel St M	26	3	0	20	0.69
R Klingelhofer ML	17	1	1	8	1.04
J Farenbaugh Hut	14	1	1	12	1.29
J Riewer DC	7	1	0	4	1.29
J Janzen Del	23	2	0	18	1.57

## East

### BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
P Sycks Md	9	1	6	.667
J Jacobson MP	14	6	7	.500
P Harrel Md	12	1	6	.500
R Monynaugh Md	15	3	7	.467
E Schutte Lor	16	3	7	.438
V Reuter MP	13	3	5	.385
J Wood MP	11	1	4	.364
D Brant A	15	2	5	.333
J Spurzem Lor	19	2	6	.316
A Schutte Lor	16	2	5	.313
Tn Klaers A	16	1	5	.313
D Kerber A	13	0	4	.308
B Valerius A	10	0	3	.300

### 2B Leaders

J Spurzem Lor	2
E Schutte Lor	2
J Jacobson MP	2
A Snyder Md	2

### 3B Leaders

None

### HR Leaders

V Reuter MP	1
B Mazer MP	1

### RBI Leaders

B Schliinz MP	4
B Mazer MP	4
J Jacobson MP	4

### TEAM Bat Ave.

Maple Plain	.271
Loretto	.263
Albertville	.235
Mound	.218

### PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
P Schumacher A	11	1	0	17	0.82
A Ketting MP	14	1	0	12	3.86
N Koch Lor	23	1	1	9	4.30
S Heesen Md	10	0	1	9	4.50