

The North Star League

# Spectator

Down the Stretch edition

## north star standings

East	W - L	Str.	Div.	vs.B	West	W - L	Str.	Div.	vs.B
Loretto	7 - 7	2W	4-1	2-3	Litchfield	11 - 3	3W	5-1	4-1
Maple Plain	5 - 7	1L	1-3	1-2	Monticello	10 - 4	1W	6-1	2-3
Albertville	5 - 8	2W	3-1	0-5	Howard Lk.	9 - 5	2L	4-3	3-1
Mound	2-11	7L	1-4	0-4	Buffalo	5-10	1L	1-6	1-3
					Kingston	2-13	7L	1-5	1-4

W - L: Win/Loss    Str.: Streak (winning or losing)    Div.: Record against division    vs.B/C: Record against other class

## Exceeding expectations

### Loretto embraces spoiler role, seeks Eastern crown

A year ago, Loretto hung its hat on an early win over Litchfield. There wasn't much else to hang a hat on, really. The Larks never shifted out of first, and thus ended up in last. It didn't look like any reinforcements were on their way for the young squad this year, either. Manager Herb Koch was aiming for *maybe* a .500 record.

But then they started winning. June rolled around, and the Larks won at Delano. Then at St. Michael. They nearly beat Litchfield, and wouldn't you know, they had Central-leading Maple Lake on the ropes last week as well. Yeah, they've lost a few clinkers, but the bottom line is that they're reaching their goal in a mighty creative fashion.

"There were only two games that we really lost. Howard Lake outplayed us, and so did D-C (both in May)," said Koch. "Other than those, we've been in every single game. It's been a lot of fun. We're very pleased with where we're at."

They'd better be. Loretto started the year with a major question mark on the hill, but their green pitching staff has turned to gold. Nick Koch and Jeremy Meintsma are pacing Loretto with ERAs under 3.50, and the Larks even strung together *eight straight* complete games.

It's not all pitching, though. Loretto did eventually attract one newcomer, Andy Hanson, and he's pulling the weight of several by hitting at a .467 clip (outpacing the rest of the East). "It's kind of been different people hitting in the key spots in each game," Koch noted. "Eric [Schutte] ripped the cover off the ball [against Maple Plain] when we needed it."

The Larks will continue to need it, too, with the bullseye on their back for the East playoffs. Boy, have they missed that bullseye....

### Not everyone's surprised in Hutchinson

On Sunday, the Hutchinson Huskies clobbered league-leading Maple Lake 7-0, pulling within one game of first place. The win cemented their place among the NSL Central contenders, and it's the best position they've been in this late in the season since joining the North Star five years ago.

Pretty heady stuff for a team that had lost its two top pitchers and best infielder, eh?

"I'm not totally surprised," admitted Hutch manager Lee Kuhl. "I guess I thought we'd be weaker earlier, but we're about where I figured we'd be now. Maybe I'm a little optimistic."

What Kuhl knew at the beginning of the year that most of us jolly experts didn't was the health of pitcher Kyle Messner. Messner, a star pitcher for a decade before Hutch joined the North Star, had been plagued by shoulder problems over the past several years. This season, Kuhl eased Messner into the rotation and didn't start him until early June. On June 19, Messner threw 12 innings against Litchfield and struck out 18. Here's what his full season looks like so far: 31 strikeouts, 0.67 ERA. Looks like a clean bill of health to us.

"He appears to be back to where he was five years ago," Kuhl noted. "The North Star League still hadn't seen the Messner we knew."

Jim Farenbaugh has also made big strides on the mound, giving Hutch a solid starting two. Throw in some defensive improvements (especially shortstop Jordan Schwarz's impressive baptism by fire), and you can't deny the Huskies are doing better than expected.

Now they just have to take that show on the road. The Jekyll-and-Hyde Huskies have been almost unbeatable at home but quite vincible elsewhere. "We're kinda hanging in there," said Kuhl, "but there's a lot of baseball left."

## Albertville's Green fires no-hitter

It was exciting to hear that an Albertville pitcher threw a no-hitter last week. It was a little surprising to hear it wasn't Paul Schumacher.

This past Sunday, Albertville's Cory Green hurled just the sixth no-hitter in North Star League history in the Villains' 1-0 win at Mound. Green dominated throughout, racking up 10 strikeouts and just two walks as he fired aspirin past the Mallards.

Albertville needed the effort, too, as Mound's Kyle Krotzer was nearly equal to the task. He gave up four hits and no earned runs as he went all nine innings as well. So stingy were these teams that Mallard rightfielder Andy Snyder even gunned down Albertville's Tony Klaers at first on a would-be base hit.

## All-Star Game goes South

*Thank god* this one didn't end in a tie.

But you can bet we'd have handled it better if it had.

There was plenty of excitement in Maple Lake a week ago as the North Star League showcased its best in the league All-Star Game. The North fought valiantly, but four defensive errors were too much to overcome. Team South pulled out a 4-2 victory.

After three scoreless innings, Team South tallied three unearned runs in the fourth off Monticello's Rick Habeck. Hutchinson's Tim Thode's bases-loaded single scored two to get the South rolling.

Team North pulled to within 3-2 on sixth-inning RBI singles by Todd Fuller (Maple Lake) and Trent Morgan (Kingston) but never got any closer.

Jim Farenbaugh of Hutch pitched two scoreless innings for the win, while Habeck took the loss. "Everyday Jeff" Janzen of Delano nailed down the save, giving up no hits and striking out a pair in two innings of work.

It's worth noting that, unlike the MLB version, this All-Star Game didn't come with any home-run derby. Consistent with the league offensive patterns this year, the teams combined for just one extra-base hit, a double by Litchfield's Jeff Gillespie. But no fans went home grouching, either!

## ...around the horn

### Ouch!

Sunday's game between Delano and St. Michael was just another unforgettable contest in the annals of the Central division. At least one of the Athletics wishes it had been more forgettable.

As they have a million times, Delano's Jeff Janzen and St. Michael's Grant Ketel were locked in a first-rate pitcher's duel. The Saints scratched across one run in the seventh, but the A's answered it on Mark Peterson's RBI single in the ninth.

Both starters pitched into the 11th when Janzen ran into trouble. He loaded the bases with two outs before coaxing a popup to the mound. Alas, he dropped the ball, allowing a shocked Chris Volkmann to score the winning run.

Janzen's arm served him well through 11 innings. Unfortunately, his glove failed him on a single play.

### Sign of the times

Delano's always-cool website offers us yet another sign that the wood bat has been to scoring what Bud Selig is to public relations.

In its online poll this week, users are asked, "If the A's hit a home run this year, who will hit the first one?"

### Pennant races

**West**—The Western teams spent the last couple weeks jockeying for position. Locked in a virtual tie two weeks ago, Litchfield, Howard Lake, and Monticello were primed to beat each other up and grab sole possession of the lead.

For now, Litchfield holds the ring. In spite of a tough 1-0 home loss to Monticello, the Blues rebounded with wins against Howard Lake, Buffalo, and Kingston to claim the lead.

Monticello's just a game out. A loss to Hutchinson knocked them off the top rung, but their deficit is hardly insurmountable. The Polecats' upcoming game against Litchfield (reschedule pending) is their only make-it-or-break-it contest left.

Howard Lake's the team that really lost ground, falling to both Litch and Monti in the past fortnight. With games remaining against Litchfield and St. Michael, the Orphans may have left themselves too much hill to climb before the playoffs.

**Central**—The Central is still anyone's contest. Maple Lake has had a wonderful season so far, and D-C's on a white-hot streak, but it's too early to fit anyone for rings. Every team has at least three meaningful games left against division rivals, so nobody's eliminated yet.

The question is, will the real St. Michael Saints show up? St. Michael is still an asterisk on everyone's calendar, and it retains its champion's swagger, but their usual magic has been missing so far. They're lurking in fourth...but that could turn into first in a couple weeks.

**East**—There aren't as many wins to go around, but it's a fun race nonetheless. Loretto will clinch its first division title since '99 with a win over Albertville. Had it not rained on Wednesday, the Larks would already be either smoking cigars or biting their nails. Saturday's Albertville-Maple Plain battle will eliminate one.

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](mailto:eclien@mninter.net) if you have any questions or suggestions.

# East

Statistics

## BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
A Hanson Lor	30	7	14	.467
B Mazer MP	40	9	16	.400
J Jacobson MP	39	9	15	.385
J Wood MP	35	4	13	.371
E Schutte Lor	50	8	18	.360
K Danielson Lor	26	2	9	.346
B Valerius Alb	38	3	13	.342
V Reuter MP	34	7	11	.324
D Kerber Alb	47	5	15	.319
P Sycks Md	35	6	11	.314
R Wilkens Alb	42	7	13	.310
S McLaughlin Alb	43	6	13	.302

## 2B Leaders

Six tied at ..... 4

## 3B Leaders

E Schutte Lor ..... 1  
A Hanson Lor ..... 1

## HR Leaders

Ben Scanlon Lor ..... 2  
B Mazer MP ..... 2

## RBI Leaders

B Mazer MP ..... 14  
Ben Scanlon Lor ..... 10

## TEAM Bat Ave.

Loretto ..... .270  
Maple Plain ..... .268  
Albertville ..... .251  
Mound ..... .205

## GWRBI Leaders

3 tied at ..... 2

## PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
P Schumacher Alb	49	4	1	60	0.73
J Jacobson MP	41	2	1	31	3.51
N Koch Lor	54	3	3	20	4.00
S Heesen Md	27	0	2	21	6.67

# Central

Statistics

## BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
D Piechowski Hut	29	9	13	.448
J Martin Hut	27	7	12	.444
C Henke Hut	37	5	15	.405
M Marquardt Hut	43	7	17	.395
J Riewer DC	42	8	16	.381
P Burkstrand DC	51	10	19	.373
J Olson Del	27	6	10	.370
D Brant St M	41	4	15	.366
M Bergstrom DC	44	7	16	.364
T Thode Hut	39	5	14	.359
K Krzmarick StM	42	3	15	.357
T Fuller ML	40	8	14	.350
R Kaping Hut	41	9	14	.341
J Janzen Del	45	7	15	.333
K Jerpseth ML	39	7	13	.333
B Fobbe ML	25	2	8	.320
E Kolles StM	36	4	11	.306

## 2B Leaders

P Burkstrand DC ..... 6  
J Riewer DC ..... 4  
T Thode Hut ..... 4

## 3B Leaders

T Fuller ML ..... 2

## HR Leaders

T Thode Hut ..... 2

## RBI Leaders

B Opsahl DC ..... 12  
T Fuller ML ..... 11  
J Janzen Del ..... 11

## TEAM Bat Ave.

Hutchinson ..... .323  
Dassel-Cokato ..... .286  
St Michael ..... .269  
Maple Lake ..... .253  
Delano ..... .249

## GWRBI Leaders

J Barbeln StM ..... 2  
P Burkstrand DC ..... 2

## PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
R Klingelhofer ML	26	2	1	11	0.68
K Messner Hut	34	2	0	31	0.79
T Johnson DC	28	3	1	27	0.94
G Ketel StM	46	5	0	32	0.98
J Janzen Del	57	3	3	43	1.87

# West

Statistics

## BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
T Tessmar Mon	31	8	15	.484
J Holthaus Mon	50	14	24	.480
E Cox Bf	57	6	23	.404
J Van Culin Mon	63	14	25	.397
T Reuter Lit	51	7	20	.392
B Toops Lit	31	6	12	.387
M Gagnon HL	29	4	11	.379
T Urdahl Lit	35	10	13	.371
D Decker Mon	41	11	15	.366
K Kraska Mon	59	15	21	.356
T Hoaglund Mon	51	11	18	.353
A Koch HL	51	5	17	.333
K Werner HL	58	8	19	.328
M Lehrer Lit	50	12	16	.320
K Carlson Kin	55	7	17	.309
M Olson Bf	49	4	15	.306

## 2B Leaders

J VanCulin Mon ..... 9  
J Holthaus Mon ..... 7

## 3B Leaders

7 tied at ..... 1

## HR Leaders

T Tessmar Mon ..... 5  
T Hoaglund ..... 3

## RBI Leaders

T Reuter Lit ..... 17  
T Hoaglund Mon ..... 16

## TEAM Bat Ave.

Monticello ..... .337  
Litchfield ..... .274  
Buffalo ..... .248  
Howard Lake ..... .232  
Kingston ..... .212

## GWRBI Leaders

T Reuter Lit ..... 3

## PITCHING LEADERS

NAME	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
S Heber HL	49	5	1	42	0.73
J Wollin Lit	62	4	1	47	1.89
D Decker Mon	39	3	2	16	2.54
I Keen Buf	37	1	2	28	3.86
L Niemela Kin	35	0	5	16	4.79