

## The North Star League

## Spectator

Grade on a (hanging) Curve edition

**Managers won't grant exception****Litchfield player declared ineligible**

The Litchfield Blues were coming off a couple of tough losses leading up to the North Star League meeting on Monday, June 25. That night, they added one more.

First-year Blues catcher Brady Toops was declared ineligible that night by a unanimous vote of the league managers. The league determined that Toops, a New London native and first-year player at Arkansas, had not satisfied the NSL residency rules.

However, the managers did not see fit to penalize Litchfield the two victories it had gained (over Loretto and Kingston) with Toops in its lineup.

The Minnesota Baseball Association has a 25-mile-radius rule, stipulating that all players on a town team must live within 25 miles of its ballpark. Yet the North Star League has established a 15-mile radius instead, due in part to the closer proximity of the towns than in most leagues. The Toops residence is 24 miles from Litchfield.

Why did Toops want to play for Litchfield in the first place? According to Blues manager Rube Nathe, he felt that the level of competition in the NSL would keep him sharp for college ball—moreso than the leagues closer to New London.

So Toops filed a tax return and paid a rent check at a home in Grove City in order to establish local residency. This was a start, the league determined, but not quite enough. That meant the NSL would have to either grant an exception for Toops or turn him away outright. The board of managers has a tin ear for exceptions; only one has been granted in the past couple decades.

In fairness, the Blues were fully forthcoming with the situation and did not intend to deceive the league. Litchfield has no track record for dishonesty, currently boasting one of the league's highest percentages of players presently living in the town they play for. But while Toops is welcome to reapply next year, his 2001 season is over.

**Can Howard Lake hold on?****Orphaning the monkey**

If a few backs are feeling lighter in Howard Lake this week, it's because a big ol' monkey just might be sliding off.

"It's been an amazing turnaround," said Orphans manager Mike Gagnon. "Just a couple weeks ago, we lost five in a row and were really questioning ourselves. Some of the fans were second-guessing us, asking, 'What's happening with the team?'"

Call it picking up steam. Howard Lake proceeded to pick up big wins over Maple Plain and Litchfield and have since ripped off three more victories.

The Orphans, though always good, haven't won a Western title since '97. The reason is simple: Litchfield's arrival in 1998. Just last season, the Orphans went 0-for-4 against the Blues, losing a couple in excruciating fashion, and they

continued the skein by dropping their first tilt this year.

But the Orphans' 3-2 victory at home on July 1 was a tasty dose of medicine. Shane Heber went all the way, giving up just five hits. The winning margin came when Ben Borrell drove a two-run shot over the fence that glanced off Litchfield CF Dan Estrada's glove.

One big difference this year is depth. Jay Reddemann and Jake Streich are back from injuries, and the defense is stickier. Heck, in last week's doubleheader at Kingston, the Orphans switched 8 of 9 position players for the second game with no dropoff in quality.

The magic number is one. If the Orphans can knock off Mound this Friday, the West is theirs. And they'll have shaken the 800-lb. Blue gorilla.

**...around the horn** **Ump gets stoned**

Loretto's recent visit to Kingston was a memorable one, and it had nothing to do with the score. The umpire left in the seventh inning with abdominal pain. The culprit? Kidney stones.

The man in blue was turning purple by the fifth inning, calling managers Herb Koch and Seth Isaacson together to let them know he might not finish. In the seventh, he could take no more and left. The pain was so intense that he pulled over and called the hospital from his car.

All turned out well, however. The stones were removed successfully, and Loretto's Rich Schumacher finished the game behind the plate.

**So that's what it takes**

Maple Lake found out the difference

between earning normal wages and commanding seven-figure bonuses. The Lakers squared off against the town team that starts Joe Mauer, the Twins' (and Major League Baseball's) top 2001 draft choice.

So how'd the kid do? Just a regular day at the park: 6 for 6 with three doubles and a homer. Memo to Terry Ryan—sign the kid.

**Boxscore line of the week**

This one goes to Litchfield pitcher Darrin Rothstein, who showed just how much fun you can have without damaging anything. In one inning of mopup duty against Mound, Rothstein loaded the bases on two hits and a walk, but wiped the slate with three strikeouts.

If Rothstein doesn't have a nickname, here's one suggestion: "LaTroy."

# Final grades are in...

## Albertville Villains

Hitting .....	B-
Pitching .....	B+
Fielding .....	B-
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B</b>

**Comments:** The Villains would be a playoff spoiler if they had a #2 starter. But behind Paul Schumacher, there's a major void. Star hitter Ramon Vega never got it going, either.

## Dassel-Cokato Saints

Hitting .....	A-
Pitching .....	A
Fielding .....	A
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>A-</b>

**Comments:** Most teams would like D-C's staff infection, because the Saints have the deepest rotation around. Eric Pokornowski has done a great job pacing the staff. Hitting is somewhat down, but there's no reason the Saints can't go deep in the playoffs again.

## Delano Athletics

Hitting .....	B+
Pitching .....	B
Fielding .....	B-
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B</b>

**Comments:** Yet another year when being in the Central has hurt the A's. Delano is a fine team, but it doesn't have the firepower to outlast the big guns. Losing two Jaunichs hurt; Janzen and Muckenhirn have held it together.

## Howard Lake Orphans

Hitting .....	B+
Pitching .....	A
Fielding .....	B+
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>A-</b>

**Comments:** This team couldn't pick a better time to hit its stride. It's deep, it's hungry, it's almost the playoffs. And it's hard to find a better tandem than the resurgent Shane Heber and the recovered Jake Streich.

## Hutchinson Huskies

Hitting .....	A-
Pitching .....	B-
Fielding .....	B
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B+</b>

**Comments:** Obviously, the loss of Mike Kobow left a huge hole in the Huskies' rotation. Dale Eng has filled in with seven wins, but the staff is thin for such a big town. Usual suspects are pacing the offense.

## Kingston Kings

Hitting .....	C-
Pitching .....	C-
Fielding .....	C
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>C-</b>

**Comments:** We could try and paint a pretty picture, but the truth is that the Kings took a step back this year. They put an extremely young product on the field—half the lineup was under 20. Still, one win is a harsh lesson. The team has potential, but it needs continuity.

## Litchfield Blues

Hitting .....	B
Pitching .....	B
Fielding .....	B
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B</b>

**Comments:** The Blues had more gaps to fill than usual, but none were as big as the one left by ace pitcher Rod Schroeder. Offense has disappeared at inopportune times, too. After the big four of Ed and Dan Estrada, Troy Urdahl, and Russ Nathe, the bats have been wildly inconsistent.

## Loretto Larks

Hitting .....	B+
Pitching .....	C+
Fielding .....	B
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B-</b>

**Comments:** They're on the downswing of a cycle, but there's hope in Loretto. Larks have maintained a .306 BA on the shoulders of Schuttes and Scanlons. Pitching remains thin.

## Maple Lake Lakers

Hitting .....	A-
Pitching .....	B+
Fielding .....	B+
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B+</b>

**Comments:** Hitting isn't a question with Maple Lake, but the pitching has held up well. The heart of the Lakers' lineup is as strong as any. Depending on how pitching holds up, they're on the brink of a state berth this year.

## Maple Plain

Hitting .....	B+
Pitching .....	B-
Fielding .....	B
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>B</b>

**Comments:** In spite of a spate of injuries, Maple Plain has maintained a team batting average over .300. But the 8.35 team ERA is a killer. Neil Johnson has paced the lineup.

## Monticello Polecats

Hitting .....	A
Pitching .....	B
Fielding .....	A-
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>A-</b>

**Comments:** Finally proving themselves a top-flight team. Polecats are young, but they've run away with the division on the strength of a solid lineup paced by Josh Holthaus' return.

## Mound Mallards

Hitting .....	C
Pitching .....	C-
Fielding .....	B
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>C</b>

**Comments:** It's been a rough welcome for the Mallards. They came into the league hoping for a few more wins, but those never materialized. Pitching and hitting both proved thin.

## St. Michael Saints

Hitting .....	A
Pitching .....	A
Fielding .....	A
<b>Overall .....</b>	<b>A</b>

**Comments:** A few roster losses? Bah. This team is in the sort of groove that brought it the state Class C championship in '97. Kyle Krzmarzick has been a nice shot in the arm.