

SPECTATOR

May 1st, 2026



A NEW CHALLENGER ENTERS THE LEAGUE

A familiar face has joined the North Star League – Once a frequent non-league opponent over the years for several of the league’s teams, matchups with Kimball now mean a whole lot more. After a long stint with the Central Valley League, the Express enter the NSL ready to compete. The Class “B” half of the league got a taste last season during the District 6B tournament, in which the

Express defeated Maple Plain, St. Martin, and Maple Lake en route to a State Tournament berth. Where will they finish in the North Star League in 2026? Take a look at the manager’s poll on the next page to find out.

IT’S BUFFALO BULLDOGS, NOT AUFFALO AULLDOGS!

After spending the 2025 season in Class “A”, it’s now official. The Bulldogs are back in Class “B”, making it 6 teams in Class “B” and 7 teams in Class “A”.

2025 STANDINGS VS 2026 MANAGER'S POLL

A new year means optimism, and we're not just talking about the beautiful ballpark in Litchfield. The start of a new season gives teams a chance to repeat last season's successes, get revenge on their NSL foes, and grow to new heights. In this next section of The Spectator, we'll compare last season's standings to where the league's managers believe things will shake out at the end of the 2026 regular season.

RANK	TEAM	RECORD
1	Buffalo	16-0
2	Hutchinson	12-4
3	Loretto	10-6
4	Litchfield	10-6
5	Dassel-Cokato	9-7
6	Maple Lake	8-8
7	Howard Lake	7-9
8	Rockford	6-10
9	Cokato	6-10
10	Maple Plain	5-11
11	Hamel	5-11
12	Waverly	2-14

CLASS C RANK	TEAM	RECORD
1	Litchfield	8-2
2	Dassel-Cokato	7-3
3	Howard Lake	6-4
4	Rockford	5-5
5	Cokato	4-6
6	Waverly	0-10

CLASS B RANK	TEAM	RECORD
1	Hutchinson	7-1
2	Loretto	5-3
3	Maple Lake	4-4
4	Maple Plain	2-6
5	Hamel	2-6

Buffalo finished with a perfect 16-0 record on the regular season when it came to league play. In Class "B", Hutchinson ended up taking the regular season crown with their only blemish being a loss to Hamel in a two-day postponed affair. Class "C" was a race to the final weekend of games with Litchfield coming out on top. Can we expect more of the same? Will new players emerge? What will 2026 have in store?

2025 STANDINGS VS 2026 MANAGER'S POLL CONT.

RANK	TEAM
1	Buffalo
2	Hutchinson
3	Maple Lake
4	Loretto
5	Kimball
6	Litchfield
7	Dassel-Cokato
8	Howard Lake
9	Hamel
10	Rockford
11	Maple Plain
12	Cokato
13	Waverly

CLASS C RANK	TEAM
1	Litchfield
2	Dassel-Cokato
3	Howard Lake
4	Maple Plain
5	Rockford
6	Cokato
7	Waverly

CLASS B RANK	TEAM
1	Buffalo
2	Hutchinson
3	Maple Lake
4	Loretto
5	Kimball
6	Hamel

Buffalo is expected to retain the throne and not only win the Class “B” portion of the league, but to also be crowned champs once again. On the Class “C” side of things, the top three are expected to hold their ground with Litchfield repeating. Plenty of wrinkles in the fold, here. For one, you have Maple Plain moving down from “B” to “C”. Last season, the Diamond Devils were on the wrong side of a 1-0 loss to Maple Lake in a game that would have qualified them for the State Tournament. With a target on Buffalo’s back, can Hutchinson and the rest of the “B” teams overtake the Bulldogs at the top of the mountain? One thing is for sure: You don’t want to miss NSL baseball in 2026.

2026 TEAM OUTLOOKS

Let's focus on each individual team for a minute. Here's some important information on each NSL team, and in their own words, what each of the manager has to say about their team in 2026.

BUFFALO BULLDOGS

- **Manager**
 - Corey Braun (6yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Jon Euerle, Mark Benzer
- **Home Field**
 - Bentfield Mills Park
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Kevin Kray
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Broc Mutterer, Luke Carnoy
- **Team Strength**
 - Hitting
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - Hoping to get a top half seed heading in to the District Tournament and earn a bid to the State Tournament.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Friday, July 17th vs. Maple Lake. Maple Lake always brings a nice crowd and it could be a key game late in the season for District seeding.

COKATO KERNELS

- **Manager**
 - Nick Corbin (14yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Adam Barnaal
- **Home Field**
 - Veterans Memorial Field at Brooks Lake Park
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - N/A
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Jackson Schrupp, Jackson Yanke, Josh Massingham
- **Team Strength**
 - Left-handed hitting and speed.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - Qualify for the Region Tournament

- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Friday, June 5th vs. D-C. Bill Aho Hall of Fame Induction.

DASSEL-COKATO SAINTS

- **Manager**
 - Jordan Flick (4yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Jeff Neutzling
- **Home Field**
 - Saints Field
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Tyler Lenz, Chester Berggren
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Noah Halonen: Has had success as a position player and at the plate and has improved year-over-year as a pitcher. This could be the season he really puts it together as a dangerous two-way threat.
 - Jayce Olthoff recorded a career-high in plate appearances in 2025 and hit .295 while reaching base at a .370 clip. He's a young player with a veteran-like approach and could be a big difference maker in 2026.
 - Josiah Bullivant has shown flashes of power at the plate and has delivered in clutch moments. A versatile player, he's primed to take another step forward for the team.
- **Team Strength**
 - Pitching is always something we rely on to keep us in ballgames. We have an assortment of arms that will all contribute throughout the year. Easier said than done, but if we can play clean defense and drive in runners in scoring position, we should end up right where we want to be.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - After finishing just one win shy of a State berth, the team is itching to get back out on the field. While still a "young" team, the majority of our players have at least a few seasons under their belt. A solid veteran core leads a team that has the experience in big games to take another step forward and break our State Tournament spell, and that is our ultimate goal.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Darwin Night! Ballpark BBQ, twine ball races, and two teams connected by the town in-between. It's always a packed house and you can expect a fun game between the Saints and Blues. Celebrate all things Darwin on Wednesday, July 1st!

HAMEL HAWKS

- **Manager**
 - Jeff Ruhr (2yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - N/A
- **Home Field**
 - Fortin Field
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - N/A
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Jack Lewin, John Delange
- **Team Strength**
 - Hitting
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - .500 record.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - June 28th vs. Loretto. It's our 100 year celebration. Loretto is 100 years old as well.

HOWARD LAKE ORPHANS

- **Manager**
 - Shane Heber (3yr) - *2025 NSL Manager of the Year*
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Chad Burau, Matt Donovan
- **Home Field**
 - Memorial Park
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Mike Mumford
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Our young pitching staff.
- **Team Strength**
 - Pitching and defense.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - Competing for a State Tournament Spot in a tough Region.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Good Neighbor Days vs. Winsted. Great crowd and fireworks.

HUTCHINSON HUSKIES

- **Manager**
 - Mike Kutter (14yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Mike Kobow, Jake Wendland

- **Home Field**
 - Veteran's Memorial Field
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Alex Flores, Nathan Schumann, Hayden Welsh
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Nathan Thode, Brady Larson
- **Team Strength**
 - The core of our offense returns along with new additions to the infield, defensively. We'll have some improved starting pitching.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - I expect to contend for the top spot in the NSL with our veteran players and new additions. Players we added last year will have some bigger roles in the field and at the plate.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Friday, June 26th vs. Maple Lake. Always a fun rivalry with the Lakers. Followed is a Sunday afternoon game in Maple Lake on the 28th. A very interesting weekend for NSL standings and District 6B!

KIMBALL EXPRESS

- **Manager**
 - Tom Marquardt (39yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Brian Marquardt, Brooks Marquardt, Scott Marquardt
- **Home Field**
 - Veterans Memorial Field
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Noah Gordon, Riley Blanc, Henry Marquardt
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Clay Faber, Jaxon Marquardt, Cody Leither, Riley Blanc
- **Team Strength**
 - Good mix of youth along with veteran leadership.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - Excited to compete in the North Star League and District 6B
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Maple Lake - Always have had a connection with the Maple Lake team over years past.

LITCHFIELD BLUES

- **Manager**
 - John Anderson (10yr)

- **Manager**
 - Tom Marquardt (39yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Eric Hulterstrum
- **Home Field**
 - Optimist Park
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Caden Schossow: A young man who moved to Litchfield from Perham.
 - Joe Pennertz: 2019 Litchfield graduate.
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Hopefully the entire lineup! haha. Excited to see each young player continue to develop and grow.
- **Team Strength**
 - We've really been blessed with starting pitching, and that won't change this year. Rotation should be solid with Avery Liestman, Owen Boerema, and Joey Hyde leading the charge.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - After back-to-back years of reaching State, the Blues hope to continue that trend. Our goal is to reach State, compete, and push to be a final weekend team.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - I would say our Watercade Friday night game, which is July 10th this year. It's the town festival, lots of buzz in the air, fireworks postgame, and live bands at the bars later at night.

LORETTO LARKS

- **Manager**
 - Herb Koch (47yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Kent Koch
- **Home Field**
 - Arnold Klaers Field
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Keenan Hodgkin and Nick Kulseth are returning.
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Ben Leuthner
- **Team Strength**
 - Pitching and defense.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - Excited to return Keenan (former league MVP) and Nick Kulseth from past State Tournament teams. We are returning the entire pitching staff and have added some good young depth this year.

- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Wednesday, June 17th - Fox 9 Town Ball Tour.

MAPLE LAKE LAKERS

- **Manager**
 - Riley Decker (10yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Matt Bergstrom
- **Home Field**
 - Irish Stadium AKA "Da Thundadome"
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Zach Zanetti: St. Michael grad, currently at Gustavus.
 - Jackson Clapp: Maple Lake HS
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Hunter Malachek is returning from a 2025 ACL tear.
 - Jarrett Faue is looking for major relief innings.
 - Matt Bergstrom is looking to make high school and college stars look silly at the prime age of 50. He may steal a base or two.
- **Team Strength**
 - I would say our team strength would be our depth and experience. We have had the same core of players for 10+ years now. We are able to deal with adversity and still accomplish our goals each year. We had to deal with lost of injuries last year to a lot of our key players.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - We always have the goal of reaching the State Tournament and then anything can happen. Just have to find a way to make it.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Friday, July 10th vs the St. Paul Snowmen. It will be the first ever matchup between the two teams and it's free ice cream night. Snowmen, ice cream, and baseball... What more could you want?!

MAPLE PLAIN DIAMOND DEVILS

- **Manager**
 - John Timpe (55yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Mike Rippberger
- **Home Field**
 - Timpe Field
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - James Stigman

- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Pitchers: Brady McPherson, Jonah Smithson
 - Hitters: Teague Collings, Colton Peters, TJ Carlson
- **Team Strength**
 - Our pitching and defense.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - With pitching staff improvements and our young players having another year of experience, we should finish somewhere in the middle of the pack. We expect to get some more production from the bottom of the lineup this season.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - The final game of the regular season because of all the playoff scenarios. It could come down to the winner earning one of the top spots in the region and the loser playing in the league playoff the following week.

WAVERLY STINGERS

- **Manager**
 - Robb Moynagh (14yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Brady Boeddeker
- **Home Field**
 - The Hornets' Nest
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Zach Stemp, Blaise Stanley, Gage Hoffer, Dominic Winnie
 - Conor Cote returns after a couple years away. He adds depth at the catcher position. Robb is known for finding guys from obscure places to sign and contribute, so we should see additional signees to come before the 6/30 deadline.
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Mitch Granum is a senior at HLWW this year. He was limited in appearances last year due to legion baseball but showed flashes of great defense and a good swing. He brings youth and speed to the diamond. We look for him to breakout this year as a regular in the lineup alongside Boeddeker in the outfield.
- **Team Strength**
 - Continuity. The Stingers are bringing back almost everyone from 2025. Keeping the same group of players together was a struggle in the early years, but having the same core group going on 4 years can only help the Stingers get over the hump.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - We look to be competitive again this year. We won back-to-back tournaments last year in Roscoe and Rosen, but had a late season

- collapse after those two weeks with a lot of success. The stingers are bringing back their core led by Monyagh, Boeddekker, and Smothers. We are also returning our ace Bill Aamodt, Andrew Moynagh, Jacob Noor, Collin Smith, Carter Scanlon, Emmett Bekkala, and 2025 All-Star Travis Bickmann. The Stingers have shown they can swing the bat with almost any team in the NSL, as proven in last years wins over Hutchinson and Maple Lake (first win ever against the Lakers), but struggle with pitching and defensive consistency. The defense improved in 2025, but it needs to be more consistent to keep opposing teams under 10 runs regularly.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Memorial Day, May 25th - 5pm vs. Howard Lake at The Hornets Nest. This game is a rivalry game due to proximity of our home fields being 4 miles apart and being the same school district. When the two teams typically play in Waverly, the ballgames have been back and forth. This should be a good competitive game again this year

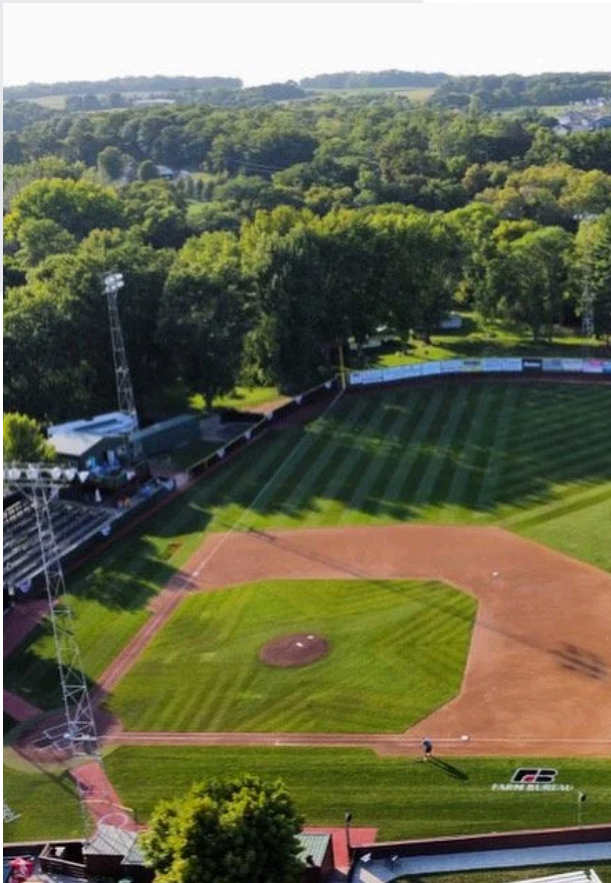
ROCKFORD CROWS

- **Manager**
 - Kevin Engebretson (5yr)
- **Asst. Coaches**
 - Ron Walters
- **Home Field**
 - Rockford High School
- **New Signees as of 5/1**
 - Owen Schuster, Easton Ridlehoover, Andrew Oldenburg, Michael Hucovski, Jack Ortale
- **Breakout Candidates**
 - Max Edwards
- **Team Strength**
 - Youth is our strength and weakness, still.
- **Team Outlook/Expectations**
 - Looking to try and get double digit wins again this season and make the Region Tournament for our second time. More teams will mean it's tougher to make the top 8.
- **If a fan could pick only one of your team's home games to attend in 2026, which game should they choose and why?**
 - Wednesday, July 8th vs. Loretto. The teams are geographically close and there are some older Rockford guys on the team. It is always fun to play them, even though we have had some bad games in the score column, we always look forward to playing them.

REGION 6C AND DISTRICT 6B

The season is just kicking off, of course, but let's travel to the future for a minute to talk about the postseason. It is, after all, what the North Star League teams are playing for all summer long.

This year's Region 6C tournament will be held at Saints Field in Dassel. No stranger to hosting big events, you can be assured that the



Pumpkin Patch will have the field looking and playing tight come August. Dates for the tournament are August 6-9 and 13-15.

The District 6B tournament will be hosted by another team and field that is used to big events and big crowds. Maple Lake's Irish Stadium is where you can find all the action from August 7-9 and 14-16.

Stay tuned for formats, brackets, and more in the next edition of the North Star League Spectator.

This season, the Spectator will be released once a month, with potential special editions here and there. For up to date information, please visit northstarleague.org or follow us on X @NorthStarLeague. Catch you in June!



