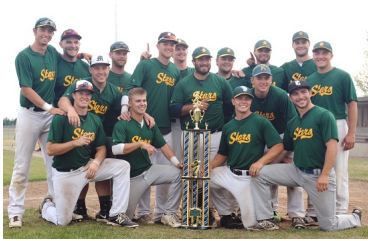


Fairfax claims IABA state title

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 14 August 2017 04:44 - Last Updated Monday, 14 August 2017 05:05



NORWAY - Many of them have followed different paths since they played baseball at Kennedy High School, but one thing has remained the same for these former Cougars.

They are still winners.

The Fairfax Stars, boasting a lineup stuffed with Kennedy grads, captured the Iowa Amateur Baseball Association state title Sunday with a 5-4 victory over Red Top in the championship game at Norway.

It's believed to be the first state title for Fairfax, according to tournament directors, and it came with nine Kennedy products on their postseason roster.

They cut their teeth as baseball players for Kennedy Coach Bret Hoyer, who has run one of the best programs in the state for 25 years.



"We learned how to play the game the right way," said Cody Bell, the tournament MVP. "Never get down on yourself."

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"It's kind of just togetherness. We stuck together the entire season."

Fairfax ran away with the Iowa Valley League title this season, then compiled a perfect 6-0 record in the state tournament with a string of clutch victories along the way.

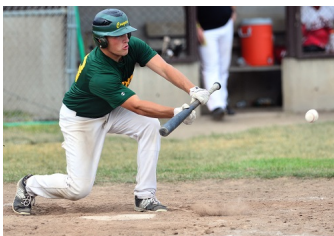
Their last four wins in the tournament were all one-run affairs with verdicts over Red Top (2-1), Walford (3-2), Norway (3-2) and Red Top again (5-4).

"It's awesome," said Chico Lizarraga, another Kennedy grad who finished second in the MVP balloting. "I'm super-proud of everyone on this roster. Everyone played a role in getting us here today."

Lizarraga, an all-star catcher, is currently an assistant coach at Kennedy and knows the "Kennedy Way" of playing ball.

"I think just going out there and playing the game with passion every day and just doing the right thing," he said. "Coach Hoyer has instilled that in every player he coaches."

Hoyer saw Fairfax edge Norway in the semifinals Sunday and was proud of his former players.



Fairfax trailed, 4-3, heading into the bottom of the sixth inning of the championship game against Red Top, but Bell and Lizarraga led off with back-to-back walks to begin the final rally.

Jacob Henry, another Kennedy grad, bunted them to second and third and John Thomas tied

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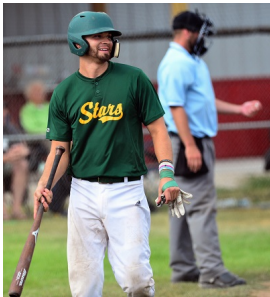
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the game, 4-4, with an RBI grounder to second base. Adam Stolley, a Linn-Mar grad, then drove in the go-ahead run with a sharp single to center field on an 0-2 pitch with two outs.

Bell retired the side 1-2-3 in the top of the seventh and the celebration began.

"It feels great," said Bell. "We've been working for this all year. This is something that's meant a lot to all of us."



Fairfax replaced Red Top as the IVL and IABA champions this season with a young club.

"It was pretty exciting for us the whole time," said Blake Hargens, another Kennedy grad who pitched a strong game in the semifinals. "Fairfax has never been seen as the top team, and then to come out with guns blazing was exciting."

Hargens tossed a complete game with eight strikeouts in the 3-2 triumph over Norway in the semifinals. It was 3-0 heading into the seventh inning, but JT Sole belted a two-run homer for the Bandits to make it exciting before Hargens closed the door.

The Fairfax Stars also have a strong connection to Mount Mercy University. Hargens began his college baseball career at Southeastern Community College before moving to Mount Mercy this past season, extending the Kennedy/Mount Mercy bond on the club.