

Fastpitch

SOFTBALL

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Fall 2005

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*Rising Star Casey Halstead Delivers;
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Changing of the Guard at ISC II

Article by ISC II Commissioner Blair Setford; Photos by Maddy Flanagan of Fastpitchwest.com



Changing of the Guard at ISC II: In just three short years, a handful of ISC II teams had established themselves as the leaders of the pack, most notably the two-time defending champion Harriston, ON Mercury's team and the 2005 No. 1 seed Tavistock, ON Smully's Merchants clubs who were the finalists in the 2004 ISC II Tournament of Champions. But, 2005 was witness to a changing of the guard as Harriston and Tavistock fell in the quarter-finals to the two teams who would eventually meet to decide the championship. Port Elgin, ON Blue Devils, led by the pitching of 24-year-old Rob Fawcett and 20-year-old Dan Martin, and Elmira, ON Cubs, riding the right arm of emerging star Casey Halstead, collectively knocked off the defending champions, this year's top-ranked team, last year's top-ranked team and the 2002 champion. Quite a feat for a pair teams making their

inaugural appearances at the ISC II Tournament of Champions. Ultimately, Elmira would prevail as the 2005 ISC II Champions, capping an outstanding six days of fastball with an 8-1 win over the Blue Devils. The Cubs would allow only two runs in their four playoff games after going undefeated in four round-robin matches. All week, the Cubs combined clutch hitting with timely home runs, flawless defense and great pitching, putting together the whole package in their run to the title. And, nowhere was this more in evidence than in the championship game as virtually every runner Elmira put on base would come around to score. With sparkplugs Matt Reinhart and Josh Brohman at the top of the order setting the table for the

likes of Mike Harnock, Lyndon Grovum and Brad Thomson, Blue Devil outfielders were kept busy as every Cubs starter had at least one hit. With catcher Jeff Franklin providing veteran savvy, Elmira features several graduates of the Waterloo Hallman Twins Junior Men's program, including co-manager Thomson, who belted a 300-foot, two-run home run in the bottom of the third inning to set the Cubs on their way. With the win in the championship game, Casey Halstead ran his record to 6-0 for the tournament to go along with one save. Halstead racked up 36 strikeouts in 37 2/3 innings, allowing only 23 hits and five walks with an ERA of 0.23, earning both the Most Outstanding Pitcher Award and the Most Valuable Player Award. In the semi-finals, Elmira eliminated the winner of the first ISC II tournament, Alvinston, ON Indians, 2-0 on the strength of a second inning



home run by Chris Mink and an RBI single by Thomson on the heels of a triple by Grovum. Ryan French went five strong innings before giving way to Halstead.

Port Elgin advanced by the same 2-0 score, topping no. 3 seed Ottawa, ON Team Easton Thunder. Centerfielder Aaron Whitney was the hero for the Blue Devils, taking a potential game-tying home run away from Ottawa pinch hitter Todd Fraser in the bottom of the seventh, crashing through the breakaway fence to make the catch for the final out of the game.

The Blue Devils made a similar escape in their quarter-final, as All-Tournament outfielder Mike Riley, with his back to the fence, hauled in a long, high fly ball by the Harriston Mercury's Aaron Small to send the two-time champions packing.

Teams from Ontario, Canada, would take seven of the top eight places as Niagara, ON Snappers were fifth, Tavistock seventh and Harriston eighth.

Hermann, MO Black Gold, led by ace pitcher Eric Steinbeck, was the top American entry, finishing sixth. Steinbeck was named to the All-Tournament team for the second year in a row, striking out 74 batters in 48 1/3 innings including 18 in a 3-2 11-inning loss to the Snappers in round robin play.

Black Gold knocked off no. 5 seed Palermo, ON Athletics 2-0 in the opening round of the playoffs and edged Pool F winner Kenosha, WI Earl's Club 2-1 before falling 5-1 to Ottawa in the



quarter-finals.

A pair of last minute dropouts meant that 38 teams from 16 states and provinces took part in the fourth edition of the ISC II Tournament of Champions, held in its entirety at Casper Park in Chippewa Falls, WI, as the rain squashed the planned move to the ISC World Tournament facility for the semi-finals and final.

Several improvements have been made to Casper Park since it hosted the NAFA World Series in 2003, including concrete pads around the backstops for all four diamonds, grass in between the four fields and the addition of several tents for shade.

Parks Director Bill Faherty and his crew deserve a long, loud round of applause for their work, particularly after torrential rains washed out play late Thursday afternoon. When the rains finally abated, crews worked most of the night to have four diamonds ready for play at 8:00 am Friday morning for the four quarter-final games.

Among the first-time participants were Oswego, NY McKie Sports, last year's ASA "A" Champion. McKie finished 12th with a 3-3 record, falling 2-1 to Tavistock in the second round of the single-elimination playoff bracket.

McKie manager Mike Cutro came away from the tournament highly impressed.

"It's good caliber ball from the 40th team right up to the first team and that's why we're here: to see those number one teams. We're already looking to book our hotel rooms for 2006."

Another team leaving with a good first impression was Memphis, TN Posse, the

runner-up in last year's ASA "B" national championship. Player/manager Correy Gex noted it's particularly exciting to play many of the Canadian teams that most U.S. teams can only read about on the Internet.

The Posse finished second in their division behind Elmira and knocked out Cobourg, ON Stingers in the first round, before dropping a 4-2 decision to Ottawa in the second round. Team Easton Thunder starter Corey Costello hit a tournament high of 76 mph on the radar gun in that game.

Other pitchers well north of the 70 mph mark included the Thunder's Dan Konkle at 75, Alvinston's Doug Charlton at 74 and Steinbeck, French and Dan Bradley of Ottawa at 73.

With the difference in pitching distance factored in, a 70 mph pitch in fastpitch softball is the equivalent of about a 90 mph pitch in baseball.

The radar gun readings were a popular feature for the thousands of listeners that tuned in to the 2005 ISC II Tournament of Champions through BallParkRadio.com. With 26 games broadcast over the course of six days, including 11 of the final 15 playoff games, coverage of the tournament was extensive.

"We covered 19 of the top-20 ranked teams over the course of the tournament, and 26 teams were featured in at least one broadcast," said BallParkRadio.com executive producer Jim Flanagan. "We received over 400 emails during the week from fans across North America and even a few from Europe."

ISC II Commissioner Blair Setford, who doubles as a commentator on many of the

broadcasts, said the internet streaming is a big hit with the players and teams, too, with many listening to games in their hotels when not at the park. "The players can't wait to hear the games when they get back home."

New this year were listening stations in the beer garden, allowing teams and spectators to not only watch a game in progress but listen to it as well.

Joining Flanagan and Setford on the broadcast crew were Lance Winn, Joe Todd, Brett Bresnahan and sideline reporter Chris Bach. Archive files of all the broadcasts are available at www.ballparkradio.com, the companion site to Flanagan's www.fastpitchwest.com. Photos, including Fastpitch cover photo, by Maddy Flanagan of Fastpitchwest.com.



Among the tournament highlights:

- Niagara, ON Snappers defeating Hermann, MO Black Gold 3-2 in an 11-inning thriller that was scoreless through 10 innings. Peter Dobbin scored the winning run in the top of the 11th on a suicide squeeze executed by Mike Bateman.
 - Denver, CO Colorado Rage edging Mankato, MN Fisher Group 4-3 in 13 innings.
 - Port Elgin, ON Blue Devils defeating the 2004 NAFA AA Champion Galesville, WI Wilber Lime 5-4 with a run in the bottom of the seventh.
 - Denmark, WI Circle Tap Lumberjacks rallying for four runs in the bottom of the seventh to defeat the host Chippewa Falls, WI Sawdust City team 5-4 in a first-round playoff game.
 - Reasnor, IA RPMs pitcher Rod Bunge gutting out a 2-1 10-inning win over St. Paul, MN Vannelli's/Rice Street after coming out of a game earlier in the day due to painful shin splints.
 - Kenosha, WI Earl's Club scoring a comeback 6-5 win over Bridgeport, ON Braves in the bottom of the seventh inning with every other team on hand to watch immediately prior to the opening ceremonies on Sunday evening.
 - Scott Young hitting a dramatic solo home run in the top of the sixth inning for the game's only run as the Niagara Snappers edged Appleton, WI The Bar of Appleton 1-0.
 - Ottawa, ON Team Easton Thunder twice rallying from two-run deficits to beat St. Paul, MN ASB Villard 5-4 in eight innings.
 - Memphis, TN Posse and Regina, SK Century 21 Angels trading seven runs through three extra innings before the Posse finally won 7-6 in 10 innings.
 - Tavistock, ON Smully's Merchants' Fred Follings pitching a five-inning perfect game in an 8-0 win over Lloydminster, AB PWM Steel Scope Dodgers.
- The 2006 ISC II Tournament of Champions heads north of the border to Kitchener, Ontario, returning to the site of the inaugural ISC II tournament back in 2002. Elmira will be back to defend their championship and record interest is expected from the always strong Ontario teams along with the competitive Michigan, Pennsylvania and upstate New York clubs. The task for the American teams, along with those from western Canada will be to complete the changing of the guard and wrest the ISC II title from Ontario.