

Fastpitch

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ISC II Championship

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by Blair Setford

After being heartbroken in Fargo in 2004 when they lost in the finals, the Tavistock, ON, Merchants were crowned ISC II Champions in 2006, fulfilling a quest that began for many on the team in 2002.

"It's a lot easier to appreciate winning the tournament after losing in the finals in 2004," said Tavistock pitcher Steve Cook, one of a number of Merchants who've been with the team for the long haul.

"It was a huge letdown in 2004, knowing how hard it is to get to that point and thinking to ourselves that we may have wasted our opportunity because it may never happen again, but luckily we got back to that point and we made the most of it," said catcher Ross Herold.

Tavistock is one of only a handful of teams to contest all five ISC II championships since the inception of the tournament in 2002. With an



Tavistock, ON Merchants celebrate winning the 2006 ISC II Tournament of Champions.

overall record of 27-6 at the ISC II Tournament of Champions, the Merchants are considered among the elite teams in the ISC II division.

While they flew under the radar screen of most ISC II watchers during the 2006 season, they put it all together in Kitchener, going 3-1 in their division to earn a first-round bye.

But there are no easy games in the playoff round of the ToC, and Tavistock drew the Elora, ON, Wellington Brewers, who defeated the Merchants in the finals of the tough southwestern Ontario qualifier tournament in June.

With an imposing lineup of impressive hitters one through nine, the Brewers were among the favourites headed into the ToC, but Ryan Cummings not only shut them out, he tossed a no-hitter.

Cummings was a revelation for Tavistock, finishing with a 5-0 record including two no-no's and two one-hitters to snag the Most Outstanding Pitcher Award.

"There could have been a number of pitchers holding the Top Pitcher plaque because of the numbers put up this year," said Cummings. "Receiving it will be a reminder in the years to come of the kind of week that we had."

"Ryan was absolutely a key addition for us," said Cook. "Throughout the year he stepped up and proved that he is on his way to becoming

an elite pitcher."

"That guy (Cummings) was unbelievable," said Herold. "It has been a long time since I've caught someone who was 'on' for such a long stretch. He was hitting spots all week."

Both Cummings and Cook credit Herold for stellar work behind the plate, helping them elevate their games.

With the Elora ghost excised, Tavistock was matched up with the hard-hitting Port Elgin, ON, Blue Devils in the quarter-finals. Again, Cummings was magic, spinning a one-hitter for his second shut-out win of the day.

As Friday dawned sunny and hot, standing in the way of a return to the finals was the Perkasie, PA, Rise, the lone remaining American team. With veteran Mike Smith toeing the rubber, the Rise had atoned for a dismal ToC in 2005, winning their division and eliminating Reading, PA, Bob Hoffman's and Kitchener, ON, Phoenix Outlaws to reach the final four.



Tavistock, ON Merchants



Micksburg, ON Twins



Ryan Cummings was named the Top Pitcher with a 5-0 record.

The Rise managed to do something that most other teams hadn't during the week, scoring two early runs against Cummings to take the lead. However, back-to-back home runs by number nine batter Brad Roth and lead-off hitter Kevin Thompson turned the tide as the Merchants would cruise to an 8-2 win.

On the other side of the draw, Palermo, ON, Athletics were doing what they've done so many times in the past, handing the ball to veteran righty Gord Scott and letting him lead the team to the championship game. Scott befuddled batters all tournament with an array of change-ups and off-speed curves that magnified the velocity on his drop and rise.

In a tough pool with Port Elgin, Alvinston, ON Athletics, Grande Prairie, AB, Pride and Harrisburg, PA, Power, Palermo finished 2-2, but eliminated Glencoe, ON, Astros in a first round game punctuated by a Glenn Inglehart home-run that cleared the championship fence, the perimeter fence and short-hopped a passing transport truck on Homer Watson Blvd. some 325 feet from home plate.

In the second round, Palermo completed the most improbable comeback of the year. Down 5-0 in the sixth inning to the defending champion Elmira, ON, Cubs, the Athletics erupted for eight

runs, lead by tournament all-star Peter Dobbin who had two hits in the fateful sixth. Scott, who started the game and gave up the five runs, came back in after reliever Chad Reed pinched a nerve to record the final out via strikeout with the bases loaded in the bottom of the seventh.

After eliminating a scrappy South Lebanon, PA, TNT team on



Corey Costello receives congratulations from ISC II Vice-President Bob McGowan on setting the ISC II strikeout record.

Thursday night, Palermo would have to face the new ISC II strikeout king Corey Costello and the Micksburg, ON, Twins in their semi-final.

Costello opened his tournament with a perfect game, striking out a tournament record 20 batters against Orangeville, ON, Resolve Kings. He followed that up with a 20-strikeout no-hitter against Reading and fanned 15 against Elmira as Micksburg went 3-1 in their pool.

The strikeouts continued as Costello faced off against young Czech flamethrower Jonas Mach and the Thomson, IL, Area Merchants in a first-round playoff game. Down 2-0 early, the Twins rallied to win in nine innings. Micksburg also came from behind to eliminate

Alvinston, scoring five late runs to win 5-4.

Costello, named the 2006 ToC Most Valuable Player, set the strikeout record at 86 with his first "K" of their quarter-final game against Ashland, OH, Merchants, passing Mach who had eclipsed the previous standard of 80 earlier in the week.

However, Costello, who finished with 101 strikeouts, was never able to get on track Friday morning against Palermo as the Athletics combined seeing-eye singles, Micksburg errors and a Keith Rankin home run to coast to a 6-1 win. Scott continued his change-up wizardry, striking out 13 for the win.

With a crowd that started at about 3,000 and swelled to capacity of 5,000 on hand at the Peter Hallman Ball Yard Friday evening, Scott and Cummings hooked up in a championship tilt that pitted the veteran finesse pitcher against the young fireballer.

Palermo broke out on top 1-0 in the fourth inning when Rankin reached on an error, was bunted to second and scored on a single up the middle by Glenn Inglehart.

Tavistock went out in front 2-

1 in the home half of the fourth as Jamie Rader singled to score Jeff Roth and Jamie Boyd.

In the fifth, Peter Dobbin doubled and came around on a clutch single by Palermo left-fielder Chris McColl to tie the game at two.

Tavistock squandered a lead-off double by Rader in the bottom of the seventh, electing not to bunt him to third which set up the first-ever extra-inning final in the short ISC II history.

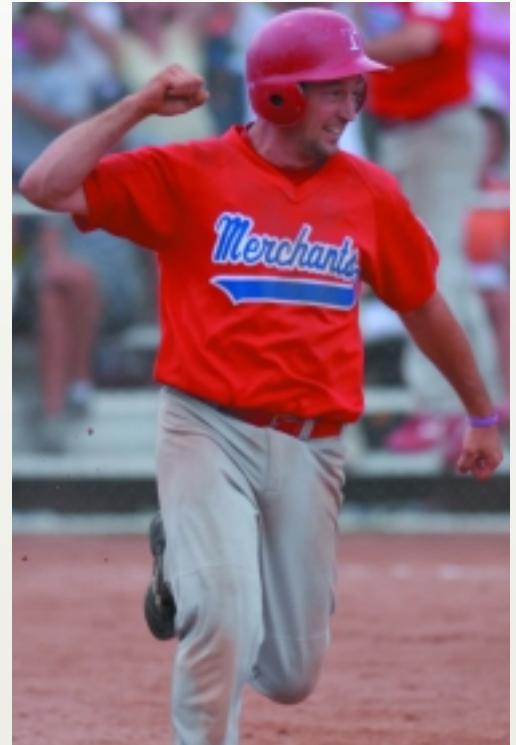
With Palermo unable to score in the top of the eighth off reliever Steve Cook and the international tie-breaker rule in effect, Tavistock executed to perfection, with Kevin Thompson bunting Brad Roth over to third and McKay driving him in with a hard one hopper that handcuffed the Palermo infielder.

"Mark McKay has been a key ingredient to our team over the past five seasons," said Cook, who got the win in relief of Cummings. Added Herold: "To see Mark show emotion like he did after he hit that ball in the 8th, it might have been the highlight of the week."

While Cook noted that with the single-game elimination playoff bracket, sometimes the best team doesn't always win, that can't be said this year as Tavistock was certainly full value for the victory.

The competitive balance in ISC II, always a hallmark of the division, reached an all-time high as five of the seven pools finished with three-way ties for first and another had a two-way tie for both first and second.

The 2006 Tournament of Champions marked a return to its



Tavistock's Mark McKay celebrates his game-winning hit



Gord Scott, Palermo, ON Athletics, was named to the ToC All-Star team.



Budd Park in Kitchener, Ontario.

roots for ISC II, as Kitchener was home to the inaugural event back in 2002. There were a total of 35 teams on hand, playing a total of 93 games.

With its natural amphitheatre setting, Budd Park was an idyllic setting for the majority of games with additional games

Around the Horn



Reid Yantzi scores for Tavistock, Ontario Merchants (2006 champs) as Chad Oechsle, catcher for Perkasie PA Rise Fastpitch waits for the ball. Jamie Boyd of the Tavistock Merchants looks on. Action is in semi-final between Tavistock ON Merchants and Perkasie PA Rise Fastpitch. Tavistock won this game, and went on later in the day to win the championship game as well.

at Kinsmen Park in nearby Cambridge. The ISC II will return to Kitchener and Budd Park in 2007. While everyone will be gunning for Tavistock, that's just fine with them.

Tournament highlights: Kyle Davis, Waterdown, ON, Hammer, hits a walk-off, come-from-behind, extra-innings home run to beat Thomson, IL, Area Merchants 5-4 in nine innings ... Through five games Thomson's Jonas Mach strikes out 85 batters to break the record of 80 set by Keith Potter in 2002 ... Corey Costello of Micksburg, ON, Twins then pushes the strikeout record to 101 ... Regan Manley, pitching for Denver, CO, Colorado Rage hits a high on the radar gun of 81 mph and is consistently clocked in the high 70s ... Reading, PA, Bob Hoffman's Garage defeats Toronto, ON, Champion Indians 6-1 in the first-ever ISC II tie-breaker game to determine the final wildcard playoff team Jeremy Tracy, South Lebanon, PA, TNT launches a home run that clanks off the fence of the tennis court well beyond the right-field fence on Budd Park #2 about 325 feet from home plate ... Host team Bridgeport, ON, PROforma Braves playing Port Elgin, ON Blue Devils in front of close to 1,000 people on Thursday afternoon in second round playoff action at Budd Park ... Ashland, OH, Merchants centerfielder Darren Hunt stealing a home run from Micksburg's Mike Bateman with a leaping grab at the fence in quarter-final action.

All photos by Maddy Flanagan, Fastpitchwest.com and Maddysphotos.com. Blair Setford is the ISC II Commissioner, and along with Jim Flanagan, editor Fastpitchwest.com, the executive producers & broadcasters of Ballparkradio.com broadcast 29 games from the 2006 ISC II Tournament of Champions. Archives can be found at www.ballparkradio.com. In addition to Setford and Flanagan, the broadcast crew for the 2006 ISC T of C included Joe Todd, Lance Winn, newcomers Kyle Smith and David Bakker, and roving reporter Chris Bach.

All Tournament Team 2006 ISC Tournament of Champions, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: Pitchers: Ryan Cummings - Tavistock, ON; Corey Costello - Micksburg, ON; Gord Scott - Palermo, ON; Catchers: Trevor Falk - Elora, ON; Tim Dubois - Kitchener, ON; Infielders: Jeff Roth - Tavistock, ON; Mike Kelly - Bridgeport, ON; Ryan Dudgeon - Port Elgin, ON; Mike Black - Alvinston, ON; Peter Dobbin - Palermo, ON; Matt Daley - Perkasie Rise, PA; Outfielders: Bob Wengert - South Lebanon, PA; Jeff Hannah - Kingston, ON; Jim Culling - Kitchener, ON; Brian Prowse - Palermo, ON; Designated Player: Jamie Boyd - Tavistock, ON; Most RBIs: Jeff Roth - Tavistock, ON; Top Hitter: Scott Walls - Harriston, ON; Top Pitcher: Ryan Cummings - Tavistock, ON; MVP: Cory Costello - Micksburg, ON

Final Order of Finish – 2006 ISC Tournament of Champions At Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: 1 Tavistock, ON Merchants (7-1); 2 Palermo, ON Athletics (6-3); T3 Micksburg, ON Twins (6-2); T3 Perkasie, PA Rise (5-2); T5 Ashland, OH Merchants (4-3); T5 Port Elgin, ON Blue Devils (5-2); T5 South Lebanon, PA TNT (4-2); T5 Kitchener ON Phoenix Outlaws (5-1); T9 Alvinston, ON Indians (4-1); T9 Mitchell, ON Mets (3-2); T9 Harriston, ON Mercury's (4-2); T9 Bridgeport, ON PROforma Braves (3-2); T9 Elmira, ON Cubs (3-2); T9 Elora, ON Wellington Brewers (3-3); T9 Bakersfield, CA California LumberKings (3-3); T9 Reading, PA Bob Hoffman's Garage (3-4); T17 Thomson, IL Area Merchants (2-3); T17 Waterdown, ON Hammer (3-2); T17 Marshall, MI Rice Creek Lighting (3-2); T17 Glencoe, ON Astros (3-2); T17 Denver, CO Colorado Rage (3-2); T17 Ottawa, ON Team Easton Thunder (2-3); T17 Oswego, NY Cutro Professional Inspections (2-3); T17 Hermann, MO Black Gold (3-2); 25 Toronto, ON Champion Indians (1-4); 26 Kingston, ON Cowboys (1-3); 26 Stittsville, ON 56ers (1-3); 26 Orrville, OH Orr Park Knights (1-3); 26 Millington, MI Up-to-Date Painting (1-3); 26 Grande Prairie, AB Pride (1-3); 31 Sydney, NS Cardinals (0-4); 31 Yakima, WA JRW & Associates (0-4); 31 Harrisburg, PA PA Power (0-4); 31 Orangeville, ON Resolve Kings (0-4); 31 Fitzroy Harbour, ON West Carleton Electric (0-4).