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October 2004

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ISC II Tournament of Champions!

**Mission(s) Accomplished at the
2004 ISC II Tournament of Champions**

**Brought to you by Fastpitchwest.com and
ISC II Commissioner Blair Setford**

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When the third edition of the ISC II Tournament of Champions was being planned for Fargo, ND, the goal was to make the tournament better in every way possible.

"We wanted to raise the bar," says ISC II Vice President Bob McGowan. "This is the top post-season event in the world for teams at this level and the tournament organization, the caliber of play and the support system should all reflect that."

Mission accomplished in that respect as the ISC II Tournament of Champions, played at the four-diamond Anderson Sports Complex, was witness to several dozen great ball games between 35 teams representing 19 states and provinces from across the United States and Canada.

Not only was the tournament extremely well run from a technical standpoint - out of 93 games scheduled, only two started late and even then, game controllers had things back on schedule by the next round of games - but for the first time, ISC II games were broadcast over the internet.

"One of the mandates that I brought to the ISC when I came aboard as ISC II Commissioner in the fall of 2003 was to get our games on the air," says Blair

Setford, ISC II Commissioner and one of the lead broadcasters for the tournament.

"We had the 2003 championship game on the air, but it was put together at the last minute and we had to scramble to get announcers," he says, adding that he wanted a crew this year with time to prepare so they would know the teams and players.

Fastpitchwest.com editor Jim Flanagan was approached in February about producing the broadcasts and joining as the lead play-by-play commentator.

"Blair set an ambitious schedule for us of 18 games over six days, but we put together a great team of on-air people and received great support from the entire group of ISC II game controllers and personnel," says Flanagan.

With Flanagan and Setford taking turns on play-by-play, they were joined in

the broadcast booth for colour commentary by the likes of ISC II Game Controller Joe Todd, of Ingersoll, Ontario, Minnesota Fastpitch website editor Brett Bresnahan and Brian Hazelton, a member of the Reasnor, IA RPM's team who did double duty playing on the field and working on air.

A total of nine round robin games were streamed over the internet through sportsjuice.com, featuring 15 different teams. With another nine playoffs games added in, 22 teams were covered at least once during a broadcast.

While actual numbers aren't available for release, Flanagan notes that the audience more than doubled over the course of the tournament, culminating in the championship game on Friday afternoon from the drop-dead gorgeous Jack Williams Stadium in downtown Fargo.

The broadcast program for ISC II walks in the success-

ful footsteps of the one initiated four years ago for the ISC World Tournament and follows a similar format.

Players were brought in for post-game interviews while others stopped by to chat or offer their insight during the course of games, providing their views on the tournament, their team and the opposition.

"Our fans back home really enjoyed hearing the games on the internet," says Denny Warrick of the Reasnor, IA RPM's team, which finished 22nd at 2-3.

Setford adds that more than one of the bars that sponsor teams were hooking laptop computers into their sound systems so fans could listen to the games.

"That's exactly the kind of thing we were hoping to accomplish," he says.





wildcard teams, knocking off last year's fourth-place finisher Marquette, MI Marquette Fence 1-0. Pitcher Eric Steinbeck tossed a brilliant two-hitter, striking out 16 for the winners. Black Gold would go on to give Harriston a scare before dropping a close 2-1 decision in the second round.

Norwich, ON Razorbacks found their stride after going 1-3 in the round robin, knocking off Denmark, WI Circle Tap Lumberjacks and Orr Park Knights before running into the Gladstone buzz saw in the quarter finals. Despite their rocky start,



Norwich finished sixth.

The last wildcard entry was Yakima, WA JRW Associates, who survived one of the wilder games of the tournament, upsetting Sioux Falls, SD Sox 2-1 in nine innings despite being victimized for 20 strikeouts by Sox ace Shane Bouman. JRW didn't record a hit until the 6th when leadoff batter Don Cawthron homered to tie the game. Steve Drissel then drove in James Munson with the winning run in the top of the 9th and pitcher Dave Drotzman was able to keep the Sox off the board in the bottom of the inning. JRW were eliminated by Gladstone in their second round game, but manager Jim Williamson says the team is already looking forward to qualifying for 2005

"Bringing the ISC II games to the people that couldn't make the tournament and providing exposure for the teams and players that they don't normally get."

The tournament format saw 35 teams separated into seven pools of five. Each team played four round robin games with the top three teams in each division and three wildcards making the single-elimination playoff round.

The fifth game of the tournament saw the first upset as top seed Kemptville, ON Thunder was knocked off by Fargo, ND Chub's Pub Wizards 5-4 in what was the first game broadcast from the tournament.

The Wizards would go on to finish 4-0 in their division joining other pool winners Tavistock, ON Merchants, Gladstone, MB Whips, Orr Park, OH Knights, defending champion Harriston, ON Mercury's, Lloydminster, AB Dodgers and Shedden, ON Mission with a first-round bye. Kemptville also received a bye on the basis of being the highest-placing 2nd seed from amongst all the pools based on their plus/minus.

Hermann, MO Black Gold set the tone in the playoff round for the

in Chippewa Falls.

Defending champion Harriston Mercury's came into the tournament ranked fifth and were on a mission to prove that their win in 2003 in Appleton, WI was no fluke. Harriston steamrolled the opposition in the round robin, outscoring teams 28-4, including a memorable 4-3 7th-inning comeback win over The Bar of Appleton, WI.

With the victory over Black Gold, Harriston met Lloydminster Dodgers in a quarter-final match-up of undefeated teams. While they were little-known coming into the 2004 Tournament of Champions, Lloydminster left a big impression on everyone, cruising through their pool play giving up only six runs in four games. The Alberta team were tied with Harriston through five innings but an RBI double by Curtis Martin gave the Mercury's a one-run cushion which Shaun Winship was able to protect, saving the game for starter Scott Smith.

That set up a semi-final rematch between Harriston and The Bar of Appleton as the Wisconsin team rode the pitching duo of Blair Ezekiel, of St. John's, NL and Gerard Long of New Zealand to play-off wins over Dawson, MN Cerro Gordo, Kemptville and St. Paul, MN ABS Villard to reach the final four.

Playing at Jack Williams Stadium, an American Legion field converted for softball use as the main park for the ISC World Tournament, Harriston scored three in the third inning off four hits and an error while the Bar scored one in the fourth on a walk, sac bunt and a rare two-base tag-up on a fly ball to the fence. Smith and Winship would combine on a no-hitter for the win.

On the other side of the bracket, Tavistock Merchants and Gladstone Whips were mowing down opponents in a relentless march to the final four. Ranked second in ISC II play entering the tournament, Tavistock edged Wilkes Barre, PA Keating's Fitness Center 2-1 before knocking off Chub's Pub 5-2 in their quarter-final game.

Tavistock was riding the pitching trio of Fred Follings, Steve Cook and Rob Oliver to great success while being led at the plate by 3B Jamie Rader, who hit .583 in the round robin, and lead-off hitter Dean Kaufman, who had announced his retirement before the tournament and was looking to go out on top.

Gladstone Whips were the pick of many observers to win the tournament after dominating their division and outscoring their opponents in their first two playoff games 11-2.

With pitchers Peter Reimer, John Desaulniers and Kevin Plett along with top hitters like Dean McBride and Rodney Speck, the Whips seemed poised to take the ISC II Tournament of Champions title north to Manitoba.

Reimer gave the Whips a 1-0 lead in the top of the 6th inning with a lead-off home run off Follings, but Tavistock countered with a Dave Kollman single scoring pinch runner Terry Gerber in the home half of the inning. In the Tavistock half of the seventh, Mark McKay led off with a single and advanced to second on an error to the right fielder. Gladstone

was elected to try for the double play on a ground ball hit by Ross Herold, but the throw to first was errant and McKay sent Tavistock off to the finals with a chance to keep Kaufman's hopes for a Hollywood ending alive.

Alas for Kaufman and Tavistock, it wasn't to be.

In an uncharacteristically sloppy game for both teams, Harriston would score at least one run in every inning, topping Tavistock 7-4 in a title tilt between two teams from the powerful South Perth league in southwestern Ontario.

In a gutsy call by coach Rick Fisk, Harriston elected to give the ball to 20-year-old rookie Joe German while Tavistock countered with Rob Oliver.

"We were just looking to see who was the freshest and maybe show them somebody they haven't seen," said Harriston catcher Geoff Gunson. "I think we were more nervous this year than last year. We weren't expected to win last year and this year I think we were a little uptight."

Both teams took turns scoring unearned runs through three innings. Harriston pitcher Nick Goetz relieved German with two outs in the third and shut down the Merchants' bats for the rest of the game. Steve Cook took the loss in relief while Follings pitched the last two innings.

Harriston left fielder Trevor Seip homered in the sixth inning to give the Mercury's some extra insurance and, for good measure, made the game-winning catch with a stellar diving effort in the bottom of the seventh.

I was just hoping I could get to it," said a still-winded Seip in a post-game interview. "There's always that one guy that makes a game-saving catch or gets a game-winning hit or comes in to pitch in relief and it's just a real team effort all the way around," he said, setting the tone for his teammates.

Added tournament MVP Jeremy Creeden: "We don't have one star, we have 15 stars."

Harriston ace Scott Smith, named the top pitcher at the ISC II Tournament of Champions for the second year in a row, was sanguine about not getting the ball in the final. "We brought four pitchers down for this tournament and we made a decision to go with a fresh arm," he said after the game. "It takes a team effort to win down here and that's what we have with different guys contributing every game."

Smith said winning this year was different than last year, but still very satisfying. "It's nice to know that last year wasn't a fluke, although we didn't think it was, it's nice to be able to prove that it wasn't."

For the Harriston Mercury's, it was definitely mission accomplished.



ISC II Staff: A dedicated crew!
Colin Smith, Doug Bach, Chris Bach, Bob McGowan
Mal Swift, Joe Todd



About the author: ISC II Commissioner Blair Setford, 36, (above right, pictured with Editor Jim Flanagan (l) of Fastpitchwest.com) has been playing fastpitch softball for twenty-nine years. In addition to his ISC II duties, Blair runs the Golden Horseshoe Fastball League - for more information, see <http://members.aol.com/blairjs/ghfl.html> Blair and his wife Monique and their two children, Benjamin and Natasha, live in Mississauga, Ontario. (l) Maddy Flanagan, photographer for Fastpitchwest.com caught in action on the scene. Once again, Maddy's photos bring this article to life.



2004 ISC II TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS ALL TOURNAMENT TEAM

Catchers:

Shane Flinger - Orrville,
OH Orr Park Knights
Chad Mix - Appleton, WI
The Bar of Appleton

Pitchers:

Scott Smith - Harriston,
ON Mercury's
Tim Neill - Norwich, ON
Razorbats
Eric Steinbeck -
Hermann, MO Black Gold

Infield:

Frank Keating Jr. -
Wilkes Barre, PA
Keating's Fitness Center
Lucas Goring - St. Paul,
MN ABS Villard
Jamie Rader - Tavistock,
ON Smully's Tavistock
Merchants
Dean McBride -
Gladstone, MB Whips
Rich Edwards - Kenosha,
WI Earl's Club

Outfield:

Rodney Speck -
Gladstone, MB Whips
Andy Sabo - Perkasio,
PA Armour Rise
Brett Kennedy -
Lloydminster, AB
Dodgers
Dan Foss - Fargo, ND
Chub's Pub

DH:

Jeremy Creeden -
Harriston, ON Mercury's

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Outstanding Pitcher:
Scott Smith - Harriston,
ON Mercury's

Leading Hitter:
Peter Reimer -
Gladstone, MB Whips

Most RBIs:

Brad Young - Alvinson,
ON Indians - 9
Lucas Goring - St. Paul,
MN ABS Villard - 9

MVP:

Jeremy Creeden -
Harriston, ON Mercury's