

# A chance to showcase themselves

## Next year's varsity team gets in important work this July

By Eric Morken  
emorken@echopress.com

It was just an intersquad scrimmage between friends on Wednesday night, but it was a baseball game being played at Knute Nelson Memorial Ballpark.

Every game played this summer is an opportunity to prepare for next spring. A lot of the guys on the field on Wednesday will be big pieces to what the Cardinals' varsity team looks like in 2021 if seasons are indeed back on as normal by then.

"We have a pretty talented group of baseball players, so I think when we put those two teams on the field, realistically it's some of the better competition we can face when it comes to pitching and at-bats," Alexandria head coach Jake Munsch said. "We just want to see improvement on the things we're working on in practice. We haven't been given a lot of time, but we are seeing improvement."

Alexandria has three teams in an independent shortened summer league that was created in June when teams were given the OK to start practicing and now compete during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group consisting of soon-to-be juniors and seniors split up to take on each other at 5 p.m. on Wednesday before the

youngest of the three teams did the same at 7.

The home team of the older group got the better of things in a 10-2 game. Nate Hammerback had an RBI sacrifice fly to start the scoring in the first inning.

Tyler Petron had an RBI single in the second before a four-run third, with Will Heydt picking up an RBI sacrifice fly in that frame. Devin Swerman broke things open in the fourth inning with a two-run double to the warning track in center field. He laced another single in his next at-bat.

"Devin swung the bat really well tonight," Munsch said. "He's a player who can play multiple positions and a guy who's going to pitch for us. When you talk about hitting, one thing I do really like about this team is they can hit the ball up and down the lineup. Physically, we're a little small. It will be nice to put on a little weight over the winter time and be able to push the ball around the park a little bit more. I'm encouraged by the hitting of this team."

J.D. Hennen, a sophomore this past school year, started for the home team on the mound and went four strong innings to earn the win. The hard-throwing righty allowed just two hits and no runs, while

striking out six.

"We're trying to get better on what we've been working on in practice, which is fielding the ball and throwing strikes as pitchers," Hennen said. "We want to just throw strikes and let our defense make plays for us. That was my main focus today on the mound. Not try to strike people out all the time. Just let them put the ball in play."

Hennen has struggled to find the strike zone a couple times earlier this summer, so Munsch was encouraged by what he saw from a player who will likely be looked upon to help out next spring.

"It was encouraging to see him tonight throw strikes that allowed our defense to work," Munsch said. "We're hoping some of our other pitchers can improve in that aspect too, but J.D. has done a good job for us, and we're excited for his future."

These players have a chance to see how they stack up against some other teams from around the area. Alexandria has played opponents from Detroit Lakes, Perham, and Moorhead this July. They have lost just one game against Moorhead in a doubleheader, while taking care of business pretty handily the rest of the time.

"I think the biggest benefits are just knowing where our team is at and getting a head start on next year's varsity season," Hennen said.



Eric Morken / Echo Press

Alexandria's J.D. Hennen throws during Wednesday's intersquad scrimmage at Knute Nelson Memorial Ballpark. Hennen allowed just two hits and struck out six in four shutout innings.

"Usually in the summer, we wouldn't have this because Munsch would be coaching the seniors (in Legion). So it's nice to get a jump on a varsity season and see where we're at compared to other teams that we'll be playing next year."

Hennen is part of a class of soon-to-be juniors that has seen success on the diamond coming through the Alexandria system. This is a chance to showcase what they can do in front of the varsity coaches they will work with next year.

"We've always said from the beginning of this

that this is not a tryout," Munsch said. "But if you want to look at it that way, in the spring we only give kids four days to prove to us what they can do. Now we're giving them a summer and a chance as best we can with 23 guys to show us what they can do. We see some bright spots in some players and surprises in some players that we thought would do a little better. That's the nature of the beast."

Teams have just a few weeks left of summer baseball before this opportunity is over. Alexandria is set on soaking up a chance to improve while

it has it.

"We talk a lot about not just the fundamental part of baseball, but learning the game," Munsch said. "Thinking about the situations and always explaining why we're doing something. Trying to make the kids get to a point where if we ask them a question, they can tell us why we're doing it. We want to rep things so many times that it just becomes ingrained in what they do. That's what we're really working on this summer is learning the game and the situational part of it."

## TREND

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to garner the respect from its metro counterparts. The Minnesota AP Top-10 poll had the Cardinals ranked seventh.

"We took that as a sign of disrespect," Hinrichs said. "At some point, we went from not having that high of expectations to feeling disrespected by people that haven't even watched us play. When those kids went out in the (Section 8AA) playoffs, they made it known that they had business to take care of."

Alexandria took down Robbinsdale-Armstrong-Cooper 36-16 before advancing the section title game with a 35-21 win over Elk River. The 8AA rematch between Alexandria and Wayzata took place for a trip to the state tournament. This time, it was in Alexandria.

"They didn't want to come up here and play," Quist said. "They had this ego they carried with them. They had a lot of

talent, and they had some Division I-level kids, but they didn't use it that game. Our guys were ready."

Alexandria took Wayzata to the woodshed. The Cardinals advanced to a state quarterfinal matchup against Park of Cottage Grove following the 48-19 win. The Redbirds ran the Trojans out of the building by halftime - taking a 28-point lead into the locker room and never looking back.

### A freezing cold take

While the celebration began, the Cardinals knew the road ahead wasn't going to be easy. Alexandria punched its ticket to the dome with a 42-21 win over Park, but Bloomington Jefferson was waiting for them. In the Class AA state semifinal matchup, one moment from a late great Minnesota media personality sticks in each alumni's mind.

"I remember so vividly when Dark Star previewed our game against Bloomington," Heydt said

with a laugh. "He said that we were going to go out there and lose by four touchdowns. We were just a team that wasn't going to back down. It was a chalkboard type of thing."

On the bus ride to the Metrodome, Quist looked out the front window through the dark sky. He saw the faded lights of the dome sit in the Minneapolis skyline. His nerves wavered through his body as the anticipation grew. That was until one player spoke up on the bus.

"One of the kids that provided a lot of toughness and confidence to that team was RJ Nodland," Quist said. "He was always a believer, and he got us through those tough patches. As a coach, I'm at the front of the bus. I looked down at the dome, and it scared the crap out of me. I'm thinking to myself, 'What are we doing here?' That's when RJ said, 'There it is, boys. Let's go out and get it.' That was special."

Alexandria and Jefferson played a tight, clean game

until the Jaguars roughed the kicker on a Cardinal punt. The play led to the Cardinals scoring the go-ahead touchdown late in the fourth quarter. After converting the two-point conversion, Alexandria led 22-19.

The fate of the season came down to the defense. With just over a minute left, Ryan Nodland made the biggest play of the season by picking off the Jaguar pass to end the game.

"They weren't used to our Cover-2 defense, and they threw it right to our safety," Quist said. "That was it. We ran out the clock and moved on. It was so surreal."

Waiting for the Cardinals in the championship game was unbeaten Anoka. The Tornados were one of the top teams in the state, and with three touchdowns in the final five minutes, they handed Alexandria its first loss of the season.

"They were big and fast, and we just lost to the better team," Heydt said. "When I look back on that season, I think

about what we were able to accomplish. Our coaches put us in a position to get the most out of that season, and I think we changed Alex football."

### Lasting impression

Alexandria football's lone championship came in 1974 in Class A, but the aftermath of the '94 season was felt for years to come. The Cardinals went back to the state tournament three more times that decade and again shortly after in 2001 and 2002. Hinrichs is still a coach in the program and has seen the steps the Cardinals took to play at a high level consistently.

"Those little kids that went to the Dome and watched that '94 team play grew up wanting to be like them," Hinrichs said. "Those were the same kids that made it to the dome in the early 2000s. It's a snowball effect. Because that '94 team committed itself to being better, they changed Alexandria football forever."

Quist believes that the

football team wasn't the only one to benefit from the Wayzata win in '93.

"The whole landscape of sports changed when kids dedicated themselves to the weight room," he said. "It's not just boys, but girls too. They wanted to get better and earn opportunities. I think a lot of those principles from back then are still true now."

Hinrichs is hoping to be a part of another team that makes a Minneapolis trip this fall, but he won't forget the group of guys who set the trend in motion nearly three decades ago.

"I don't look back on that year and think about what could've been for those guys," Hinrichs said. "I look at when that team beat Brainerd, Willmar and Tech to get the top seed in 8AA. I remember beating Wayzata and Elk River and going to the Dome. There are too many great memories from that year to ruin by thinking of a bad one. That team was just special."

## RESORTERS

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electronically to avoid the exchange of physical scorecards between players and officials.

The Resorters Tournament has already encouraged players to use a phone app such as Golf Genius in past tournaments. This has players enter their scores hole-by-hole. When players use it, the app allows fans the chance to follow along with ongoing matches. That electronic score keeping becomes even more important at this year's event.

"We're really trying to go paperless and touchless as much as we can," Lee said. "That's the whole goal. We'll have a scoring

area where you will come and just verify your score with us. In front of you, there will be a TV screen that you can see. I'll be sitting at a computer six or eight feet away. You see your score, verify that's what you shot, and I hit confirm and away we go."

The field itself won't be cut. Player entries are actually up from last year, with the field filling out quickly once registration started. As of July 20, the total number of participants was at 356 between 10 different divisions — Junior 10-12 and 13-15s, men's regular, men's championship, men's executive, men's seniors, men's masters, men's grand masters, women's regular and women's executive.

"We paid attention to what

the MGA was doing, what the PGA was doing, what the state guidelines were. All those things were part of the consideration of whether we could even have Resorters. All those guidelines, we felt like we can do," Lee said. "We can check all those boxes with what it looks like in the patio seating and downstairs and with our volunteers and concession stands. We'll keep the flow of traffic moving and the congregation limited. We're on a golf course with a bunch of acres, and we can use them."

The annual putting contest for contestants will still run on the Wednesday night of Resorters week, and fans will also be allowed to be on the course to follow matches.

"The big thing is we're going to have signs out reminding people to social distance and do the right thing," Lee said. "The pro shop is going to be wearing masks, and we're going to limit the people in the pro shop. We're going to have a tent outside for cart rentals, so that will be an outside process this year. We're going to sanitize all our carts and sanitize all the high touch points. Then just try to keep our distance from each other."

Lee said the field of golfers this year will feature a lot of talented players again throughout each division. The 2019 championship flight winners were Cecil Belisle (men's championship), Troy Johnson (men's executive), Steve Herzog (men's senior),

Dave Battey (men's master), Tom Eidsvold (men's grand master), Leah Herzog (women's regular), Betsy Aldrich (women's executive), Thomas Gogel (junior 13-15) and Carver Larson (junior 10-12).

"There's no doubt with the registration and the way that went this year, the need for it is incredible," Lee said. "People want to play golf and they want to compete. In that sense, it's going to be a normal Resorters. It's just going to be a lot more paying attention, doing the right thing and taking care of yourself, as well as others. There's ways to do it. We're using technology the best we can. Golf is lucky in that we have a lot of acres, and it's outside."

## AGC

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Member-Guest Tournament.

Wagner and Beach took home the second-best net score with a round total of 68.

"This is where I grew up playing," Wagner said. "It's a beautiful course, and it's well maintained. The people here are incredible. I graduated from Alex, so this place feels like home."

Beach grew up 45 minutes away from Alexandria in Eagle Bend. The

two have been friends for many years, and placing in the tournament is a bonus for them.

"This is a social event for us," Wagner said. "We like to come out here and see some old friends. It's about having a good time."

AGC head pro Kyle Lee understands the importance of tradition. In his second year at AGC, he looks forward to the annual member-guest events.

"We like to carry on the tradition of showcasing our golf course to friends and family," Lee said. "This year, we've been seeing a lot more family members that have been

playing. A bedrock for a lot of golf courses is its member-guest tournaments."

Finishing in the top spot of the gross-scoring field was the family duo of Gail and Lia Feriancek. They won with an 18-hole total of 81. Two strokes behind them were Monie Keeley and Liz Neff, who shot an 83.

Each year, the members pick the name for the tournament. During the COVID-19 pandemic, AGC members had some fun by naming the event the "Pandemic Par-Tee." Wagner joked about how the tournament received a gift bag with hand san-

itizer in it but commended AGC for making sure everything is safe.

One of the most significant changes to this year's tournament was the electronic scoring. Players record their scores on the Golf Genius mobile app and can look at live scores in real-time.

"This is the way that golf is trending. It was going this way before the pandemic," Lee said. "I thought it went great today, and it was good for us to get the hang of it before Resorters comes around in two weeks."



Submitted

Lia (left) and Gail Feriancek (middle left) finish with a one-round total of 81 for the lowest gross score. Liz Neff (middle right) and Monie Keeley finished in second with an 83.