

SPORTS

Send your scores and story ideas to sports editor Martin Schlegel

If you've attended a high school game, please share photos to mschlegel@ourkemediagroup.com



TOWN BALL

MAKING *a* STATEMENT

Aces ready for state as Region 5C champs

BY MARTIN SCHLEGEL
Sports Editor

With a spot at the state tournament already secured, the Red Wing Aces had one game left to determine who would get the No. 1 and 2 seeds from Region 5 in the Class C tournament. The Aces pulled away in the eighth inning for a 9-2 win over the Cannon Falls Bears Friday night at The Ath.

The turnaround from a season ago to become Region 5 champions was top of mind as catcher Dixon Irwin felt the Aces made a statement.

"It feels so much better to get the No. 1 coming off a year like last year," he said. "Last year we lost two one-run games and went 0-2. Being able to win two close games and really be able to make a statement to get that one seed really feels good heading into the following weekend."

Marcus Walm, who played for previous Aces teams that went to state, hasn't gotten to play yet in state with the team. He's feeling more than ready to have that chance this year.

"I missed the two seasons the team went because I was down at school," Walm said. "Super excited to be able to play this year."

Throughout the Region 5C tournament, the Aces proved just how clutch they can be at the plate and on the mound. Several times in the three games the Aces were pitching runners in scoring position with less than two outs or trying to navigate the bases loaded with one or no outs.

Ben Kuehni worked out of an inning with the bases loaded in an early opportunity for the Bears in the second inning. The Bears scored a run on a throwing error, but a strikeout and double play ended the inning with the Aces still ahead 3-1 at the time. The Bears loaded the bases in the third inning as well and did not score.

Spencer Schroeder had to pitch out of a bases loaded jam in the sixth after a two-out rally by the Bears. He was able to get the final out without a run scoring and keep the Aces ahead 5-2.



MARTIN SCHLEGEL / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP

Red Wing Aces pitcher Spencer Schroeder delivers a pitch in the fifth inning of the Region 5C championship on Friday, Aug 12.

Similar to the two previous games in which other Aces pitchers desperately needed and got key outs, the Aces pitchers showed a clutch factor to escape tough situations all tournament.

"Confidence is a huge thing in close, tight games in the playoffs," Irwin said. "Even though, like tonight where they had back-to-back innings where there nobody or one

out, just the confidence in our pitchers, confidence I had in our pitching staff to get gritty and get guys to fly out, ground out, whatever they needed to do to get us out of the inning and keep us in the game."

The Aces blew the game open in the eighth inning. Leading 6-2 with a run in already in the inning, Walm came up with the bases loaded and two outs. He had been on base multiple

times already in the game. In one of his previous at-bats in the third inning, Walm crushed a pitch to dead center. It bounced high off the wall and he later came around to score the fourth run of the game.

With a full count and runners moving on the pitch, Walm crushed another. This one to left centerfield and looked as if the neighborhood wasn't big enough to hold it in.

The ball, again, hit high off the wall, all three runners scored on Walm's second massive double of the game.

"That second one, to get some runs in, that was huge," Walm said when asked which of his hits got the team going more. "Just to seal the deal for us. Relax a little bit. It was the eighth inning and all we had left was to get three outs."

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RED WING



Left: Reese Tripp (right) celebrates with co-head coach Kyle Blahnik after hitting a triple during a baseball game against South St. Paul on May 1, 2021, at The Ath in Red Wing. Right: Kyle Blahnik (left) retired from the Red Wing Aces before the season began. He played 16 seasons with the Aces.



FILE PHOTOS

Finding balance Coach, referee spending more time at home

BY MARTIN SCHLEGEL
Sports Editor

Nine years ago Kyle Blahnik started as a basketball referee. He took the training courses and joined the Rochester Area Officials Association.

Becoming a referee was just another way for him to stay involved in school activities.

He was doing lower level games in the Red Wing area, then soon picked up some varsity basketball games outside of Red Wing.

"It gave me more freedom to find nights to work," Blahnik said of the schedule he chooses. He said he could pick a varsity game each week or do more than a cou-

ple lower level games. "I kept getting better at it and enjoyed doing it."

As for the feeling he gets while reffing, Blahnik said there's different energy in a gym during a highly attended game on a Friday night.

"It amps you up when reffing a big game and the crowd hangs on your call," he said.

Blahnik, an economics and government teacher at Red Wing High School, added referee duties to his plate as something to fill in gaps here and there. Referees are needed now more than ever and Blahnik was able to fill that need, especially locally.

On top of teaching and reffing, Blahnik became

co-head coach of the Winger baseball program three years ago. He, along with Paul Hartmann, have kept the baseball program in a healthy position, helping send multiple players to play baseball after high school.

He first started as a varsity assistant in 2012 when he began teaching.

That's not all. Blahnik made time to keep playing baseball himself for the Red Wing Aces. For 16 seasons, Blahnik played for the team at multiple infield positions.

Before this season began, Blahnik made the decision to retire from the Aces. He and his wife

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SPORTS INJURIES

Mayo Clinic offers Saturday clinic for athletes

Mayo Clinic Orthopedics and Sports Medicine will provide a Saturday morning injury clinic for Rochester-area middle school, high school and college athletes injured during recent sports activities.

This includes all athletes from schools in southeast Minnesota, western Wisconsin and northern Iowa. The clinic will open each

Saturday at 8 a.m. between Sept. 3 and Oct. 15. The clinic will be held on the third floor of the Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center at Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

Appointments are preferred and may be scheduled by calling Mayo Clinic Orthopedics and Sports Medicine at 507-266-6690. Phone lines open at

7:30 a.m. on Saturday, with the last available appointment starting at 11 a.m.

Walk-ins are welcome. Insurance will be billed for these visits.

The clinic is staffed with physicians, athletic trainers and physical therapists. Services offered include X-rays, evaluation and management of acute injuries, splinting, bracing,

crutch-fitting and instruction, and rehabilitation.

Mayo Clinic requires all staff and visitors to wear a mask while on campus. COVID-19 vaccinations are encouraged, but they are not required.

For more information, contact Mayo Clinic Orthopedics and Sports Medicine at 507-266-6690.



Red Wing Aces center fielder Brodie Smith (5) slides into second base safely as the ball gets past the Cannon Falls Bears second baseman in the Region 5C championship on Friday, Aug. 12.

MARTIN SCHLEGEL / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP PHOTOS

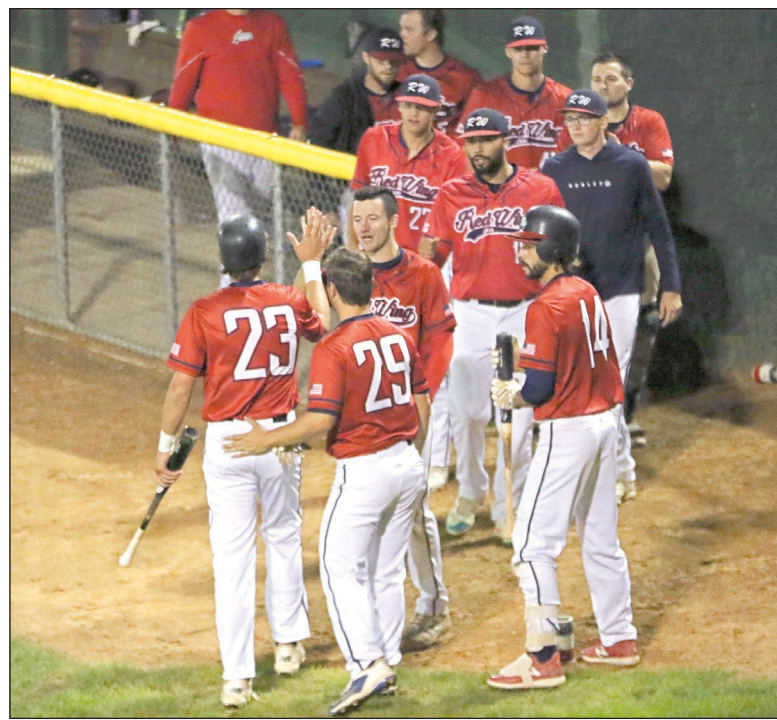
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Up next

The Aces receive a first-round bye in the Class C State tournament for winning the region and will face the winner of a first-round game between the Pierz Lakers and the Watkins Clippers. Pierz and Watkins are scheduled to play Saturday, Aug. 20, at Bell Field in Faribault at 4:30 p.m. The Aces take on the winner at Memorial Park in Dundas on Friday, Aug. 26. First pitch is scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

Readers can reach Martin Schlegel at mschlegel@orourkemediagroup.com.

The Red Wing Aces dugout celebrates an early run in the Region 5C championship on Friday, Aug. 12.



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have a 14-month-old daughter. Blahnik could see the effects his presence at home had on the family.

In the past he would coach during the spring which led to him being home late most nights. Then he transitioned right into the Aces season.

"I barely got to see my daughter in the spring," Blahnik said. "My wife shoulders a lot of the load at home. I have a win in the marriage column."

Wanting to be at home more and help out, Blahnik cut back a little on reffing as well and

said he now feels a better balanced life.

When asked if he misses playing during the summer for the Aces, Blahnik said he does some nights and added "the juices were pumping again on Monday" during the Ace's one-run victory over Hastings that clinched a trip to the Class C state tournament.

The Aces roster consists of many players whom Blahnik has coached, played with, or both. He said it has been satisfying to see so many players he has coached through the years play in college and for the Aces. He feels it's a great opportunity to learn more about yourself as a player and about the game.

In high school, a player can have a good season. Transitioning that into a league with better, more experienced pitchers and wood bats can be tough for some. Having coached some, it's satisfying to see them succeed with the Aces or in college. Even more satisfying when he works with a player and they take in the feedback, apply it and it works.

"Even if you are struggling, there are guys there that can pick you up," he said. "The Aces have been so good for so long because of the leadership they have."

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Call 651-977-6335 to schedule an appointment. mayoclinichealthsystem.org



SPORTS CALENDAR

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20

Volleyball
Z-M at Apple Valley (scrimmage), 9 a.m.

Boys Soccer
PIZM at Farmington (scrimmage), 8 a.m.

Girls Soccer
Red Wing at Roseville (scrimmage), 8 a.m.

Girls Tennis
Lake City at Faribault quadrangular, 9 a.m.

St. Charles at Lake City, 7 p.m.

Simley at PIZM, 7 p.m.

Girls Soccer
Red Wing at Mankato East, 6 p.m.

Lake City at St. Charles, 7 p.m.

PIZM at Caledonia, 7 p.m.

Girls Tennis
Red Wing vs John Marshall (Mankato West), 11 a.m.

Red Wing at Mankato West, 1 p.m.

Amerly at Ellsworth, 4:15 p.m.

MONDAY, AUGUST 22

Girls Tennis
Stewartville at Red Wing, 10 a.m.
Lake City at John Marshall, 10 a.m.

Girls Golf
Ellsworth at Princeton Valley Golf Course, 4 p.m.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 23

Volleyball
Ellsworth at Colfax quadrangular, 5 p.m.

Girls Soccer
PEM at Red Wing (scrimmage), 7 p.m.

Girls Tennis
Red Wing vs Mankato East (Owatonna), 11 a.m.

Red Wing at Owatonna, 1 p.m.

Ellsworth at Altoona, 4:15 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24

Volleyball
Goodhue at Red Wing (scrimmage), 9 a.m.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25

Boys Soccer
Mankato East at Red Wing, 7 p.m.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26

Football
Ellsworth at New Richmond, 7 p.m.

Volleyball
Ellsworth at invite (UW-Stout), 8:30 a.m.

Town Ball
Red Wing vs Watkins or Pierz Class C State (Dundas), 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27

Football
Red Wing, Z-M at Lake City (scrimmages), 9 a.m.

Volleyball
Ellsworth at invite (UW-Stout), 8 a.m.

Boys Soccer
Red Wing at Mankato West, 7 p.m.

Lake City at Kasson-Mantorville, 2 p.m.

PIZM at St. Paul Humboldt, 12 p.m.

Girls Soccer
Mankato West at Red Wing, 3 p.m.

PIZM at St. Charles, 2:30 p.m.

Cross Country
Ellsworth at Eau Claire North, 9:30 p.m.

Dates, times and locations subject to change



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