

East claims fourth straight crown

AMERICAN LEGION: East beat Chugiak to make final, defeated them again for title.

By BRIAN SINGLER
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Zac Beltz knew it. So did the entire East team.

But if the weight of history affected the three-time champions, it didn't show Saturday at Mulcahy Stadium.

Beltz pitched eight innings of relief for the win and tournament MVP Chad Nading launched a game-sealing three-run home run as East became the first team to win four straight American Legion Alaska State Baseball Championships.

"There was great pressure," Beltz said about his East team, which had to win two games Saturday to claim the title. "But I knew we would win it because we wanted it the most."

East won the first game 7-2 over Chugiak behind eight no-hit innings from Nading and then finished off Chugiak to capture the double-elimination tournament.

"No one's ever won more than two (titles in a row)," said East manager Tony Wylie. "I never had these expectations.

"But this team has more heart than any team I've had in 20-plus years coaching,"

Beltz took over for starter Josh Easterly, who allowed two first-inning runs, in the second inning. He scattered nine hits with seven strikeouts, allowing two runs the rest of the way.

"He wanted the ball," Wylie said. "He was a bulldog."

Beltz set the record for the most innings thrown by a pitcher in the history of the state tournament, tossing 21 in three games, all with his signature sidearm motion and an assortment of fastballs and sliders.

"I pitched to get ground balls and popups," Beltz said. "But my defense was what worked for me.

The offense wasn't too bad either.

Zach Plancich went 2 for 4 with three runs scored and Paul Lumpkin added two hits, two runs and two RBIs as East used a five-run fifth inning to blow the game open.



East piles up Aug. 5, 2006 to celebrate its 2006 American Legion Championship after it defeated Chugiak twice to win the title. (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)



The Chugiak baseball team watches East celebrate victory in the championship American Legion game Aug. 5, 2006. (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)



Chad Nading celebrate East's victory after the last out against Chugiak in the American Legion championship game, Aug. 5, 2006. (Photo by MARC LESTER /

Lumpkin's big blow was a two-run double off the wall in left center that gave East the lead for good at 4-2.

Nading capped the game with a mammoth blast to right field, a near carbon copy of the ball he hit to end East's semifinal game against Bartlett on Friday.

After the game, he was the only person besides Wylie to get the ceremonial bucket baptism.

Chugiak, meanwhile was still reeling from a roster that was decimated before and during the game.

Pitcher Lane Grey left midway in the tournament to go to California. Matt Devlin left Friday to play college football at Humboldt State. Outfielder and pitcher Larson Frank pulled his hamstring in the second inning of Game 2 Saturday and had to watch from the dugout.

"It seemed like everything was against us from the start of the game," said Chugiak manager Bill Lierman. "We lost four starters from the start of the tournament and two .400 hitters, all seniors and leaders."

Even worse was that the projected starter for Game 2, Ben Rosen, one of Chugiak's top pitchers, was ejected from the tournament in the earlier game, after a controversial collision at first base with East's Plancich.

"The umpire ruled malicious intent to injure a player," said Chugiak manager Bill Lierman. "Our team disagreed with that."

East evened the matchup between the state's two top squads to 5-5 on the season, including the high school season, Legion season and the state tournament. Last year, the two teams also had to play two games on the tournament's final day to decide a champion.

"They're a solid team," Lierman said. "With all our errors, they deserved it."

In the first game, Nading's eight no-hit innings and Jake Plancich's solo home run in the second helped East win and force the decisive Game 2.

Nading struck out 12, gave up only one earned run and settled down after starting off shaky.

He hit the leadoff hitter, Ben Rosen, walked Keegan Kucko and then hit Zachary Morse to load the bases with nobody out.

But Nading fanned two and forced Conor Spink to fly out to get out of his early jam.

The next seven innings were gravy for the lanky right-hander.

He masterfully retired 19 of the next 24 batters on either strikeouts or ground balls.

Jake Plancich hit one deep in the first to put East ahead 1-0. He

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Chugiak's Robert Baker dives for a foul ball in the championship American Legion game against East, Aug. 5, 2006. (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)



Zac Beltz hurls for East in the championship American Legion game against Chugiak, Aug. 5, 2006 (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)



East manager Tony Wylie is drenched after his team claimed the American Legion championship, Aug. 5, 2006. (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)

finished with two hits and four RBIs.

His brother, Zack Plancich, went 2 for 5 and scored three runs, while Paul Lumpkin drove in two runs.

After, the doubleheader, Wylie celebrated soaking wet next to a mound of East players with Beltz on the bottom. Wylie will retire from coaching to concentrate on his job as a scout for Major League Baseball's scouting bureau.

"Yea, baby," Wylie said, holding the glittering blue championship trophy at arm's length in admiration. "This is a helluva way to go out."

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American Legion Baseball

Alaska State Baseball Championship

At Mulcahy Stadium

Saturday's Results

Game Two

East Post 34 000 150 14 -- 11 13 2

Chugiak Post 33 200 010 10 -- 4 11 1

East -- Easterly, Beltz (2) and J. Plancich. Chugiak -- Griffith, Morse (5), Geurts (8) and Kucko. W -- Beltz. L -- Griffith. 2B -- East: J. Plancich, Lumpkin. Chugiak: J. Spink. 3B -- Chugiak: Geurts. HR -- East: Nading

Game One

East Post 34 010 200 112 -- 7 9 2

Chugiak Post 33 100 000 100 -- 2 0 5

East -- Nading, Beltz (9) and J. Plancich. Chugiak -- J. Spink and Kucko. W -- Nading. L -- J. Spink. 2B -- East: Lumpkin. HR -- East: J. Plancich.

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East's Chad Nading is congratulated on a 3-run home run in the top of the eighth inning in the championship American Legion game against Chugiak Aug. 5, 2006. (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)



Zac Beltz, center, celebrates East's American Legion championship on Aug. 5, 2006 (Photo by MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News)