**Minutes**

**Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee
2024 Spring Meeting
Saturday, March 23
Location: Buffalo Post 270**

Director Randy Schaub called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m.

Buffalo Post 270 Commander Connie Herzog welcomed the committee members and explained lunch plans.

Present were Schaub, Vice Director Brandon Raymo, Advisor to the Director Jim Peck, 1st District Director McCready, 2nd District Director Vern Kitzberger, 3rd District Director Bruce Young, 6th District Director Wes Thompson, 7th District Director Joe Dollerschell, 9th District Director Mike Arvidson and 10th District Director Seth Pugh. Vice Director Jeff “Slick” Miller participated from Arizona via Zoom video conferencing.

Absent were 4th District Director Gail Kalata, 5th District Director Michael Rothstein and 8th District Director Tom Coombe. Young explained Rothstein was with his Holy Angels team.

Also present were Secretary Tim Engstrom, Emeritus Al Davis, Div. I Junior Tournament Director Jack Strong of Buffalo, guest Joe Bares of Jordan Post 3 and Sleepy Eye coaches Brandon Streich and Aaron Nesvold.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the Fall 2023 Meeting held Sept. 27 over video conference and at Sept. 30 at Osseo-Maple Grove Post 172.

Additions were made to the agenda. Dylan Feeney of Le Sueur-Henderson arrived.

Young spoke about the Div. IA Tournament bracket possibilities. Miller asked about the metro and which American Legion districts were involved. Young said 3rd, 10th, 4th and 5th. Discussion ensued on second place and third place.

Scott Ross, team manager for Osseo-Maple Grove Post 172, walked in. Kalata joined the via Zoom. Luverne coach Barry Shelton joined via Zoom.

Continuing the discussion, Young noted 2024 is a trial year for the Div. IA Tournament. If it is successful, the committee could extend it to the entire state. McCready added he believes five teams from 1st District would be interested next year. The discussion veered into scheduling and a possible conflict with the Prospect Series. Miller said the committee would have to pick which to favor. Arvidson said teams don’t care about the all-star series if they are going to a state tournament. Someone asked where the tournament is at. Young replied that Burnsville is hosting. Schaub tabled the discussion until the afternoon.

Shelton presented a bid for Luverne to host the Div. II Junior State Tournament in 2027. He described sound problems being resolved and excellent support from the community and from Luverne Post 123.

Feeney presented a bid for Le Sueur to host the Div. II Senior State Tournament in 2027 and provided a handout. He noted improvements to the ballfield, new sponsors and the recent hosting of other baseball events. Schaub said he liked the lodging situation. Feeney noted a Best Western didn’t exist when Le Sueur hosted a tournament in 2016. He described the possibility of a banquet being held either at a gun club, college or a brewery space. He also said there are new food options.

Ross discussed how plans are coming along for the 2024 Minnesota American Legion Baseball Div. I State Tournament, to be held at Gleason Fields in Maple Grove. He pointed out how ballfields are new, opening in spring 2023. It is an all-turf facility. Other fields to support action on the first two days could be Delano, Champlain, Brooklyn Park or Braemer Field in Edina. It will depend on volunteers and concessions. He said hotels are lined up (his committee chairman is in the hotel biz), and he has garnered $5,000 from Post 172 to offset costs, with another $5,000 likely down the road. He has lined up retired Vikings linebacker Chad Greenway to be the keynote speaker at the banquet, to be held at Post 172. His host committee is selling the ads for their program, rather than going through Normandin Publications.

Lon Berberich of Le Sueur-Henderson walked in.

Ross said the State Baseball Committee HQ will be at Gleason Fields. His host committee has asked the city to bring in an RV or seek a local dealer to lend one. Player check-in will be at one of the hotels, with Post 172 as a backup location. A photographer has been lined up to take team photos at check-in. The host committee is seeking a grant from Experience Maple Grove (as the convention and visitors bureau for that town, it collects lodging taxes and hands out grants for events that attract visitors).

Streich and Nesvold presented a bid for Sleepy Eye to host the 2027 Div. II Junior State Tournament. He passed out a handout and ran through its contents: new scoreboard, improvements to the field, renovated surface, new sod, new dugout benches with new railing and netting. He said the city is installing fiber optics and Wi-Fi to provide the host with streaming capability. Sleepy Eye, he said, has a strong volunteer base, things for visitors to do, good financials, dedicated sponsors and works well with the local Chamber of Commerce. Kitzberger speaks well of the program.

Schaub called for a brief break. Department Adjutant Mike Maxa arrived. Several presenters departed.

After, Schaub introduced 10th District Director Seth Pugh.

The next item on the agenda was a request from Duluth to combine schools for Junior and Senior teams. Schaub said the committee got hoodwinked last year in granting a variance for Denfield and East to combine (Denfield claimed to not have enough players). However, the DI team that made it to state included Marshall kids, going beyond what was granted. They formed a Duluth-wide megateam. Marshall is a private school. Engstrom noted the combination even was exposed for all to see in a TV sports report. This, he said, ticked off some other Legion team managers and coaches when they learned about it, if they didn’t already know.

Coombe entered via Zoom and chimed in. He said he doesn’t like what Duluth did one bit. He said all three schools are good at baseball on their own, and having a super team is unfair to other teams in the substate. On the other hand, he wonders where they would play summer baseball without combining. He said he favors tabling the matter and seeking more information from Duluth about forming two Senior teams rather than the combined Senior-Junior teams.

Kalata said she contacted the Duluth manager and he was going to send her addresses of the players not attending the base school. He didn’t supply it. She said she wishes he had supplied something for the committee to review at the Spring Meeting.

Coombe noted Duluth didn’t ask. “They told us, ‘We were going to do this.’”

Schaub said, “We took it away from Bloomington. I have no program taking it away from Duluth.”

Coombe said he can guarantee some of the Marshall players live closer to Hermantown and other schools than East or Denfield. (Denfield is essentially “West High.”)

Peck said the committee received complaints. He recalled when the Rochester A’s fielded the best kids from the entire city. The Baseball Committee flat said they aren’t allowed to do it anymore.

Coombe said Duluth released a player to Hermantown, which suggests they are putting a team together based on who they want on the team, rather than base school.

Miller said not taking action opens a can of worms. The committee should say no. He moved to say no to combining Senior-Junior teams. Peck seconded. The motion carried.

Coombe moved that Schaub and he make contact to indicate the committee’s decision to the team and identify players from base and non-base schools. Schaub said no motion was necessary, and that Schaub and Coombe can do that as part of their regular duties.

Kalata added that if a private school is in a base area, they have a right to roster those kids. Schaub added it is important to follow the rules.

Next up was Braden Thompson from Dawson-Boyd, who presented a bid for Dawson to host the Div. II Junior State Tournament in 2026 or 2027. He said the baseball program has a lot of support from Dawson Post 177. There is a new scoreboard, with interchangeable features. The concession stand and press box were finished in 2013. The field has new foul poles and is in a good location in town. He said everything is much-improved since the mid-2000s. The pitcher’s mound was redone in 2022. The host will provide lunch. The program has many helpers, families and volunteers. Madison has a hotel. Montevideo, too. They have a photographer, sponsors, many concessions. The next project is upgrading the speaker system and to start livestreaming games. They would be willing to host a banquet.

Dollerschell asked if Dawson would be interested in the Div. II *Senior* State Tournament.

Thompson said yes, and said they aren’t set in stone on a particular year either.

Next up was Vice Director Brandon Raymo’s administrative duties (i.e.: registration, background checks, concussion protocol certification, sex abuse training) in 2025. This season, he is showing Wayzata coach Marshall Dalziel how it all functions.

Miller moved to hire Dalziel to do the administrative duties in 2025. Wes Thompson seconded. Young and Rothstein abstained. The motion carried.

The Minnesota American Legion Baseball Prospect Series (aka “all-star series”) has a request for $2,000. Engstrom explained that the committee historically gave $2,000. Last year, Scheels gave $2,000 to the Prospect Series via the annual donation to the committee. Plus, the committee gave its usual $2,000, so it received a $4,000 bundle. Discussion ensued on rising costs of lodging of players at the four tournaments and now a fifth tournament. Miller motioned and Young seconded for the Prospect Series to receive $2,000 as a pass-through from Scheels and for the Prospect Series to provide financial reports in future years. Motion carried.

Kitzberger had to leave. Maxa left shortly after.

A discussion was had on rising trophy costs from last year, with Engstrom noting the vendor is charging more and that the committee also awarded more than usual last year. Also, Engstrom said he sent letters to posts seeking donations and has raised $2,600 so far. The discussion then turned to whether to provide trophies to the new Div. IA State Tournament. Considering it is experimental, had teams from four districts and not statewide, Miller and Kalata felt it should not get an A-frame trophy that typically represents a Legion Baseball state title. Schaub said the trophies can come from money raised. Further discussion ensued questioning who really has a patent on the A-frame trophies or whether a patent really exists at all. Did 1971 HOF inductee Shelly Hanson of Austin Post 91 design it? Engstrom said he would touch base with former secretary Al Zdon. (Zdon later told Engstrom he didn’t know for sure and that it might just be a line that Jim Anderson from AAA Awards repeated often enough to him that Zdon came to believe it.)

Dollerschell reported on progress for the 2024 Div. II Senior State Tournament to be held the BOLD High School Baseball Field in Bird Island. Committees are in place. Fundraising is ongoing. There is a new scoreboard, concession stand, press box, new sound system, new splashpad for kids. The tournament will be livestreamed. Teams will be housed in Redwood Falls, a 25-minute drive. The banquet will be at the Redwood Falls Community Center. Legendary Gophers’ PA announcer Dick Jonckowski is the emcee. The speaker is Barry Wohler, a Bird Island guy who played football and basketball at Minnesota and St. Cloud State and was in Dodger organization. He is the basketball coach at Orono High.

Schaub called a break for lunch. The remaining presenters departed.

McCready provided an update on the 2024 Div. II Junior State Tournament planned for St. Charles High School Baseball Field. Improvements, he said, have been made to the field. The observation tower and the pitching mound will be worked on. He said the host committee is working with the Rochester Sports Commission. Photographer will be the same as when St. Charles hosted it in 2019. Players will be bused to stay near Whitewater Valley State Park, with the state staff staying overnight in St. Charles. A banquet is planned with Pine Island’s Craig Anderson playing a role. There is a strong squad of volunteers. There will be a live national anthem sung.

Peck discussed planned coaching clinics by retired Southwest Minnesota State baseball coach Paul Blanchard. He described three or four clinics on Sundays: St. Charles, Crookston, Virginia. Schaub said the contract describes a $300 stipend and 50 cents per mile, $120 allowance for lodging, one day of $35 meal money. He charges $35 per coach.

Young handed out a sheet and went over committee financials. (See sheet attached with this email.) Discussion ensued. No motions were made.

The meeting returned to the discussion on state tournament structure. He described possibilities of 12 substates instead of 15, which would still result in a 16-team state tournament for Division I Senior. Discussion ensued on possible ties, other situations. Kalata reminded committee members that the reason for going to substates was to eliminate griping about unfair districts. Take 12 runner-ups from the teams with the least runs allowed. Miller said rotating substates is simple. Discussion ensued.

Strong suggested doing eight substates. Further discussion.

Schaub: The solution is E, H and K get two because they have the most teams. Arvidson said if Div. IA is a trial, then this must be a trial, too. Further discussion.

Finally, Arvidson motioned “to follow their great leader.” Specifically, he called for substates E, H and K. Thompson seconded. Motion carried.

Engstrom asked about printing rulebooks. Arvidson advised to print the same number as last year for postseason use and post the revised rulebook on the website and app.

Engstrom said the committee could save money by not mailing out preseason kits. After all, we possess the email addresses of every manager and coach in the state. Every year, we pay postage, plus we pay one or two people to collate and stuff. (Zdon used to hire his wife, Mary.) McCready agreed it would be more convenient to have the documents available in his computer, than as paper. He motioned to email preseason kits. Arvidson seconded. Motion carried.

Now it was time to award postseason tournament bids. There were no bids for the 2026 Div. II Senior State Tournament.

Raymo moved, McCready seconded, to award Le Sueur the 2027 Div. II Senior State Tournament. Schaub said it is best to award 2026 before awarding 2027. Raymo rescinded his motion. Schaub said bids will be awarded at the Fall Meeting.

Raymo moved to award the 2026 Div. II Junior State Tournament to Parkers Prairie. Miller seconded. Motion carried. Schaub reminded the committee that 2025 Div. II Junior is in Hayfield.

Arvidson moved to award Sleepy Eye the 2027 Div. II Jr. State Tournament. Peck seconded. Motion carried.

Schaub described a meeting with Perham for hosting the Div. I Junior State Tournament that fell through. Miller noted the Lake Region is short on lodging during the summer.

Peck said the Div. I Senior State Tournament is dealing with Alexandria. Engstrom added that Jamie Mortland from Scheels would like to see the Div. I Senior return to the Saint Cloud area so it is within her store’s territory. Alexandria, she said, is in a no store’s land. Thompson said he is working with Sartell people.

Miller advised Engstrom to say in the email for preseason kits that the committee is seeking bids for 2026 D1 & D2 tournaments.

Engstrom talked about how HF2000, the sports betting bill, provides tax relief for charitable gambling and, if passed, it could assist Minnesota American Legion Baseball with its lodging problems.

Schaub and Kalata discussed National American Legion Baseball’s requirement for adult participants in the national tournament of 64 (regionals and ALWS) must complete abuse training and background checks.

Kalata brought up Bloomington’s past variance, whether they want it again this year. Nothing was submitted. She said Mark Scott submitted teams as two Junior and two Senior based at Jefferson, with no Kennedy teams. Was there any special deal? She noted that any deals are expired without a request to renew. Northside Minneapolis also was brought up. Schaub said he can handle the matter as state director.

David brought up doing the coin flip at the tournament director level. (In the past, it has been done at the Spring Meeting.) McCready moved to have tournament directors do the coin flipping. Peck seconded. Motion carried.

Peck and Young briefly discussed Div. I umpires.

Engstrom said the next meeting is at 9 a.m. Sept. 21 at Apple Valley Post 1776.

Thompson moved to adjourn. Peck seconded. Motion carried.

**Addendum:**

On April 24, the Baseball Committee voted by email to name Levi Fry of the St. Michael Post 567 team as Coach of the Year.