

# Well Known Programs Help County in State Baseball Poll

**Leipsic, Miller City, Fort Jennings All Ranked Among Top Ten**

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Most everyone agrees that the Putnam County League is as good a Class A league as any in the state when it comes to basketball. Go ahead and add baseball to the list.

In the season's first United Press International coach's poll taken last Wednesday, there were three PCL teams ranked among the top ten in the state.

Leipsic (2), Miller City (3) and Fort Jennings (9) all earned state spots. All three coaches agree that it is quite an honor to receive such recognition.

"The kids are pretty excited," said Leipsic Coach Ted Miller, his team second behind top ranked Graysville Skyvue (last year's state champs). "I think we were ranked at one time last year in the second ten, but this is by far the highest. In fact we received the most first place votes (six to Skyvue's five).

Past success, all three coaches also admit, has a lot to do with the high rankings. "There's no question the reputation of the schools means a lot," remarked Fort Jennings Coach Tom Sakemiller, beginning his 19<sup>th</sup> year as Musketeer boss. "Not everybody has played us or Leipsic or Miller City but they know of the excellent programs each has."

Leipsic is the 1976 state champion, under Miller, while Miller City has earned state berths each of the last three years including the state title in 1984. Fort Jennings has been in district play five of the last six years and were regional runners-up in 1981.

"Leipsic I think got the county noted as a baseball league," said Miller City's Dan Kern who in his 12<sup>th</sup> year as Wildcat coach has a remarkable 202-43 record. "When I started coaching in 1975 a state title was about the furthest thing from my mind. But when Leipsic won it in 1976, it opened a lot of people's eyes that we could compete with any Class A team in the state."

Miller admits he did not know if that 1976 club could win it all. "I knew we had a good team and could play against any team in the area. I remember driving down to Columbus for the state tournament and not knowing what to expect. Were we going to get our doors blown off or what?"

That is not the only good team Leipsic has put together either. In Miller's 13 years at Leipsic, he has not had a losing season. The 1976 team was 29-1 with the 1980 team going 18-3 and the 1981 club 21-7.

The 1978 club made it to the regional finals and the last five years the Vikings have made it to the districts.

Under Miller, the Vikes have won six Blanchard Valley Conference titles and three PCL crowns.

"I've had some great talent here," said Miller, a Findlay College graduate as is Sakemiller. "The kids have everything to do with our success."

Sakemiller agrees. "We've been very fortunate at Fort Jennings to have had some very good players (last year there were three FJ grads playing college ball two of which just

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graduated). I think that speaks highly of our program.”

Since Sakemiller began coaching at Fort Jennings in 1968, he has seen a change in the high school baseball programs, but not as much in the players as in the coaching.

“I don’t see any difference in the kids over the years. I guess we’ve been lucky to be a small rural community where things don’t change much. But I think the coaching has changed. It is a lot better now. The coaches are video taping games and there are batting cages now to help with indoor practice.”

“I remember kids just getting a few swings in before the first game. And everyone had wood bats. Heck, we could break five or six bats in one game.”

Like Miller and Kern, Sakemiller also fielded excellent teams’ year in and year out. In 18 years, 14 of those have been winning campaigns.

Kern’s clubs have put together staggering won-loss marks. His 1977 team went 27-0 in gaining the state title. His last three teams have also advanced to state including the 1984 team that captured the title with an 18-4 record.

Last year’s team, ranked number one the entire season, went to the state semis with a 27-0 record before losing to Skyvue. The 27 straight wins, along with the last nine of the 1984 season, gave the Wildcats 36 consecutive triumphs, a county record.

Last year Kern was also named UPI’s coach of the year. “I think our past success has a bit to do with our ranking now. Truthfully, though, we are not deserving of such high ranking. We lost so much from last year (seven starters).”

Though Kern and the rest of the league keeps a rather modest profile to their team’s capabilities, one can bet that at least one PCL team will again advance to regional competition and a possible state berth. As people know, records speak for themselves.

| T. Sakemiller | Ted Miller | Dan Kern  |
|---------------|------------|-----------|
| 1968 9-15     |            |           |
| 1969 17- 7    |            |           |
| 1970 13-11    |            |           |
| 1971 18-10    |            |           |
| 1972 14-13    |            |           |
| 1973 10-15    |            |           |
| 1974 3-11     | 1974 8-8   |           |
| 1975 14- 9    | 1975 16-5  | 1975 17-8 |
| 1976 11- 7    | 1976 29-1  | 1976 17-1 |
| 1977 9- 6     | 1977 14-5  | 1977 27-1 |
| 1978 3-10     | 1978 16-8  | 1978 13-3 |
| 1979 8- 9     | 1979 13-4  | 1979 16-6 |
| 1980 15- 8    | 1980 18-3  | 1980 9-8  |
| 1981 16- 5    | 1981 21-7  | 1981 23-2 |
| 1982 12- 8    | 1982 16-8  | 1982 17-6 |
| 1983 11- 8    | 1983 11-8  | 1983 18-3 |
| 1984 16- 4    | 1984 13-7  | 1984 18-4 |
| 1985 7- 4     | 1985 15-9  | 1985 27-1 |

Tom Sakemiller’s record is 206-160. Ted Miller’s record is 190-73. Dan Kern’s record is 202-43.