

Miller City Runner-Up at Columbus in 1983

Putnam County Sentinel – June 8, 1983

Time ran out on the Miller City Wildcats Saturday morning. As a matter of fact, a little more than time ran out on the Cardiac Kids from northern Putnam County who were attempting to win their second state championship in seven years.

Their luck ran out, their pitching ran out, their clutch hitting and ability to come from behind ran out and their usually fair fielding ran out.

It was just not their day and the charges of Coach Dan Kern, who had not been thought of as state championship material until late in the season, bowed to Ashtabula St. John in the finals of the Class A state tournament at Columbus on Saturday morning by a score of 10-2.

That ended a 13 game winning streak for the Cats who had been thought to be out of the tournament many times along the way to their second state meet, but every time were able to come from behind in the late innings to keep their string alive. Just the day before, in a rain delayed state semi-final game they were able to score four runs in the bottom of the seventh inning to eke out a 10-9 victory over New Miami.

But it was not to be on Saturday for it was Ashtabula's day. For seven straight innings Miller City was able to put the lead off batter on base, but only twice were they able to bring him home as an unheralded pitcher of the Ashtabula Herald's handcuffed them with mighty tough pitching when the chips were down.

Mike Hayes a 6-2 junior who was not even listed as a pitcher in the official tournament program, and who had not been put into Coach Bill Schmidt's regular pitching rotation until midway through the season, kept the Miller City bats silent when they were needed the most.

The Wildcats touched Hayes for only five hits, and they could not bunch them at the right time. Miller City left ten runners stranded on the base paths.

Meanwhile, Kern went with his ace Jeff Hermiller, but the lanky junior just wasn't sharp on that day, and lasted only one and two-thirds innings. By the time Kern replaced him with sophomore Mark Lammers, Miller City was behind 6-0. The Wildcats also hurt themselves badly with seven errors.

Hayes went all the way on the mound for St. John's, and never was in serious trouble until the seventh inning – and that was not really serious either because he was working with a nine-run lead. He struck out five and walked four, even though the Wildcats were able to get the first batter on base in every inning.

He worked his way out of trouble every time as Miller City stranded runners on second and third in the first inning, first and third in the second, first and second in the third, had four different base runners and left runners on first and third without scoring in the fourth, left another on third in the sixth and runners on second and third again in the seventh.

But on the mound was not the only place Hayes starred for the new state champs. In four appearances at the plate he banged out a two-run single, drove two more runners home when his sharp grounder got through the Miller City third baseman in the fourth inning, and reached base once more on an error which put another runner in scoring position.

Miller City's first two batters, Jay Meyer and Bruce Kreinbrink opened the game with singles, but were unable to score as a strikeout and a double play ended the inning. That double play, according to Kern, was the key play of the game and took the heart out of the Wildcat attack.

Then Ashtabula unloaded on Hermiller in the bottom of the first frame with four runs on five hits and two Wildcat errors. The first three batters Dave Rozzo, Chuck Herpy and Eric Opron, banged out singles for one run. After Hayes flied out, John

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Elzeer pushed across a run with another single and he went to second on the throw to the plate. With two out Sean Gouhin lined sharply to center field and the ball got through the outfielder for an error, allowing two more runners to cross the plate.

Hermiller got the first two Herald batters in the second inning but the roof caved in. Herpy cracked his second hit to center and Opron rapped one through the gap to the warning path for a double Hayes followed with a short shot to center which brought both runners home, and he went to second on the throw.

Lammers then took over on the mound for Miller City and Elzeer sent his first pitch through the infield for a run-scoring error.

The Miller City sophomore was tough from then on, but his infield left him down, In the fourth inning Herpy cracked a one-out double, and then two consecutive throwing errors on grounders off the bats of Opron and Hayes accounted for two more runs which gave them a 9-0 lead.

Ashtabula's last run came on two throwing errors and a mental error. Two errors and an intentional walk loaded the bases with Opron on third. With one out, Gouhin smacked a high fly to right field which was easily handled by the Miller City fielder, but he obviously thought it was the final out and failed to throw the ball back into the infield, and Opron easily tagged and trotted home.

Lead off batter Jay Meyer, who was officially two for two at the plate, scored both of Miller City's runs. He led off the fifth inning with a single and went to second when the St. John's catcher threw the ball away on an attempted pickoff. Another throwing error brought Meyer home.

Meyer walked to start the seventh, as Miller City again came up with a last-ditch rally, which was too little and too late.

Hayes was within one pitch of the state championship when Hermiller rapped an 0-2 pitch for a long single which scored Meyer. Then the Ashtabula pitcher ran into control problems and walked Dale Lammers on four straight pitches, and went to 3-2 on Ned Kreinbrink before the Wildcat first baseman grounded out to end the tournament.

Opron led the winning attack as he reached base four times in four tries on a single, a double and two errors. He scored three times and his pinch runner scored once, and he drove home one run. Herpy had a double and two singles in four trips and scored three runs.

Miller City ended the season, in which they won the Putnam County League championship, with a fine 18-3 record. Ashtabula, a normal football power which had won the state football championship once, had been in the state baseball tournament twice before but making its first appearance in the championship game. They went 22-5 in a tough season during which they competed in a Class AAA conference.

Miller City	AB	H	R	RBI	
Meyer	2	2	2	0	
B.Kreinbrink	4	1	0	0	
Vennekotter	3	0	0	0	
Hermiller	3	1	0	1	
D.Lammers	1	1	0	0	
N.Kreinbrink	3	0	0	0	
Mike Lammers	2	0	0	0	
Mark Lammers	2	0	0	0	
Wank	1	0	0	0	
Wenzinger	2	0	0	0	
Ashtabula	AB	H	R	RBI	
Rozzo	3	1	1	0	
Herpy	4	3	3	0	
Opron	2	2	3	1	
Pape	0	0	1	0	
Hayes	2	1	1	4	
Elzeer	2	1	1	2	
DiDonato	4	0	0	0	
Gouhin	4	1	0	2	
Sheldon	3	0	0	0	
Helmecci	0	0	0	0	
Craffey	2	1	0	0	
MC 000	010	1	2	5	7
St. John430	201	x	10	10	3

Hermiller, Mark Lammers (2) and Wenzinger, Hermiller (2); Hayes and DiDonato.