

Clutch Hit Makes Miller City Champs Again in 1984

Putnam County Sentinel – June 6, 1984

Jeff Hermiller lay sprawled out about a third of the way beyond third base. Bruce Kreinbrink stood on second base having a heart attack. Coach Dan Kern was in the third base coach's box having the biggest let down of his life. Frantic Miller City fans were jumping up and down in the stands yelling, "Get up! Get up!"

It was a scene too fantastic for even the most unbelievable fiction! It could only happen in real life!

It was the last half of the last inning of the Class A championship baseball game on the varsity diamond at Ohio State University.

The score was tied at 3-3 and the tournament's star was rounding third base with the state championship riding on his back, when his feet went out from under him on the slippery grass.

Hermiller, who doesn't like the new rubber spikes players are required to wear, said he got off the base path onto the grass and slipped. He thought about going back to third base, but saw the cut off man had just gotten the ball out in the outfield "so I just kept on digging".

The 6-6 senior, who was the hero of Friday's semi-final victory, got up and tore for home, sliding in under the throw. He almost couldn't find the plate as he was immediately swarmed on by the rest of the Miller City club which had just picked up the state championship with Hermiller's game winning run.

All bedlam broke loose in the wild finish as Miller City defeated Tuscarawas Central Catholic from New Philadelphia 4-3.

Hermiller, who had clouted a 370 foot two run home run in the first inning – his seventh round tripper of the season – scored from first base after drawing a one out walk.

Third baseman Kreinbrink, the only left handed batter on the Wildcat club, was the hero as he crossed up the Saints with a drive deep into left field, which was just out of the reach of the diving Tuscarawas left fielder, Chuck Slowikowski.

The ball rolled all the way to the wall and by the time Slowikowski retrieved it Hermiller was on the way to third and being waved home by Coach Kern.

"I just got off on the grass. These spikes aren't made for grass," Hermiller said after he had fallen heading for home with the winning run. But after seeing the ball was still in the outfield he was sure he could make, and he did.

Kreinbrink, who bats .340 and hits to left a lot, easily made it to second. "When I saw Jeff fall down, I about had a heart attack," he said.

Kern didn't see Hermiller fall, "I was looking into the outfield and kept saying to myself, we won the SOB, we won the SOB. And then I looked around and saw Jeff lying on the ground. Boy, was that a letdown. I didn't know where the ball was at that time. I kept looking for the throw home, but Jeff got up and easily beat the relay."

Kreinbrink said that the pitch from Central's Jim Contini was a fast ball. "He threw me fast balls all day. He didn't throw me any curves," Kreinbrink said.

It was a great end to a great career for three Miller City seniors, Hermiller, second baseman Roger Wenzinger and left fielder Mike Lammers, who were playing their last game in a Wildcat uniform. They had graduated a week earlier.

"I'm happy for our seniors especially," Kern said. "They have had fantastic tournament success. They were down here last year."

The Wildcats were not quite so successful a year ago when they lost in the state finals to Ashtabula St. John 10-2.

For Kern, who has finished 10 seasons at the Wildcat helm, it was the third trip to the state tournament where he won it all twice and was runner up once. His 1977 team was also the state champion. His 10 year record is 174 victories and 41 losses. This year's team went 18-4.

Tuscarawas, which lost only three times while earning 19 victories going into Saturday's championship game, was a high scoring outfit. In seven previous tournament games they had scored 75 runs while allowing only 25. In Friday's semi-final round they beat Columbus Ready 10-5.

And that produced another Miller City hero in the finals. Junior Leroy Johnston was given the starting pitching assignment and came through with flying colors. Johnston had won the honor three days before when he hurled four excellent innings against Columbus Grove which gave Miller City a share of this year's Putnam County League championship.

"Leroy was nervous as heck out there at the start of the game, but he got his confidence as the game went on and he did one heck of a job," Kern said after his young pitcher went all the way.

The junior right hander set the hard hitting Saints down with just eight hits, all of them singles. He got off to a shaky start but had his curveball working at the end and finished out with two strikeouts in the seventh inning, the last one by Central Catholic's clean up batter, catcher Monte Vasco, who had been on base three times previously.

Clutch Hit Makes Miller City Champs Again in 1984

Putnam County Sentinel – June 6, 1984

Central got to Johnston for two runs on three hits in the first inning and put three more runners on in the second, but Johnston was in command nearly the rest of the game. The only other run off him came on a couple errors in the fifth inning.

"We put him in trouble a couple of times," Kern said. The key defensive play of the game came in the same inning when the Wildcats made their only two errors and allowed Central to score an unearned run to tie the game.

Contini led off the top of the fifth with Miller City leading 3-2 and he popped back to the pitcher. Then center fielder Casey Cummings singled to left. Second baseman Erik Young smashed one to second which was mishandled and the Saints had runners on second and third.

Then Vesco's shot went through second allowing Cummings to score from third and Young rounded third with the ball in center field. Scott Schroeder rifled the ball home but it went through Hermiller's legs.

Johnston was backing up the play and relayed the ball back to Hermiller who tagged Young at the plate, effectively killing off the rally. Tuscarawas did not threaten again.

The Miller City hurler struck out only four, but two of them were big ones in the seventh inning. He walked only two.

However, he got off to a shaky start. Contini started the game with a single but he was cut down at second by Cummings's grounder to short, and Hermiller threw out Cummings on an attempted steal.

Young followed with a single and Vesco walked and both moved up on a wild pitch. Designated hitter then gave the Saints a 2-0 lead with a single down the right field line, the fifth straight Central batter to reach base, before Johnston close out the inning with a strikeout.

Hermiller's blast over the center field fence quickly tied matters in the bottom of the first inning. With out one Mark Lammers singled to left and went to second on a passed ball. Hermiller then followed with a 370 foot shot and from then on the game was batter for batter.

Contini developed control problems and walked home a run in the third inning. Mark Lammers was on with a fielder's choice and then Hermiller, Kreinbrink and Tom Lehman all drew free passes to make it 3-2.

The Central Catholic pitcher regained his control and went the rest of the way, allowing only three more hits and giving up just two more walks. For the game he allowed just six hits, two fewer than his teammates got off Johnston. He struck out six and issued five walks.

But one of those probably will haunt him the rest of his life. That was to Hermiller with one out in the bottom of the seventh and he turned into the tournament winning run.

Kern, who has been there before, had sympathy for the team he beat. "That was a tough game to lose. We lost a blowout last year and that wasn't so bad. But when it's close like this it has got to be hard to lose," he said.

It was also sweet to win. The wild finish cleared the Miller City dugout and there was a pile of human flesh atop Hermiller at the plate.

The large contingent of Miller City fans, biggest among the 12 schools in the state tournament, also went wild and the celebration continued for two days as the team was met on their return from Columbus on Sunday afternoon with a parade through Ottawa and onto Miller City where the team was again feted by family and friends.

Tuscarawas Central C.	AB	R	H
Contini, p	3	0	2
Cummings, cf	3	1	1
Young, 3b	3	1	2
Vesco, c	2	1	1
Barnabi, dh	2	0	1
Nesslrode, 2b	3	0	0
Blickensderfer, ss	3	0	0
Slowikowski, lf	3	0	1
Stringer, 1b	3	0	0

Miller City	AB	R	H
Wenzinger, 2b	3	0	0
Mark Lammers, ss	3	2	1
Hermiller, c	2	2	1
Kreinbrink, 3b	3	0	1
Johnston, p	3	0	1
Lehman, 1b	2	0	0
Warnimont, dh	3	0	1
Mike Lammers, lf	2	0	1
Schroeder, cf	3	0	0

Tuscarawas	200	010	0	3	8	0
Miller City	201	000	1	4	6	2