

'76 Vikings, '77 Wildcats to Meet

State Baseball Champs Will Play

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Sixteen years ago Leipsic gave Putnam County its first baseball state championship. A year later Miller City made it two straight state championships in baseball in Putnam County.

Now the members of these two state championship squads will be back on the diamond in a friendly game on Sunday, July 26 at Miller City, at 2 p.m. However, should Miller City be involved in the State ACME tournament that day the game will be pushed back to a late date.

The idea to match the state championship teams in a friendly game came about through a conversation reminiscing about the glory days.

"I was talking with one of the Tooman boys from Leipsic and he mentioned how nice it would be to get together," Miller City coach Dan Kern said. "So I called Ted (Leipsic coach Miller) and he also liked the idea, so we went about putting it together."

"The game will give these players a chance to be in front of the fans again. It's not really a game to win or lose, but a chance for them to get together and trade war stories" (about their playing days).

"The players are excited about the game. We should have a good turnout. Right now we have only a couple of players who say they may not be able to make the game because they live elsewhere and getting back would be difficult."

Coach Miller echoed the sentiments expressed by the Miller City coach. "I'm excited about it," Miller said. "It's the type of game these players from the past will enjoy."

"The players had mixed emotions about the game. Some were ready to go the minute I talked to them about it and some wondered if they had a glove. Not everyone will make it, but the majority of the players should be there."

Leipsic won the Class A 1976 state baseball championship by beating Cuyahoga Heights 6-5 in the finals. That completed a season which saw them end with a record of 29-1.

Ironically their only loss was to Miller City in a Putnam County League game 4-3. The Wildcats finished the 1976 season with a 17-1 mark, losing to Kalida in the sectional tournament.

Miller City won the 1977 Class A State Championship by defeating Versailles 4-1. They finished their season with a perfect 27-0 mark.

Actually it was Leipsic's victory in 1976 that actually may have set Miller City on their course for winning in 1977.

"I was in our driver education car going over a bridge near Bath when we heard the end of the game on the radio," Kern said. "That opened my eyes. I said if they could do it then we had a chance of doing it. Before I had always felt you needed to be from the big city to win a state title."

Being the first baseball team from the county to win a state title, Leipsic went into the tournament not knowing what to expect.

"We really didn't know if we could compete with teams from other areas of the state. We didn't go into the season expecting to win the state title. But as the season progressed we felt we had a pretty good team. The players had confidence in themselves and that's what it takes. I think losing to Miller City during the season really helped bring our players back to earth and work hard to win."

The only loss suffered by Leipsic in 1976 was a 3-2 Putnam County League loss to the Wildcats. However, both coaches seem to agree if the Viking had the field they did today Leipsic may have gone through the season undefeated.

At the time Miller City and Leipsic met in '76 they didn't have a fence in the outfield. Without the fence Miller City centerfielder Steve McKibben was able to haul in several long drives which today would be home runs in Leipsic.

However, that fact could be disputed because no one knows for sure just how an outfield fence may have changed the game.

One thing for sure is that when the two teams meet on July 26 this may be one of the war stories the two teams may be trading since both units carried quite a few players over into the following years.