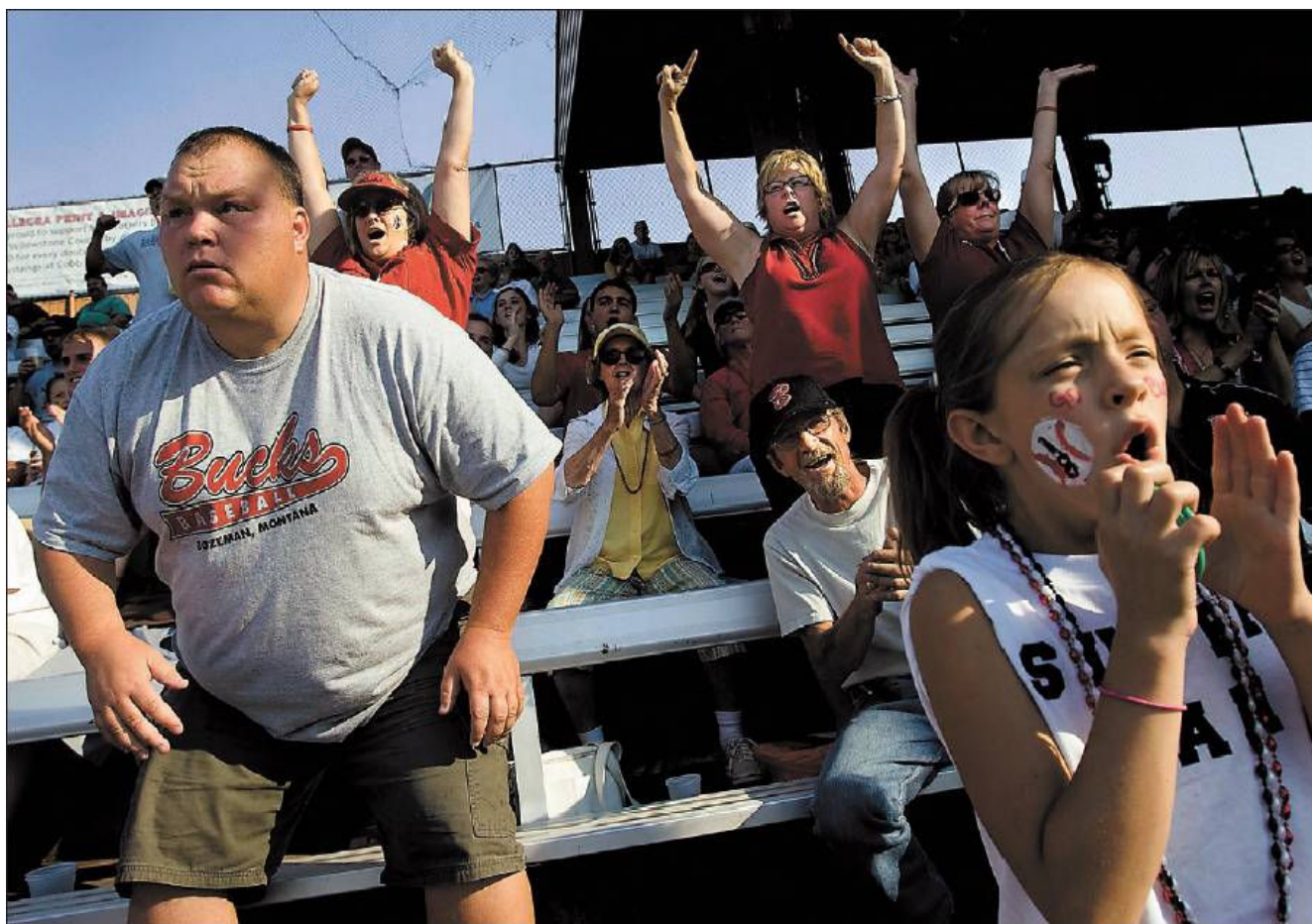


# Diamond jubilee



TIM KUPSICK/CHRONICLE

Bozeman Bucks fans celebrate as first baseman Sean Potkay hits a single in the American Legion state championship game against the Billings Royals Wednesday evening. The Bucks won 8-3 to claim the title, the team's first-ever state American Legion crown.

By **TIM DUMAS**  
Chronicle Sports Writer

**B**ILLINGS — Even before the bottom of the ninth inning began, they were on their feet. History was about to be made.

Fans of the Bozeman Bucks — including eight of third baseman Caleb Schlender's nine sisters and the six siblings of pitcher Gabe Weidenaar — cheered every strike. The final one, blown past Josh Miller of the Billings Royals, touched off a bounding mass of back-slapping Bucks just behind the pitcher's mound as Bozeman was free to celebrate its first American Legion state baseball championship Wednesday evening.

**“It’s a monkey off our back. We finally reversed our Bucks curse.”**

— Bozeman Bucks centerfielder Andy Pike

Fittingly, the 8-3 victory marked the final Legion game to be played at Cobb Field, which will be demolished later this summer. The stadium was erected in 1948, 20 years after American Legion baseball debuted in Montana.

Bozeman's program, which dates to the 1930s, had been close before, finishing second in

1957 and 1965. The team even won the championship in 1948 before it was taken away due to an ineligible player.

On Wednesday, current and past players reveled in the long-awaited glory.

“It’s a monkey off our back,” said center fielder Andy Pike, whose team advances to the regional tournament in Lewiston, Idaho, next week.

“We finally reversed our Bucks curse.”

Rod Nute, who played in 1952 and '53, could hardly form the words when asked if he felt proud.

“Oh gosh,” is all he muttered, before reaching for a handkerchief.

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During the game, Bozeman's faithful fans had no trouble displaying their pride near the Bucks' dugout behind first base. Schlender's sisters came equipped with white T-shirts, all adorned with "18 Caleb" on their backs.

On the front, each wore a different slogan in black felt letters: "Baby Sister," read 3-year-old Whitney's. And Schlender's lone younger brother, Wesley, 7, ironed on his intentions for later years: "Future Buck." The players' mothers painted

baseballs on their cheeks with their sons' numbers in the middle and several youngsters painted their faces red and black.

When the game was over, family members took the field to exchange tearful hugs and snap keepsake pictures. What

better way to celebrate than with loved ones.

"It's fun," Caleb Schlender said. "Seeing them with all their little shirts — it makes it pretty surreal."

It's real. The long wait is over.