

LONG JOURNEY ENDS

Bucks' record season concludes with 7-2 loss to Bellingham

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LEWISTON, Idaho — It's too bad the Bozeman Bucks couldn't have saved a few runs from Sunday's wild win against Lewis-Clark. They could have used them Monday night.

Less than 24 hours after collecting 19 hits and scoring 14 runs against the host Twins, the Bucks managed just five hits and a pair of unearned runs in a 7-2 loss to King Nissan of Bellingham, Wash., at Harris Field.

The loss eliminated the Bucks from the American Legion Northwest Regional. King Nissan went on to defeat Lewis-Clark 2-1 with a run in the bottom of the ninth inning. The win advances Bellingham to next week-end's World Series in Oklahoma.

"Considering our season, this is an ironic way to end it," Bucks coach Mitch Messer said. "The one game we don't hit, we get knocked out."

"I'm not sure we had a game this season where we had just five hits. I don't think we ever scored two or less runs. But, hey, that's baseball."

The loss drew the curtain on the Bucks' finest season. They won 59 games and advanced to the regional tournament for the first time in program history.

"It was a sad way to end the season, because I didn't think we'd go out that way," said shortstop Gabe Weidenaar, who played his last game for the Bucks.

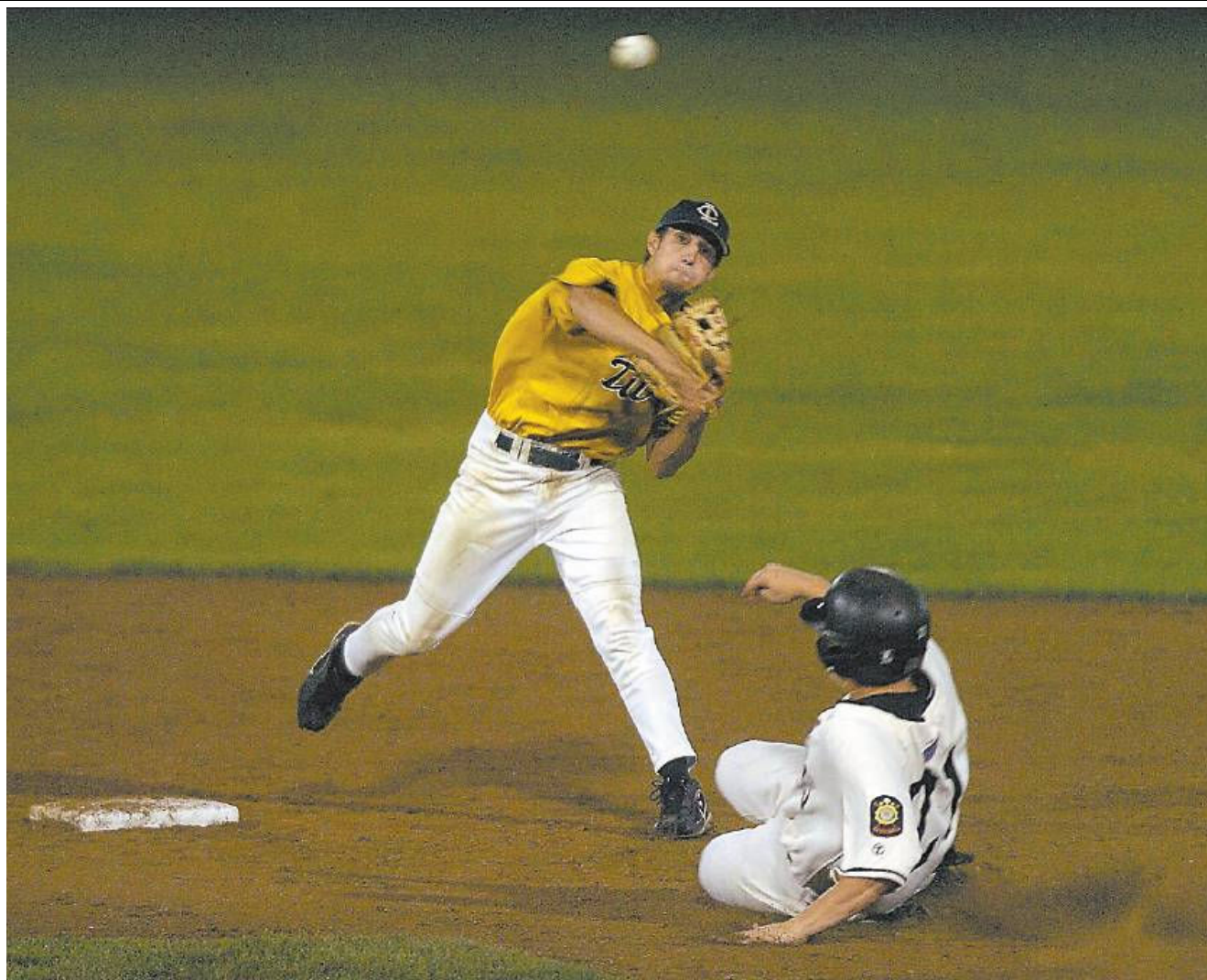
"It was a good season. We found out that we're a really good team. Going into this season, we weren't really sure of how we'd be. We had some doubts about that. There's no way that anyone thought this is how far we'd go."

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KYLE MILLS/LEWISTON TRIBUNE

Bozeman's Tanner Newman chases down Bellingham's Kal Hatch as he tries to score in the second inning. Hatch was called out on the play for running out of the baseline. In the background is third baseman Caleb Schlender.



KYLE MILLS/LEWISTON TRIBUNE

Lewis-Clark's Taylor Forge fires a throw to first after forcing out Bozeman's Sean Potkey to start a double play in the third inning Sunday night during Bozeman's 14-13 victory at the American Legion Northwest Regional baseball tournament in Lewiston, Idaho.

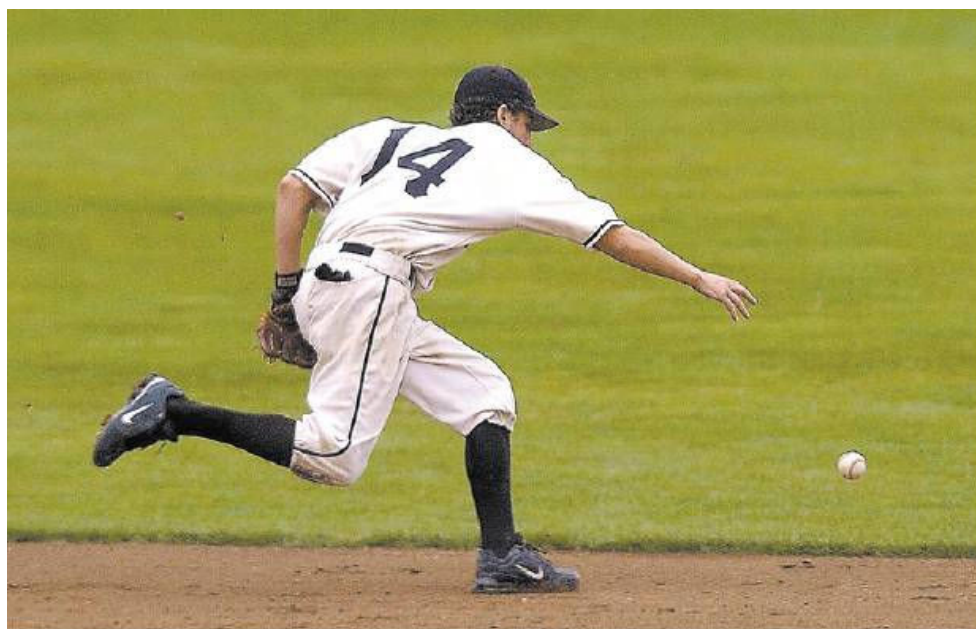
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The way the Bucks started the tournament last Thursday, few would have predicted they'd get within a game of the championship, either.

But, after giving up 10 unearned runs and losing 14-7 to Boise in the opener, Bozeman bounced back with a 16-7 win against the South Anchorage Wolverines and 9-7 triumph against Pinnacle Bank of Papillion, Neb., before Sunday's marathon 14-13 victory against the Twins.

"I'm proud of these guys for fighting their way back through the tournament," Messer said. "It would have been easy to roll over and call it quits. These guys fought, and they've done it all year."

The Bucks (59-16) had thrived all tournament — all season, for that matter — on big innings, but they could get little going offensively Monday against King Nissan right-hander Jordan Chambers, who



KYLE MILLS/LEWISTON TRIBUNE

This grounder got away from shortstop Gabe Weldenaar Monday night in the Bucks' finale.

ger Jordan Chambers, who walked five and struck out six.

Chambers, who said he threw just six breaking balls all game, spotted his fastball well. And when the Bucks did hit the ball hard, they inevitably hit it right at someone.

"My coaches told me to locate my fastballs and let them put it in play," Chambers said. "I was here at that game (Sunday night). The pitching (Bozeman) hit was not real spectacular. I saw they had a little trouble with the harder stuff, so I figured that if I threw fastballs, they'd have trouble with it, and they did."

Messer gave Chambers all the credit: "He did a good job of moving the ball in and out. He used his offspeed (pitches) just enough to make his fastball effective. He didn't strike out a lot of us, but we weren't finding holes, or we'd hit it right back up the middle at the pitcher. That's just the way it

goes. He did a good job.

King Nissan got all the runs it needed in the first three innings against Bozeman right-hander Tanner Newman, who made his second start of the tournament.

The Bellingham team scored two runs in the first inning on three hits, added a run on four hits in the second and then tacked on two more in the third on one hit and three Bozeman errors. The Washington champ wrapped up its scoring with two runs in the seventh off Bozeman reliever Anthony Rinard.

The Bucks scored both of their runs in the bottom of the fourth inning. They collected just one hit and got a lot of help

from King Nissan, which committed three errors.

Sean Potkay opened with an infield single and moved to second on a throwing error by the third baseman. Potkay moved to third on a fly out to center and scored on a groundout. After Ryan Minkoff walked, a booted ground ball put runners on first and third.

After a walk to Trevor Peck loaded the bases, an attempted pickoff throw by the

Washington catcher sailed into center field to allow Minkoff to score.

Otherwise, the Bucks struggled.

All five hits were singles, and no batter had more than one.

The only other inning Bozeman got a runner as far as third base was the second.

Messer said he hopes the strong season and tournament performance set the stage for next season.

The Bucks return a strong lineup, and they will play host to the 2008 Northwest Regional.

"We've got a majority of these guys coming back," the coach said. "They got here and got the good experience. They smelled it. They know what it's like. They know they can compete at this level."

Bellingham 7, Bozeman 2

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Jordan Chambers and Taylor Schenck. Tanner Newman, Anthony Rinard (6) and Ryan Minkoff.

Bellingham (63-6) — Kai Hatch 1-b, Danny Hennigs 2-4, Rhett Fenton 2-5, Taylor Schenck 1-2, Tyler Slesk 1-5, Jordan Chambers 2-4, Alan Kennedy 1-5, James Culwell 0-3, T.J. Fife 0-2, Brady Locker 2-4.

Bozeman (59-16) — Gabe Weidenaar 1-5, Matt Comer 0-4, Caleb Schlender 1-4, Sean Potkay 1-3, Andy Pike 0-3, Ryan Minkoff 1-4, Anthony Rinard 1-3, Chris Schmidt 0-2, Trevor Peck 0-2, Tanner Newman 0-2.