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All Billings semifinal at Rein goes to Cardinals

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The Billings Cardinals and Billings Blue Jays share the same home town. But that's about all they have in common.

The Cardinals, head coach Cash Seal said, pride themselves on pitching and defense. They've given up double-digit runs just nine times through 47 games.

Four of those nine games have been against the Blue Jays and head coach Scott Hayden said it's not unusual for his team to put together such offensive outbursts.

"We had one inning not too long ago where we scored 15 runs," Hayden said. "There have been quite a few instances where we've scored more than nine runs an inning."

The Blue Jays could have used one of those big innings in the semifinals of the Howard Rein Tournament on Saturday, as they fell 9-1 in a five-inning mercy-rule

"Anytime you can play baseball, it's a great day. When you couple that with our nation's best holiday in a rivalry game, I think that's a great thing."

— **Scott Hayden**,
Billings Blue Jays coach

contest to their crosstown rivals.

"In the beginning of the tournament, we played real well," Hayden said. "As it wore on, though, we didn't really look like our team. Today was definitely not our team."

The Cardinals, on the other hand, were pleasantly surprised by their offensive production. And the 11 hits — including four doubles — was something equally as uncharacteristic, Seal said.

"The kids just showed up in this tournament and hit the baseball," he said. "We've

been struggling at the plate. Before we came here, we went to Powell and we got beaten up because we couldn't swing it with some of those older teams. But they're improving every day at the plate and they showed that today."

The Cardinals got a couple things they've grown accustomed to — good pitching and steady defense. Starter Brady Gustafson allowed four hits — all singles — and no walks. His defense committed one error behind him.

"We have a great pitching staff," Gustafson said. "We're really deep and I feel we'll be good heading down the stretch."

As lopsided an affair as it was, if the Blue Jays could have gotten one out in the Cardinal half of the fourth, it may have been a different game. Blue Jays' starter Ian McCracken retired Josh Monson and Danny Rodison back-to-back to begin the inning, but two walks, a hit batsman and three doubles later, the Cardinals had chased McCracken and the damage was done.

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The Cardinals put up six runs in the inning, highlighted by a bases-loaded double from centerfielder Clay Compton which drove in three.

Gustafson allowed two base runners in the bottom half of the inning, but that was all the offense the Blue Jays could muster.

With the win, the Cardinals advance to play the Missoula Mavericks, who beat the Kalispell Lakers 9-1 in the other semifinal on Saturday, in the championship game tonight at 8 p.m.

The Blue Jays, who lost 2-1 earlier Saturday to the Mavericks, will play the loser of the 9 a.m. game between the Bozeman Spikes and Butte Muckers.

Despite going winless on the day, Hayden wasn't feeling down about his team.

"We're going to be a tough contender when it comes to state," Hayden said referring to the state tournament that will be hosted by the Gallatin Valley Outlaws in Three Forks starting July 30. "We feel like we'll be one of the teams to beat."

And besides, Hayden said, it's hard to feel down on the Fourth of July.

"Anytime you can play baseball, it's a great day," Hayden said. "When you couple that with our nation's best holiday in a rivalry game, I think that's a great thing."

MISSOULA MAVERICKS (A) 9, KALISPELL LAKERS

1: Michael Melugin held the Lakers to three hits while striking out nine and Tres Cunningham hit

a walk-off double to cap a six-run sixth inning as the Mavericks finished a mercy-rule shortened game in the first semifinal contest on Saturday.

The Lakers were only able to get one out in the bottom of the sixth and it came at the expense of a run on a sacrifice fly ball from Nate Ratts. Cunningham led the Mavericks with three hits.

**MAVERICKS (A)
2, BLUE JAYS 1:** The Mavericks' Stuart Breckenridge and the Blue Jays' Chris White locked in for a seven-inning pitchers duel in the final pool play game of the tournament early Saturday morning.

Each struck out two, walked one and allowed one earned run. But the Mavericks' nine hits off White put more pressure on the Blue Jays' defense than the two given up by Breckenridge and the Mavericks came out on top. Nathan Jewett and Shawn McArthur each had two hits a piece for Missoula.

MOUNTAIN VIEW TOROS 10, LETHBRIDGE

MINERS 7: The Toros used a seven-run bottom of the fourth to come from behind and beat the Miners in the first game of the loser's bracket, Saturday.

Miners' first baseman Braeden Heyland led all hitters with three singles and three RBIs. Five Toros had multiple hits, including leadoff man Scott Curtis, who also scored two runs, drove in two and stole two bases.