

After 42 years, the 1977 baseball champs make the Hall



Before they were accepting the 1977 state “A” championship trophy (top), the Ephrata High baseball team was showing off the district title plaque in an advertisement published by the Grant County Journal. Members of the team in bottom photo were (front, from left) Dan Fields, John Stierwalt, Joel Whitver, Bryon Allen, Gary Donabauer, Hal Killian, Steve Lose, (back) Eric Monson, Ted Kallstrom, Chuck Berrie, Nick Brossoit, Ralph Moore, Mike Harvill, Mike Smick, Dave LaBounty and Ed McNamara.

BY STEVEN SMITH of the Journal

EPHRATA – In 1975, Dave Johnson and Marty O’Brien coached the Ephrata High varsity baseball team to a 27-4 record and titles in the Caribou Trail League, district six and region four. They played in the state “AA” title game but lost to Clarkston, 6-0.

In 1976, almost the exact same story. A 20-9 record, titles in the league, district and regional. An 8-3 loss to Orting in the state “A” championship game.

So, when 1977 rolled around, the two coaches knew a change was on the way

At the end of the year, the 1977 team completed its first-ever run to a state championship, the first for a boys team at

Ephrata High. And for that reason, the 1977 Tigers will be the first team in school history to be enshrined in the inaugural class of the new Ephrata athletic Hall of Fame on Sept. 28 at the St. Rose of Lima School.

The team finished the year with a 28-2 record, the most wins in a single season for a team coached by Johnson. That was a mark the Tigers had to wait until Johnson finished coaching after 36 years to figure out.

On the other hand, that season was a record-setting endeavor for the Tigers:

- Team batting average: .306.
- Opponent average: .102.
- Runs batted in: 138.
- Total hits: 220.
- Total runs: 189.
- Total doubles: 27.

And the numbers put up by individual players were also impressive:

•Ralph Moore, the team's top pitcher at the start of the season, finished the year with a 9-1 record with a 0.49 ERA and 103 strikeouts in 72 innings on the mound.

•Ed McNamara, a junior who went on to coach baseball at Moses Lake High before passing away in 2011, led the team in hitting, setting new school records at the time with an average of .450 and 36 total hits.

But the numbers were just a part of the equation that led to the state title – a change in the mood on the team occurred because many of the players on the 1977 club were first-year varsity. Most of the same players made up Johnson's rosters in 1975 and 1976 – by the next year, a primarily new group would take the field for the Tigers.

It was a group that O'Brien had some difficulties with a few years earlier, recalled Johnson.

"Most of those (1977) kids had been in Marty's conditioning class at the junior high a couple of years earlier and they were bickering with each other so much during conditioning that Marty finally kicked them out – it was the only time he ever had to do that," Johnson laughed. "The big thing was to get the three-star t-shirt (being in conditioning for sixth, seventh and eighth grades) and all of them just had two-stars. He even told them they weren't going to do anything in high school because all they did was fight with each other."

But in the three years between getting booted out of conditioning class and getting to the state title game "they matured. They were just high-strung kids, but good kids. He just got fed up with them. They wanted to prove that Marty was wrong, that they were able to make something of themselves in high school."

By the time 1977 rolled around, the talent level was high after coming up through the ranks – they started with O'Brien on the JV for two years. That developed them as players, especially three solid pitchers – Moore, McNamara and Nick Brossoit. The team was 8-0 when spring break arrived – that included wins over AAA teams University-Spokane and Lake Washington; a 7-1 victory over Eastmont; and three wins that gave the Tigers the championship at the Connell Invitational.

Then the landscape changed with one move. Dave LaBounty transferred from Moses Lake to Ephrata just after the season started and became an instant impact player for the Tigers.

"The first time Dave pitched for us, it was against Rogers (Spokane) and he had 17 strikeouts. Rogers came down for a doubleheader – I knew their coach really well," Johnson said. "After Dave pitched the first game, their coach told me they'd give us a better second game – Moore went to the mound and struck out 14 Pirates for the sweep."

Johnson said LaBounty's move to Ephrata came while the school was on spring break. "Dave was tired of Moses Lake – he was very serious about baseball and he wanted to be in a good program."

"We were starting to get a reputation as a good program and Dave's dad, Larry, had coached at Big Bend and knew what we were doing here," Johnson continued. "Moses Lake had some good pitching and some good athletes but Dave was frustrated with practices and everything going on there at the time. So, his dad rented a trailer and moved to town to enroll him."

"Dave told me he didn't care if he had to play JV baseball – he just wanted to be in a good program. He fit in with that crew – he's a humble guy, he wasn't flamboyant or arrogant, and a great competitor," the coach continued. "We probably still could have won that year – Dave just made it easier for us."

LaBounty's first game in orange-and-black was on April 19, 1977 – he threw a three-hitter victory over Chelan (the only CTL loss that season was two weeks earlier at Cashmere); LaBounty tossed a no-hitter with nine strikeouts at Quincy on May 3.

The postseason simply belonged to the Tigers – they beat Omak 4-0 to win the CTL district title. LaBounty then took to the mound back in Moses Lake while nursing a sore groin – he still managed to go seven innings to beat East Valley-Yakima, 6-2, throwing a five-hitter with 11 strikeouts to win the regional title and move on to the state final four.

But the win over East Valley was a comeback victory after the Devils had taken a 2-1 lead. Joel Whitver had given Ephrata the lead in the top of the second inning when he singled and scored on an East Valley error – after the Devils had taken the lead, Hal Killian smacked a triple in the fourth inning that scored Chuck Berrie to tie the game at 2-2, and LaBounty, Eric Monson and Steve Lowe all contributed to finish off the victory.

The next weekend, playing in intermittent rain at Parker Field on the campus of Yakima Valley College, Moore would throw a four-hitter with eight strikeouts and McNamara would slam two home runs with four RBI in a 6-2 semifinal victory over Colfax. That put Ephrata in a title game for the third year in a row, a rematch of the 1976 clash with Orting.

with 12 strikeouts in an 8-1 win over Chelan. After that, Moore and LaBounty were nearly unstoppable – Moore struck out 17 in an 11-0

The Cardinal took a 1-0 lead early, but the Tigers were not going to be kept away from the big trophy for a third year. LaBounty got the start and came up huge, throwing a three-hitter while striking out 10 – Killian, McNamara, Whitver and Gary Donabauer had two hits each, and Moore came on in relief in the seventh inning, striking out the side to finish the win.

So, in the end, a bunch of new faces to the varsity team, the guys who got booted from junior high conditioning, a talented bunch of ball players who found a new friend from up the road, started Ephrata baseball into a dynasty with the first state championship.

“After the 1976 team lost to Orting, the new guys were highly motivated. The motivation to beat Orting was there, but a lot of the 1977 seniors called themselves the ‘No-Names,’ Johnson recalled. “There were some big-time players on the two teams ahead of them but they wanted to prove they could finish the job.

“When they came up, they felt like they had something to prove – the 1975 and 1976 guys were getting all the press, so here came the next group from the JV and they wanted to show what they could do,” said the coach. “In 1977, we finally got over the hump.”

A look back at some of the players on the state title team

from the memory of their coach, Dave Johnson:

Mike Harvill (deceased): Enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Ed McNamara (deceased): An all-state player, moved on to the baseball team at Washington State. Worked as a building contractor and was the varsity coach at Moses Lake until his death to a heart attack.

Ralph Moore (deceased): Played junior college baseball, ran a successful dry wall business.

Gary Donabauer (deceased): Worked for the Chelan PUD until his death earlier this year.

Joel Whitver: Worked for International Paper as a trouble shooter and motivational speaker.

Byron Allen: Played baseball at Concordia College in Oregon, now a successful businessman in Portland.

Hal Killian: Played one year of baseball at North Idaho Junior College, lives in Manson and does sports broadcasting for local radio.

Steve Lowe: Lives in the Tri-Cities, is a prosecuting attorney for Benton County.

Eric Monson: Was a three-sport standout at Ephrata, played four years of baseball at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, where he was also a tight end on PLU's NAIA national championship football team in 1980. He is a member of the PLU Hall of Fame. Taught and coached in Tacoma and Mt. Vernon, now teaches in Thailand.

Ted Kallstrom: Three-year starter in the Tiger outfield, had key hit in title win. Played junior college baseball – lives in Ephrata but operates a fishing company based in Seattle that works out of Alaska.

John Stierwalt: A sophomore in 1977, went on to enlist in the U.S. Air Force, later a cargo-jet pilot.

Nick Brossoit: An all-state football player, went to PLU to play football. Got teaching degree and PhD in education, retired in 2011 as superintendent of the Edmonds School District.

Dave LaBounty: Winning pitcher of state title game, played two years at Yakima Valley CC and one at George Fox College in Oregon. Was drafted twice in 1979 out of YVCC (by San Francisco in regular draft, by Kansas City in supplemental draft), opted to play in college. Signed as free agent with Pittsburgh in 1980, spent four years in the minor leagues. A former teacher, coach and principal, is now superintendent of schools in Warden.

Chuck Berrie: Played one year of junior college baseball, now works for Grant PUD.

Mike Smick: Started as an outfielder in 1977 as a sophomore, would become "best hitter in EHS history." Played at Centralia College and Eastern Washington State College. Is now a successful businessman.

Dan Field: Sophomore in 1977 on the varsity roster.

Dave Treiber: Team manager, went to the University of Washington and earned a degree in aeronautical engineering, now works for Boeing.