

Springfield Tops Vienna for District Title

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The number has now swelled to eight and counting for manager Al Vaxmonsky and Springfield Post 176.

Eight is the number of American Legion District 17 tournament championships Post 176 has won during Vaxmonsky's tenure as manager.

AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL

The most recent came last night at Waters Field in Vienna when No. 2 seed Springfield (20-8) rallied from a 5-1 first-inning deficit to defeat top seed Vienna Post 180 (23-6) by a 13-6 score in the deciding playback game.

The tourney crown was Springfield's first since 2006. Post 176 finished second the last two summers.

Springfield now moves on to the state tournament at Dan Daniel Park in Danville, and plays a first-round game against host Danville Post 325 at 8 p.m. July 27.

"Every time is fun, because it is a different group of kids," said Vaxmonsky in regard to winning the district.

Vaxmonsky said he was concerned entering the game about whether his team could bounce back from a 9-8 loss to Vienna the night before at Waters. His worries grew much deeper once Vienna took a 5-1 lead last night, when Post 180 roughed up Post 176 starter, and eventual winner, Matthew Keen (7-1) for four first-inning hits and drew a couple of walks.

Keen also hit a batter in that inning and Springfield made one error.

"He was tight in that first inning and we weren't playing baseball," Vaxmonsky said.

Keen quickly settled down in the second inning and didn't allow another hit or run until he was relieved by Brennan Miller in the seventh.

"Once he got his bearings and found his comfort level, he was OK," Vaxmonsky said of Keen. "He throws strikes and keeps the ball down. Then we knew we had Brennan in our hip pocket to come in, and that was nice to know."

Miller finished the game by not allowing a run and just one hit.

Springfield, which had 15 hits, scored single runs in the first and third innings when hit batters eventually scored, then broke the game open with seven in the fourth when Post 176 batted around. Joe Townsend (4 for 6, three RBI) belted a two-run homer in that frame, Miller (3 for 4, two doubles) had a two-run double, and No. 9 batter Hunter Bronder had a two-run single.

"Certainly a home run always helps," Vaxmonsky said.

Vienna made two costly errors that inning and walked two batters.

"We made way too many mistakes and just ran out of pitching," Vienna manager Frank Werman said. "We got up early



Springfield Post 176, top, won the District 17 tournament and Vienna Post 180, above, was second. (Photos by Dave Facinoli)

and we thought they might have been done. But then we let them back in.”

Springfield added four more runs in the eighth when Post 176 bunted for three hits that inning off of knuckleball reliever Mason Hauser, then Nick Digby (2 for 5) lined a three-run triple down the left-field line.

“You have to give Al credit there, they did what they had to do with those bunts,” Werman said.

Said Vaxmonsky: “Frank had to change the rhythm of the game there, and he did with the knuckleballer. It was a good move. We were swinging too hard against him, so we had to change the rhythm back in our favor with the bunt, and that worked out pretty well. Nick came through with the big hit.”

For Vienna in the title game, Scott Bernier had a two-run single in the first, and Chris Hanson, Eli Facenda, Matt Chandler, Justin Puentes and Matt LaBarge had Post 180’s other hits. All six hits were singles. Vienna’s Brandon Chandler pitched the final two innings of shutout relief.

For Springfield, Nathan Slater was 2 for 3 with a sacrifice fly and John Ponton 2 for 4.

“I told our guys this was our best team as far as camaraderie and playing together,” said Werman, Vienna’s manager since 2006. “Even though we didn’t win the championship, it was an excellent season.”

NOTES: Springfield has finished second in the district tourney seven times under Vaxmonsky, who has never won a state title but his teams have finished second twice. He has more than 425 wins as Springfield’s manager . . . Vienna has finished no worse than fourth in the district tournament under Werman. Post 180 won the title in 2007, was second in 2006 and third last summer. “We’ll have another good team again next summer,” Werman said.