

## SPORTS

# Legion All-Star Baseball Game Is a Hit

Nationals team victorious in Fourth of July showcase in Vienna.

By RICH SANDERS  
THE CONNECTION

The grand old game of baseball was once again on Vienna's center stage on Independence Day as the annual American Legion All-Star Game was played in the heart of town at Water's Field. A big, laid back crowd was on hand to take in the District 17 (Northern Virginia) league's holiday showcase game, which began at 10 a.m., and was played in pleasant, overcast conditions.

As usual for the July 4 contest, made up of high school and first year college aged players, winning was not so much the day's priority for either team — the Nationals or the Americans — as much as simply enjoying the game and giving those on hand a good show.

"It's a game where you get to go out on the Fourth of July and play with and against the best players in the league," said Springfield Post 176 catcher/infielder Nathan Slater (Lee High School), who lined a single into left field in a first inning at-bat for the Americans. "Everyone wants to win and everyone out here is competitive. But at the end of the day it's about having fun."

Slater, in pre-game ceremonies on the infield, read the American Legion Code of Sportsmanship to both teams following the pre-game player introductions. It reads: "I will: keep the rules, keep faith with my teammates, keep my temper, keep myself fit, keep a stout heart in defeat, keep my pride under in victory, keep a sound soul, a clean mind, and a healthy body."

Slater said the atmosphere was fantastic for the Legion All-Star game.

"It's nice seeing there's still support for baseball in the area," he said, after the game. "This place is packed."

Bill Murphy, in his 12th year as the District 17 baseball commissioner, was the public address announcer for Monday's All-Star game.

"A lot of the players really look forward to this," said Murphy, a former president of the Vienna Little League. "The All-Star game gives the players incentive and pride, and something to shoot for. Every year people around town will come up to me and ask, 'Are you still having the Fourth of July All-Star Game?'"

Both All-Star managers, veteran skipper Al Vaxmonsky (Springfield Post 176) for the American squad and Vondell Johnson (Arlington Post 139) for the Nationals, did their best to give all of their respective teams' players quality playing time.

On this day, the Nationals team, made up of players from Alexandria Post 129, Arlington Post 139, Vienna Post 180, and Annandale Bicentennial Post 1976, lit up the scoreboard and defeated the Americans by a score of 15-6. The American squad was made up of players from Falls Church Post 130, Springfield Post 176, Fairfax Post 177, and Centreville Post 1995. Both teams also had players from Alexandria Post 24.

Throughout much of the game, patriotic band music could be heard from the grounds of the Vienna Community Center beyond the outfield fence as preparations were being made for the upcoming day-long festivities.

On the artificial turf ball diamond, the District 17's top players were putting on a batting clinic as both teams combined for 23 base hits, 15 for the winning Nationals.

Both teams offered a myriad of offensive highlights. The Nats, in a seven-run top of the second inning, knocked around four doubles, the two-baggers coming from 1976's Joe Warren (St. Stephen's & St.



Nathan Slater, a 2010 Lee High graduate, reads the American Legion Code of Sportsmanship prior to the game.

"It's a game where you get to go out on the Fourth of July and play with and against the best players in the league."

— Springfield Post 176 catcher/infielder Nathan Slater

The Nationals would go on to tally three more runs in the eighth, the big blow coming off the bat of left-handed hitting Facenda, who tripled down the right field line for two runs. Earlier in the game, Facenda, who was the Nationals' starting pitcher, singled the opposite way down the left field line.

The Americans also had some big at-bats. In their three-run bottom of the second, Springfield Post 176's Joe Townsend (South County Secondary) pulled a ball into deep left field and off the left field fence for a double. But a fine defensive relay play on the extra base hit resulted in a base runner being thrown out at the plate, the tag applied by catcher Hanson.

In the American third inning, Falls Church Post 130's Danny Zdanczewicz (Bishop O'Connell) doubled home a run. The Americans, later in the game, scored single runs in both the sixth — an RBI single by Centreville Post 1995's James Wiltshire (Paul VI) — and seventh innings — a sacrifice fly by Falls Church Post 130's Bruce Beatty (McLean High).

The Americans used nine different pitchers, playing one inning apiece. Tossing shut-out innings were Post 176's JT Williamson (West Springfield High), Falls Church Post 130's Phillip Morris (McLean), Springfield Post 176's Matt Keen (Lee High), Springfield Post 176's Justin Drechsel (Hayfield), and Beatty.

The winning pitcher for the National League was Facenda, a southpaw who worked both the first and second innings.

Wiltshire, a 2010 graduate of Paul VI High and a current student at Virginia Military Institute (VMI), was thrilled to be an All-Star member of the American team.

"I wouldn't want to be anywhere else," said Wiltshire, a Chantilly resident who plays outfielder and pitcher for Centreville Post 1995. "Playing on the [Fourth of July] holiday is a bonus. It's like Christmas in July."

Agnes School), Post 139's Ryan Dick (Washington-Lee High), Post 24's Robert Banks (Hayfield Secondary), and Alexandria Post 129's Adam Forrer (T.C. Williams). During that same half inning, Alexandria Post 24's George Palacio (Mount Vernon High) and Vienna Post 180's Eli Facenda (Madison High) both had singles. Eleven players batted in all during that breakout second inning.

The game's lone home run came by Warren, a towering fly ball over the center field fence to lead off the fifth inning and give the Nationals an 8-4 lead. Warren would finish the day with three hits.

The Nationals displayed some aggressive base running in a four-run sixth inning. Vienna post 180's Chris Hanson (Oakton High) began the big inning with a high fly double into shallow left center field. Two batters later, the hustling Hanson scored from second base on a groundball out to shortstop off the bat of Vienna Post 180's Mason Hauser (Oakton). Later in the inning, Forrer, who earlier reached base on a hit's batsmen, stunned the fans and American Leaguers with a dash towards home on the pitchers' windup. Forrer slid safely onto the plate for a rare steal of home. Later that same inning, Alexandria Post 129's James Clark (T.C. Williams) roped a line drive double into left center field to plate two more runs, giving the Nationals a commanding 12-4 lead.



Nathan Slater readies for the pitch during first inning action of the annual District 17 American Legion All-Star Baseball Game held on Independence Day at Waters Field in Vienna.

PHOTO BY RICH SANDERS/THE CONNECTION