

## **Pride happy with year despite early tournament exit**

*By MARK TUPPER - H&R Executive Sports Editor*

DECATUR - David Boys was standing at Rotary Park on Sunday, dodging rain drops, threats of lightning and a few haunting thoughts of what might have been.

The Decatur Pride shortstop was upbeat but disappointed that the Pride could not have made a better showing in the Amateur Softball Association Class A Men's Fast-pitch National Tournament.

The Pride bowed out Saturday with a 2-2 tournament record, then watched from the sideline as Vandalia Freight carried Central Illinois' hopes forward.

Then Sunday afternoon, Vandalia was knocked out in an 11-6 loss to New Image of Montfort, Wis. The Class A national championship game ended up in a weather-delayed contest between winners' bracket survivor Marshall (Mich.) Lightning and New Image.

The scoreless game was halted in the sixth inning due to lightning, and when rain fell later, the field was ruled unplayable.

Teams were given the option of resuming play this afternoon, but both teams had travel obligations. So by ASA code, the Michigan Lightning was declared the national champs for having more winners' bracket victories and because they beat New Image head-to-head earlier in the tournament.

Meanwhile, the 27-team Class C national championship went to the Adamstown (Pa.) Blue Lake Builders, who defeated the Montgomery (Ala.) Travelers in the title game.

As for the Pride, despite the disappointment of not winning the national championship, Boys said their 59-17 season was still a success.

Putting the team together for the first time since disbanding in 2001, the Pride proved that a mixture of locally grown veterans and young players can compete on the national stage.

``I'm so glad I got to play again," said Boys, who was Decatur's only representative on the Class A All-America team. ``It was a blast."

The Pride ran into a talented Michigan Lightning team on Friday night and lost 3-2, sliding into the losers' bracket.

Sean Kelly outpitched the Pride's Brent Stevenson, overtaking Decatur after the Pride had built a 2-1 lead.

``They hit a home run to tie it 2-2, then they started to move the ball and took the lead," Boys said.

``They are a young, athletic team, a good team.

``We had runners at second and third in the sixth and I hit the hardest ball I've hit, maybe ever, right at the left fielder. He caught it, but if it had been a few feet on either side of him, we would have scored two runs. But we didn't score and Sean Kelly mowed us down after that.

``Still, with only eight teams in the field, we felt we had enough pitching to come back through the losers' bracket."

And the Pride tried to do that, defeating Belleville Pete's Blues 8-0 as Bobby Ginger pitched the shutout. Boys was 2-for-3 with a homer and three RBIs. Blake Martin was 3-for-3 with a double and a run batted in.

Then the Pride knocked off Shawnee (Kan.) Piper Club 12-5. T.J. Dobson was the winning pitcher. Boys was 3-for-3 with a double, homer and three RBIs, and Larry Moffett was 3-for-4 with two runs batted in.

But the end came on Saturday when Vandalia smothered the Pride 7-0 behind Ray Reynolds' no-hitter. He took a perfect game into the seventh before Decatur managed its first base runner. Stevenson was the losing pitcher in that one.

Looking back, Boys said injuries to pitchers David Scott and Bobby Ginger probably forced too much of the pitching load on Stevenson.

``Brent threw a lot of innings," Boys said. ``And that was probably the fifth time he had faced Vandalia and he wasn't going to surprise them.

``It was one of those days on Saturday. Play. Rain, Wait. Play again. Rain. Wait.

``We had such a nice crowd on Friday night and to lose that game was kind of a heartbreaker for us. It just wasn't meant to be."

Vandalia landed four players on the All-America team. They were infielders J.D. Arnold and Nick Casey, utility player Rich Well and pitcher Alan Meinhart.

Michigan pitcher Sean Kelly was named Class A tournament MVP.

Ryan Witges of Teutopolis Koerner Miller Lite was the leading hitter in the Class C nationals with a batting average of .714. He was a first-team All-America selection. Named to the second team was utility player Nate Westendorf of Teutopolis Kenter's Bud Light.

The most valuable player in the Class C national tournament was Ryan Rutt, who had a 6-0 record pitching for the championship team.

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