

Elks & Merchants Dominate 1996-2008

Wyndmere had a difficult road to the 1996 Class A title game. In their opener, they found themselves down 9-1 to Hope-Finely in the third inning. Chris Ohm hit a three-run homer to start a rally and hit another in the bottom of the ninth as Wyndmere came back to win 16-15. They played another close game, edging Kindred 10-9 in the second round before trouncing Berthold 21-7 in the semis. Ohm and player-manager Tom Tamlyn hit back-to-back homers in a six run first inning in the win. After Scott Hanson threw a seven-inning no-hitter in an opening round 12-0 win over New Rockford-Sheyenne, defending A champ Tolna also had to come from behind in their semifinal game. Tolna took an early 7-0 lead, but Fairview rallied to take an 11-8 lead, before Tolna scored six runs in the ninth to take a 14-11 win. The Class A title game was also a see-saw affair. Powered by two home runs by Scott Sand, Tolna took an early 9-0 lead. Then Wyndmere's Troy Wittenburg hit a grand slam beginning a comeback that would result in an 11-10 Wyndmere win in the title game. Tamlyn, who reached base seventeen times in four tournament games, was named Class A MVP.

Enderlin, back in the AA tournament, had an easy road to the finals in quest of their seventh AA title, beating the Fargo-Moorhead Miners 11-4 and Langdon 20-1 in the semis. Devils Lake, fielding their first team since 1992, were down 2-1 to Fargo Hope Lutheran in the top of the eighth inning of their semi-final game. The Lakers scored two in the bottom of the inning and two more in the ninth, keyed by an RBI single by Eric Nygaard, and Devils Lake went on to win 5-4. Nygaard was scheduled to catch in the championship game and was warming up starting pitcher Mark Riggs in the bullpen. Riggs said his shoulder was sore from pitching the day before, so Nygaard took off his catcher's equipment, tossed a few more balls, and then took the mound as starting pitcher. He used his curveball to stifle the powerful Enderlin hitters, allowing just six hits in an 8-1 upset win in the AA title game.

The Jamestown Merchants were strengthened in 1996 by a new third baseman named Travis Hafner. The Sykeston native had attended a tryout camp sponsored by the Atlanta Braves in Mandan the previous summer and was offered a free-agent contract. Hafner didn't feel he was ready for professional baseball, so the scouts recommended he attend Crowley County Community College in Arkansas City, Kansas. After a successful freshman season there, Hafner was drafted in the 31st round of the amateur draft by the Texas Rangers but again elected not to sign. Instead, he came home for the summer (he was born in Jamestown) to play for the Merchants. Hafner hit an amazing .633 (fifty-seven for ninety) with 8 home runs and forty-eight runs scored and driven in. He led the Merchants to a record of 28-6.

The Merchants lost all three games played against the crosstown Elks during the regular season, but the Elks were without two of their best players (Jim Roaldson and Tom Hager were away coaching the American Legion boys) and the Merchants beat the Elks 12-3 in the opening game of the Class AAA tournament. Right-hander Ryan Kragh allowed just two hits over eight innings pitched, retiring the last fifteen Elks batters, and 21 of the last 23. The Elks stayed alive by scoring five ninth inning runs against Grand Forks Gerrells to take a 6-5 win and stay alive in the double-elimination tournament. Quad City eliminated Gerrells, but the Merchants gave them their first loss of the tournament and the Elks eliminated Quad City 13-5 in a loser-out game.

This set up a championship series rematch between the one-loss Elks and the undefeated Merchants. The Elks, now full strength, pounded the Merchants 19-6 in the first game on Sunday, with manager Steve Olson smashing a grand slam in a seven run first inning, and took the second game as well by a score of 10-0. The Elks combined excellent hitting with dominant pitching by their ace Cory Anderson in the sweep. Wayne Hogan got seven hits and Roaldson six. Olson knocked in seven runs and Piatz reached base eight times in the two games. But the tournament MVP was Anderson, head baseball coach at Valley City State. He was the winner in the must win game against Quad City, pitched five innings in the first game against the Merchants and came back and pitched a complete game three-hitter in the second game, running his season record to a perfect 14-0.

The Jamestown Merchants played under a variety of names, depending on who they could get to provide some sponsorship money. For a time, they were the VFW/Midwest Clinic Merchants, then the Miller Lite Merchants, and later the Goodroad Sports Merchants. The 1997 version of the Merchants was formed by Tom Gould when he became aware that there were a number of talented players in town who couldn't break into the veteran Elks lineup. The Elks were the top team in town (and the entire state) having won five of the last six state Class AAA titles and winning 27 of 28 games against the Merchants. But the Merchants swept the Elks in a double-header right before the tournament, and they felt they might be ready to challenge the Elks for supremacy in town.

Keven Gall hit two homers as the Merchants beat Quad City 8-1 in their opening round game in the AAA tournament and then dropped a close one to the Elks. Steve Bennion hit homers in the first and eighth, but in between, Elks starter Jon Knaub tossed six scoreless innings, retiring 16 of 23 batters. Scott Radloff, joining the Elks this year after a break from amateur ball, hit two homers and the Elks won 6-4. The Elks then knocked off the Fargo Mudhens 16-7, the big hit a Bob Piatz eighth inning grand slam and the Merchants came through the loser's bracket beating Quad City again 8-6 on a two-run homer by Bennion in the top of the ninth. Bennion hit two more homers in the championship game (making six for the tournament earning him the MVP) but Elks pitcher Cory Anderson held the rest of the Merchants down and the Elks took another state title by a score of 4-3.

Defending AA champ Devils Lake won their first two tournament games. Last year's MVP Eric Nygaard struck out thirteen in a 7-0 shutout of Sheyenne-New Rockford and hit a three-run homer in a 10-4 win over the Jamestown Merchants II in the semi-finals. 1995 Class A champion, and 1996 runner up, Tolna moved up to Class AA this year and had little trouble with the tougher competition. They downed Minot Air Base 10-2 and then beat Enderlin 11-4 to reach the title game. Tolna took an early 10-0 lead and starter Mike Hattlestad was pitching well through six innings, but Devils Lake mounted a comeback, eventually cutting the margin to 10-7. Mike Hanson relieved Hattlestad and saved the game giving Tolna their first AA state title.

Hope-Finley won their opening game in the Class A tournament and the "Horned Frogs" reached the title game when pitcher Justin Burchill struck out twelve and retired the last eleven batters of the game in a 5-3 win over Kindred. Defending A champ Wyndmere won their opener and then got by Rolla 10-6 in the semi-finals. However, the Class A title game was a blow out. Hope-Finley committed ten errors and Wyndmere rapped seventeen hits, five of them by the Braves lead-off hitter Jeremy Peschel, and Wyndmere won their second straight A title by a score of 22-8.

Minot Air Base's first round game of the 1998 Class A tournament was rained out, so they had to play two games in one day when they returned to Jamestown later in the week. They won both, beating Tolna (who had moved down from the AA division) 11-6 and Minto 10-3. Rugby beat the Jamestown Merchants II and then scored seven runs in the eighth inning to down Kindred 13-8 to reach the title game. Rugby then beat the Air Base 17-8 in the Class A title game. After two straight A titles, Wyndmere was bumped up to AA this year and breezed through the early rounds. The Braves downed Beulah-Hazen 15-2, beat the Fargo-Moorhead Miners 13-2 in the semis, and then downed another Fargo team, the Mudhens, 7-4 in the final. Wyndmere's left-handed pitcher Mike Peschel, a nineteen-year-old redshirt freshman with the NDSU baseball team, won all three games in the tourney, allowing just six earned runs in twenty-one innings, and ran his season record to 12-0.

The Grand Forks Gerrells Dagwoods lost their opener in the AA tournament 14-12 to the Jamestown Merchants but in a rematch later in the week manager Greg Cascaes hit two homeruns in a 10-5 win to reach the championship game. Defending champ Elks had a hard road to the final in defense of their title. In their opener, Devils Lake took an early 8-4 lead, but starter Jon Knaub settled down, throwing five scoreless innings, as his teammates battled back for a 10-9 win. They trailed the Merchants 10-8 but scored four eighth inning runs to squeeze past their cross-town rivals 12-10. It looked like the Elks' luck would run out in the final. Gerrells scored six first inning runs off of Elks starter Wayne Hogan and four more in the third to take a 10-0 lead. The Elks responded with ten runs in the bottom of the inning. Gerrells surged ahead again with four in the top of the fourth, but the Elks responded with six runs of their own to take a 16-14 lead. The Elks eventually won the slugfest 23-17. Shortstop Bob Piatz reached base a dozen times in three games (six hits, three walks, and three hit by pitch) stole five bases and scored ten runs. The forty-year-old Piatz, in his nineteenth season with the Elks and twenty-fifth straight playing in the tournament was named MVP, is first since winning the award back in 1987.

Rolla got by Wyndmere II and Langdon to reach the 1999 Class A title game. Enderlin smashed out eighteen hits (Tyler Schlect and Sean Syverson going a combined nine for ten) in their opening round win over Fairview and scored eight runs in the fifth to drub Drayton 17-6 in the semi-finals. Rolla took a 5-0 lead after 4 ½ innings in the title game. Enderlin's oldest player, manager Lyle Halvorson, who had played in his first state tournament thirty years earlier in 1969) started a rally with an RBI single, and then the team's youngest player, seventeen-year-old Micah Hoy, continued the rally with two-run homer in the seventh as Enderlin went ahead 10-5. Rolla scored four runs in the ninth to cut the lead to 10-9 but Seth Janz came in in relief and struck out Aaron Disrud for the game's final out giving Enderlin their first title in five years.

The Fargo-Moorhead Mudhens outscored their opponents 35-5 in their first two class AA tournament games, downing Minto 22-1 and Hope-Finley 13-4. The Jamestown Merchants II barley got by Rugby 12-11 in their opener, having to rally for three ninth inning runs and beat the Townies 11-2 in the semis. Dave Schmichael, one of seven Merchants who played on last year's state Legion championship team, tossed a four hit compete game (both runs allowed being unearned), and chipped in a two-run homer. The Mudhens continued their dominance in the final, beating the Merchants 14-2 in seven innings. Winning pitcher Matt Smiley had a shutout going until the first tow Merchants homered in the ninth, but he retired the last three batters to pick up the win. The Mudhens leadoff man, Chris Siverson, reached base thirteen times and scored eleven runs in the three tournament games, and was named Class AA MVP.

The Elks, winners of seven of the last eight state titles, and the Merchants, champions of the Jamestown Twilight league, were again favorites going into the 1999 Class AAA tournament. However, the tournament, previously played over two weekends, was shortened to one weekend this year with opening round games on Thursday night and the championship on Sunday. This meant a greater premium would be placed on pitching depth. Teams once could get by with one or two starting pitchers but now needed at least three in the compacted schedule. Wyndmere won Class A titles in 1996 and 1997, moved up to Class A last year and bumped up another class this year. The Braves might have had the deepest pitching in the Class AAA tournament field, so were considered dark horse contenders.

So, it wasn't a big surprise when Wyndmere beat the Merchants in the opening round. A three-run homer by Kevin Gall gave the Merchants an early 4-0 lead, Still trailing 4-1 in the eight, the Braves' Tom Tamlyn knocked in one run with a double and pitcher Mike Peschel tied the score with a two-run homer. Then in the ninth, Troy Wittenburg laid down a bunt with two strikes scoring Jeremy Peschel from third and Wyndmere came back to beat the Merchants 5-4. Elks starting pitcher Ron Siwa allowed four runs to Devils Lake in the first three innings but then allowed just four base runners over the last eight innings as his teammates rallied. Wade Snyder's fielder's choice in the ninth plated the tying run and his RBI single in the eleventh gave the Elks a 5-4 win

Devils Lake and the Merchants were eliminated in loser-out games leaving Wyndmere to play the Elks for the championship. In the first contest, Doug Hogan homered twice, and Cory Anderson shook off a rough start to retire ten of the last eleven batters he faced to lead the Elks to an 11-4 win. In the final, the Elks banged out twenty-three hits, including three homers, and Wade Snyder drove in six runs in an 18-4 thrashing of Wyndmere. Ron Siwa pitched his second complete game in three days, scattering eleven hits while walking none. Doug Hogan, the Elks twenty-two-year veteran first baseman said, "This never gets old...you never get used to winning...this is what you play for. Baseball's a fun game and winning makes it all the more enjoyable."

In the lead up to the 2000 state tournament, the *Jamestown Sun* wrote about two other baseball related events during the summer. They printed a daily "Darin's Day" in which they tracked the game-by-game performance of Jamestown native Darin Erstad who was now an all-star outfielder with the Anaheim Angels. The Sun began tracking Erstad's daily progress three years earlier when he was still in the minor leagues with Vancouver of the Pacific Coast League. During the 2000 season he reached a high batting average of .386 on July 19th but still finished the season at .355 and led the American League with 240 hits.

The sun also reported that a barnstorming team called the "Legends of the Road", made up of high school and college players from the west coast, would be in town to play against the Elks. The Legends were formed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of barnstorming baseball and wore replica uniforms of the Negro League's Kansas City Monarchs. This brought back memories for 77-year-old A. J. "Tony" Carlascio who remembered the heyday of the barnstorming teams when they played in Jamestown many years earlier. Carlascio recalled watching Satchel Paige pitch at Jack Brown Stadium (then called McElroy Park) and was the batboy for the 1934 Jamestown team that employed five black players.

The 2000 tournament had a little different feel as it was the first year it would not be played under the direction of Jack Brown. Considered the father of amateur baseball in North Dakota,

Brown passed away the previous fall at the age of 72. He served as director of the Jamestown Parks and Recreation Department for forty years and was involved in every aspect of the annual tournament, from grounds keeping, to scheduling games, to arranging for umpires, to lining up concession workers. Things were left in capable hands of Jack's son Richard (R. D.), who had been hanging around the tournament since he began shagging balls when he was six years old. In addition to many leadership positions with the ANDABL, Richard took over the management of the tournament.

In the Class A tournament played on the first weekend of August, Langdon beat Hope-Finley 11-2 and Wyndmere II (their "B" team) beat Beulah 6-5 to reach the championship game. Tom Tamlyn had three hits and Chris Hills, who would be named tournament MVP, pitched six strong innings as Wyndmere beat Langdon 8-4 for the title. In the Class AA tournament, the following weekend, the Kindred Kings and the Jamestown Merchants II (their "B" team) advanced to the championship series. Powered by three home runs, including a grand slam by Bryan Erstad, the Merchants won the first game 9-7 to force a winner take all. Kindred's Chris Clemonson, who threw 176 pitches in the loss the day before, took the mound again. He threw more than one hundred more pitches in a complete game five hitter with twelve strike outs. Clemonson chipped in with a two-run homer in the Kindred 16-3 win.

The Jamestown Merchants, managed by Tom Gould, entered the Class AAA tournament with a sparkling 30-1 record. Their top three starting pitchers, Steve Hockert (11-0), Wes Rutgers (7-0), and Ron Siwa (7-0) were all undefeated, but their offense was just as strong. Experienced hitters Jeff Gould, Steve Bennion, and Jared Purdy helped the team average more than nine runs per game and a team batting average of .398, including eight players over the .400 mark. The Elks, under the direction of twenty-three-year veteran Doug Hogan, had won eight of the ten championships in the 1990s, including the last four. They still had a solid nucleus of Cory Anderson, Wayne Hogan, and Tom Hager, but struggled to a mediocre record of 12-11.

The Wyndmere Braves, who came in with a record of 23-20 under manager Tom Tamlyn, Sr., beat the Elks 7-6 in the opening game. In their next two games the Elks, powered by two home runs by Wayne Hogan, beat the Fargo-Moorhead Mudhens 14-12 and the Jamestown Townies to eliminate both teams in the loser out format. After an opening round bye, the Merchants eliminated the four-time defending champion Elks 10-4. The Elks took an early four run lead on two run homers by Wayne and Doug Hogan, but Merchant pitchers Jason Klabrener and Steve Frey held the Elks scoreless on two hits the rest of the way.

Only Wyndmere and the Merchants remained alive, both undefeated in the tournament so far. In the first game of the championship series on Sunday Wyndmere beat the Merchants 13-11 and finished them off the next day 17-7. The Braves built a 17-0 lead after a fourteen-run fifth inning that featured four home runs, two by Corey Wichaël. In two games Wyndmere had scored thirty runs on forty-two hits off Merchant pitchers. The win marked the fifth state title for a Wyndmere team in the past five years. They took the Class A title in 1996 and 1997, AA in 1998, and their second team won the A title two weeks earlier. Braves pitcher/second baseman Jeremy Peschel was named MVP.

The Enderlin Indies entered the 2001 Class A tournament seeking their eighth amateur baseball title since 1987. The Indies were managed by fifty-two-year-old Lyle Halvorson who was a member of all seven previous champions, was recently elected to the ND Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame. He started out in 1970 with Lisbon and moved to Enderlin in 1977. The highlights of a

pitching career that spanned more than twenty years was a no-hitter against Braddock in 1970 and a one-hitter against Watford City in 1984. The no-hit bid was broken up by a single in the seventh inning; the only ball to leave the infield against Halvorson all day. He was also active in the state baseball association serving as president, vice-president, and commissioner.

The Indies won their first tournament game by forfeit over Grafton and Issues like the Grafton forfeit were becoming more and more of a problem for the state commission to deal with. Teams were required to pay an annual dues to the association and an entry fee for the state tournament. The state office sometimes had trouble collecting by the due date and bracket pairings couldn't be completed until the association knew which teams planned to participate. R. D. Brown summed up the frustration when he said, "Grafton was a no-show and of course we didn't get any cash up front. We will keep on everyone's ass next year and they can't play if they don't pay; that will be the new 2002 theme."

Enderlin then downed Steele-Dawson-Wishek 14-4 in the semi-finals. In the other bracket, the Beulah Blackhawks beat Fordville 22-7 and Oakes 13-2. Beulah found themselves one player short at the start of the Oakes game. Scott Nustad, a former Jamestown player, happened to be in the stands watching the game when Beulah manager Kevin Flaagen asked him to suit up. Nustad hit a homer and drove in five runs in the win. In the championship game, catcher Kevin Brantland's two-run homer in the fifth broke a 3-3 tie and Brock Engstrom smacked a grand slam in a six-run sixth inning to break the game open and Enderlin went on to beat Beulah 13-3 for the title. In addition to Halvorson and Brantland, shortstop Tyler Schlect was the third member of the Indies to celebrate an eighth state title.

2001 Class A champ Wyndmere II moved up to Class AA this year and had little trouble adjusting to the stiffer competition. Chris Hills hit two homers, one a grand slam, in a 19-2 opening round rout of Dickinson and shortstop Terry Tschida hit a two-run homer as a part of a four for five day as Wyndmere downed the Jamestown Merchants II 10-4 in the semi-finals. Nineteen-year-old right-hander Tschida took the mound in the championship game and pitched a four-hit 6-0 shutout of Rugby to take the title

For the last two decades, the Jamestown Elks had dominated the Class AAA division of amateur baseball in North Dakota. They won titles in 1983, 1985, 1987, and eight more during the decade of the nineties. The Elks entered the 2001 tournament with a 20-9 record, including a sweep of three games against the defending AAA champ Wyndmere Braves. Managed by Dick Brown, the backbone of the Elks for the past twenty years has been the Hogan brothers, Wayne and Doug. Wayne, an outfielder and left-handed pitcher, was playing in his eighteenth tournament, having been a member of eleven state championship teams, ten of those as a member of the Elks. The Merchants, on the other hand, had never won a Class AAA title. They won in Class AA in 1993 and moved up to AAA the next year. They were runners up in the Class AAA tournament 1994, 1996, 1997 and 2000.

The Fargo-Moorhead Mudhens, Wyndmere Braves, and Grand Forks Gerrells were all eliminated in the double elimination format while the Elks and Merchants went undefeated. Then the Merchants Greg Huerchert threw a complete game 8-1 win over the Elks handing them their first loss. The two Jamestown teams faced off on Sunday with a Merchants victory meaning the championship, but an Elks win forcing one more deciding game. The Elks smashed six homers, two each by Jim Roaldson and Matt Johnson, and pitcher Cory Anderson cruised to an easy 14-2 win in the first game. Anderson started again in the final for the Elks and the Merchants turned

the tables. Bryan Erstad, the Merchants twenty-year old center fielder had gone one for fourteen in his first three tournament games, but in the final he went five for five with three homers and six runs batted in as the Merchants won their first AAA title by a score of 22-4.

As amateur players were reaching into their pockets to pay their team's entry fee for the 2002 state tournament, it would have been interesting to know what they thought about two other players they likely knew, and probably played against at one point. That August Sykston native and former Jamestown Elk Travis Hafner had been called up to the major leagues by the Texas Rangers and Jamestown's Darin Erstad signed a four-year contract extension with the California Angels for a total of \$32 million.

A column by sportswriter Michael Weber in the August 8 issue of the Jamestown Sun was headlined "Amateur Baseball on the Rebound". He noted the previous trend of a steady decrease in teams and that only two years earlier amateur baseball in the state had been on "life support" when only sixteen teams entered the 2000 tournament. However, that number increased to eighteen in 2001 and jumped to twenty-five this year, including three entries from the small town of Wyndmere. R. D. Brown optimistically stated, "Maybe this is the beginning of a new cycle."

Forty-six-year-old Ron Fiala of Wahpeton, making his amateur baseball debut, pitched Wyndmere III to an 8-1 opening round win over Tolna, allowing just five hits. But it was the Hazen-Beulah Backjaws and Fordville who met in the Class A championship game. The Blackjaws took the title 6-3 to two long-time players, second baseman Dennis Samules and catcher Kevin Flaagan. Samuels, who had been playing in the state tournament since 1974 won an earlier title with Fargo Glass and Paint, but this was Flaagan's first state championship.

For the first time in fifteen years the Valley City Merchants entered a team in the state amateur tournament. They defeated the Jamestown Merchants II and Wyndmere II to earn the right to face Enderlin in the Class AA title game. Valley City scored six runs in the first inning and collected twenty-five hits on the day in a wild 19-13 win over Enderlin. Justin Thornton, with two homers and six runs batted in, and Trapper Wager, with five hits in six at bats, including three doubles, were the hitting stars.

In the Class AAA tournament the following weekend the Wyndmere Braves went 3-1 in double-elimination pool play, beating the Mandan Prairie Dogs 10-1 behind fourteen strikeouts by Justin Burchill, downing the Jamestown Elks 7-2, and eliminating the Fargo Mudhens 5-3 on a Jeremy Peschel grand slam in the sixth inning. The Jamestown Merchants went undefeated, downing Grand Forks Gerrells 13-4, keyed by six RBIs by Jared Purdy, and handing Wyndmere their only loss 7-1. The two remaining teams faced off in the final. Wyndmere's Peschel hit two more homers, but Jason Kalbrenner homered for the Merchants, and Kevin Gall and Kevin Dobson each had three hits, as the Merchants held on to beat the Braves 11-9 for the AAA title.

Fifty-six-year-old insurance salesman Jim Duffey had been making the 320-mile trip from Fairview, Montana to the state tournament in Jamestown nearly every August for the past thirty years. Still an active player (the team's regular second baseman), and for many years the ANDABLs northwest region commissioner, Duffey organized the Fairview amateur team in the late 1970s and had been managing the club ever since. Drawing players from all-over western North Dakota and eastern Montana, Fairview won a state Class A title in 1993. The Fairview bats were working from the start of the 2003 Class A tournament and never let up. They scored nine runs in the first inning and seven more in the second in a 24-8 thrashing of Wyndmere II in

their opening round game. Jake Schmitz hit two homers, both three-run shots in a 13-4 win over Minto-Midway in the semi-finals. They continued their offensive barrage in the title game, downing the Fargo Pistols 16-5 to take the championship. In three tournament games Fairview hit seven homers among their 54 hits and outscored their opponents by a margin of 53-17. Josh Erickson, who went ten for thirteen and knocked in a dozen runs, was named MVP.

Tate Meyhoff smacked two homers as the Mandan Prairie Dogs outlasted the Grand Forks Gunslingers 18-14 in the first round of the Class AA tournament. Bob Schulte hit a grand slam and the Prairie Dogs followed that up with a 14-3 win over the Jamestown Eagles in the semi-final round. In the other bracket, Enderlin crushed Mayville 20-4 and scored six runs in the first inning, highlighted by a three-run homer by Chris Schmitz, and hung on to beat the other Jamestown team, the Tarno Millers, 9-8. In the championship, Brock Engstrom homered twice as Enderlin won their eighth state amateur championship with a 14-3 win over Mandan. Schulte, of the runner up Prairie Dogs, went 10 for 13 in the tournament, collecting at least three hits in each game and drove in nine runs to garner the Class AA MVP.

The Jamestown Merchants, who won the Fargo League pennant, entered the Class AA tournament with a sparkling 30-4 record and were considered favorites to win their third straight title. Manager Tom Gould's squad had great balance throughout their lineup and nine players with six or more years of experience in amateur baseball. In pool play Jack Newark hit three homers and Steve Bennion two more as they downed Enderlin 22-4. Newark hit two more homers in a 15-4 win over Wyndmere in their next game

There was one upset in the Class AAA tournament. Chris Schmitz was the winning pitcher and hit a three-run homer in the bottom of the ninth to give Enderlin a 6-4 win over Grand Forks Gerrells. Enderlin was allowed to play in the AAA tournament based on their AA title the previous week. Gerrells came back through the loser's bracket and won their next three games to face the Merchants in the championship game. Even a line drive to the face of Merchant starting pitcher Mike Rerick, requiring a trip to Fargo for treatment, didn't derail the Merchants from their third straight AAA title as they beat Gerrells 12-3.

Gerrells' Mike Devillers, a player for the UND Sioux, was the second MVP to come from the runner up team (Bob Schulte of Mandan won in Class AA). Devillers went ten for seventeen in the tournament, including a grand slam and on the mound pitched three scoreless innings to save a game against the Jamestown Elks and allowed just one run and six hits in eight innings in a win over Wyndmere. The Merchants, who outscored their opponents 50-10, were so well balanced that any one of their players, especially second baseman Jack Newark who hit five home runs, could have been named MVP, but Michael Weber, writing in The Jamestown Sun, conceded that Devillers was deserving of the award.

Wyndmere II won their first two games in the 2004 Class A tournament beating Wishek and Rugby as did defending champ Fairview with victories over Oakes and Beulah-Hazen. In the title game Fairview jumped out to a 5-1 lead in the third inning but right-hander Dustin Bratlien, who played shortstop for Fairview the first two games, came on in relief. He allowed just two hits and no runs over the last six innings retiring eighteen of the last twenty Wyndmere II batters as Fairview came back for an 11-5 win and their second state championship. Bratlien was named MVP.

The Mandan Prairie Dogs, in just their fifth year of existence, opened the 2004 Class AA tournament with a 7-2 win over the Grand Forks Gunslingers. Mandan lefthander Rob Birdhorse struck out nineteen. In the second round, Tim Gauer stroked a two-out, two-run single in the twelfth, as Mandan overcame a six-run deficit to defeat Jamestown Tarno Distributing, The Gunslingers came back through the loser's bracket beating Enderlin 4-3 and eliminating Tarno 12-11 in ten innings. Grand Forks had built a 9-1 lead after six innings, but Tarno rallied to tie. The winning run scored on an error when Jamestown pitcher Jason Falk threw wildly past first base after fielding a sacrifice bunt. In the championship game, the Prairie Dogs scored six runs in the second and six more in the fourth inning to down the Gunslingers 16-4. Mandan's Tate Meyhoff, who went four for six and pitched three scoreless relief innings in the Tarno semi-final game, was named MVP.

Grand Forks Gerrells, led by Brian Devillers who hit .531 on the season, entered the Class 2004 AAA tournament with just two losses and gained the number one seed. The Jamestown Merchants who came in with a 30-6 record, averaging more than ten runs per games, were seeded second. Jamestown Bud Lite Elks, the Wyndmere Braves, and the top two finishers in the Class AA tournament, the Grand Forks Gunslingers and the Mandan Prairie Dogs, rounded out the six-team Class AAA tournament field.

Mandan and the Gunslingers lost their first two games and were eliminated. In the winner's bracket, Gerrells' Brian Devillers hit two homeruns to hand the Elks their first loss 8-4 and Joey Vannett's two homers, one a grand slam, powered the Merchants past Wyndmere, knocking them out of the tournament. Just three teams remained alive as Sunday play began. In the day's opening game, the Elks Any Fiala, pitched a complete game as the Elks eliminated three-time defending champion Merchants 11-2, leaving just Gerrells and the Elks to play for the title.

In the first game, Cory Anderson pitched seven shutout relief innings and Sam Joseph homered in the top of the eleventh inning to give the Elks a 5-4 win over Gerrells. In game two, Jed Steiner hit a two-run homer in a four run first inning and the Elks cruised to a 9-1 win in the championship game. Tom Klapp, a native of Elksford. British Columbia and current pitcher for the Valley City Vikings college baseball team, pitched a complete game victory. After earlier being named the outstanding senior in the Dakota Athletic Conference (DAC) Klapp was named MVP of the Class AAA tournament

The Jamestown Merchants II opened the 2005 Class A tournament by batting around twice in the first inning against the Fargo Mudhens, scoring fourteen runs on just five hits, on their way to an easy 26-1 win. They then downed Fairview in the semi-finals. They then bet the Wyndmere II Storm 14-5 for the title. In Class AA, Jamestown Tarno Distributing downed the Minot Air Base and Mandan, while the Beulah-Hazen Blackjaws got by Enderlin and the Grand Forks Gunslingers. In the championship game, Trapper Wagner (later named MVP) and Matt Lundeen each went four for four with a homer as Beulah-Hazen won the title by beating Tarno 7-4.

The Jamestown Merchants won the Fargo League title and compiled a season record of 27-4, however they were upset by Wyndmere in the first round of the Class AAA tournament by a score of 4-3. They came back through the loser's bracket with wins over Mayville and a re-match with Wyndmere. The Elks won their first two tournament games and the familiar foes faced off in a championship game that would turn out to be one of the most closely contested of their long rivalry. The Elks scored first on an RBI single by starting pitcher Tom Klapp in the fifth and took a 3-1 lead on a run-scoring double by Sam Joseph in the bottom of the eight. The Merchants

rallied in the top of the ninth, scoring one to cut the lead in half, but Klapp struck out Jack Newark with two base runners on to end the game and give the Elks the championship 3-2.

Fairview, Montana scored forty-five runs, an average of fifteen per game, in three games in the 2006 Class A tournament to sweep to the championship. They downed the Fargo Metros 16-6 in the opener and then scored six runs in the first inning and ten more in the second in overwhelming Minot Air Force Base 22-1 in the second round. Fairview finished off the Class A field with a 9-5 win over the Jamestown Merchants II in the championship game. Fairview's Jason Erickson was named most valuable player.

In the four team Class AA tournament, Jeff Hewitt hit a three-run homer and pitched a complete game to lead the Jamestown Tarnos to a 13-1 win over Enderlin in the title game.

Only two teams entered the 2006 Class AAA state tournament. The Jamestown Elks had won the last two state titles and had taken four of five games from the Merchants during the season, so were favored in the best of three series with their cross-town rivals. In the opening game, the Elks took an early 7-1 lead but had to hold on as the Merchants rallied, finally winning 10-8. Elks' pitchers issued twelve walks Merchants took game two 12-1 behind the strong pitching of Josh Shaw to force a decisive third game. Bryan Erstad homered, and pitcher Greg Lunski threw a three-hit shutout in a 9-0 Merchant win for the championship. In the final 16 innings of the series, the Merchants outscored the Elks 21-1.

Fairmount organized an amateur team for the first time in the spring 2007 and finished off the year with a championship in the Class A division. They managed to score nine runs on just two hits in the second inning of their opener against the Mantador Monsters and eventually went on to win 11-1. Pitcher Jared Keaveney allowed only two hits and hit a two-run homer in the one-sided win. Fairmount won the title by out-slugging the Fargo Metros 14-10 in a sloppy game in which each team committed five errors.

The Enderlin Indies beat Hazen-Beulah 13-7 in their first-round game but had to beat the last two Class AA champions on their way to their title. Nate Roesler's RBI single in the tenth inning was the margin in a 7-6 win over the Jamestown Tarnos in the next game. In the championship game Andy Frase allowed a run on two hits in the first inning but shut down Fairview on one hit the rest of the way as Enderlin cruised to a 10-1 win. Lead-off batter Joe Krivarchka, who would be named MVP, homered in the game and scored ten runs in the three Indie victories.

Just three teams entered the Class AAA double elimination tournament. In early round games the Jamestown Elks beat the Fargo Mudhens twice to eliminate them but lost to the Merchants when Josh Shaw and Linton native and current University of Minnesota Gopher pitcher Kyle Carr combined to beat them 5-1. The two Jamestown clubs entered Sunday play with the Elks needing a win over the Merchants to stay alive.

Nolan Mitchell threw a six-hitter, retiring fifteen Merchant batters in a row at one point, to give the Elks a 5-2 win and force a winner-take-all championship game. This time Carr started and pitched the first five innings with Shaw finishing up, and Bryan Erstad smacked two home runs, as the Merchants repeated as state AAA champs 6-2. Shaw, who had a brief stint with the Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks in professional baseball earlier in the summer, was named most valuable player.

Four teams entered the 2008 Class A tournament. Steve Slauchbaugh's three-run homer helped the Fargo-Moorhead Mets (Mets) defeat Edgeley 6-4 in one of the first-round games. In the other, Mantador starting pitcher Alex Althoff issued ten walks helping the Jamestown Merchants IV to a 7-4 win. The Mets beat the Merchants 12-5 in the title game with MVP Nate Smiley throwing his second complete game.

Jamestown's Miller Chillers, Enderlin, Fairmount, and the Fargo Mets all won first round games in the eight-team Class AA tournament. Catcher Jason Falk hit two homers to power the Chillers past Enderlin 17-10 in one semi-final game. In the other contest Fairmount was down 8-0 after seven innings but rallied for four in the eighth and five more in the ninth to edge Fargo 9-8. Their magic ended the next day when Cory Anderson pitched the Chillers to a 9-3 win in a game that was delayed twenty-five minutes, and then called after 5 ½ innings due to rain.

In his first year managing the Merchants, Bryan Erstad hit .456 and led the team to a 17-10 record. Again they faced the Elks, who manager Boya Quichocho led to a 10-12 mark in a best two of three for the Class AAA title. Greg Lunski outpitched Quichocho in a 6-3 Merchant win in game one. In the second game, the Merchants 35-year-old second baseman Kevin Dobson broke a 3-3 tie with an RBI single in the top of the eighth inning. The Merchants added three insurance runs in the ninth and swept the championship series with an 8-3 win over the Elks.