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SEMO Spartans Win Back to Back State Championships

JULY 20TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Spartans Win Back to Back State Titles - by Rhylan Hillis

Dexter, Missouri - The Babe Ruth League SEMO Spartans 15 year olds have once again advanced to the Midwest Plains Regional Tournament. They won the Babe Ruth State Championship in Joplin last week. This is the second year in a row the team has taken a state title.

After going 3 - 0 in pool play in the Junior Babe State playoffs, the first loss for the SEMO Spartans came on Saturday losing 3 - 6 to Booneville.

The Spartans defeated Carthage 15-0; Carl Junction 29-0; Monett 20-1 and lost to Booneville 6-3 in pool play.

In bracket play, the Spartans defeated Booneville 7-0 and beat Mineral Area 4-2.

This was a tough loss for the Spartans and put them in the number 2 position of the tournament. Fortunately this allowed the Spartans to come back the next day and beat Booneville 7 - 0. It was a tough battle against Booneville. The Spartans were down early two runs, but with the help of ace pitcher Gage McNeil and closer Haden Hillis, the Spartans battled back to for the win.

"It felt pretty cool because it was all up to me and I had one job, to focus and throw strikes and I did and we came back and won," commented McNeil, pitcher for the Spartans.

The next game was the championship game and all eyes were on the state trophy.

The evening before right fielder, Haden Hills, from Dexter slept with the state trophy from 2016.

"I knew it would remind everyone how good it felt to win," stated Hillis.

The match-up was a repeat of last year's championship game, Mineral Area had the #1 seed. Garrett Henson was selected to pitch for the Spartans.

"I knew before the game even started that it was win or go home, so I put the team on my back and took them for a ride," stated Henson.

Mineral Area started out strong by scoring two runs early, but that didn't stop the Spartans from fighting back.

In the bottom of the 4th inning, Gavin Bond hit a fly ball deep to right center to tie the game.

Then two hits from Kaden Siebert and Gage McNeil put the Spartans on top making it a 4 - 2 game. At the top of the 7th inning the Spartans needed three more outs to grab the title as State Champions. The first two outs came with a diving catch from Jack Scruggs.

"It felt pretty cool to make an important out," commented Scruggs. People were on the edge of their seat waiting for the third out. The pitch was made, the ball went flying high, and as the last out was just about to be made by center fielder Ethan Hutchison, one could hear in the stand, "State Champs Baby!"

Third baseman, Kaden Siebert after the game said, "It always feels great to win a championship, but this one felt really special."

The tournament will take place in Junction City, Kansas on July 26th - July 30th.

On Friday, July 21, team members will be waiting tables at Dexter Queen on Business 60 to earn tips that will help fund their Junction City trip. The public is encouraged to visit Dexter Queen and support the local SEMO Spartans.

Pictured following their victorious state competition are, front row: Kaden Siebert, Carson Bell, Peyton Driskill, Camden Riley, Mason Keena, Gavin Bond; Back row: Coach Kyle Matthews, Jack Scruggs, Luke Becker, Garrett Henson, Ethan Hutchison, Jake Hankins, Gage McNeil, Haden Hillis, and Coach Caleb Miller.

Special thanks to Rhylan Hillis who provided much of the information, quotes, and majority of the article on the Spartans Championship win. She is going to make a great sports commentator in her future after high school! The ShowMe Times looks forward to her continued coverage of the Spartans and who knows you might be reading more articles from Miss Hillis in the future. Stay tuned!

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