

# Sports

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## Cougars split home opener



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Senior Curtis Paulson reaches home safely after a bad pitch gave him the opening to score. The IVHS baseball team went one and one against 6A Crater Tuesday, Mar. 22.

By Darcy Wallace  
IVN Staff Writer

The Illinois Valley High School baseball team could be hitting its stride.

After two back-to-back games against Crater JV Tuesday, March 22, coach Bob Johnson says the 2011 team is already looking stronger than last year.

"We're getting better every game," Johnson said. "If we keep improving at the rate we're going now, we'll be pretty competitive with everybody we play."

After weeks of heavy rain and spring storms, the Cougars finally had the chance to play on their home turf at Illinois Valley High School, facing the 6-A Crater JV from Medford.

At first, Illinois Valley struggled to contain Crater on defense. Though the opponent only had five hits, they were able to score 12 runs by out-maneuvering the Cougar defense.

In game two, the Cougars reversed the result, winning 5-3 in a combination of strikeouts, strong defense and plenty of hits.

This time, the Crater defense struggled to contain Illinois Valley. Curtis Paulson, Andrew McLaughlin and Zach Anderson were just some

of the Cougars getting hits in the last two innings. Paulson slid home evading the catcher's glove; on defense, Josh Free tagged out a Crater player going for first in a crucial end-of-game play.

"You have to have your pitchers throwing strikes and your guys [on defense] have to pick up grounders and throw 'em out," Johnson said. "If you do that you have the chance to win almost every game you're playing."

According to Johnson, strong pitching from Bryan Biggs and Anderson struck out several Crater players and helped Illinois Valley hold and extend its lead.

"I don't think we made any errors," Johnson said. "I was really proud of our guys. We played excellent defense."

Last season, Illinois Valley didn't get many wins but played hard in the 4A Skyline division with several young players. The 2011 Cougars are a mix of all grade levels; so far, they've shown promise both in defense and their ability to get hits.

"I'm looking forward to this season because I think we're going to have a lot of fun," Johnson said. "They work really hard. Over spring break we practiced almost every day...they want to play, they want to win and they want to learn."

Illinois Valley played Brookings Harbor on Tuesday, March 29, the first team in a 3-A league of comparable size, a possible peek into how difficult upcoming matches against Southern Cascade opponents might be.

"[Brookings Harbor] seemed to have some pretty good ball players last year," Johnson said. "It'll let us know about where we stand with some of these teams...I think we'll do fine."

Assuming the weather cooperates, the next scheduled game is 12 p.m. Saturday, April 2 at home against Glide.

## IV Little League hosts first Mudsling Tournament

By Darcy Wallace  
IVN Staff Writer

Starting at 7 a.m., Illinois Valley Little League teams held the first Mudsling tournament fundraiser for the organization Saturday, March 19 and Sunday, March 20.

Nine teams duelled it out at Jubilee Park in Cave Junction. Mike Hussey Trucking narrowly edged out Aftershock for first place with Aftershock a close second. The Rebels took third to round out the top three.

IV Little League member Christi Alvarez said "the first pickle" started Sunday morning when Silver Bullet teammates thwarted a double-play effort by Aftershock. But they made it through

to face The Rebels. Aftershock narrowly won 6-5.

Aftershock then gave Mike Hussey Trucking its first loss, but the latter team regrouped and defeated Aftershock 25-13 to win the championship.

The rest of the teams, The Misfits, The Tribe, Silver Bullets, DLC, Patrick O'Connor Landscaping, NWD and S.N.A.F.U. also brought their 'A' games in support of the fundraiser.

According to Alvarez, the motto for the weekend was "rain, snow, sleet or shine, play ball!" This was tested in the very first game between The Misfits and S.N.A.F.U., which included a little bit of everything; sun, showers, snow and hail.

"Despite the sometimes dreary weather, all the teams played knowing

they were doing something for the kids, and that showed through when under normal circumstances tempers would fly," Alvarez said.

For the inaugural tournament, Don and Regie Valenti screen-printed new "March Mudsling" T-shirts. It wasn't just about winning: IV Little League board members thanked the umpires and the volunteers who helped the event run smoothly.

"[The board] would like to thank all ten teams...for coming and spending such an amazing weekend with us in support of our own future ballplayers. Without you, this would not have worked," Alvarez said.



(Courtesy photo for the Illinois Valley News)

Teams slop through the mud during the first Mudsling tournament Saturday, Mar. 19.

## Academic Masters competition coming to IVHS

By Darcy Wallace  
IVN Staff Writer

Josephine County's Academic Masters competition started in 1984 with the hopes of inspiring and motivating students to challenge themselves intellectually.

Nearly 30 years later, the program will come to Illinois Valley High School on April 27. This week, IVHS faculty will select the five Cougars who will represent the school in competition.

"It's great to host this year and to see Illinois Valley students get support," said Academic Masters board member Jack Dwyer. "They came together for the basketball team recently and I hope to see that [support] again."

According to Dwyer, students from four schools will compete at IVHS with \$15,000 in prize money at stake. Students will test their knowledge of English, science, social studies and math; some will perform a music selection as well.

Students from Hidden Valley, North Valley and Grants Pass high schools

are scheduled to compete at Illinois Valley. Contestants will receive a question with 30 minutes to prepare an answer and have five minutes to present it — in front of an audience.

"This is going to be a great event for the school," Dwyer said. "I'd like to see IV know about it and I applaud the young students who will be performing that night."

Dwyer said local organizations help support the Academic Masters program, allowing cash awards from \$300 to \$1,200 for the winners. The team with the highest score will receive \$250 for their school.

As the "home team" this year, Illinois Valley High School also has the chance to win a \$250 award for having the highest attendance.

Dwyer said he's been on the Academic Masters board for three years, but taught at Lorna Byrne Middle School for 28 years before.

"This seems to be the finest hour for our schools when academic achievement is recognized," Dwyer said. "I have not found a similar contest anywhere else so it's a