

UNDEFEATED: 27-0

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and knocking on the door, and obviously they're excited and felt that they would get this moment."

Knappa senior Justin Drago — a player of few words — said finally winning a state championship was "surreal. Can't believe it. Glad I finally got one."

'Ready to go'

The Dragons may have been the favorites on paper, but everyone could see a Logger victory coming right down Interstate 5.

Knappa got off the bus at Volcanoes Stadium carrying a 26-0 overall record, which included a win over Monroe the first week of the season.

The Loggers have been playing great defense, their pitchers were well-rested, and the Knappa players were "excited for the opportunity," Miller said shortly before the contest.

"They've put in a lot of work, and they feel like they belong here. I think there's a good edge, a good looseness to them. They're excited and ready to go."

Once the game started, the boys from the North Coast withstood the nearly 90-degree heat of the Willamette Valley. The players from Monroe did not.

While the Loggers made all the routine plays, the Dragons suffered a defensive meltdown.

Monroe's ace pitcher, Austin Crowson, allowed just six hits with six strikeouts. But every pop-up, fly ball and ground ball was an adventure for the defending champions, who turned a few nice plays, but booted some even bigger ones.

The Dragons set the tone on the second batter of the game, when Knappa's Jason Miller reached on a fielding error. The next batter — older brother Andy Miller — launched a towering fly ball to right, where the Monroe outfielder lost the ball in the sun.

Andy Miller ended up on third, but his brother was thrown out at the plate, and the Dragons eventually got out of the inning.

After scoreless second and third innings, the Monroe miscues turned up again in the fourth.

Andy Miller's routine fly ball to left was dropped by the Dragon outfielder, allowing Miller to reach second; Drago drew an intentional walk; and Noah Kinney reached on a dropped fly ball to center to load the bases.

Nate Truax drove in the first run with an infield single, which the Dragons also misplayed by not covering first base.

After a fly out, Monroe catcher Tielar Murray turned in the defensive play of the game.

The Loggers missed an attempted squeeze bunt, and Murray was able to run down Drago as he was headed back to third, then tagged Kinney out trying to reach third for an unassisted double play.

"We had the right guy (Dale Takalo) there, and we'd do it again," coach Miller said. "He's a great player, he missed it, and you have to move on. And we did. Our kids rolled with those early punches really well."

The Dragons, however, did not roll very well.

Austin Drago was hit by a pitch to lead off the fifth inning and took second on a wild pitch; Tyson Burnard had a one-out single to left field; and Drago scored moments later on a wild pitch.

After a walk to Jason Miller, Andy Miller sent a fly ball to center, which was caught by Kyle Bateman, but deep enough for Burnard to tag and score.

That was all the runs the Loggers could score, but it was plenty for Rusinovich.

"As soon as we scored our second run, we knew it was ours," Justin Drago said. "I knew it was ours. Chase is going to shut 'em down and Tyson will finish it."

Coach Miller said, "With Crowson on the other side, you're hoping to score five or six runs, but realistically we



Knappa's Tyson Burnard, center, celebrates with Chase Rusinovich, No. 10, and Dale Takalo, No. 5, after winning the 2A Baseball State Championship at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer on Friday.



Knappa hoists the first-place trophy after winning the OSAA 2A Baseball State Championship at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer on Friday. Knappa beat Monroe 3-0. View more photos online at www.dailyastorian.com



Knappa's Jason Miller, No. 33, rounds second in the first inning against Monroe during the 2A Baseball State Championship at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer on Friday.

thought we better keep (Monroe) under three today.

"Chase stood tall and did that for us. We let 'em off the hook a few times, but with the way our pitchers were throwing today, that three-run lead felt pretty good."

Confident from the get-go

Rusinovich struck out 11 batters in six-plus innings, allowing two hits, with two walks and two hit batters.

"I felt confident from the get-go, but once we scored a few, it really took some pressure off," Rusinovich said.

"I had all my pitches working," he added. "Warming up, I knew it was going to be a good day. I had good control and my breaking ball was working. My arm felt great, and it was easy to keep my pitch count low. The heat wasn't a problem at all. It actually made me pitch better."

Rusinovich said, "My strikeout pitch was my curve ball today. I was keeping them off-balance pretty well. They

weren't able to really touch the curve ball, and the outside fastball, they couldn't touch that either."

Defensively, the Dragons committed five errors.

"I always feel that the team batting has a little bit to do with that," Jeff Miller said. "I also think (the Dragons) are not used to that many balls coming into play when (Crowson) is on the mound. So if you have a fast, hard infield like this and you put the ball in play hard, good things happen. Make a team make decisions under pressure, and in high school baseball, good things are going to happen."

Some good things almost happened for the Dragons in the bottom of the seventh.

Monroe opened with a hit batter, a walk and a single by Bateman to load the bases.

Burnard came on in relief of Rusinovich, and later called the bases-loaded, no-outs situation "very nerve-wracking," until pinch-hitter Tyson Horning delivered a weak grounder back to Burnard, who threw home

for the first out, and catcher Nate Truax tossed it to first for the double play.

Threat over.

"It's a 21-out game, and the last three always seem to be tough," Miller said. "Ty did a great job. He doesn't feel the pressure. He just gets more excited and more of a 'bulldog' type attitude, the tighter and bigger the moments are. It's that kind of an attitude that allows a team to achieve at this level."

All season, Knappa's strategy of starting Rusinovich and finishing with Burnard proved unbeatable.

"That's how we started out against Regis," Burnard said. "Chase builds it up, then I come in for the finish. It works a lot better because my arm doesn't have the stamina that Chase does."

Andy Miller said, "Chase was on his game today. His pitches had a lot of movement, and his curve ball was breaking good."

Burnard and Truax had two hits apiece to lead Knappa,

while Justin Drago was walked intentionally twice.

"Everybody says it's a good thing, but I don't like it," Drago said. "I like to hit. I guess it's respect."

Defensively, the Loggers committed no errors behind Rusinovich.

"I've said all year, this is as good a defensive squad as we've had," coach Miller said. "It's what our recipe has been this year — good defense, good pitching, put the ball in the play, and good things will happen."

'It's awesome'

Once the championship trophy and medals had been presented in the post-game ceremony, senior Andy Miller stated, "It's awesome. I can't believe it's my last game already."

Miller's past includes watching the Loggers play in state championship games ("When I was watching that 2010 game, I thought it would be awesome to experience that"), but also an inju-

SCOREBOARD

BASEBALL

HIGH SCHOOLS			
2A State Championship			
Knappa 3, Monroe 0			
Knappa	000	120	0-3
6	0		
Monroe	000	000	0-0
3	5		

Rusinovich, Burnard (7) and Truax; Crowson and Murray. **Win:** Rusinovich. **Loss:** Crowson. **Save:** Burnard. **RBI:** Kna, Truax, A.Miller. **3B:** Kna, A.Miller, Burnard. **SF:** Kna, A.Miller. **SB:** Kna, Burnard, J.Drago. **CS:** Kna, J.Drago, Kinney. **E:** Monroe, Sherman 2, K.Bal-lard, Bateman. **LOB:** Knappa 7, Monroe 6. **WP:** Mon, Crowson 2. **HBP:** Kna, A.Drago; Mon, A.Crowson, Gwillim. **DP:** Knappa, Monroe 2.

Umpires—HP: Dan Clements. 1B: Rob Sellars, Sr. 3B: Tony Gabirelson. **Start:** 1:32 p.m. **Time:** 1 hour, 56 minutes.

Moda Health Players of the Game: Chase Rusinovich, Knappa; Kyle Bateman, Monroe.

State Championship Scores

6A-Sheldon 2, West Linn 1
5A-Hood River Valley 2, Liberty 0
4A-Scappoose 11, Henley 6
3A-Santiam Christian 3, Glide 0
2A/1A-Knappa 3, Monroe 0

Clatsop County Baseball State Champions

Year: Team, Coach
1957: Seaside (A-2) Baily Brim
1960: Seaside (A-2) Everet Clary
1972: Seaside (AA) Jim Auld
1994: Warrenton (2A/1A) Lennie Wolfe
2006: Astoria (3A) Dave Gasser
2009: Astoria (4A) Dave Gasser
2010: Knappa (2A/1A) Jeff Miller
2011: Astoria (4A) Brian Babbitt
2015: Knappa (2A/1A) Jeff Miller

SOFTBALL

State Championship Scores
6A-Tualatin 10, Westview 0
5A-Putnam 3, Pendleton 2
4A-McLoughlin 4, Banks 0
3A-Dayton 5, Rainier 1
2A/1A-Pilot Rock 2, Weston-McEwen 1

ry-plagued high school career which forced him out of football and to miss part of or entire seasons in basketball and baseball.

"It's been a long road, Miller said, "but this makes it all worth it."

Despite not facing much competition during league play, and despite not having a summer team last year, the Loggers were clearly the best team at the 2A/1A level.

Knappa could very well be back in Keizer next year, the first week of June.

"I hope so," Burnard said of next year's team. "We set a good enough example. I hope they know what to do now."

• Check out interviews with the Knappa players and coach at The Daily Astorian's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/DailyAstorian/videos>