

Knappa: ‘We’ve been really fortunate. None of it is guaranteed’

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In addition, “we had no catcher. Klauser said he would catch because he had done it in little league. But we went to Clatskanie and they smoked us, and he said ‘no more of that.’ That’s when Scott Lambert, who was a really good second baseman, said, ‘I hate catching, but I hate losing more.’ I’ll do it.

“He didn’t know what he was doing to start, but at the end of the year he’s throwing out runners in the state championship game,” Miller said. “To me, that was one of the most remarkable individual sacrifices and performances that I’ve been around.”

Knappa lost two of three games to Portland Christian to finish the league season, and entered the state playoffs as the league’s No. 2 seed.

“There was an extra round in those days,” Miller recalled. “So we played Pilot Rock at Wahtonka, and their pitcher had never lost a game in high school. (Knappa’s) Cody Strickland had a terrible finger injury on his pitching hand and hadn’t thrown in quite a while.

“He said, ‘I’m going today,’ and he literally pitched with his index finger off the baseball the entire game, and threw a brilliant game,” winning, 9-1.

From there, “we went to Lowell, where we had three lightning delays, so the game took forever. We used three pitchers and somehow squeaked that one out.

“We didn’t come home, drove to southern Oregon and played Bonanza, and that game ended on a miracle play by Benthin at second base,” a 5-4 Logger victory.

Road trip

The weeklong road trip continued.

“We went to Roseburg and played (defending state champion) Umpqua Valley Christian, a place Knappa had never won,” Miller said. “They had destroyed us 10-0 the year before, so that was a sweet victory. Then we came home, turned around and went to Salem.”

The Heppner Mustangs were coming off a 3-2 win over Portland Christian in the other semifinal, preventing an all-Northwest League final.

And, just two days before the 2A/1A championship game, Scappoose beat Astoria in an all-Cowapa League 4A state title game. It was an eight-inning thriller won by the Indians, 2-1.

So it was up to the Loggers to save the weekend for Clatsop County.

The 2A/1A championship game took place June 7, 2010 at Volcanoes Stadium. Before the contest began, Miller said, “I remember watching Heppner warm up, and thought, ‘Wow, they’re better at every position.’ But our kids just went out and played.”

And it all started with the birthday boy on the mound.

Strickland was Knappa’s starter, and hooked up in a pitching duel with Heppner’s Drew Johnson.

On his 18th birthday, Strickland allowed one run on five hits, with four strikeouts and no walks. Johnson had better numbers, allowing just four hits, and struck out seven with no walks.

In the second inning, Kyle Kelly struck out looking, but reached safely on a passed ball. With two outs, Zweber doubled to right to bring in the first run.

Knappa rallied again in the fourth, sparked by a lead-off double from Strickland.

Dalton Kelly was hit by a pitch, and Kyle followed with a single to score Strickland with the second run, all Knappa would need.

Heppner scored a run in the sixth, and the Mustangs had runners at first and third with no outs in the seventh.

One baserunner was called out on a runner’s interference, and the Loggers turned a strikeout-tag out double play to end the game.

“There’s more dominant performances, but I chal-



Photos by Gary Henley/The Astorian

Knappa pitcher Cody Strickland threw just 63 pitches in his complete-game win in the state title victory over Heppner.



Knappa coach Jeff Miller talks over strategies with his assistants during the 2010 state championship game.

lenge anybody to find a better pitching performance in a game than the one Cody had,” Miller said. “It was a 63-pitch complete game that lasted under an hour.”

Heppner stranded three baserunners, Knappa just two.

Birthday present

After the game, Strickland said, “It’s the best birthday present I could ever ask for. At the start I was throwing pretty hard. It wore off at the end, but I hit my spots and we made a lot of plays out there,” including two double plays.

In his one and only year of high school baseball, Klauser went out as a state champion.

“Everybody had been trying to talk me into it for

years, and I figured, it’s my senior year, I might as well play the last spot.”

Miller says now, “I think we hit .209 for the playoffs, but we would always have a key guy get on, then a key hit, and it would be enough to win. That was a lot of fun. Not only being the first championship, but that particular makeup of kids and how it came together was really special.”

Picking an “all-decade team” for Knappa baseball would be fun — but impossible for the coach.

“That would be fun con-

versation, but there’s no way I could ever pick that kind of thing,” Miller said. “I love ‘em all.”

He added, “We’ve been really fortunate. None of it is guaranteed, and it’s been a special run of kids, parents, school support and luck. There’s a lot of pitchers, teams and players out there who are really good. I just try to make them appreciate the game, and try to make ‘em a little better than when they started, and hopefully it works out.”

From 2010 to 2019, it worked out.

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Jeff Miller | Knappa coach

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