

Tribal members help Willamina win state baseball championship

Bruckner brothers instrumental in state title effort

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Tribal member Brandon Bruckner, 18, will probably remember his game-saving play at shortstop on June 5 at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer for the rest of his life.

His team, the Willamina Bulldogs, was tied 5-5 with Westside Christian at bat in the bottom of the seventh inning and two outs. Westside Christian loaded the bases — 90 feet away from winning the state 3A title game and notching the team's fourth win this year against Willamina.

However, Brandon made a diving stop at short of a hard-hit grounder and flipped the ball to his brother Brent at second base to force out Western Christian's catcher Kevin Krostag, sending the game into extra innings.

Four innings later, Willamina scored eight runs in the top of the 11th and won the state championship, beating Western Christian for the first time this year.

The Bulldogs team included Tribal members and brothers Brady, Brent and Brandon Bruckner, as well as Santiago Atanacio and Leland Butler who did not play in the title game.

Brandon Bruckner contributed to a Willamina defensive effort that gunned down four Western Christian runners at the plate and forced the Eagles to leave the bases loaded in three consecutive innings. Western Christian stranded 14 base run-

ners — and potential game-winning runs — from the sixth through 11th innings.

"We should have lost this game several times, but we made some great plays," said Willamina baseball coach Cliff Toney in the *McMinnville News-Register*. "These kids are winners."

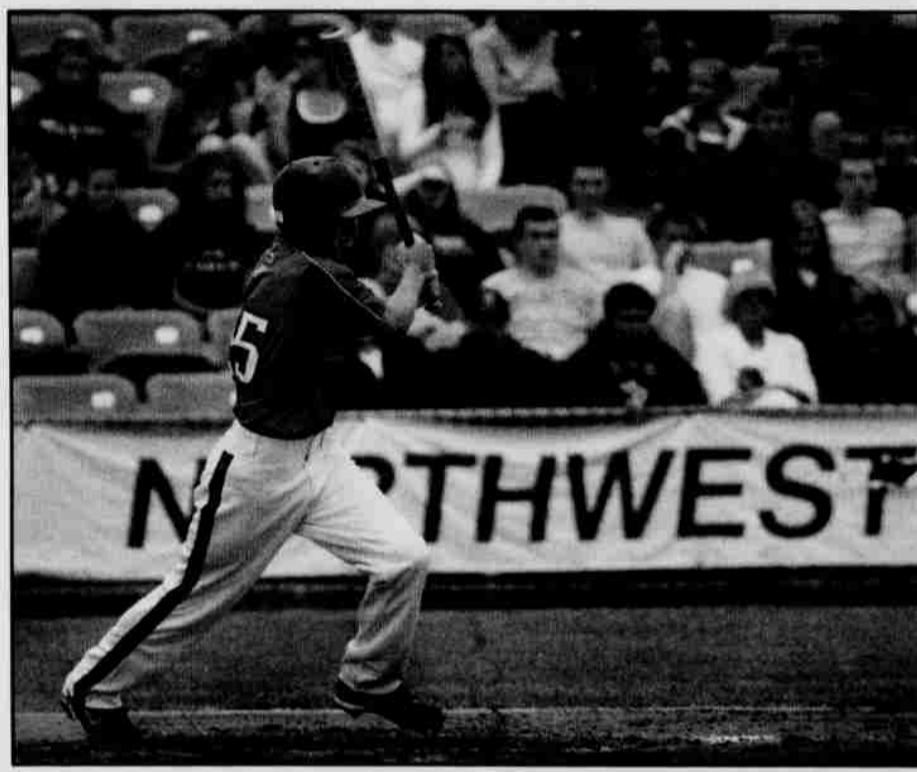
After Bruckner's spectacular play in the bottom of the seventh, Willamina reclaimed the lead 6-5 in the top of the eighth, but failed to hang on to the lead in the bottom of the eighth. The score remained knotted at 6-6 until the 11th inning.

In the top of the 11th, Willamina notched seven hits against three Western Christian pitchers. Aided by five Eagle errors, the Bulldogs scored eight runs to take a commanding 14-6 lead.

Freshman Brady Bruckner, 15, began the 11th-inning attack with an RBI single, his only hit in seven at-bats. It scored his brother Brandon, who drew a walk to start the inning and moved over to third on a ground ball and then a wild pitch. Brady later scored on an RBI single to center field by his brother Brent, 16. Brandon also was responsible for knocking in the 14th run with a single up the middle.

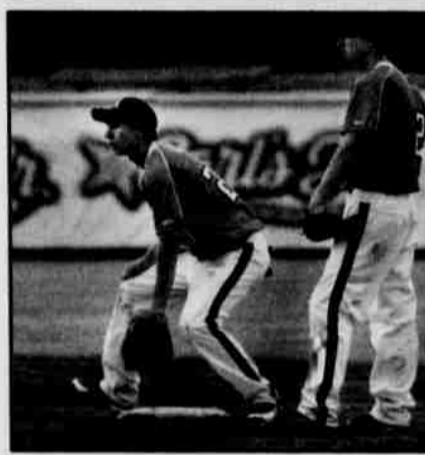
In the bottom of the 11th, Western Christian scored three runs before Bulldog pitcher Chris Orozco fielded a ground ball and tossed it to first baseman Derek Littlejohn to seal the state title victory.

The win in the state championship game lifted the Bulldogs to



Above, Tribal member Brady Bruckner was a designated hitter for Willamina High during the Class 3A state championship game against Westside Christian at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer on Friday, June 5.

Right, Willamina High baseball team members, brothers and Tribal members Brandon Bruckner, left, looks to field a ball as his brother Brent Bruckner stands next to him while warming up between innings of the Class 3A state championship game.



22-6 on the season and dropped Western Christian to 23-5.

To reach the title game, the Bulldogs knocked off the No. 1 Grant

Union Prospectors of John Day in a semifinal game on June 2. Western Christian was ranked No. 2 going into the state title game.

Before the state title win, Willamina had lost three games to Western Christian this year by a combined score of 38-6.

Brady, Brent and Brandon are the sons of Tribal member James Bruckner and his wife, Melanie, of Grand Ronde.

Meanwhile, the Willamina Bulldogs girls softball team, which included Tribal members Justine Colton, 17, and Carley Trammell, 17, also played for the state title on June 5 in Corvallis against the Valley Catholic Valiants, losing 4-3.

Willamina was trying to end a five-game losing streak to the three-time defending state champs and played even through four innings, but three errors helped doom the effort. It was the Bulldogs' third straight loss to Valley Catholic in a state title game.

Colton was credited with an RBI single in the bottom of the sixth, which made the score 3-2 in favor of Valley Catholic, but the Valiants scored an insurance run in the top of seventh, which they needed for the win. ■



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Brandon Bruckner, Willamina High's third baseman and Tribal member, runs to home plate to score during the 11th inning of the Class 3A state championship game against Westside Christian at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer on Friday, June 5. Willamina won in 11 innings 14-9 to become the state champions.