

Mavericks win North Central Conference baseball tournament

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Free Press photo by Pat Christman



Minnesota State outfielder Mark Dolenc connects on a seventh-inning grand slam to give the Mavericks a 6-4 lead.

A grand slam by junior rightfielder Mark Dolenc sparked Minnesota State Mankato to a 7-5 victory over Nebraska-Omaha in the championship game of the 2006 North Central Conference Baseball Tournament in Mankato May 13.

The Mavericks took the game's first lead in the third inning when junior second baseman Nick Gonzalez singled and later came in to score on a fielder's choice. Junior centerfielder Eric Austvold singled to drive in Dane Allen in the fourth to make it 2-0 Mavericks, but UNO responded with a run in the fifth and a run in the sixth and then took a 4-2 lead in the top of the sixth when centerfielder Chad Leon hit a two-run home run.

Then, in the bottom of the seventh and after singles by Gonzalez and Tony Altavilla, UNO freshman Tyler Cloyd hit Maverick junior catcher Pat Ottum with a pitch to load the bases. Dolenc, who leads MSU with a .388 batting average, proceeded to line the ball over the left field wall for his fifth home run of the year. The Mavericks scored another run in the inning when, again with the bases loaded, junior shortstop Scott Kemp scored on a balk.

UNO scored a single run in the top of the ninth, but Mavericks closer Nick Fellman, who came on in relief of starter senior lefthanded starter Matt McMurtry to throw the last two innings, claimed his 16th save of the year as the Mavericks earned their 20th North Central Conference championship and first since 2002.

McMurtry, who allowed four runs on six hits, struck out two and walked four in seven innings. The decision gives the North Platte, Neb., native a 10-2 mark for 2006. The 10 wins ties the Minnesota State Mankato season record set in 2002 by another lefthander, Chris Rupert.

Minnesota State Mankato, which has now won 21 of its last 23 games, stands 40-11 overall for the season with today's victory.

The league title automatically qualifies the Mavericks for the 2006 NCAA Division II tournament. Regional sites and brackets are to be announced May 15.