

# 2011 Team Wisconsin- Nearly Perfect

Team Wisconsin participated in the Midwest Classic Baseball Tournament in Plainfield Illinois on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup> 2011. The Showcase tournament is one of the biggest college exposure opportunities in the entire country. Over 80 D1 college coaches and professional scouts were on hand to watch the best high school baseball prospects from 14 different states.

Once again Team Wisconsin showed that it was on the top of the list in terms of overall talent and garnered the largest following of college and pro scouts as they played their five games. The players maintained their composure, although playing in front of coaches from Arizona State, Duke, Connecticut, Maryland, Michigan State, Minnesota, Southern Miss, Villanova, TCU, Missouri, Nebraska, Western Carolina, Kentucky, and a slew of others was pressure packed at times.

Team Wisconsin finished with a 4-1 record and was one inning away from perfection for the first time ever. Still the team finished as good as any Wisconsin team has ever finished in this prestigious tournament. This was an especially impressive performance since all five teams that were faced saved their best pitching to try and knock off Wisconsin. The teams from Minnesota, Nebraska, and Indiana all had pitchers throwing in excess of 90 MPH against Wisconsin. Yet the team rose to the challenge and defeated them all.

The team finished with an ERA of just 2.20 and a batting average of .317. Their opponents could only manage a batting average of .215 and gave up over 6 runs per game. The team was led by Nate Ricci (Madison LaFollette) hitting .533 with two doubles and 6 stolen bases and Elliot Ashbeck (Marshfield) hitting .636 with two doubles. Also batting over .500 was Zach Fairchild (Sun Prairie) who hit .556 and smashed three doubles.

Team MVP's were Nate Ricci and Craig Nennig (Wrightstown). Craig played a flawless shortstop for five games and successfully turned 4 double plays while handling 16 ground balls without an error. He made every play look effortless and easy, even balls in the hole and up the middle. He caught the eye of virtually everyone in the entire place with his smooth hands and quiet glove and quick feet. For that, scholarship offers would be made at a fast and furious pace following the tournament. Ricci was the offensive spark for the team. He batted leadoff and managed to lead Wisconsin to quick scores in the first inning of every game that was played. His example at the plate led to confidence and composure by those hitters who followed him to the plate.

## **Game one- Kentucky sneaks past Wisconsin 6-5**

The tournament began with a loss for Team Wisconsin against Kentucky. Wisconsin had dominated Kentucky for five innings, but then after a pitching change Kentucky managed 6 runs in the sixth inning after 4 walks and 5 consecutive hits. Starting pitcher Ryan

Radue (Fox Valley Lutheran) was very effective in changing speeds and keeping the Kentucky hitters off balance. Kentucky later proved to have the second best hitting team in the tournament. Through five innings he only gave up two hits and struck out two. Offensively, Nate Ricci (Madison LaFollette) led the way going 2-3 with a double. Ben Messenger (BayPort) also added a double for Wisconsin.

## **Game two- Wisconsin beats Minnesota in Marquee game of tournament**

The matchup between Wisconsin and Minnesota was the highlight of the tournament featuring Wisconsin's powerhouse hitting and Minnesota's powerhouse pitching. Minnesota brought Mitch Brown to the mound, a hard throwing right hander topping out at 93 MPH with a devastating curve ball. Wisconsin rose to the challenge in the third inning with back to back doubles from Craig Nennig (Wrightstown) and Eric Cottrell (Arrowhead). Later in the game Minnesota brought in another flame-thrower in Hunter Gamoke who delivered gas at 87-89 MPH. Both Zach Fairchild (Sun Prairie) and Elliot Ashbeck (Marshfield) smoked doubles and Brad Boegel (Kewaskum) and Nate Hoffman (Sun Prairie) added singles to greet Gamoke with four consecutive hits. Both Ashbeck and Fairchild finished with two hits leading Wisconsin past Minnesota 8-2. There were over 70 college coaches and professional scouts lined up and down the left and right field fences to watch this highly anticipated game, and the radar guns behind home plate went 6 rows deep and were lit up with 90+ numbers for most of the game.

Wisconsin starting pitcher Ben Messenger (BayPort) kept Minnesota quiet by striking out six and giving up only one hit. His fastball was clocked at 85 MPH with good tail and his curveball was sharp and downward breaking. Ryan Bloom (Boyceville) relieved Messenger in the fourth and went the final four innings giving up only three hits while fanning three. The two aces allowed only one earned run while putting Wisconsin in the win column against a very good Minnesota team.

## **Game three- Wisconsin powers past Nebraska**

Wisconsin saved starting pitcher Kyle Cody (McDonell Central) for Nebraska, since they notoriously bring some of the best hitters to this elite tournament. Nebraska at the same time brought out their ace for Wisconsin. The two pitchers traded 91 MPH fastballs for five innings. Cody gave up only three hits while sending three back to the bench via strikeout. Wisconsin broke things wide open when Clark Eagan (Appleton North) crushed a 89 MPH fastball off the left center fence bringing in three runs. Also ripping doubles for Wisconsin were Nate Ricci (Madison LaFollette), Zach Fairchild (Sun Prairie) and Eric Cottrell (Arrowhead).

After Cody kept the Nebraska bats quiet, Wisconsin brought in Nate Hoffman (Sun Prairie) and the master of the mound continued the frustration for the Nebraska hitters. Hoffman allowed only one hit and struck out two. He made the Nebraska hitters look foolish, nearly falling over themselves with curveballs and change-ups dropping through the strike zone. His precision fastball at 85 MPH coupled with dirty off speed pitches

proved to be way more than Nebraska could handle. When it was said and done, Nebraska managed only four hits and zero earned runs for a final score of 6-1.

### **Game four- Wisconsin defeats Michigan 6-2**

Wisconsin coasted past Michigan in game four on the heels of a towering two run home run by Craig Nennig (Wrightstown) The blast set the tone in the first inning and Michigan was not able to recover. Also finishing with multiple hits for Wisconsin were Nate Ricci (Madison LaFollette) and Ryan Bloom (Boyceville) who added a two RBI triple as well.

Elliot Ashbeck was the starting pitcher for Wisconsin and got the win. Ashbeck gave up only two hits over four innings. He mixed his pitches nicely and had good movement on his 86 MPH fastball. Drew Haack (Middleton) came in relief in the fifth inning and continued to keep Michigan under control giving up only one earned run on three hits. The closer for Wisconsin was Brett Steinwagner (Hudson) and he shut the door on Michigan striking out two with his 87 MPH fastball.

### **Game five- Wisconsin outlasts Indiana 5-4**

The final game of the tournament featured another ace pitcher from Indiana against Wisconsin. Again Wisconsin was able to come out on top against another D1 pitcher throwing in the upper 80's and low 90's. The hero yet again was Nate Ricci (Madison LaFollette) who lined the game winner into left field scoring Craig Nennig (Wrightstown) in the bottom of the seventh. Most of the damage was done early in the first inning when Brad Boegel (Kewaskum) singled, Drew Haack (Middleton) singled, and then Elliot Ashbeck (Marshfield) drove them in with a roped double into right field. Both Ricci and Ashbeck finished with multiple hits. Zach Fairchild (Sun Prairie) also added a double for Wisconsin and Craig Nennig (Wrightstown) finished with two RBI's.

Wisconsin pitchers Ryan Radue (Fox Valley Lutheran), Nate Hoffman (Sun Prairie), Ben Messenger (BayPort), Nate Ricci (Madison LaFollette) and Brett Steinwagner (Hudson) were very effective against Indiana giving up seven hits and two earned runs while striking out four.

When the dust settled Team Wisconsin had continued their great tradition of showcasing top notch pitching and aggressive hitting to secure another spot on top of the standings of the Midwest Classic. This type of play is what keeps the scouts and recruiters coming back to watch Wisconsin year after year.