



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 7, 2001

Midget Red Sox capture Ontario 'A' title

Milton defeats Belleville twice to clinch the gold

By **STEVE LeBLANC***The Champion*

Revenge is rarely as sweet or memorable as it was for the midget Red Sox Sunday.

Avenging a slim defeat that came in round three of their double-knockout tournament in Brantford, Jeff Harper's charges secured consecutive pay back victories over Belleville to reign supreme at the Ontario 'A' championships.

Making this feat all the more rewarding is the fact that the team's nucleus had two previous cracks at provincial gold — two years ago as midget freshmen and six years ago as major peewees — but had come up short both times.

"It took three kicks at the can to finally do it," said a jubilant Harper. "The thing that stands out for me is how everyone contributed. We were kind of shut down offensively, but we got great pitching and defense from a number of guys."

The Milton Chrysler Dodge sponsored midgets — who joined their senior counterparts in the winner's circle last weekend, capturing their first provincial crown since 1993 — clinched the title by blanking Belleville 3-0.

As with the four wins delivered earlier in the tournament, stand-out pitching and defense paved the way to victory — the Red Sox' 30th and final one of the season.

Michael Volpe out-duelled Belleville's Team Ontario ace with a four-hit, nine-strikeout gem through six innings. Having reached his allotted out total with just one frame remaining, he handed things over to Kevin Cooper — whose cohorts managed three routine grounders with little difficulty to seal the deal.

Volpe also stood tall at the plate with three hits, including a triple to bring home Ryan McManus — who was pinch-running for Evan Jeans. The veteran catcher had been drilled with an 85 MPH fastball in the back to reach base for the ninth time at the tournament. Scott Connolly and Conan O'Brien cashed in the second and third runs, which were scored respectively by Volpe and Andrew Kirkland.

Defensively, Andrew Pepper led an errorless campaign by initiating a pair of double plays in the fourth and fifth.

Milton had to don its proverbial rally cap earlier in the day during the initial return engagement with Belleville. Down 2-1 after three innings, the local lads battled back to prevail 5-2.

O'Brien's three-run homer in the fifth highlighted the reversal of fortune for the eventual champs — who shut out Belleville over the final 11 innings of their Sunday double-header to take the gold.

Rob Angus went downtown to spark the rally while flawless fielding and a solid complete-game effort from Steve Spiers factored heavily into the win.

This marked the second of two comeback victories for Milton Sunday. The first came against another provincial team hurler and



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton's midgets proudly display their medals and trophy secured at last weekend's Ontario 'A' championship in Brantford. The Red Sox won five of six games to clinch the gold.

his teammates from Sault Ste. Marie.

The Red Sox offered the weekend's most dramatic climax in this one, scoring three times in their last at-bat to squeak by 5-4. Volpe provided the heroics, connecting on a two-out hit that brought in Jeans. Just about every player contributed to this exhilarating triumph, with runs three and four scored by Kirkland and Ryan Harper. RBI were posted by Jeans and Paul Duff.

Jeans reached base safely all four times up while Angus made the defensive play of the morning clash — gunning down a runner at third base from deep centre field. Mark Black laid down the tag.

The Red Sox's three straight do-or-die victories followed their only blemish of the weekend — a 5-4 setback to Belleville Saturday. A shaky start made the difference in this one as the midgets were hammered for five runs on half-a-dozen hits in the opening frame.

Harper settled down after the first and delivered five shutout innings — fanning six batters along the way — to keep things tight.

Prior to that, the champs turned back challenges from Brantford

and Sudbury — beating both 4-3.

Chris Dumencu cemented the latter win with three shutout innings while leading offensively with a two-run double was Cooper.

Harper put the finishing touches on the first round victory by scoring from second base on a wild pitch to the backstop — punctuating the extra-innings showdown.

Black and Jeans added singles in the tournament opening win.

Also part of the provincial championship squad were pinch hitter Reg Taylor and middle reliever James MacDonald. Assisting Harper on the bench this year were coaches Larry Black and Gary Cooper.

The midgets were both provincial and regular season champions this year and finished with an overall record of 30-9-1.

For results on the senior Red Sox' Ontario 'D' championship victory, see page 25.



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