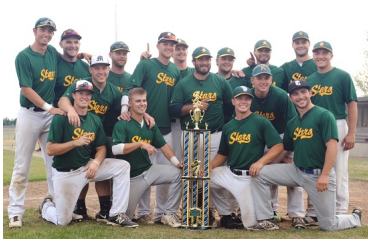


All six IVL teams likely to make state

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Loras Schulte spends a lot of days this time of year gathering information.

As the president of the Iowa Amateur Baseball Association, Schulte is the man ultimately responsible for putting together the annual IABA state tournament, contested over the first two weekends in August.

The Iowa Valley League is always well-represented in the tournament. Last year, the final three teams came with the IVL with the Stars eventually downing Red Top to capture the crown.

When the 12-team tournament field is finalized sometime next week, it is almost certain that half the field will consist of the six IVL teams.

"I can't remember the last time the league has been this competitive from top to bottom," Schulte said. "We've had 18 one-run games and seven two-run games. There have also been more extra inning games than I can ever remember."

With two weeks remaining in the regular season, the Stars lead the way at 11-5 with Norway bring up the rear at 6-10. Williamsburg was the only team to not make the tournament last year, but the Red Sox have rebounded with a solid season in 2018.

"Norway has had some really close games," Schulte said. "Watkins has been the same way. I don't think there is one team who would be an overwhelming favorite to win the tournament."

Having the entire IVL qualify for state has happened in the past.

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"I wouldn't say it has been a common thing, especially when there were more teams to choose from," Schulte said. "The Iowa Valley League has always been considered the best overall league in the state, but there have been teams that have come in from other leagues and won the state title."

The state tournament used to be a 16-team event. Schulte explored the possibility of going back to that number.

"There are some teams playing in the western part of the state we would love to include," he said. "(IVL Secretary) Mike Gibney has reached out to them, but we haven't got much of a response."

There used to be a league in the Des Moines area. And other leagues, including the IVL, have seen a reduction in the number of teams.

"I'd love to get it back to 16 teams someday," Schulte said. "One of the problems is getting teams and host sites to commit to two weekends in August."

Leagues based in the Quad Cities and in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area had teams in last year's tournament. Schulte said it is likely one of the host sites on the first weekend will be in the Quad Cities.

"I'll know a lot more about a lot of things next week," Schulte said. "The tournament will be double elimination. Teams that win their leagues will get better seeds and, of course, any host site will have their team playing there. That can affect seeding at times."

Schulte expects to see a competitive tournament.

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"There is always a lot of good baseball," he said. "Like it often does, winning a tournament like this will require good pitching depth. You have to have three or four good arms to get through and win."