



2019 Mid-Plains League Season Review





Baldwin City Blues

The Baldwin City Blues boast a rich history of success in Kansas, dating back well beyond the Mid-Plains League's inception. Originating as a youth team in Johnson County, the Blues kept much of their roster intact from coach pitch to the adult amateur level. After winning two straight titles in the Ban Johnson League as the youngest champions in league history, the Blues relocated down the road to Baldwin City to become a founding member of the Mid-Plains League.

The Blues are now a household name among MPL fans. They were named as the 2018 Organization of the Year, being awarded the honor of hosting the 2019 All-Star Game. The All-Star organization has many stars in its lineup, including some that currently represent Baldwin City on the Mid-Plains League statistics leaderboard.

Many Baldwin City alumni have gone on to find success in the professional ranks. Former Blues have been drafted by the Cardinals, Tigers, Rays, Pirates, Royals, and Nationals. Blues have also played professionally for independent teams, including the local favorite Kansas City T-Bones.



Maurice Bruce smashes a pitch to left field vs. Sabetha.

(Photo by Michael Moore)

Baldwin City
Blues

For much of 2019, Baldwin City's Adam Carlson was the league leader in batting, carrying a .433 average into the month of July. Maurice Bruce, second only to Carlson, hit .415 to that point. Bruce is also among the league's leaders in home runs, doubles, RBIs, and stolen bases. Rounding out the league's top five is catcher Brandon Van Becelaere, a .371 hitter.



Junction City Brigade

The argument can be made that the Junction City Brigade are the Mid-Plains League's most competitive team. The four-time Cowdin Cup champions are certainly the most successful playoff team and their management has been the driving factor in their consistent triumph. After Coach Seth Wheeler retired after a five year run that yielded a pair of league titles, GM Cecil Aska made another monumental move by hiring Derek Francis. As the head coach, Francis led Junction City to a Cowdin Cup championship in 2018, his first year at the helm. The Brigade's dominance continued into 2019, where they spent much of the season in first place as they made their way to the Cowdin Cup Championship Series, earning the right to keep the cup in Junction City for the second straight offseason.

Junction City stands out among the Mid-Plains League's best when it comes to fan experience. Just down the road from Fort Riley, home to over 15,000 active duty military members, Rathert Stadium is a popular weekend spot for the community to come together and wind down during their busy summers. Built in 1937, Rathert is the most historic venue in the MPL. On any given summer weekend, you can find the stands packed and the beer garden buzzing as fans gather to watch Junction City's premier baseball club dominate series after series against their foes from throughout Kansas and Missouri.



Junction City poses following their second straight Cowdin Cup victory. The Brigade won game two in Belton, MO.

The 2019 campaign for the Brigade may have been their best yet, as Derek Francis managed to recruit a dangerous squad for the second straight year. Pittsburg State RHP Caleb Rogge held the MPL's third-lowest ERA at 1.13, while Oklahoma State Cowboy Riley Taylor came in second with an ERA of 1.10 in 32.2 innings pitched. Taylor pitched seven shutout-innings in game one of the Cowdin Cup Championship. On the offensive end, Tyler Halstead finished the year as the league's top hitter, boasting a .397 average. Halstead also led the league in doubles.



Kansas City Knights

The Kansas City Knights are one of the newest members of the Mid-Plains League, but have had no trouble being competitive in their first couple of seasons. The Knights were led by Mike Holmes, as well as former MLB standout Freddie Patek. Patek, a three time MLB All-Star, led the American League in stolen bases in 1977 on his way to cementing a spot in the Kansas City Royals Hall of Fame. Owned by Martin and Lori Radosevic, the team is under the care of a great group with a vast wealth of baseball knowledge. In 2019, the Knights established internet radio station KNGT- Home of the Kansas City Knights. Fans all over the world can tune in each night to listen to Maddux Radosevic, the youngest broadcaster in MPL history, call all of the action live.

After spending their inaugural season at the KC Urban Youth Academy's state-of-the-art venue, the Knights were given the honor of hosting the 2018 Mid-Plains League All-Star game. In 2019, they split their time between the KCUYA and Eudora, providing fans across both Kansas and Missouri with the opportunity to spend summer nights cheering on their favorite team.

Knights



KNGT Broadcaster Maddux Radosevic interviews Knights' ace Cole Bohannon after a win in Topeka.

The Knights are well represented among the league stat leaders in 2019. Baker University's Martin Radosevic Jr. lead the MPL in walks, amassing 26 in the regular season. Southpaw Cole Bohannon tied for second-highest wins count in league play. Cole also finished in the top four innings pitched, and is not far out of first in the "total strikeouts" category. Brian Hawkins, the 2019 MPL All-Star Game MVP, finished the season with 22 RBIs.



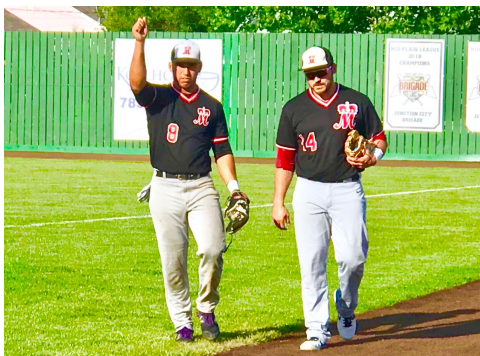
Kansas City Monarchs

The Kansas City Monarchs served as the Mid-Plains League's at-large team in 2019. The Monarchs are consistently the top team in the Kansas City Amateur Baseball Association (KCABA), having won seven championships in just nine years of competition. This year, Kansas City joined the MPL for a two-game series against each of the seven collegiate summer squads. Founded in 2010, the Monarchs are led by player/manager Jonathan Krysa, who has been in command for the entirety of their run in the KCABA.

The Monarch roster is comprised of former collegiate players, as well as ex-professionals. The group has more playing experience than any other member of the Mid-Plains League, with players in aged in their mid-20s all the way to 40-plus. Their success has not been contained to Kansas and Missouri, as they annually compete for National Amateur Baseball Association (NABA) and Men's Senior Baseball League (MSBL) World Series titles. The Monarchs have been crowned as national champions in four of the last nine years, including the 2018 MSBL 25 and over World Series.



Michael Gonzales scopes out the left-field wall at Ralston Stadium. Michael drove in a run in Kansas City's 8-1 victory.



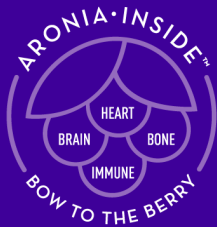
Javier Pena (left) and Gilberto Pena warm up ahead of their July 1st bout with Junction City.

As the Monarchs have already proven to be one of the nation's best, it is no surprise that they were successful in their Mid-Plains League campaign. At the end of the regular season, the Monarchs held a 9-5 record in MPL play while sweeping the Liberty Monarchs and Sabetha Bravos. The Monarchs also earned a win against Gilberto Pena and Alex Lahasky have led the way for Kansas City through fourteen games. Pena went 18/42 in 2019, earning four doubles and a pair of home runs on the way to a .400 batting average. Lahasky, the team's RBI leader, drove in ten runs while gathering 16 walks against Mid-Plains League competition. On the hill, Josh Kerchen has shown that he can hang with the best of the MPL, fanning 36 batters in 27 innings of work. Kerschen held a WHIP of 1.22 in that time.



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Liberty Monarchs

The Monarchs struggled from the start in 2019. While they built a promising roster going into the season, the team was catching bad breaks from day one. With Iowa Western reaching the NJCAA World Series, the Monarchs were left shorthanded in the first two weeks of the Mid-Plains League season. Jevon Mason and Spencer Parker both came in and had tremendous seasons after leaving the Reivers, earning all-star bids to represent the Liberty for the Blue Team.



The Liberty roster was certainly loaded at the top, with six players batting above .300 on the year. Nate Bray led the way with a .386 average and 26 walks. The Central Methodist Eagle scored 19 times on his way to an all-star appearance. Doug Wood was another star and made it known that he is one of the MPL's best. Wood hit .364 with six doubles and 27 runs scored in his MPL campaign. If Wood plans to return to the MPL in 2020, don't be surprised if coaches around the league line up to snag one of the top shortstops of 2019.

Despite arriving late, Jevon Mason fit right in to the meat of the Liberty lineup. The former running back, out of West Des Moines, IA, reached base 41 times in 81 plate appearances in his all-star caliber season. In the 2019 Mid-Plains League All-Star Game, Mason scored a run on two walks while making highlight reel plays in the outfield throughout the night. Regardless of where Jevon decides to play following his time at Iowa Western, there is no doubt that he will be a star at the four-year level.

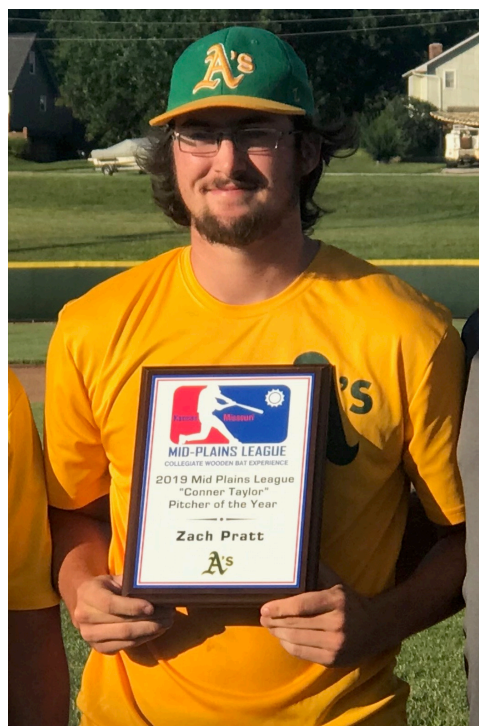


Midwest A's

The Midwest A's have been one of the Mid-Plains League's best since their inception, but 2019 was truly a breakout year for the crew out of Belton. The A's started out the season with quite the hot streak, going 8-0 before facing the eventual Cowdin Cup Champions. The A's finished the regular season at 19-7, earning the two-seed in the playoffs. Midwest eventually fell short in the Cowdin Cup Championship, but have no reason to be disappointed after a tremendous season in which the A's proved to all that they are trending upward.

Dusty Stroup, former Missouri Western State Griffon and incoming Central Missouri Mule, helped carry his team to the 8-0 start while batting .333. In that time, Dusty hit three shots while scoring 13 times. The most impressive feat is certainly in the RBI column, as Stroup drove in 19 runs in the first two weeks of the 2019 season. To top off a tremendous year, Dusty was awarded "Mid-Plains League Player of the Year" honors, after finishing the season with a league-high 39 RBIs, nine doubles, and six homers.

On the hill, Jeremy Husband and Zach Pratt proved to be showstoppers all summer long. The former threw 39.2 innings with seven starts, earning a 3-0 record on the year. Husband struck out 42 batters while allowing a WHIP of just 1.21. While Husband may have ended up as the top pitcher on many MPL squads, there is no doubt that Zach Pratt was Midwest's ace in 2019. Pratt was valuable as a reliever as well as a starter. In ten appearances, Zach earned six starts and five wins, with his only loss coming to the Junction City Brigade. Pratt struck out 54 batters on the year, second only to Brock Renter. The former Belton Pirate achieved an ERA of just 1.19 and a WHIP of .904 on his way to winning the "Conner Taylor Pitcher of the Year" award. This came as a surprise to very few, as Zach was the only player or pitcher in the Mid-Plains League to earn the weekly award twice in 2019.



A's Ace Zach Pratt poses after receiving the 2019 "Mid-Plains League Conner Taylor Pitcher of the Year" award.



Sabetha Bravos

The Sabetha Bravos experienced a rebuilding year in 2019, but were successful from start to finish. After dumping the "Lobos" brand in favor of a new name and look, the Sabetha organization got to work building the 2019 squad. Players on the roster represented six countries in 2019, including members of various national teams.

Among Sabetha's best, Wilkin Perez stood out from day one, earning the MPL "Player of the Week" honors in week one. Perez, out of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, hit five doubles and a home run while driving in 21. Jose Marroquin made the trek to Sabetha for the second straight year, moving from the field to the hill. The position change paid dividends for the Bravos, as Marroquin turned out to be one of Sabetha's top gunslingers. Marroquin will continue his career with the Schoolcraft College (MI) baseball program.



Ivan Medina, Wilkin Perez, Jose Marroquin, and Carlos Barrios visit the Jaw Bats factory ahead of the 2019 MPL All-Star Game in Baldwin City.



The Bravos pose during a pregame stretch session ahead of a playoff game in Sabetha.



The Bravos hold batting practice ahead of a midseason matchup with the Midwest A's.

While many Bravos impressed MPL fans, nobody made a more significant impact in 2019 than Brock Renter. The ace out of Peru State led the league in pitches thrown, and led the Bravos pitching staff in nearly every category. It is worth noting that in his single offensive start, Renter went 3/3 with a RBI and run scored. If he returns to Sabetha in 2020, the Bravos will surely become a Cowdin Cup title contender.



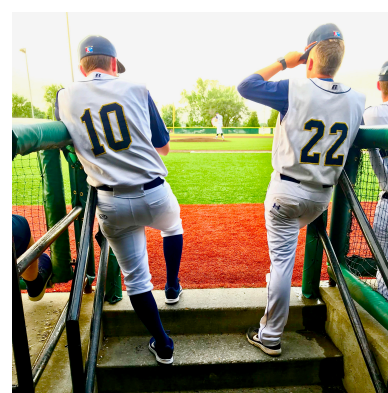
Topeka Golden Giants

The Golden Giants' season was a roller-coaster ride to remember for players and fans alike. After a 2-2 start in which Topeka was a few gusts of wind from being 4-0, the Giants got to work to solidify a lineup and pitching rotation that would carry them deep into the playoffs. With J.B. Eary, Jason Eary, and Beau Vaughan at the helm, strides of improvement were made both offensively and defensively throughout the summer. As far as the pitching staff, Beau Vaughan's squad clearly benefitted from the teachings of former ASU Sun Devil and 13-year pro. Gunslingers like Casey Wulfkuhle, Gavin Greenwood, and Hayden Nierman were strong all summer long. Bryce Lopez pitched lights-out in each outing, shutting out his opponents in 11 of his 12 appearances. Lopez finished the year with a 1.636 ERA and a WHIP of just .636.

Offensively, the roster was made up of guys capable of sparking a rally. Washburn University's Zion Bowlin led the way in batting average hitting .358 through the 2019 Cowdin Cup Playoffs. Justin Rieschick and Jake Baker, committed to Arkansas-Pine Bluff and KU respectively, combined for 45 walks in 2019. Rieschick, one of the most aggressive baserunners in the Mid-Plains League, has stolen 32 bases in two seasons with the Golden Giants. Andrew Stewart, Reid Greaser, Tyce Brown, and Zion Bowlin all hit multiple home runs for Topeka. Bowlin advanced to the semifinal round of the 2019 MPL Home Run Derby.



The Golden Giants pose before the 2019 MPL All-Star Game. Zion Bowlin, Reid Greaser, Hayden Nierman, Casey Wulfkuhle, Gavin Greenwood, Mitch Lady, and Andrew Stewart all represented Topeka in Baldwin City.



J.B. and Jason Eary look on amidst a midseason matchup with the Kansas City Knights. J.B. is an assistant at Ottawa U (AZ) while Jason Eary is heading into his fourth season as Student Manager at Cal State Fullerton.

2019 Mid-Plains League Final Statistical Leaderboard



Batting Average (min 75 PA)

.397 Tyler Halstead JCB
 .383 Maurice Bruce BCB
 .381 Zion Bowlin TGG

Hits

(35) Sam Tatum JCB
 (35) Doug Wood LM
 (34) Ivan Medina SB

Doubles

(10) Tyler Halstead JCB
 (9) Dusty Stroup MWA
 (9) Maurice Bruce BCB

Home Runs

(6) Dusty Stroup MWA
 (4) Brian Hawkins KCK
 (4) Maurice Bruce BCB

Stolen Bases

(20) Sam Tatum MWA
 (16) Tyler Halstead JCB
 (14) Justin Rieschick TGG

Wins

(4) Jack Christian JCB
 (4) Zach Pratt MWA

ERA (min. 15 Inn. pitched)

0.00 / 19.2 Dalen Blair MWA
 1.10 / 32.2 Riley Taylor JCB
 1.13 / 16.0 Caleb Rogge JCB

Innings Pitched

44.0 Brock Renter SB
 40.0 Jack Christian JCB
 39.1 Zach Pratt MWA

Strikeouts

(55) Brock Renter SB
 (48) Zach Pratt MWA
 (34) Jeremy Husband MWA

Saves

(4) Nick Michael KCK
 (2) Matt Nolan KCK
 (2) Chance Crowley BCB
 (2) Hayden Nierman TGG

(All stats through end of regular season)

