

West Lawn tops Boyertown, 9-7

By Darryl Grumling

Eagle/Times

Imitation might be the most sincere form of flattery, and it got West Lawn the biggest win of its Berks Legion season Saturday night at George Field.

The Owls out-Boyertowned the four-time defending Berks champion Bears to take home a 9-7 win in the winners bracket final.

West Lawn (25-4) will take on Hamburg (15-14) tonight at George Field at 7:30. In the first game of the playoff double-header, the Bears (27-2), who had their 27-game league winning streak snapped, will meet Birdsboro (14-13) at 4.

■ Birdsboro batters Temple 27-4, and Hamburg ousts Shillington 12-6 in 10 innings in Saturday's other Berks Legion playoffs.

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The double-elimination tournament will continue Monday — and, if needed, Tuesday.

Brian Dallas had the big hit — a monster two-run homer over the left-field scoreboard — during a four-run seventh inning that broke a 5-5 tie as the Owls used two Boyertown staples, the bunt and big inning, to come away with the

win. No. 9 hitter Nate Shultz finished off the inning with a two-run double.

Right-hander Scott Kramer (7-0) turned in the performance of his career, recording 12 strikeouts, scattering 12 hits and pitching out of trouble at every corner en route to a 191-pitch complete game.

West Lawn got off to a quick start — breaking Boyertown's string of 27 consecutive innings without an earned run — by taking a page from the Boyertown book.

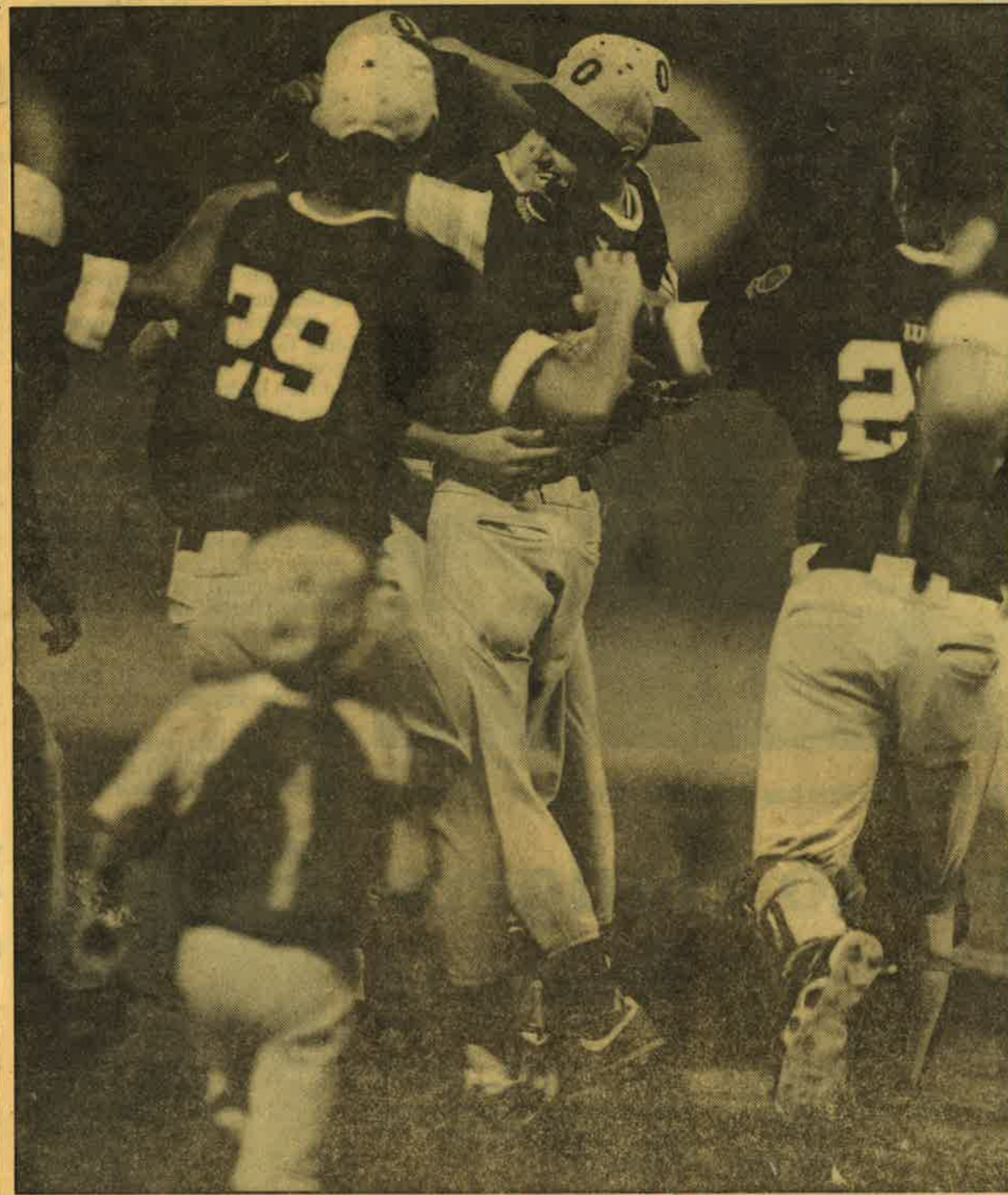
In the first, leadoff man Mike Smith got nicked by an 0-2 pitch by Jed Johnson, moved to second on Chad Harbach's sacrifice, took

third on Scott Kramer's 5-foot infield single and scored when Johnson threw errantly to first on a pickoff attempt.

The Owls scraped for two more in the second. Mark Scalese drew a leadoff walk, took second on a wild pitch and third on Nate Shultz's sacrifice. After Smith walked and stole second, Harbach scored Scalese with a groundout. Scott Kramer scored Smith with a single.

The Bears got one back in their half on Jeff Minotto's RBI single before Kramer got out of a bases-loaded, one-out jam by striking out the dangerous Jason Benyo (4-for-5, 1 RBI) and Steve Mest.

Owls beat Orioles, 12-1



Eagle/Times: Dennis R. Bender

West Lawn's Jeff Kramer, center, is mobbed by teammates after 12-1 Berks title win Monday.

West Lawn Legion champ

Owls whip Orioles to take Berks title

By Darryl Grumling
Eagle/Times

When the dust finally cleared Monday night after a frenzied five days of the Berks Legion League's eight-team, double-elimination playoff tournament, it was a rather simple formula that enabled West Lawn to take home the title.

Pitching and defense might seem a bit old-fashioned, but they were once again the keys as the Owls ended eighth-seeded Birdsboro's gallant postseason run with a 12-1 win at George Field.

The Owls (27-4) will be the No. 1 Berks seed in next week's Pennsylvania Region II tournament, which begins Tuesday at Emmaus. Regular season champion Boyertown (27-3) will be the other Berks entry.

No. 1 starter Jeff Kramer (7-1), one-half of West Lawn's twin-brother ace act, tossed a masterful 13-strikeout, two-hitter — on two days' rest — against an outfit that had rung up 47 runs in its last three wins.

Kramer, a 17-year-old right-hander, shut down the Orioles (16-15) with his blazing fastball, sharp curve and change repertoire. He allowed just Jake Ketterer's first-inning single through the third-short hole and Billy Stiles' fourth-inning, two-out double down the right-field line.

Kramer and underrated Birdsboro starter Brandon Fick (4-4) were locked in a 1-1 tie through five — Fick had a one-hitter going — until the Owls went up for good with two in the sixth.

With one out and runners on first and second, Brian Dallas bounced a potential double-play ball to third. The Orioles' Jay Petrillo stepped on the bag for the force but overthrew first to allow Kramer to score from second. Chad Faller followed with an RBI single to make it 3-1.

The Owls broke it open with four unearned runs in the eighth when Fick wild-pitched two runs home and Kramer helped himself with a two-run bloop double to right.

Birdsboro, which had eliminated four-time Berks League champ Boyertown 9-3 Sunday, fell apart in the eighth, committing three errors that led to five runs.

"We took a lot of pitches early," said Owls coach Tony Matz III. "I thought that would eventually free us up for the late innings. We've seen Fick's (pitching) lines and we knew he could walk people, and that's what we went after."

"Then came the wild pitches, the men on base, and everything kind of clicked. We got some hits, some errors and everything went from there. As long as we could be patient, we were going to be patient, and as long as Jeff kept them at one run, we were going to be patient."

Birdsboro got to Kramer for a run in the first when Fick walked, took second on a wild pitch, took third on Ketterer's single and scored on Duane Barbon's groundout.

But that was all the Orioles got, thanks to Kramer's pinpoint location (he walked just two) and a little help from the air-tight infield of second baseman Dallas, short-stop Scott Kramer and third baseman Mark Scalese. The Owls didn't make an error in the game; the Orioles made four.

The Owls tied it in the first when hustling leadoff man Mike Smith (1-for-2, three runs scored) walked, moved to second when Chad Harbach was hit by a pitch and scored all the way from second on Chad Ruth's groundout to second.

Kramer, who threw 83 strikes in his 133-pitch complete game, took care of the rest until his teammates busted it open.

"You've got to give him all the credit," Birdsboro coach Ron Stiles said. "He pitched a phenomenal game. We couldn't stick him, simple as that. We just went dead tonight — maybe it was a let-down from last night."

"I think we were still in good shape down 3-1, but after that they



Eagle/Times: Dennis R. Bender

The West Lawn Owls leave little doubt about who is 'No. 1 in the Berks Legion League after 12-1 win over Birdsboro Monday.



Eagle/Times: Dennis R. Bender

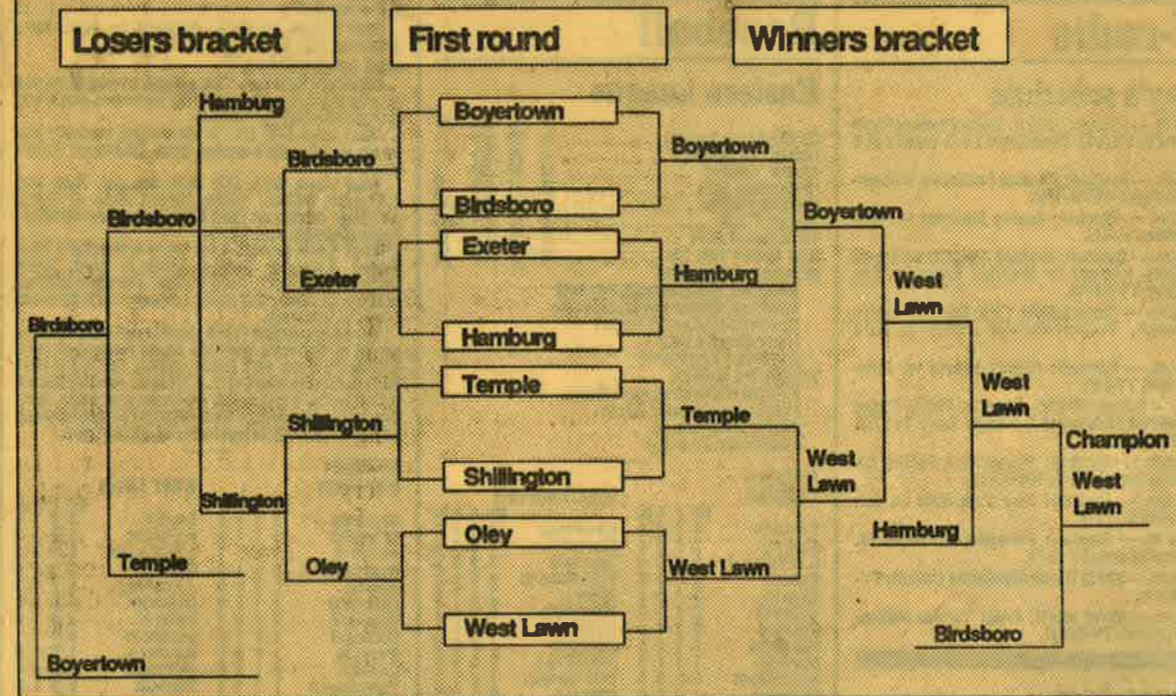


Eagle/Times: Dennis R. Bender

West Lawn's Jeff Kramer (back facing) receives a title hug.

West Lawn's Brian Dallas (14) is congratulated after scoring.

Berks Legion playoffs



West Lawn takes title

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started hitting the ball and running on us and we self-destructed. That's been the character of our team this year."

To set up Monday's final, the Owls first had to finish off depleted Hamburg, beating the Hawks 12-3.

West Lawn, up 4-0 after three when rain forced suspension of Sunday's game, tacked on two runs in its fourth before Bob DeLong's scrapping Hawks made it a game.

Despite losing two starters who left for the shore Sunday and having run out of pitching depth, Hamburg cut it to 6-3 and had runners on second on third with dangerous leadoff man Todd Gregor at the plate.

Jay Nigrini, who got the save with four innings in relief of starter Rhett Stauffer (3-0), dodged a bullet by getting the league's home-run leader to line a one-hopper back to the mound for the final out.

The Owls got an insurance run in the sixth before settling matters with a five-run eighth.



Eagle/Times: Dennis R. Bender

Birdsboro pitcher Brandon Fick's disappointment is evident.

It was wild, it was wacky, it was West Lawn

Owls finally get the best of Boyertown en route to Berks Legion title

It was one of the wildest and wackiest weeks imaginable.

And when the curtain came down after five chaotic days of madness and mayhem on the diamond, the West Lawn Owls stood atop the Berks Legion League.

The five-act drama began on a hot Thursday afternoon and wound down with the Owls' 12-1 title game win over Birdsboro Monday night.

And while the time in between was heaven for West Lawn, it served as Hell Week for many of the eight teams that qualified.

After two relatively surprise-free days at home sites, the craziness began Saturday when the scene shifted to George Field.

First, veteran Temple coach Dick Gochbauer could only watch in horror as a streaky Birdsboro team pounded out 24 hits and took advantage of 10 A's errors en route to a 27-4 win.

And while the Orioles' Bryon Kauffman did turn around and bat left-handed at one point — he got a hit — there's no truth to the rumor that venerable George Field concessionaire Pop Shue left his stand to take some cuts.

Then Shillington and Hamburg went at it nip-and-tuck before the Red Sox seemingly took control with a 6-4 lead after eight. The Hawks, though, scraped for two runs to tie it as Red Sox ace Jason Klonis (8-0, and eligible to pitch three innings) looked on from the bench. The tying run came on a two-out, two-strike wild pitch.

Then the Houdini-like Hawks somehow managed to get out of a two-on, none-out situation in the bottom half on a curious out call at the plate and even more curious

Darryl Grumling



play-calling from the Shillington bench.

Here's the scenario: The Red Sox didn't bunt with runners at first and second, none out and No. 3 hitter Joe Schroeder up.

Schroeder struck out and Greg Miller followed with a single to right. Baserunner Brian Focht was sent from second, and while John Slebocka's throw was there in time, Focht appeared to get under catcher Danny Wessner's tag. Out, said home plate umpire Ron Perry.

Kerry Eyster then popped up for the third out and Hamburg gleefully settled matters with a six-run 10th.

Oh, but Saturday's best action was yet to come. Scott Kramer threw nearly 200 pitches, and he and his West Lawn teammates dodged nearly as many bullets as the Owls eeked out a 9-7 white-knuckler over Boyertown.

West Lawn used Boyertown-esque tactics to scratch out early leads of 3-0 and 5-2, but the Bears inevitably came back to tie it 5-5 after six and seemingly turn the momentum around.

Bears starter Jed Johnson apparently settled in, striking out the first two batters in the sev-

enth, but Jeff Kramer worked a two-strike walk and the Brian Dallas hit one out of sight to get West Lawn rolling.

When No. 9 hitter Nate Shultz ripped a two-run double off the fence, the Owls were on their way to exorcising the Bears, their personal demons the past three years.

"Once we got by Boyertown," said Matz III, "it got a lot off our backs. There's a lot of our guys who have played against them and have never gotten by them.

"When we came back with a four-run inning (in the seventh inning) after they had tied it, that was the turning point. The two-run homer (by Dallas) and two-run double (by Shultz) really charged us up."

Kramer got by on guts and guile from the middle innings on. Though he struck out 12, he allowed 13 hits, and Boyertown stranded 14 runners.

The day after the Bears' 27-game winning streak came to a halt, they lost again, to Birdsboro, in a game that went from the ridiculous to the sublime. It was indeed a Bloody Sunday that turned the four-time defending Berks champ Bears into the Legion of the Doomed.

Birdsboro, which sent the 0-7 Kauffman to the mound in Thursday's 16-1 first-round loss to the Bears, sent the 0-8 Kauffman back out again Sunday — and won 9-3.

In one of the biggest Berks League upsets of all-time, the jacked-up Orioles came charging out of their dugout from a football huddle formation, and remained charged up the rest of the way.

The No. 8 seeds took a 6-0 lead

in the second before ace Matt Spade was summoned from the bullpen to restore order. He did, but not until league stolen base king Jake Ketterer swiped home for the third time this season and second in three days.

Though practically everyone on hand expected Boyertown to rally — and the Bears did hit some shots — they didn't come back because of a gritty effort by Kauffman, who, for this one game at least, was paid back in full for a season of tough luck on the mound.

"I think our kids learned a lot from it," said Boyertown coach Rick Moatz of his team's surprising elimination, "(that) they just can't expect to throw their gloves out on the field and expect a 'W' to flash on the scoreboard.

"Teams get up for us in a once-and-done situation. They think they can beat us."

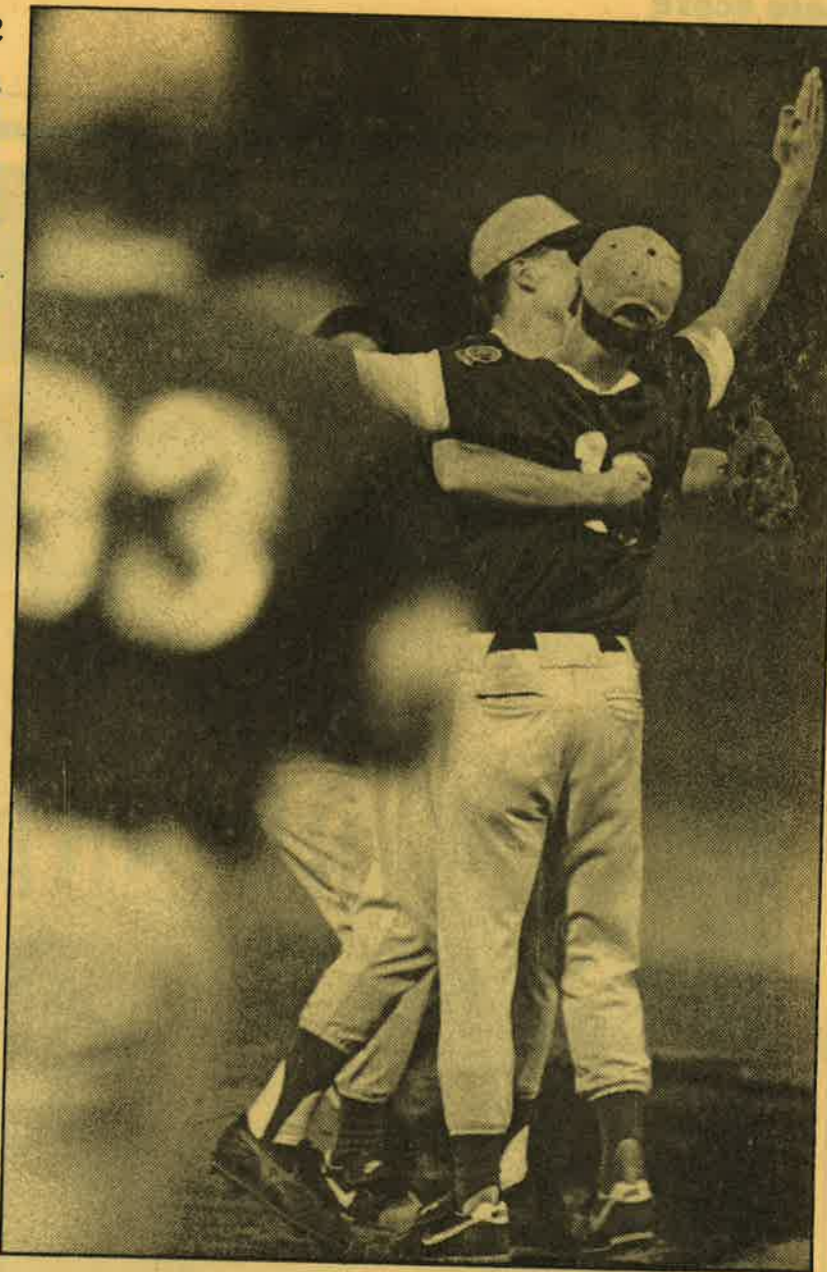
Monday's action was anti-climatic. Hamburg lost 12-3 to the Owls.

Then all the Owls had to do was outlast the Orioles, which they finally began to do in the sixth, breaking up Brandon Fick's one-hitter and going up 3-1. West Lawn busted it wide open with nine in the final two innings, and Jeff Kramer did the rest with a dominating 13-strikeout, two-hitter.

Even after Monday's action, the Owls still had pitchers Chad Ruth and Scott Kramer available.

By that time though, there was nobody left to face them.

Darryl Grumling is an Eagle/Times Legion beat writer. His columns appear periodically in the Reading Eagle.



Eagle/Times: Dennis R. Bender

Jeff Kramer and his West Lawn teammates had something to hoot about after winning the Berks Legion championship

earlier this week. The Owls beat Birdsboro 12-1 in Monday's final game.

Owls' winning hand more than two aces

By Darryl Grumling
Eagle/Times

Contrary to popular belief, West Lawn's baseball team doesn't begin and end with Jeff and Scott Kramer.

There are a lot of other key guys for the Berks champion Owls, who ended Boyertown's four-year reign by defeating Birdsboro 12-1 Monday night for the Legion title.

Let's see, there's leadoff hitter Mike Kramer, first baseman Chad Kramer, second baseman Brian Kramer, coach Tony Kramer III — just kidding, fellas.

Seriously, while the top-notch, top-gun duo of right-handers has been the cornerstone of the Owls' pitching-defense-and-fundamentals oriented attack — the twin 17-year-olds are a combined 14-1 — the team's success has been more than just two-fold. A lot more.

An in-depth look at the 27-4 Owls reveals a team that has matured perhaps a year sooner than expected, and a team with a lot of underrated talent.

Here's the roll call:

■ **The money players:** Obviously the Kramers belong here, along with two other guys — leadoff hitter and left fielder Mike

Smith and second baseman Brian Dallas.

Scott Kramer went 7-0 on the mound with a 1.92 ERA with two saves while putting up some impressive offensive numbers as well. He hit .439 with 23 RBIs and turned in the Owls' performance of the year in the playoffs by outlasting Boyertown on a 12-strikeout, nearly 200-pitch complete game.

Jeff Kramer has a 7-1 record and a team-high 15 steals. He capped off the Owls' march through the Berks playoffs by shutting down a red-hot Birdsboro team with a 13-strikeout, two-walk, two-hitter in the final game. On two days' rest, no less.

Smith (.428), a left-handed hitting spark plug, has jump-started the Owls' offensive attack with a lot of pop (five homers), a lot of hustle (35 runs, 11 steals) and a lot of discipline (23 walks, 10 hit-by-pitches).

Dallas hit .279 but made his hits count by producing in the clutch for a team-high 23 RBIs. Nearly all of his seven triples have come in key moments, and his prodigious tie-breaking, two-run homer in the Owls' 9-7 winners bracket final win over Boyertown was the turning point in the tournament.

■ **The unheralded ones:**

Otherwise known as the Chads — Harbach, Ruth and Faller.

Ruth, who has quietly posted a 6-1 record and 3.73 ERA as the No. 3 starter, hit .371 and scored 24 runs from the cleanup spot and showed power to the gaps. The slick-fielding Conrad Weiser grad was nearly flawless at first base as well.

The hard-nosed Harbach has gotten the job done from the No. 2 slot, hitting .306 and gaining a reputation as the team's best bunter. Behind the plate, the 16-year-old has done a nice job handling the Owls' pitchers and using a quick release to throw out a good percentage of would-be base stealers.

Faller, a diminutive (5-7) but aggressive type, patrols right field with reckless abandon — he has thrown four runners out at first base, and is eager to show off his arm. His .281 average and 18 RBIs from the No. 7 slot gives stability to the bottom of the order.

■ **The guys in the pen:** Jay Nigrini and Rhett Stauffer. Nigrini, a lefty, is 3-2 as the fourth starter and spot reliever. Stauffer, a late-season surprise, is 3-0 in spot starting duty. Stauffer worked five innings and Nigrini

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Owls are full of aces

Berks' best a full house

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closed out the Owls' 12-3 win over Hamburg that preceded the final.

■ **The bottom brigade:** Mark Scalese, Nate Shultz and Chris Morgan, who have performed admirably in the down side of the order.

Scalese (10-for-37, 22 times on base) has not looked back since winning the third base job from Eric Dameron at midseason. Consistent fielding and heads-up baserunning have been the hallmarks of his game.

The versatile Shultz, who was a JV player at Conrad Weiser in the spring, plays both shortstop and the outfield with a deceiving stick for a No. 9 hitter. His two-run double that followed Dallas' homer was the straw that broke Boyertown's back in the winners bracket final.

Morgan, another Weiser import, is the team's fourth outfielder. Speed and defense are his calling cards.

■ **The shock troops:** Let's not forget about Dameron (.469), and the 16-year-old quartet of Andy Skinner, Chad Whitmoyer, Sean McKee and Dustin Caruso — all of whom have contributed at one time or another off the bench.

■ **The coaches:** Finally, a tip of the cap to Owls coach Tony Matz III and assistants Kurt Behrenshausen and Tony Matz II. Although the younger Matz and Behrenshausen, the pitching coach, look no older than some of their players, the duo deserves a lot of credit for West Lawn's usually flawless execution of fundamentals — doing the little things right that eventually allow the Owls to break games open.

Winning hand is a full house

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Owls' Mike Smith
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