

Alton Post 126 American Legion Baseball Team Ready For Firecracker Tournament This Weekend, Looking Forward To Great Competition

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS - A local Fourth of July tradition returns after a one-year absence, and the Alton Post 126 American Legion baseball team is looking forward to the return and the competition it provides.

The annual Firecracker baseball tournament is back after missing the 2020 edition because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and although a pair of teams have dropped out from the previous field of seven, the five remaining teams, including the Legionnaires, will convene at Moody Park in Fairview Heights and will provide local fans with great competition throughout the weekend.

"Yeah, I'm glad that it's back," said Alton manager Doug Booten. "It's always a fun tournament. I just wish we had a few more teams, but each team in it has a legitimate shot to win it."

Alton will be joined by Trenton, Highland, Ballwin, Mo. and Washington, Mo. in a round-robin affair, starting Friday morning, and will climax with the championship game Sunday morning at 11 a.m. And this will be the first time that the Legionnaires will have faced all four teams this season, and Booten is looking forward to the tournament itself.

"Washington was in the Best of the Midwest tournament in Terre Haute (ind.) with us," Booten said. "and they played well."

Booten's own team has played well thus far in the summer season, and looks to be a contender this weekend.

"The team has been coming together lately," Booten said. "and I think we could really win this tournament."

The Legionnaires start the festivities off on Friday morning at 10 a.m, going up against Ballwin, then Ballwin plays Highland at 12:30 p.m. Washington meets Highland at 3 p.m., and the first day climaxes with Alton playing Trenton at 5:30 p.m.

Saturday's play commences with the Legionnaires meeting Highland at 10 a.m., then Washington meets Trenton at 12:30 p.m. Alton plays Washington at 3 p.m., and the round-robin concludes at 5:30 p.m with Ballwin going up against Trenton. The top two teams in the round-robin then play on Sunday morning at 11 a.m. for the championship.

Booten points to two key factors that could help the Legionnaires win the tournament.

"The keys are going to be pitching and timely hitting," Booten said. "We haven't been able to play for a week because of rainouts, but against Elsberry (Mo.), we had good relief pitching, and against Eureka (Mo.), we had four pitchers combined only give up two runs. That's amazing."

Booten does feel that Alton will be facing very good competition this weekend, and the team is looking ahead to the challenges of the tournament as the Legionnaires begin preparing for the postseason starting later in July.

"This will be a good challenge for us this weekend," Booten said. "Hopefully, we'll get on a roll and run all the way through the playoffs. We haven't played any of these teams yet this year, so we're looking forward to the challenge."