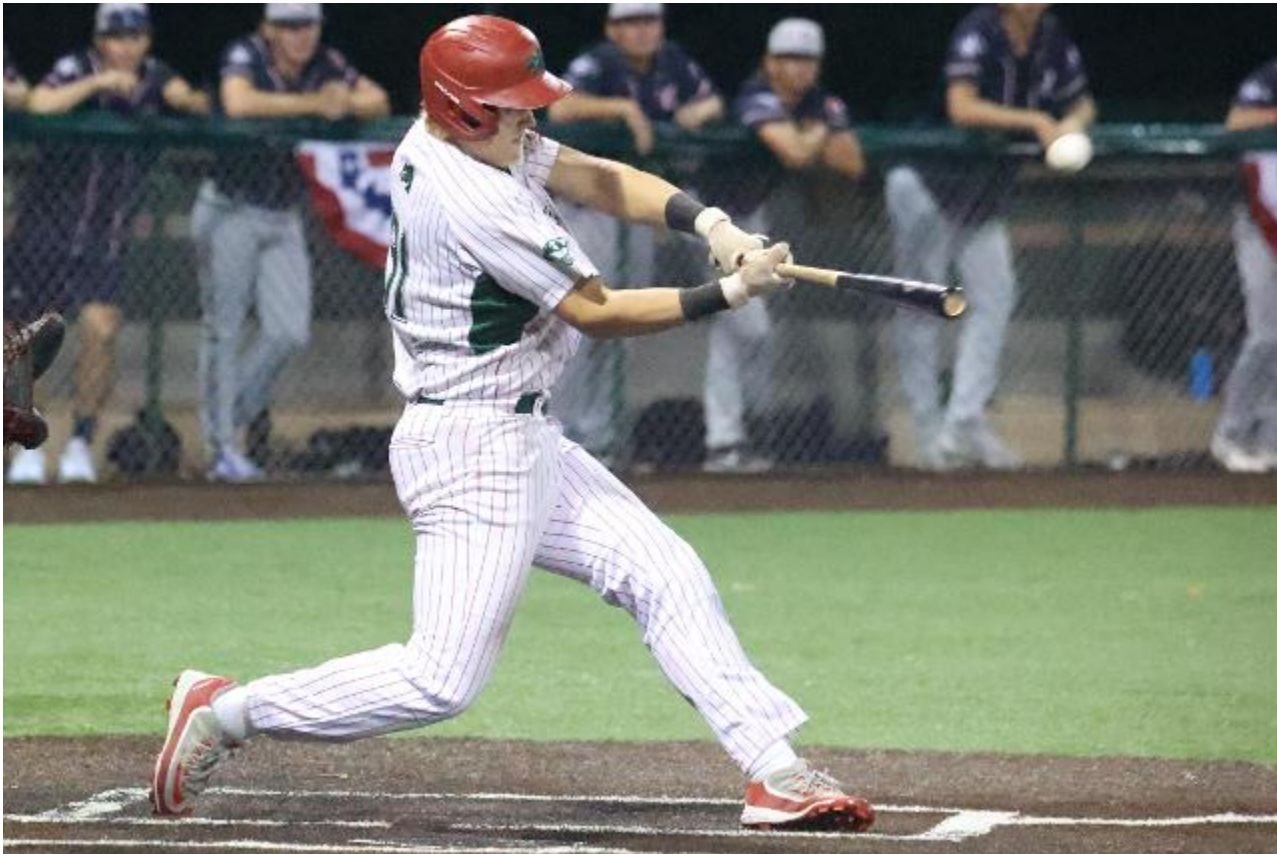


# **With Clutch Hit, Metro East-Lutheran Grad Erik Broekemeier Is Big Key To Dragons' Playoff Run**

by Bradley Piros, Reporter  
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EDWARDSVILLE - Heading into the summer of 2022, recent Metro East-Lutheran graduate Erik Broekemeier didn't have a place to play.

So, Chris Erwin, Father McGivney's head baseball coach, reached out to Erik to see if he'd be interested in playing on Troy's Legion team. Erwin got to coach with and against Erik.

Erwin talked about a time when Father McGivney took on MEL and Erik was the starting pitcher for the Knights in the Regional Championship game.

After graduating high school, Erik was having a tremendous Legion season with Troy. Erik is a Byron, Carlson, Petri & Kalb Male Athlete of the Month for McGivney.

In the final game of the season, Troy played Alton Post 126 at Lloyd Hopkins Field.

It just so happened that Dallas Martz, general manager of the Alton River Dragons, had to cover a shift in the concession stands. He wasn't even supposed to be at the ballpark that night.

Erwin recognized the situation and went up to Martz and said 'hey, come take a look at this guy.'

Erik started on the mound that night for Troy and threw the first five innings. His team might have lost 4-0, but the result didn't matter. He still struck out 10 batters while only allowing one hit.

That performance certainly impressed Martz, so he signed Erik right then and there after the game.

"Erik was a late signing in the season, we saw him playing out here in a Legion game against Alton and he caught our eye so I signed him that night," Martz said. "We didn't even leave the ballpark and we signed him and the rest is history."

"Erwin had told me earlier that year that he knew Dallas and that he was going to try and talk to him about next year" (2023 season), Erik said. "Erwin told me after the game that Dallas wanted to talk to me and said he needed pitchers and gave me his card."

Erik doesn't pitch very often for the River Dragons, but he has been hitting pretty well recently. He earned his way into the lineup as the designated hitter.

"I asked Darrell (Handelsman) if he'd let me get some at-bats, and he said sure," Erik said.

He talked about how in his first at-bat against the Danville Dans he took a 90 mph fastball to the brim of his helmet. Luckily he was okay and continued on his way.

Things have been going pretty well since then as Erik has played in 15 games now and is batting .289.

Last night, August 9th, the River Dragons hosted the Quincy Gems in the Prospect League Western Conference Championship game. It didn't look very promising for Alton to continue their season when they were trailing 7-1 midway through the seventh.

But, a three-run homer off the bat of Eddie King Jr. made it a 7-4 ball game and gave the River Dragons life.

Alton still trailed heading into the bottom of the ninth, but they had the top of their order coming up with their backs against the wall.

After Mike Hampton got walked, King got hit by a pitch. Then Marcus Huesohn got walked. So, the bases were loaded with Erik coming up to bat.

What he did next was the wildest way to end a baseball game. He rocketed a fastball over the fence to hit a walk-off grand slam and win the game 8-7.

He was at a loss for words after the game saying it was the greatest hit of his life.

"I said a prayer to myself, 'God help me come through in this situation and he did just that. I'm very blessed,'" Erik said postgame.

"I just wanted to do something cool and do my part for the team. I missed a few fastballs earlier in the night, so I knew what I had to do. I didn't miss that one," Erik said the next morning.

During the school year, Erik will attend Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa.

He said their season was going pretty well.

"I had a pretty decent season. We made it to the playoffs for the first time in three years which was good."

He'll return there in the fall but only when he's done with the River Dragons' season.

They aren't done yet. Erik and the Dragons earned their way into the Prospect League Championship.

The best of three series begins Thursday night (August 11). The first pitch is set for 6:35 p.m. at Lloyd Hopkins Field. Games two (and three if necessary) will be in Chillicothe, Ohio, the home of the Paints.