

The 1997 NBC World Series Final was one that those in attendance will not soon forget. Lawrence-Dumont Stadium was electrified by a ten inning affair between the Nevada (MO) Griffons and the Mat-Su (AK) Miners. 5,640 fans witnessed Mat-Su scrap from behind to win 10-9 in the bottom of the tenth inning to claim the title. Mat-Su's Mike Cervenak tripled off of the center field wall to start the tenth. Then Nevada elected to intentionally walk the next two hitters to set-up a force play. The Griffons' efforts were all for naught when Derek Besco, Cervenak's University of Michigan teammate, drilled the first pitch into left field, scoring Cervenak from third.

Mat-Su had been down as many as five runs before gradually fighting their way back to tie the game with two runs in the eighth. Derek Besco finished the night 3 for 5 with 2 RBI including the game winner and takes the bragging rights from his twin brother and adversary, Bryan who happened to be playing for the Griffons. It was the first time the twins had ever faced each other in a game, having always been teammates until this summer.

The Mat-Su victory marks the tenth anniversary since they last won the coveted National Baseball Congress Crown, making only two other appearances in the decade. Mat-Su Manager, David Ravitz, took the Manager of the Year honors for bringing the Miners back from a second round loss to the Hays (KS) Larks to win the NBC World Series Championship.

During the Miners quest for the title, they eliminated the No. 1 & 2 seeds, Nevada (MO) Griffons and the Kenai (AK) Peninsula Oilers, respectively, in the Semi-final and the Championship Finals. After an opening round win versus the Oklahoma City Aggies, Mat-Su was all but written off after getting pummeled in the second round, 11-1, by the Hays (KS) Larks, but battled to win six consecutive games against the Denver (CO) Cougars, Clarinda (IA) A's, Liberal (KS) BeeJays, Prairie (IL) Gravel, Kenai and finally Nevada.

Normally it is a challenge to choose between the outstanding individual performances during the NBC World Series, but Jeff Juarez made a convincing argument, batting mostly from the ninth spot in the Nevada Griffons batting order. Even though Juarez could not bring the Griffons their first NBC Title, he led the tournament in hits and batting average going 18 for 30 with seven extra base hits which translated into a .600 average. In addition, the junior at the University of Texas - San Antonio, led the tournament in runs scored with 17 and finished in the top five in the home run (4), total bases (34), and RBI (14) categories. The performance turned in by Norman (OK) Boomerang Brian Shackleford was truly remarkable as he crushed opposing pitchers for 5 home runs, 11 RBI, a 2.200 slugging percentage, all in just 10 at-bats. Unfortunately, the Boomerangs made an early exit from the tournament or Shackleford may have challenged many long standing NBC World Series records.

Jeff Juarez was joined at the top of the Leading Hitters category by three Nevada teammates. Brian McMillin, Paul Bartolucci, and Bryan Besco led the Griffons to the 1997 Batting Title as the team boasted a .393 average in their eight games during the NBC World Series. Only the Tacoma (WA) Timbers managed a higher average (.449), but despite the monster average, the Timbers only managed to win two games, thus not earning enough at-bats to meet the tournament minimum.

For the second straight year a Kenai (AK) Peninsula Oiler took the Leading Pitcher honors, as Mario Ramos, a freshman at Rice University won two games in as many starts and compiled a 0.64 ERA. Ramos' NBC World Series leading ERA was nearly a run better than the rest of the field. In 14 innings, the left-hander recorded 19 strike outs while allowing only one extra base hit and one earned run, walked four and held opponents to a .264 batting average.

In addition to Ramos, there were a number of outstanding performances turned in during the 1997 NBC World Series as a number of players signed professional contracts during this year's tournament. St. Louis O'B Clarks opening round starter, Terry Farrar, was unavailable for later games after being snatched up by the Texas Rangers following a 5 inning run rule performance against the Midwest City (OK) Dawgs in which Farrar allowed just three infield singles. Santa Barbara (CA) Forester's Seth Bean pitched two complete game wins with a 2.40 ERA including a two hit shutout of the defending Champion El Dorado (KS) Broncos, which led to his signing a professional contract with the Minnesota Twins.

Another anomaly of the NBC World Series appeared again from the Chicago, Illinois area as the Prairie (IL) Gravel followed in the footsteps of the Midlothian (IL) White Sox. The Prairie Gravel, uncharacteristic of most

NBC teams, were compiled of a number of ex-professional players and only one collegian. The Gravel rattled off five consecutive wins in their first trip to Wichita, but ran into trouble in the Quarter and Semi-Final rounds. Like the Midlothian White Sox, the Gravel knew how to pummel the baseball and conjured up enough arms to keep games within reach, but their 11 errors in the tournament finally cost them as they lost to the Mat-Su Miners and Nevada Griffons on consecutive nights. Mike Birsa and Sam Sorce showed the crowds at the NBC World Series that they were not past their prime. Birsa, led the tournament in home runs (6), extra base hits (10), total bases (36) and RBI (16). Sorce, a jack of all trades, was a designated hitter, played first, and pitched during the Gravel's first run at the crown. He amassed a .357 batting average with 10 hits and 7 RBI and also had a 4.80 ERA in 15 innings while on the hill for the Gravel.

Each year the NBC World Series draws the top collegiate prospects and the Major League scouts flock to watch their future. This year at Lawrence-Dumont more than 60 scouts gathered and agreed that Kenai Peninsula Oilers right fielder Ryan Ludwick was the Top Major League Prospect among those competing in the tournament this year. Ludwick, a freshman at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, led the Alaska Central League in home runs this summer and posted a .786 slugging percentage while scoring 9 runs during the NBC World Series.

The ever popular Baseball 'Round the Clock promotion, in its 7th year, drew national attention from "This Week in Baseball" and the American Way, American Airlines in-flight magazine. 292 dedicated souls attempted to stay for the 17 game marathon but only 175 actually made it for all 56 hours of 'Round the Clock action at Lawrence-Dumont Stadium. Jeff Parsons and Dan Zavala two longtime 'Round the Clockers survived this Wichita tradition each year that it has been held, 1997 marking its seventh anniversary. John Morthland participated in Baseball 'Round the Clock and his personal account will appear in the September-1997 issue of the American Way. Additionally, This Week in Baseball will air a feature on Baseball 'Round the Clock on Kansas stations and nationally on WTBS and WGN.

The National Baseball Congress World Series took to the air broadcasting the Championship Finals on KAKE Channel 10 and will be seen around the country more than 50 times on the PRIME/FOX Sports Network during August and September. Live radio coverage of the feature games was broadcast each night on Wichita's KNSS 1240 AM and a number of teams also broadcast their games live on radio stations in their hometowns.

In addition to a number of radio remotes and television features, the Wichita area media came out in force as more than 90 media passes were issued. The Wichita Eagle continued their overwhelming involvement with the NBC World Series writing feature stories on Merle Eberly, of the Clarinda (IA) A's, the Nevada Griffons, and of course Baseball 'Round the Clock. In addition to the written features and daily coverage, the Eagle took the NBC into the information age by adding a dedicated home page on their Internet server, Wichita Online. The on-line access provided up-to-date information on games, scores, and stats throughout the tournament as well as taking the Championship Game into a virtual play-by-play mode which allowed more than 7,000 fans from across the country to tune in and follow the game in real time. Also on hand was Bill Nichols to capture a photographic account of the NBC World Series for Baseball America. The NBC World Series averaged 5,366 fans over the course of the 15 day tournament featuring 32 teams.

The National Baseball Congress would like to thank the many fans and business sponsors, especially our presenting sponsor Southwestern Bell, who made the 63rd annual NBC World Series an extremely successful event. Recognition should go to the many NBC Tournament Directors and League Commissioners who assisted with the tournament. All these participants make the NBC World Series a world class event. Special thanks goes out to the entire City of El Dorado for hosting eight games at McDonald Stadium. The 1998 World Series will take place from July 31st - August 14th.