



Mav-elous

MSU wins NCC tournament

By Brian Ojanpa
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MANKATO — Simply put, the Mavericks refused to lose.

Minnesota State, North Central Conference Baseball Tournament runners-up the past two seasons, fought back from a two-run deficit Saturday to down Nebraska-Omaha 7-5 for the 2006 NCC title.

"We don't lose at home," a joyous MSU coach Dean

Bowyer said, moments before receiving the requisite ice-water dousing from his players.

"The kids deserve this because they work so hard," he said as he plucked ice chips from his uniform. "They commit themselves to the program."

The 40-11 Mavericks have won 21 of their past 23 games, and Saturday's home win came with a caveat.

The championship game of

the rain-bedeveled tournament was moved from Franklin Rogers Park to Mankato East High's Wolverton Field, the only local field currently with lights.

It sprinkled again during Saturday's game, and MSU outfielder Mark Dolenc followed suit by raining on Nebraska-Omaha's parade.

The junior from Eagan hit a



Pat Christman

The Minnesota State Mavericks launch into their victory celebration after winning the North Central Conference Baseball Tournament on Saturday. MSU beat Nebraska-Omaha 7-5 at Wolverton Field.

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Photos by Pat Christman

Minnesota State outfielder Mark Dolenc connects on a seventh-inning grand slam to give the Mavericks a 6-4 lead.

MSU: Dolenc belts grand slam

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seventh-inning grand slam to put the Mavericks up for good at 6-4.

His blast was set up by singles from Nick Gonzalez and Tony Altavilla, and catcher Pat Ottum getting plunked by a pitch.

In stepped Dolenc against Nebraska-Omaha freshman starter Tyler Cloyd, who came into the game with a 7-0 record.

"He'd been throwing me sliders all game, and I'd been sitting on them," Dolenc said.

Sure enough, Cloyd started Dolenc out with two sliders that both missed outside. He then came with a fat fastball, taken for a strike, and followed that with an even fatter fastball.

"He gave me cake, and I swung and missed," said Dolenc with a grin.

"I kind of baited him to throw me another one."

Cloyd did, and Dolenc hit a low rocket over the left-field fence, ending Cloyd's day.

The Mavericks added another run that inning when they loaded the bases again, and Nebraska-Omaha reliever Shawn Smith balked.

MSU starter Matt McMurtry held Nebraska-Omaha scoreless until Chad Leon's solo homer in the fifth.

The like-nicknamed Mavericks tied the game in the sixth,



A hanging Mavericks shortstop Scott Kemp had a hand in four MSU double plays on Saturday.

and went ahead 4-2 an inning later on another Leon homer.

Last year, a superior Nebraska-Omaha squad beat MSU in the championship game, and Dolenc said he and his upperclassmen teammates weren't about to cave in again.

"Some of the younger guys were hanging their heads when we got behind, but we said, 'No, we are not going to lose this game,'" Dolenc said.

MSU starting pitcher Matt McMurtry said the difference between the 2005 MSU squad and this year's team is unwavering confidence.

"We realized, 'We're losing this game. We've got to get it going,' and we came out on fire," McMurtry said. "We're the better team. We've beaten them four out of five times this year."

McMurtry, a senior, pitched

seven innings, allowing four runs on four hits. The win gave the North Platte, Neb., native a 10-2 record, tying him for the MSU single-season win mark set in 2002 by another lefty, Chris Rupert.

The NCC title, MSU's 20th, qualifies the Mavericks for the NCAA Division II tournament.

Regional sites and brackets are expected to be announced Monday.