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Sports

MSU BASEBALL, PAGE D4

Mavericks off to fast start after Florida



Florida trip puts spring in Mavericks' step

MSU baseball team opens season 10-4

By Brian Ojanpa
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MANKATO — If a successful spring trip is any indication, then the upcoming season bodes well for Minnesota State baseball.

"I think there is correlation," says Mavericks coach Dean Bowyer, whose squad posted a 6-1 record last week in Florida and returned home with a team batting average of .347.

The week in Fort Myers, coupled with an earlier slate of games in Georgia, gives MSU a 10-4 record, including wins in eight of their last nine games.

"Everyone had at least one good game hitting," Bowyer says of the Florida contests against other Division II teams.

In years past, the Mavericks took an annual spring trip to Texas. But for the past three



Submitted photo

Minnesota State centerfielder Ben Kaus zeroes in on a catch during a spring-trip game in Fort Myers, Fla.

years, they've taken two trips — and reaped the rewards, Bowyer says.

"Going to Georgia really

helped us in Florida. Because we hit a lot in Georgia, it wasn't really important for us to have hitting practice on the

field before games in Florida. I think that helped us stay fresher down there."

Infielders Nick Gonzalez and

Scott Kemp are both hitting .432, with Dan Woodall at .387.

Adam Sudbeck (.367, team-high 12 RBIs) and Pat Ottum (.360) lead the team in homers, each with two.

Senior outfielder and Mankato East grad Ben Kaus (.350) finished strong in Florida, Bowyer says.

"The last three or four games he was hitting the heck out of the ball, but he was struggling before that."

Junior lefty Jon Bjelland has been impressive on the mound so far, with a 2-0 record and 1.08 ERA to go along with a staff-high 20 strikeouts.

Closer Nick Fellman recorded saves in all five of his appearances, and New Ulm native Bob Wellman (2-0) looked good in relief, says Bowyer, who notes that the Florida trip wasn't all games and no play.

"The players had a day off. We dropped them off at the beach at 11:30 and picked them



MSU infielder Nick Gonzalez (left) is hitting .432 through 14 games this season. Lefty pitcher Jon Bjelland is 2-0 on the mound with a 1.08 ERA.

up at 4."

The well-traveled Mavericks are back in action Friday when they play Southwest Baptist in Bolivar, Mo.

Their home opener is scheduled a week from today against Bemidji State, but lingering winter makes that iffy at best.

"So what else is new, huh?" says Bowyer who, heading into his 34th season of coaching in the upper Midwest, is no stranger to early-season cancellations.