



# Sports



Minnesota State pitcher Nick Fellman holds school records for saves in a single season and for a career.

## Walk-on runs up big numbers as MSU closer

In a tight baseball game, retiring that final batter can be a bearcat.

"The 21st out is the toughest out to get," says Minnesota State closer Nick Fellman. "You've got to have a tough mentality to come in at the end of the game, when everything is so chaotic."

Fellman has established his toughness cred, and then some.

Last week the 6-foot-3, 190-pound righty from Eagan set MSU single-season (12) and career save (13) records. And because he's only a red-shirt sophomore, his ultimate totals figure to become the program's gold standard.

And to hear Fellman and MSU coach Dean Bowyer talk, it's all the result of fortunate happenstance.

"We just lucked out," Bowyer says of his closer.



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## OJANPA: Slider is closer's out pitch

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Says Fellman, "I came here as a third baseman. I didn't pitch that much in high school."

As it turns out, failure begat Fellman's success.

His Eagan High teammates, Mark Dolenc and Nick Gonzalez, were heavily recruited by Bowyer, but Fellman arrived at MSU as a walk-on — and promptly dug himself a hole.

"I wasn't hitting the ball that well, but they saw I had a pretty good arm, so they made me a pitcher."

That sort of switch has precedent in Bowyer's program, most notably Kevin Dixon, who came to MSU as a hitter — and excelled — but was thrust into a closer role after he displayed a 94 mph fastball.

The departed Dixon was a fifth-round draft choice of the

Cleveland Indians last year.

On the Mavericks' 2005 squad, Fellman was Dixon's set-up guy. And while the flame-throwing Dixon got most of the attention, Fellman quietly put up some gaudy numbers of his own.

Last year, Dixon was 1-3, with a 1.17 ERA and 23 strikeouts in 23 innings.

Fellman was 4-0, with a 1.82 ERA and 39 strikeouts in 34 innings. He does it with a fastball that tops out in the upper 80s, and with his out pitch, the slider.

Bowyer says the role of closer is not for the meek.

"You've got to want to be in that situation. You've got to want to be the guy when the game's on the line. The other guys have confidence in Nick."

The school save records were formerly held by Todd Revenig, who pitched briefly for the Oakland A's in 1992. Revenig set those records in

1990, about the time Bowyer began using pitchers exclusively as closers.

Back then, Bowyer says the competitiveness of the North Central Conference was more uneven, which led to more lopsided scores that precluded save situations.

Bowyer feels there's more parity now, which produces more close games. Hence a greater number of save opportunities, of which Fellman has taken full advantage.

"You've got to be a bulldog out there," Fellman says. "A closer has to have a different mentality, has to be more jacked up."

For Fellman, that jacking up comes in a hurry.

"I throw 15 pitches in the bullpen, and I'm ready."

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