

The 1960 Riley High School baseball team accomplished a feat that no other baseball squad in school history could match, an undefeated, perfect conference record of 8-0 and an overall record of 14-4. The team was led by 2<sup>nd</sup> year head coach Doug Simpson and assistant Richard Thompson. Simpson was a member of the first Riley co-champion team of 1948. Simpson also led the Cats to a co-championship in 1965. Serving as team managers were Ron Longley, Mike Swartz and Jim Blondell.

The team was made up of 11 Juniors and a handful of Senior veterans. The outfield of Jim Niemann, Dave Gapski and Bob Foor with Senior Larry Marosz was well patrolled. Bill Lyrberg, Alton Sanders and Darrell Stroup also saw action. The infield consisted of 3b Bob Rickel and Tom Ellison, SS Jim Perkins, 2b Arden Floran, a 3 year starter. Hal Widener played 1b along with Foor and Gapski. Infield reserves included Arthur Floran and Bob Lerman. John Barth and Bob Skelton shared the catching duties. Tim Chapman and Don Ellison were also available. Bob Rickel 7-0, Hal Widener 4-0, Tom Ellison 1-1, Bob Skelton 1-3 and Dave Gapski 1-0 did the pitching. Rickel won all 6 of his starts and 1 game in relief and was the top pitcher in the area which included 2 future major leaguers. Arden Floran, Jim Perkins and Hal Widener were at or over a .300 batting average. Bob Foor, Larry Marosz and Bob Rickel hit over .400. Dave Gapski hit over .500 and was voted team MVP. Jim Niemann finished just below .300. Also, John Barth, Tom Ellison, Art Floran, Alton Sanders, Bob Skelton and Darrell Stroup contributed key hits during the season. Following is a short description of the 1960 season.

Cold temps and snow flurries greeted the Cats on opening day, Friday, April 8 at Mishawaka's Merrifield Park. Riley parlayed 9 hits with 9 walks and 6 Mishawaka errors to rout the Maroons 15-4. An 8 run 4<sup>th</sup> sealed the contest. The game was called after 5 innings because of the weather. Bob Rickel was the winner, Hal Widener pitched the last inning.

The following Tuesday, 1959 City Champs Washington came to Riley. The Panthers scored 4 runs in the 7<sup>th</sup> to tie the game at 5. Riley had put up 5 in the 6<sup>th</sup> to lead 5-1. A squeeze bunt in the 7<sup>th</sup> won 6-5 for Riley as Rickel won in relief of Tom Ellison. Arden Floran had a triple, the only extra base hit of the game.

The next day the team traveled to Niles, Mi. and Hal Widener hurled Riley to a 5-0 victory, striking out 7, giving out only 4 hits and drove in a run with a triple.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive day, April 14, Riley traveled to St. Joseph High and defeated the Indians 6-5 as Dave Gapski hit a bases loaded double to key the win. Bob Rickel pitched in relief to help Bob Skelton get his 1<sup>st</sup> win. The game was called after 6 because of darkness.

Adams was next at the Riley Dust Bowl. Dave Gapski cleared the left field fence in the 6<sup>th</sup> for a home run. In the bottom of the 8<sup>th</sup>, Arden Floran walked, took second on a single and scored the winner on an overthrow at 3<sup>rd</sup> on a sacrifice play. Gapski, who relieved Hal Widener in the 8<sup>th</sup>, was the winner, his only pitching appearance of the year.

The Cats opened conference play Tuesday, April 19 at home against Elkhart, bombing the Blazers 10-1. Tom Ellison spun a 4 hitter while striking out 6 with 0 walks. Larry Marosz drove in 4 runs with 3 hits while Dave Gapski batted in 3 with 2 hits.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Riley traveled to Laporte and beat the undefeated Slicers 6-2 as Bob Rickel won with a 6 hit performance, striking out 7. Rickel out dueled Ron Reed, a future big league star of 19 years. Laporte scored 1<sup>st</sup> with a home run in the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Cats came to

life in the 5<sup>th</sup> inning . when they scored 4 times with 5 singles and a sacrifice bunt. They scored twice later. Rickel led the offense with 3 singles and 2 RBI's. John Barth, Dave Gapski and Jim Perkins each had 2 hits.

Mishawaka was up, this time in a conference match and the unbeaten Wildcats maintained their leadership in the ENIHSC with a 6-5 triumph at Riley. Bob Skelton got Riley rolling in the 1<sup>st</sup> inning with a 2 run triple. Bob Rickel doubled in the 5<sup>th</sup> and scored on a wild pitch. Hal Widener was the winner with Tom Ellison's relief in the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Penn's Bill Edgerton struck out 14 Riley batters ending the winning streak 3-1 in a non conference game. Dave Gapski scored the only run, driven in by Darrell Stroup. Bob Skelton went the distance and gave up 6 hits. Edgerton later pitched in parts of 3 years in the American League.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Wildcats were handed their 2<sup>nd</sup> straight loss, 7-6 as St. Joseph scored a run in the 8<sup>th</sup> to win in extra innings. Tom Ellison started, Hal Widener and Bob Skelton relieved with Skelton getting the loss. The Cats scored 5 runs in the 1<sup>st</sup>. Jim Perkins tripled and scored on Arden Floran's sacrifice. Bob Rickel walked and came home on Dave Gapski's home run which ended up at the center field fence 461 feet from home plate. Jim Niemann later drove in 2 runs.

On the next day Riley captured its 4<sup>th</sup> straight league victory beating Central 13-5. Bob Rickel pitched a complete game, striking out 8. Errors were responsible for most of the Central runs. Arden Floran hit a bases loaded triple, followed by a triple from Tom Ellison. Dave Gapski had a double, 2 singles and 3 RBI's. Darrell Stroup added a run producing triple in the 6<sup>th</sup>. After scoring 9 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> the Cats coasted the rest of the way. Riley traveled to Goshen and whipped the Skins 6-1. Bob Skelton and Tom Ellison had doubles in Riley's 3 run 4<sup>th</sup>. Bob Foor, Jim Niemann and Jim Perkins each had 2 hits. Hal Widener worked 5 innings for the win and Ellison finished the game.

Riley suffered its last regular season loss to visiting Benton Harbor, a non conference game 4-3. Tom Ellison and Bob Skelton pitched with Skelton getting the loss.

On the next day the Cats were back on track beating Michigan City in a rain make up 4-1. Bob Rickel went the distance, striking out 8. Bob Foor and Dave Gapski contributed triples to the Riley attack, Foor also added a single and a walk and 2 stolen bases. Perkins and Arden Floran also stole twice.

Riley clinched the ENIHSC title on Thursday, May 12 with an 8-1 victory over Washington at Harrison Field after a rain out at Adams earlier in the week. Bob Foor hit a 3 run homer in the 6<sup>th</sup> to put the game away, Bob Skelton contributed a run producing triple and Arden Floran had 2 hits. Bob Rickel pitched a complete game, striking out 10, with 0 walks and allowed only 2 hits. Bad blood spilled out as both benches were warned about close pitches. This was to play out in the city tournament.

Rain delays and conference make up games threw the city tournament into turmoil. Riley ended the regular season on Tuesday, May 24 at Adams, winning 3-1, completing its conference schedule 8-0. Hal Widener and Bob Skelton combined for a 3 hitter against the defending champion Eagles. Widener was the winner and Dave Gapski had 2 hits.

Tournament action for Riley started later that night at Bendix Park.

Riley slipped by a determined Washington Squad 1-0 on the 24<sup>th</sup> with a big crowd in attendance. Ace Dan Meert had a no-hitter for 5 and 2/3 innings. In the 6<sup>th</sup>, Dave Gapski was safe on an error, Bob Skelton hit into a force out. With 2 outs, Bob Foor drew a walk.

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Jim Niemann then singled between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, scoring Skelton with the only run of the game. That was Riley's only hit. Winning pitcher Bob Rickel, 7-0, allowed 2 hits, fanning 10. In probably the best performance by Meert and Rickel, both pitchers took note of the bean balls from the May 12 game.

Central gained the finals by beating Mishawaka, Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 8-7 in 10 innings on a squeeze bunt by catcher Jim Snyder. Earlier in the day Central lost to Elkhart 5-2 in a make up game dropping them to 4-4 in conference play. A well rested Central team was facing a favored Riley squad that had played twice the day before.

Tom Ellison was the starting pitcher for the Cats. Riley jumped out to a 5 run lead in the 1<sup>st</sup> inning, sending 11 batters to the plate on 3 hits, 2 walks and 2 Central errors. Jim Perkins's double was the big blow in the inning. After the 1<sup>st</sup> inning Riley was held to just 3 more hits. The Bears scored 1 in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2 in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> to close the gap 5-4. The Riley defense tightened up and went to the bottom of the 7<sup>th</sup> leading by a run. Three of the Central runs had scored on errors. With 2 outs, Central's Tom Nelson singled and on a 3-2 count All Star catcher Jim Snyder hit a long home run over Jim Niemann's head in left field. Half of the overflow fans of 1500 erupted in joy and half felt the heartache of the Riley players who gave so much during the season. As hard as the loss was, nothing can take away the great season these young men accomplished.

When you look back to 1960 and realize that 5 people in the team picture are gone: Assistant Coach Richard Thompson, team manager Jim Blondell, players John Barth, Dave Gapski and Darrell Stroup, you face reality. A dream season ended with a bad finish and a life lesson learned.