

# Grand Island's emotional run comes to an end

## Vikings comeback bid fails this time

By Aaron Mansfield

News Sports Reporter

Published: June 9, 2012, 11:39 PM

Updated: June 10, 2012, 2:02 AM

ENDICOTT — The 2012 season was full of emotion for the Grand Island Vikings. A season of improbable, come-from-behind wins, battling New York's best without their injured leader and rallying around the loss of a beloved man in the community: first baseman Matt Lenz's father, Ken.

The Vikings (18-8) couldn't muster the magic one last time, falling short in the state championship game and losing 9-7 to the powerhouse Section-IX champ Cornwall Green Dragons (21-5). But it is the unlikely run to the state finals that will stick with them and their fans, many of whom made the three-plus hour drive to Endicott.

"You've got a group of kids that believe in themselves," Grand Island coach Dean Santorio said. "We had some tough losses throughout the season to good ball clubs, but they didn't let that stop them. Every game was a huge win and I have a lot of respect for these kids battling through tough times. Just a group of kids that worked hard and were committed, and they were fun-loving kids, too."

The Vikings made one final push down 9-4 in the seventh. With the bases loaded and one out, Dylan Kelly drilled a ball to center and drove in two. A sacrifice fly made the score 9-7, but Grand Island couldn't get any closer.

"We were right there," Santorio said.

Grand Island struggled to contain Cornwall's potent bats at Union-Endicott High School Saturday afternoon, as it seemed every Green Dragons hit went deep into the outfield. Grand Island starter Dylan Kelly, impressive in eight innings of work at the Far West Regionals on Tuesday, pitched on short rest and Cornwall took advantage, grasping a 4-3 lead it never relinquished.

Cornwall coach Guy Maisonet also won a state championship in 1993, but he said this time he really sat back and appreciated the moment.

"This one, I really took it in a lot more," he said. "It's the pinnacle of what you work for in high school."

Grand Island star John McGinty has battled elbow and wrist injuries for the past two weeks. He fought through the pain and pinch-hit in the bottom of the sixth, making his first appearance in three games with his team down 9-3. He swung at the first pitch he faced — he said one swing took all the strength he had — and drove in a run.

"The farther we got, the closer we got," McGinty said. "We just played together, we'd go out together on the field and pray together."

Cornwall gained separation in the top of the fifth inning on a bases-clearing double by shortstop Dillon Merola that made the score 8-3. By that point, the Vikings were down to their fourth pitcher, without McGinty, Kelly, and A.J. Jasek, who pitched in the Vikings' first game of the day.

In the semifinal game, the Vikings knocked out the Section-III New Hartford Spartans, 4-2. Jasek led the way, as he stayed in control the entire game and didn't allow a baserunner after the third inning.

The Vikings fell behind 2-0 in top of the third but rebounded and led 3-2 by the inning's conclusion. Right fielder Jesse Ciffa padded the lead with an RBI in the bottom of the fifth, but Jasek didn't need it.

"With a big game like this on the line, I can't ask for anything more out of a kid," Santorio said. "He's not pitching fully rested, but that's what happens in a situation like this. He's just a gutsy kid who's full of heart. He showed that out there and his breaking ball was fantastic today. I can't say enough good things about him."

New Hartford finished the year 11-11 after a surprising run to the state semifinals, rattling off five consecutive wins before falling to Grand Island.

"I just don't want them to base the season on what just happened," New Hartford coach John Randall said. "It's going to sting and then when that feeling goes away, it'll probably be a couple days, we'll realize everything we accomplished."

Grand Island felt the sting later in the day, as some of the Vikings fought tears after the game. Grand Island graduates 11 seniors, but Santorio has faith that the younger players on his squad are capable of achieving success as veterans next year.