

Story by Coach Paul Nasca

St. Joe's came into the playoffs on a high note defeating rival Canisius 10-5 in the final regular season game and gaining the second seed for the playoffs. The first game of the playoff would be contested against Nichols. Matt Matre threw a complete game 4 hitter with 8 strikeouts. The Marauders scored 3 runs in the first and 3 runs in the third to provide the winning margin of 6-0. Leading the offense was Mike Szalach who had 3 hits and Grand Island native Donny Kilian had 3 hits and an RBI. Tyler Mills also contributed 2 hits and Grand Island native Alex Kovacs executed 2 perfect sacrifice bunts that lead to 2 runs.

Next up for the Marauders was a date with upstart Christian Central Academy and their senior pitcher Peter Moran. Moran kept the Marauders hitless through 4-2/3 innings before Jake Kopacz broke up the no hit attempt with a sharp single up the middle. The Marauders found themselves down 3-0 in the bottom of the 6th when they were able to scratch a run across on a pass ball which set the stage for the events that followed in the 7th. Szalach led off the 7th with a walk and was followed by Kovacs who reached base on an error by the shortstop. With men on first and second and a failed bunt attempt the Marauders were down to their last 2 outs and leadoff hitter Tyler Mills up. Mills laced a single to right center that scored Szalach and moved pinch runner Tommy Brummer to third. Mills proceeded to steal second and that set the table for Jared Baldinelli who drilled a 1-2 fastball to deep right center which scored both Brummer with the tying run and Mills with the game winning run. Chris Falk was the starter on the mound and gave up the 3 runs but also had 11 strikeouts on the day before giving way to Matre who recorded the final 4 outs to send St. Joe's to the finals versus St. Francis.

Game 1 was started by the Marauders fast, as they got 3 runs in the top of the first courtesy of a St. Francis error and a 2-run single from Philip Wells. St. Francis would get one back in the 2nd but the Marauders answered again with a run in the 4th only to see the Red Raiders score, to cut the lead to 4-2 after the 5th. In the top of the 7th Baldinelli singled and stole second, leading the way for Kilian to hit an RBI double into the right field corner, scoring Baldinelli. St. Francis would get one run in the bottom of the 7th, but the final score was 5-3, setting the stage for the Marauders to try and clinch their first title since 2005, the next day.

Sophomore Chris Falk was the starting pitcher in game 2 and did a great job scattering 4 hits and 1 earned run, but the story unfolded late in the game as the championship was earned in dramatic fashion. The Marauders would again take a 3-0 lead after a 3 run 3rd inning as Kovacs reached base followed by a perfect sacrifice from Kevin Kabacinski to advance him to second. Mills and Baldinelli followed with walks and Kilian hit into a fielder's choice that was thrown away leading to 2 runs. Jake Kopacz would follow with a double off the left field wall to create the 3 run lead. The teams would exchange runs with Kovacs again singling and scoring to make the score 4-1 Marauders. St. Francis scored 2 runs in the 5th to cut the Marauder lead to 4-3. After Falk retired the Red Raiders in order in the 6th, they were 3 outs away from the title. Falk retired the first 2 batters of the 7th on 2 pitches and had a 2-2 count on leadoff batter, Paul Wujick, when the potential last pitch of the game was called a ball and Wujick followed that with a double to left field. Coach Paul Nasca left Falk in the game to face hitter Matt Michalski. Michalski lined the first pitch into left field and St. Francis coach Paul Bartell waved Wujick around to try and score but he was greeted at the plate by Kovacs as he received a bullet throw from Kopacz in left field to cut down the would be tying run and send the Marauder faithful into a frenzied celebration. Grand Island natives Donny Kilian and Alex Kovacs were voted to first and second team All-Catholic respectively for their efforts on the year.