

# SUMMER SUCCESS

By Brother Neal Golden, S.C. '57 CJ



For two summers in a row, 1947 and 1948, baseball teams based at St. Aloysius reached the finals of the All-American Amateur Baseball Association (AAABA) tournament in Johnstown PA.

## 1947

The Knights of Columbus sponsored the first New Orleans AAABA league, which allowed participants who were too old for the Junior American League summer league. The teams competed under their school names, as listed along with their coaches. Catholic High (BR) – Melvin Didier; Fortier – Pete Mailhes; Nicholls – George Manteris; Peters – Milton Clavier; Redemptorist – Billy Brinkman; St. Aloysius – Charles Laiche; Warren Easton – Harold “Hoss” Memtsas

Johnny Altobello, who directed the Crusader prep team to the state finals where they lost to Jesuit, handled the school's Legion team. However, he assigned some of his best diamondmen to Laiche to create as strong an AAABA entry as possible. Jesuit and Holy Cross entered two teams in Legion rather than one in each league.

Laiche's top pitcher, Al Ketchum ('48), started strong with a one-hitter against Nicholls June 11. The Crusader lineup read as follows: CF Nick Revon ('48), LF Louis Campos ('48), SS Al Lichtenstein ('49), RF Charles Bordlee, 3B Robert Piper ('47), 1B Dick Sallinger ('47), C Ray King ('48), 3B Jennings Beninate, and Ketchum.

Losses to Easton and Catholic cost the Crusaders the first round title. They would have to win the second round to make the playoff for a shot at the national tournament in Johnstown PA. And that's exactly what they did, despite an upset by Nicholls, as Ketchum won four games.

So Aloysius met Easton, the first round champs, in a best-of-three series for the championship. All games were scheduled for nine innings instead of the seven of the regular season.

The Crusaders won the first 4-3 in a 15-inning classic. Ketchum threw the complete game. King got life at first on an error by the right fielder, moved to second on a sacrifice by Lou Greiner ('47), and scored the winning run on Revon's single.

Two nights later, the Eagles evened the series with a 3-1 triumph as lefty Don Robinson outdueled Huey Bridges ('50).

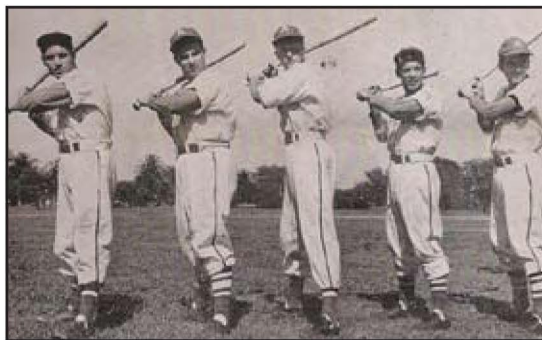
The rubber game was moved from Muny Park to Pelican Stadium in anticipation of a large crowd. Ketchum toed the slab again but was not effective, blowing a 6-1 advantage. After the Crusaders retook the lead on a deftly executed double steal by Campos and Bridges in the top of the sixth, Revon took the hill and shut down the Eagles the rest of the way to preserve the 7-6 victory.

By pre-arrangement, the winning team could pick a limited number of players from the other teams to enhance the roster for the national tournament. Laiche kept 11 Crusaders: King, the captain, Revon, Dom Russo ('47), Bordlee, Ketchum, Henry Kirsch replacing the injured Sallinger at first, Campos, Beninate, Lichtenstein, Bridges, and Lacy Aucoin ('48). Added from the other schools: P-1B Malcolm Landry, 3B Luther Payer, and C Jerry Marchand from Catholic High; P Ed Konick of Redemptorist, P-OF Tony Roig from Fortier, and OF Francis Abraham of Easton, a .400 hitter.

The team left by train on August 19 for the 16-team double-elimination tournament, the third conducted by the AAABA. Concord NH was installed as the favorite while the unknown New Orleanians were a dark horse.

**Game One:** Ketchum twirled a three-hit shutout against Newark (NJ). Lichtenstein's two doubles drove in two of the three runs.

**Game Two:** Behind 3-2 at the end of the sixth to Zanesville (OH), N.O.



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scored four in the seventh and four in the eighth. Bridges and Roig shared the pitching duties.

**Game Three:** Konick scattered eight hits and didn't walk a batter in the 7-2 win over Philadelphia. New Orleans played its third straight errorless game. Payer and Landry each collected three hits.

**Game Four:** The Crescent City squad prevailed over the other unbeaten team, Washington D.C., 10-5 before a “near capacity crowd” at Point Stadium. Ketchum hurled his second tournament victory. “Texas” Jones, hailed as the outstanding young pitcher in the East, was driven from the mound in the sixth.

**Game Five:** Washington defeated Concord to make the finals but needed to defeat N.O. twice. Jones got revenge, allowing only 7 hits, in the 8-2 romp. Konick took the loss.

**Game Six:** Lightning struck twice as Washington won by the same score, 8-2, to cop the crown before 8,000 fans. At the request of Captain King, Laiche started Landry over Ketchum. A five-run third drove the southpaw from the hill, and Al pitched the rest of the way.

## 1948

This time, the New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) sponsored the All-American league. Laiche again managed the Aloysius entry. The seven schools from '47 plus Holy Cross comprised the circuit.

The Crusaders dominated play, winning both rounds. The most common lineup looked like this: CF Campos, 2B Jerry Peltier ('48), 1B Dick Brennan ('51), SS Lichtenstein, LF Kirk Drake ('48), 3B Revon, C King, RF Martin Pfister, P Bridges or Jay Lacoste ('50). Huey provided the highlight of the regular season with a no-hitter against Peters on August 5. He also authored a four-hit shutout against Catholic High while Lacoste blanked Holy Cross on three hits.

With no playoff needed, Aloysius played a team of All-Stars from the other schools. In addition to preparing the champs for Johnstown, the games gave Laiche and Altobello, who would take over for nationals, a chance to evaluate roster additions. The Crusaders showed their strength by capturing two of the three contests, 1-0 (another Bridges masterpiece) and 14-1 (a Revon five-hitter).

Abraham, Konick, Marchand, and Payer made the squad for the second year. But the most crucial addition was lefty Larry Lassalle from Peters.

With a stronger and more experienced squad, the Louisianians would not be denied.

**Game One:** Lassalle struck out 16 in the 6-1 victory over Philadelphia.

**Game Two:** Bridges tossed a 3-hitter as Baltimore fell, 3-1.

**Game Three:** Revon knocked a triple and a double, driving in two and scoring two. Konick pitched a complete game, 8-2.

**Game Four:** Lassalle fanned only 11 this time to knock South Amboy (NJ) from the ranks of the unbeaten, 12-4.

**Game Five:** Marx Jewelers again provided the opposition in the finals. Needing two victories as in '47, the Washington club didn't win even one. Lichtenstein smashed a first inning homer with Abraham, who had doubled, on base. After Washington tied the game in the second, N.O. got two more in the fifth on singles by Campos, Lichtenstein, and Drake and another double by Abraham. Konick started and pitched effectively into the eighth. Lassalle relieved with the bases loaded, none out, and a run in. He struck out two and forced the third to pop out. He then set down Washington in the ninth for what today would be credited as a save.

After the game, the team learned that Konick's mother, only 39, died in New Orleans earlier in the day.

NORD honored the champions on September 1 at City Hall on St. Charles Avenue. It was the third national baseball title won by a Crescent City team. The other two came in the American Legion Little World Series: the Zatarain Papooses (Peters) in 1932 and Jesuit in 1946.