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## Miners have new life with playoff berth

**By Gary Fauber**  
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Finally, the West Virginia Miners can breathe a sigh of relief.

The mood in the clubhouse was decidedly lighter on Saturday before the Miners' regular-season finale at Butler. Despite a loss to Slippery Rock the night before, West Virginia clinched a Prospect League playoff spot thanks to Butler's loss at Lorain County.

For a team that had lost nine of its last 10 games, the Miners can now take a deep breath and try to win a championship in their inaugural season.

"They're out there having fun in BP (batting practice), trying to loosen up," manager Tim Epling said before the game against the BlueSox.

If it looked like the Miners (26-30) were pressing over the final two weeks, it's because they were.

The team had won six straight and eight of 10, increasing their lead for overall second place to as many as eight games. But things took a bad turn, and a five-game losing streak suddenly changed the question from when will the Miners make the playoffs to will they at all.

It became obvious the situation was getting dire, but now West Virginia is in. It will visit Chillicothe at 7:05 p.m. Monday for the Eastern Division championship.

"We started hitting the ball better and playing pretty good, with the exception of the kid who shut us down against Chillicothe and then (Friday) night," Epling said.

He was referring to Thursday's 12-0 loss to Chillicothe, in which Paints starter Matt Barnes handcuffed the Miners to the tune of four hits, followed by another four-hit loss to Slippery Rock.

The Miners struck out 10 times and walked just once against starter Joe Garrity.

"That tells you something right there," Epling said. "If you average five or six walks a game, then you are doing a good job at the plate."

Epling was disappointed that his hitters were not more aggressive.

"We did not adjust to the umpire's strike zone," he said. "The umpire did a good job, but he had a big strike zone and we did not use a swing mentality. So we talked about that."

The team will meet at Linda K. Epling Stadium for dinner today before busing to Chillicothe at 6 p.m.

In the league's worst-kept secret of the summer, Dean Wolosiansky (5-1) will start Monday against Chillicothe. Wolosiansky leads the league with a 1.19 earned run average.

Monday's winner will play in the league championship series Wednesday at Chillicothe's VA Memorial Stadium.

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