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By The Register-Herald and the Bluefield Daily Telegraph

Miners season a rousing success

By Gary Fauber
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BECKLEY — Where has the summer gone?



West Virginia Miners' Chris Kay (7) is congratulated by Victor Gomez (55) and Blake Roberts (8) after Kay hit a three-run home run against the Butler BlueSox July 12 in Beckley. Register-Herald file photo

The calendar may read Aug. 11, but it's hard to believe two months have gone by since the West Virginia Miners started their inaugural season on June 3.

A historic period in Beckley officially came to an end Monday when the Miners lost 5-3 to Chillicothe in the Prospect League's Eastern Division championship game. Three unearned runs for the Paints in the seventh inning did West Virginia in.

The Prospect League is in its second year of existence, and West Virginia holds the distinction of being the first team to make the playoffs in its debut season.

No one was sure what to expect from this team. The announcement of the franchise's formation was not made until December, at which time plenty of work at Linda K. Epling Stadium remained to be completed. Pitching coach Jeff Wallace was on the phone recruiting players all winter, while most established teams already had their rosters online.

Still, the Miners were successful enough to play a 57th game.

"I thought if we played right around .500 ball, it would be a good thing," manager Tim Epling said. "But I didn't realize how competitive the league was."

With the exceptions of Chillicothe — the league blueprint — and Springfield, no team ran away in the

postseason push.

"If you take a look at the standings, any given day anybody could beat anybody," Epling said. "With the exception of one or two teams, everybody was right there. That right there was kind of an eye opener for me.

"Then, after the season wore on, about midway through I said we have a pretty good shot at this. We started playing better, and to be honest with you, I looked at it as a great challenge for us because we only had two all-stars (pitchers Dean Wolosiansky and Chris Marlowe). No position players."

Despite that, Epling was pleased with the progression of several players throughout the summer.

Center fielder Joe Koch grasped firmly on the leadoff position in the batting order and led the team in several categories. Second baseman Travis Isaak played in all but one game and had a team-high 30 RBIs, and his glove was one of the best in the league. First baseman Blake Roberts came on late in the season to provide the Miners with a clutch bat.

"When we (looked) position by position, our guys have really excelled greatly compared to these other teams that have been well established over the years," Epling said. "In that aspect of it, I'm really proud of the guys for what they did."

The inaugural season was by no means a trial run, but the Miners plan to work on getting even better this offseason.

"This is a good accomplishment," Epling said. "It's a start. Hopefully it will continue for years to come."

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