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BASEBALL

## Right-hander Seth Claybourne helping Millard West hit all the right notes so far this season

By Mike Patterson / World-Herald staff writer 11 hrs ago



Reliever Seth Claybourne earned a pair of wins during last week's Millard West tournament for the unbeaten Wildcats.

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To pitch or to sing?

That was the dilemma Millard West's Seth Claybourne faced on a recent night. And as it turned out, he was able to do both.

Claybourne, a junior right-hander, is an important part of the Wildcats' top-ranked team. He also is a member of the school's show choir, which presented a problem during Millard West's baseball tournament last week.

The Wildcats were playing the last of four first-round tourney games that night, scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m. Claybourne's tryout for next year's show choir was set for the same night at 10:30 p.m.

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“It was the latest tryout time possible,” he said. “I was hoping things were going to work out for me.”

But when the baseball tournament ran late, Claybourne had a problem. The reliever wanted to stay with his team but knew he couldn’t miss the tryout for show choir, a performing group that sings and dances.

“I could tell he was stressed out,” Millard West coach Steve Frey said. “I just told him to go and that we’d figure out the pitching thing.”

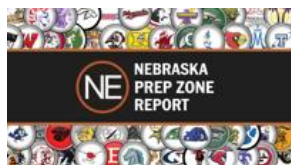
Given the green light, Claybourne left the dugout and sprinted to the nearby school building.

“I ran up there as fast as I could,” he said. “I knew I couldn’t miss it.”

Still wearing his baseball uniform, Claybourne made it through his tryout. His routine included the singing of “My Country ’Tis Of Thee,” though “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” might have been more appropriate.

He then hustled back to the baseball diamond, where the Wildcats were in extra innings against Millard North.

“All of a sudden he was in the dugout again,” Frey said. “I didn’t think he was coming back but I was glad to see him.”



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Claybourne not only returned, he played a key role. He pitched the ninth inning and earned his first varsity victory as Millard West won 7-6.

“It was a really cool night,” he said. “One that I won’t ever forget.”

Claybourne came through again two days later. He pitched four innings of relief and earned his second victory as Millard West defeated Lincoln Southwest 8-7 in the tournament's championship game.

"We're on a really good run and the team has come together," he said. "And it's always fun when you're winning."

Claybourne has successfully mixed baseball and music in his three years at Millard West. This is his first year on Frey's varsity squad and first as a member of the school's top choir and show choir groups.

"It can be a little challenging sometimes with the scheduling," he said. "But for the most part, I've made it work."

He had another close call a few months ago during varsity baseball tryouts, which coincided with a show choir performance in Mitchell, South Dakota. Claybourne spoke with Frey, who informed him that day's tryout would be all about hitting — good news for a pitcher.

"I know it's not easy when players are trying to juggle some different things," the coach said. "We try to work with them as much as we can."

Claybourne made it to the show choir performance in South Dakota and later found out he had made the varsity baseball team. But if there comes a time when he absolutely has to decide between the two, the pitcher knows what he's going to do.

"I hope to play baseball in college someday," he said. "That's always going to be my priority."



Millard West has been hitting all the right notes so far, winning its first 14 games. Claybourne said he is optimistic the team will keep it going.

“We have goals that we want to achieve,” he said. “And we’re all working hard to make this season special.”

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Left to right, sitting: Tony Martin, Omaha Burke; Tyler Goodro, Omaha Creighton Prep; Scott Kaskie, Papillion-La Vista; Sam Merrill, Millard North; Connor O'Neill, Omaha Westside; Kevin Dooley, Papillion-La Vista; Matt Bowers, Omaha Roncalli; Dustin Koca, Omaha Westside. Kneeling: Jared Erspamer, Millard South; Tim Huber, Omaha Creighton Prep; Ryan Wehrle, Papillion-La Vista. Standing: Drew Schwab, Omaha Westside; Steve Winkelmann, Omaha Gross.

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Clockwise from upper left: Omaha Westside's Erik Bird, Millard South's Conor Gillaspie, Omaha C Jewell, Millard West's Jon Reed, Omaha Westside's Sam Murphy, Bellevue

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