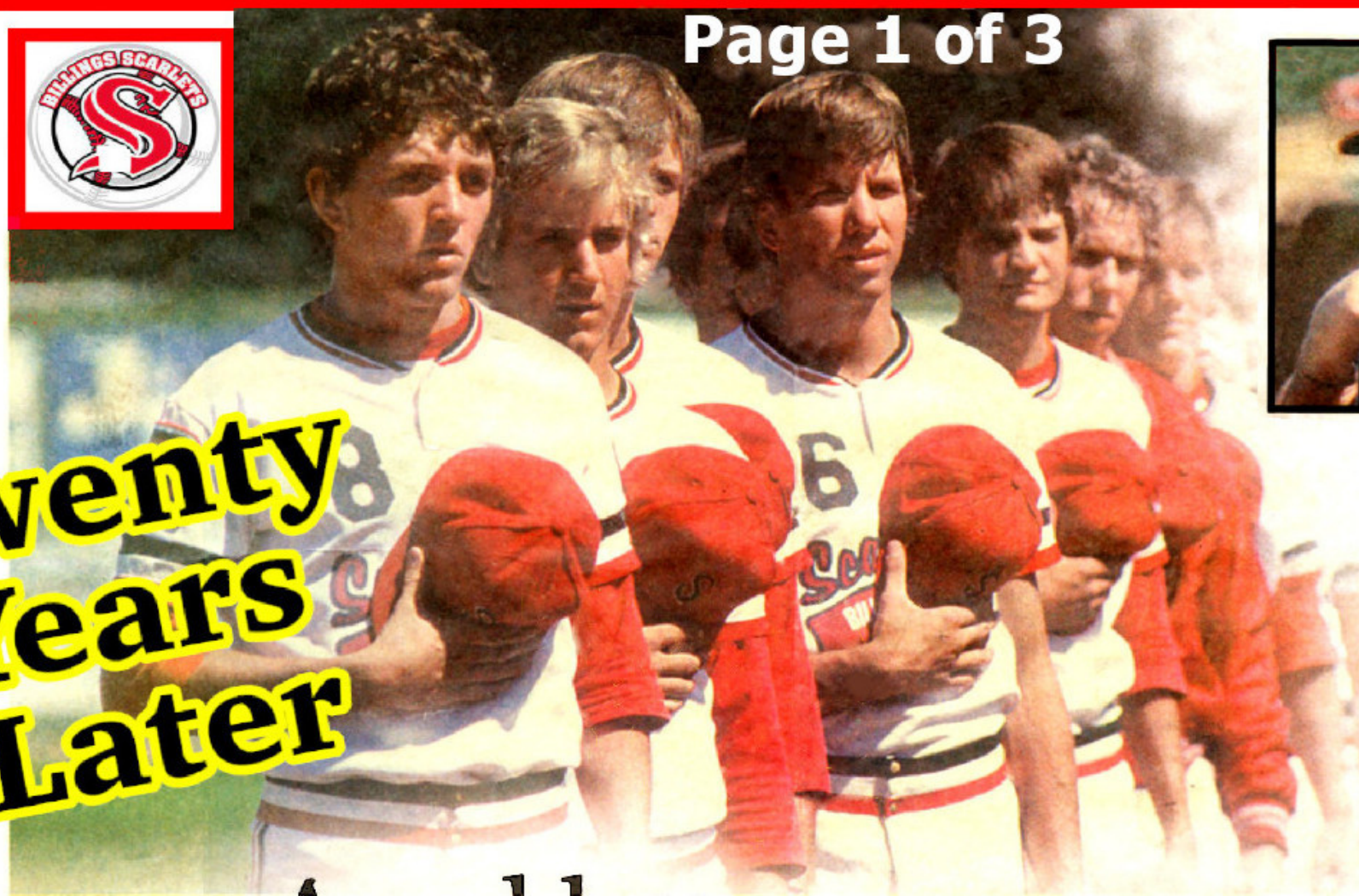




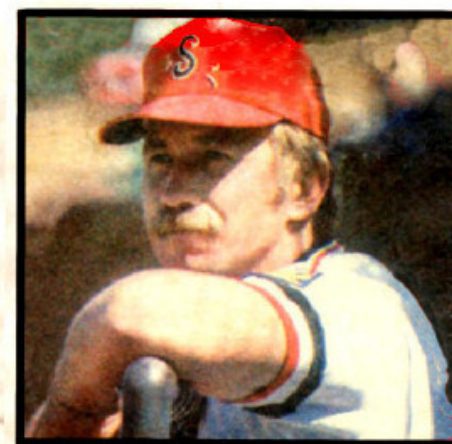
## **Twenty Years Later**

**In 2002 the Billings Gazette published a 'Twenty Years Later' article that looked back at the 1982 Scarlets and the disappointment of not going to the Little World Series that fall.**





**Twenty  
Years  
Later**



Longtime coach Dennis Maggert, above, saw his Billings Scarlets dominate the regular season only to suffer disappointment in post-season play.

# A red-letter Night

Former Billings Scarlets recall  
how their dream of a trip to the  
American Legion World Series  
ended 20 years ago

Story by ED WEST  
Of The Gazette Staff

The crowd poured into Cobb Field, quickly filling every available seat and spilling out along the foul lines.

It was August 25, 1982, an evening filled with a sense of anticipation, a feeling that the city had something special in an American Legion baseball team that evoked memories of the glory days of two decades earlier.

That was a time when Billings was nationally-known, when its teams were a regular visitor to the American Legion World Series. Four times in five years from 1958-62, Billings made it, getting as far as the championship game in 1960.



And many thought this team, the Billings Scarlets, was good enough to make it that far again. That's why they stood in long lines at the ticket booths on the opening day of the Region 7 tournament.

"I was warming up and there was a corridor of people," said the Scarlets' starting pitcher Jeff Ballard. "They had to split them up so I had some room to throw. They put a screen up so no one would get hit."

Ballard was one reason everyone was so excited. The 6-foot-3 left-hander had returned in mid-June from Stanford University, which had played in the College World Series. Going into that evening's game against Bellevue, Wash., Ballard hadn't lost a Legion game in over two years and had a 32-game winning streak.

The team was also riding a 24-game win streak and had a 49-3 overall record. Besides Ballard, who would go on to play seven years of major league baseball, the Scarlets had a talented, veteran group of players. Four of them would join Ballard in the major college ranks. Todd Teegarden (2B-P) and Larry Hawthorne (OF) played at the University of Wyoming. Kyle Johansen (C) and Brad Helmer (SS) went to the University of Utah.

The Scarlets also had standouts in Brad Bolin, Hal Hoagland, Kerry Wahl, Mike Wier, Brad Stief and Mike Reichenberg.

Going into the regional, the team had a batting average of .336, led by

Ballard's .527 mark. The pitching staff had a combined earned run average of 1.96 and had thrown 15 shutouts. Hoagland was 10-0 with Bolin and Ballard at 8-0 and Todd Teegarden at 9-1.

In addition, there was a group of promising younger players such as 15-year-olds Travis Teegarden, who later pitched at Wyoming and for the Billings Mustangs, and Warren Schaefer. They helped the Scarlets win another state title in 1985.

Not only was there talent, but the first thing Todd Teegarden recalled was, "It was quite a group of friends."

Bolin said the season was "fantastic. We basically were brothers."

"They were a lot of friendships made," Helmer added. "We were a pretty close-knit team. We had a lot of good athletes, not just baseball players."

Ballard, Bolin, Todd Teegarden and Wier were all members of West's 1981 state championship basketball team. They'd also experienced a good deal of success in Legion prior to the 1982 season.

Ballard, Bolin and Teegarden had played on the '79 state championship team and many of the others were on the '80 and '81 outfits that got beat in the title game.

As expected, the Scarlets entered the season as a heavy favorite and they didn't disappoint, winning their

Please see Scarlets, 5D





## Twenty Years Later

## Page 2 of 3

first 20 games

Todd Teegarden fired a one-hitter against Cody, Wyo. in seven innings during the second game of the season. Hoagland matched that performance a few days later, fanning 13 in a shutout of Miles City. Ballard came back with a 13-strikeout, two-hit effort against Butte.

Casper, Wyo handed the Scarlets their first loss 3-2. Aurora, Colo. knocked off the scarlets in the IGA tournament and Helena escaped with a 4-3 decision a few days later.

The Scarlets came back and beat perennial powerhouse Yakima, Wash. twice and were off on another streak. Bolin threw a one hitter against the Billings Royals and Ballard twice turned in 17 strikeout performances as the wins piled up.

"We were solid everywhere"," said Bolin who played at North Alabama.

While coach Dennis Maggert, who guided the Scarlets for 21 seasons until leaving after the 1996 season, doesn't like to compare his teams, although he did offer this description of the '82 team:

"It had a real deep pitching staff. We had guys who knew how to pitch."

"Defensively, it was an exceptionally solid lineup. They could go beyond making the routine play. Offensively, it was relentless. They went at it every inning. One through nine, it was a very solid lineup. Anyone of them could deliver the hits."

The Scarlets rolled into the state tournament having won 20 in a row and were an overwhelming favorite.

Ballard remembers the confidence the team had and a funny incident before the tournament.

"Maggert got us together and said 'You can't just throw your hat on the field and

expect to win.' After he got done Bolin and I threw our hats on the field. He was mad at us a little bit."

But there was no letup and no upsets. The Scarlets tore through the tournament, taking four straight games by a combined score of 75-8, the most dominating run since the 1960 Billings champions rolled over four opponents by 53-8.

In the championship game, Wier drove in six runs. Wahl knocked in five and Ballard and Helmer four apiece in a 22-3 rout of Helena.

That just produced more excitement for the regional. Some Scarlets fans put up signs in a Westend neighborhood the day before the tournament began.

"It never crossed our minds that we wouldn't win," Ballard said. "Everything was set in place for that team in that year. It was one of those years we thought the stars were lined up."

### Falling Stars

However the Region 7 tournament was filled with talented teams. Bellevue, Wash. the Scarlets' first opponent, was the defending regional champion and had Mike Campbell, who went on to become a major league pitcher.

Lafayette, Calif had Chip Hale, who made it to the majors with the Minnesota Twins and later managed the Missoula Ospreys in the Pioneer League, and Ron DeLucci, who became a first round draft choice of the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1983.

Some of the Scarlets were familiar with Bellevue and Campbell, having played them





## Twenty Years Later

## Page 3 of 3

a few years earlier in a Pony tournament in Seattle.

Ballard and Campbell settled into a classic pitching duel from the beginning.

"It was quite a game," Bolin recalled. "The stands were overflowing (the crowd was announced at 4,938). It was something else."

But it was a situation that wasn't familiar to the Scarlets.

"Our downfall was we hadn't been in very many close games," Ballard said "To win those games, you have to make a big pitch and get the big hit. We never had to worry about that. We were always thinking 10 or 15 runs ahead. We were thinking, 'This isn't supposed to happen.'"

In the top of the ninth, with the score tied 1-1, the Scarlets looked like they were going to take the lead. With Hoagland on second base and two outs, Todd Teegarden hit a high hopper over the glove of third baseman, Tom Stickney. The ball appeared headed to left field, but shortstop Steve Routos cut it off and rifled a throw home to get Hoagland at the plate.

Finally, in the bottom of the 12th, Bellevue broke through against Ballard who'd retired 17 in a row. Troy Anderson singled, Shawn Kearney put down a sacrifice bunt and Stickney drilled a 2-0 pitch to right to win the game.

Ballard finished with 22 strikeouts and Campbell had 14. Ballard walked just one batter and gave up seven hits while Campbell issued two free passes and yielded nine hits.

Years later, Ballard ran into some scouts who'd been at the game.

"They said it was one of the best games they'd ever seen in baseball. I was in the majors then and this was 10 years later. It

was just a well-played game. It was a great experience."

As great as it was, the huge crowd left disappointed and the Scarlets were stunned.

"We were drained. It was such an emotional letdown," Bolins said, who started the next afternoon against Lafayette.

"It was such a heartbreaking loss," Ballard said, "We were so down. We were beaten before the game started."

Lafayette put the Scarlets away with a six-run sixth inning on the way to an 11-2 victory. The Californians didn't stop there and came back to win the tournament, winning two games on the final day against Medford, Ore. Lafayette advanced all the way to the national championship game, where it lost to Boyertown, Pa, which played in front of 6,500 hometown fans.

The Scarlets winning percentage of .907 (49-5) remains, the best in team history. Their 49 wins, was eclipsed by the 2000 and '01 teams, who both won 57.

While it's intriguing to think of what might have happened had they won that first game, the Scarlets might not have won it all anyway.

But they will be remembered for a dominating season and allowing nearly 5,000 fans to share in a dream which lasted for most of an August night.

---