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## SPORTS

# STAR Financial ends season with 12u championship

By Sean Douglas

Under the bright lights of Lincoln Field No. 4 on Friday night, the final contest of the second season of the revamped Marion Babe Ruth League certainly did not disappoint.

For six innings, the palpable excitement hung over the field as the top two teams in the 12u division danced toe-to-toe.

But in the end, a strong pitching performance combined with key hits in crucial situations made the difference, as No. 1 seed STAR Financial, coached by Duran Inman, defeated Tino Mitchener's No. 2 seeded Marion Firefighters by a score of 6-5.

"We fought all year with Tino's team, and we knew at the beginning of the season that it would be us at the end," Inman said after the game. "We struggled. We struggled real hard with pitching and hitting. "But we ended up pulling it off at the end. That's all that matters."

While he ran into some early trouble and experienced a few more hiccups in the fifth inning, Ke-vaunte "KD" Simmons was the star of the evening, frustrating the Firefighters' potent lineup with a perfect blend of his scorching fastball and his ever-improving changeup.

"If you know KD the way everybody else knows KD, that boy can clock in," Inman said of Simmons. "He clocked in today, and that's all we needed."

Simmons pitched the entire contest, finishing with a whopping 17 strikeouts.



STAR Financial - Marion Babe Ruth 12u Tournament champions.

He struck out the side of three of the game's six innings, including the final frame to seal the deal, while not allowing a single hit.

While Simmons was in control for most of the contest, his pitches lacked command in the first inning, and the Firefighters took advantage. Ah'lijeh Monday, Gage Stickann, and Mason Bunch each reached via walks, and three eventually came around to score, giving the Firefighters an early 3-0 lead.

STAR Financial, however, had an excellent lineup of their own, and they quickly found a way to right the ship. Simmons helped his own cause, hitting

a solo shot to right field in the bottom of the second inning, and Jamari Collins later scored on a passed ball, cutting the firefighters lead to 3-2.

Simmons found his groove in the second, third, and fourth frames, facing nine total batters and striking out eight of them.

"KD has one of the best fastballs in the state, but now he has developed a really good off-speed pitch," Mitchener said. "He fooled a lot of my power hitters with the off-speed. That makes him even more hard to hit."

In the third inning, STAR's offense continued to hum. A pair of RBI doubles from DeShawn Inman and Izaiah Freshwater,

combined with another score on a passed ball, gave the No. 1 seed a 5-3 lead – one they would not relinquish.

One of the biggest moments of the game came in the following inning, as Jalen Collins, one of the smallest players on either team, collected the most important hit of the contest. Collins ripped the ball to the fence in left-center field, coming all the way around to score to increase STAR's lead to three runs.

"He's the smallest kid in the league, and that hit right there, it set the tone," Inman said. "It set the tone for the whole team. Everybody was proud of him because that hit mattered. When it mattered, he

pulled through."

The Firefighters upped the ante in the fifth inning, scoring two runs and putting the tying run on third, but they would not get any closer. Simmons finished the game with five straight strikeouts, securing the championship for STAR.

"Everybody knew what this was going to be – a one-run ball game," Mitchener said. "I couldn't be prouder of them. That's a very, very good baseball team, one of the top pitchers in the state, and we went down to the wire with them every time. We battled. I can't ask any more than that."

Friday night's contest concluded what has been a tremendous second sum-

mer of baseball at Lincoln Field. In a year full of uncertainty, the Marion Babe Ruth League provided an escape – a way for families and kids to forget a national crisis and enjoy a national pastime.

Safe to say, it was a rousing success, and Mitchener is already looking forward to next season.

"It's been a fantastic season," Mitchener said. "There were a bunch of close ball games. The kids were excited. There were more cars out here for our coaches pitch championship game then I have seen in 10 years.

"I want to grow on that. I want to double that next year. And I think we can."

# Jack Sutter third family member in Grant County Sports Hall of Fame

By Sean Douglas

When looking at the rich history of Marion athletics, several names stand out.

The Gallagher family, which includes Meshingomesia golf pro Jim Gallagher Sr. and former PGA golfer Jim Gallagher Jr., made their mark on the fair-

ways and greens around the county. The Blackmon family, including current Marion head coach James Blackmon Sr. and current senior point guard Jalen Blackmon, have found success through basketball.

In this same lineup is the Sutter family, who have been a part of some of the

greatest and most beloved teams in the history of the city.

"If you had a Mount Rushmore of names, family names where multiple people from the same family had success athletically, the Sutters and Gallaghers are at the top of the list," Grant County Sports Hall of Fame

President Andy McCord said. "You put those two names together, you would be hard pressed to look around the state of Indiana and find a county with two families with such a deep rich tradition athletically that span generation after generation after generation."

John Sutter was inducted into the Grant County Sports Hall of Fame in 2014 after a stellar career for the Marion Giants basketball team in the mid-60's. His brother, Joe, was inducted two years earlier, having been a part of the late 60's Giants that compiled a record of 70-13.

Now their dad, Jack Sutter, a successful businessman and tennis player, will be joining them as part of the Hall's 12<sup>th</sup> class.

"When you look at names in the history of Grant County sports, the Sutters are a name that go right up