

# Tigers tear into opponents, take 2016 title

Submitted by Matt Towns

For millions of Americans, the summer sunshine means one thing – baseball. But while major league turnstiles spin and little league fields echo with the yells of youngsters, baseball fans in the Edgerton area have been visiting the quaint little ballpark in Albion for generations to see something a little different: Home Talent baseball. Amateur baseball at its best.

Making their home in the idyllic setting of Albion Park, the Albion Tigers are part of the 44-team Home Talent League, the oldest and largest amateur baseball league in Wisconsin.

As the name would suggest, clubs in the Home Talent League primarily draw their players from their local communities, creating a unique connection for their players and supporters not often found at other levels of sport.

Drawing their talent almost exclusively from the successful baseball program at nearby Edgerton High School, the Tigers

currently compete in the Southeast Section of the league. There are also Home Talent League ball clubs in nearby Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Cambridge, Lake Mills, Stoughton and Utica. The Southeast Section schedule, consisting primarily of Sunday afternoon games, starts on May 1 and runs through August. In addition, Albion plays an Eastern Night League game most Thursday nights.

Built on the campus of the old Albion Academy, Albion Park is truly a unique place to spend a day in the park and catch a ball game. Without an outfield fence to obstruct their view, many fans sit under the shade trees beyond the outfield.

Those who like to be closer to the action congregate nearer the infield on bleachers or lawn chairs and avail themselves of the concession stand, which serves bratwurst, hot dogs, cold drinks and other items. Indoor restrooms, a playground for the kids and the overall relaxed atmosphere of the small village park add to the attraction for Tiger fans young and old.

## Not-so-humble beginnings

The original Albion Tigers ball club was a semi-professional organization in the 1930s. These were some heady times for the little hamlet, as Albion was able to attract players from as far away as Madison, Milwaukee, and Rockford.

The farmers and merchants of Edgerton and the surrounding area were no different than most places in America at the time – they loved and supported their local baseball club, and the weekly games were

known to draw up to 2,000 fans on a Sunday afternoon. Unfortunately, the ball club was disbanded in the early 1940s as the country turned its focus to World War II.

## Long run of success

In 1946, the Albion Tigers were reborn as an amateur outfit, and a year later they joined the Home Talent League. Under the leadership and management of Albion tobacco and dairy farmer Wally Olstad, Albion established themselves as a lasting power, winning sectional championships and reaching the league's Final Four in 1953, 1957 and 1976.

The 1953 Tigers, in celebration of Edgerton's centennial, grew out their beards and went down in legend as "The Bearded Tigers" as they pounded their way to the Eastern Section championship. Many of those stars were still around (with or without their beards) in 1957 when Albion ran through the Eastern Section undefeated only to fall in the league title game 2-1 to Middleton. "I had 22 ballplayers on that team. Nobody could beat us," Olstad told an Albion



The 2016 Albion Tigers were champions of the Home Talent League, Wisconsin's largest and oldest amateur baseball league. Here, the Tigers celebrate their Southeast Sectional title at Jones Park in Fort Atkinson on August 21, 2016. (Photo by Betsy Towns)

manager many years later.

Olstad would stay with the club until 1985, at which point longtime Tiger standout Larry Buhrow took over the reins. Olstad compiled 319 wins in his 39 seasons, and was named Manager of the Year twice (1976 and 1981) in addition to his three sectional championships. Olstad's name still appears on the hand-operated scoreboard and a concrete memorial bench in Albion Park.

## A new millenium

The Tigers of the early 2000s again established

themselves as a perennial contender in the Southeast Section. After a lengthy postseason drought, they returned to the Southeast playoffs in 2002 and have been back ten times since. Jim Eastman (2002), Matt Towns (2004) and Ben Towns (2012) have all been recognized as HTL Manager of the Year for their efforts in keeping Albion near the top of the Southeast Section standings.

A high point came in 2011, when the Tigers won a Southeast Section title and their fourth trip to

the Home Talent League Final Four. The following year brought a 24-4 overall record but saw the Tigers fall one game short of a title repeat. In 2014, the Tigers found themselves one strike away from the Final Four, only to lose the sectional final to archrival Utica in extra innings.

## Champions!

Albion broke through again in 2016, and in a big way. Winning their division with a 13-3 record in the Southeast Section,

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Albion shortstop Tyler Oren was a Home Talent League All-Star in 2016, batting .448 over the regular season with a .507 on-base percentage. (Photo by Troy A. Bruzewski)

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### Albion Tigers 2017 Schedule

<b>May 7</b>	<b>McFarland</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>May 13</b>	<b>@Evansville</b>	<b>6 p.m.</b>
<b>May 18</b>	<b>@Jefferson</b>	<b>7:30 p.m.</b>
<b>May 21</b>	<b>@Deerfield</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>May 25</b>	<b>@Waterloo</b>	<b>7:30 p.m.</b>
<b>May 28</b>	<b>@Stoughton</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>May 29</b>	<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>June 4</b>	<b>Lake Mills</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>June 8</b>	<b>Cottage Grove</b>	<b>6 p.m.</b>
<b>June 11</b>	<b>@Waterloo</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>June 15</b>	<b>Lake Mills</b>	<b>6 p.m.</b>
<b>June 18</b>	<b>@Clinton</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>June 22</b>	<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>6 p.m.</b>
<b>June 25</b>	<b>Jefferson</b>	<b>3:15 p.m.</b>
<b>June 29</b>	<b>Fort Atkinson</b>	<b>6 p.m.</b>
<b>June 30</b>	<b>Home Talent League Futures Game, Sauk City</b>	
<b>July 2</b>	<b>@Fort Atkinson</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>July 4</b>	<b>Utica</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>July 6</b>	<b>Waterloo</b>	<b>6 p.m.</b>
<b>July 9</b>	<b>@McFarland</b>	<b>4 p.m.</b>
<b>July 11</b>	<b>@Cottage Grove</b>	<b>7:30 p.m.</b>
<b>July 16</b>	<b>Evansville</b>	<b>2 p.m.</b>
	<b>(@Racetrack)</b>	
<b>July 20</b>	<b>@Lake Mills</b>	<b>7:30 p.m.</b>
<b>July 23</b>	<b>@Utica</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>July 27</b>	<b>@Milton</b>	<b>7:30 p.m.</b>
<b>July 30</b>	<b>Stoughton</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>Aug. 2</b>	<b>@Johnson Creek - X</b>	<b>7:30 p.m.</b>
<b>Aug. 5</b>	<b>Deerfield</b>	<b>1 p.m.</b>
<b>Aug. 6</b>	<b>ALBION PAR THREE CHALLENGE, CREEKVIEW</b>	
<b>Aug. 11</b>	<b>Home Talent League All-Star Game, Madison</b>	

RED GAMES = IN ALBION  
X = EXHIBITION GAME

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