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THE MONROE



Western Michigan's Jared Kujawa dives back to first base as Michigan's Kendall Patrick takes the throw Wednesday.

MULE REUNION

KUJAWA, LAMB, SZKUTNIK MEET ON DIAMOND

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ANN ARBOR — Three former Bedford baseball stars held a reunion at the University of Michigan's Ray Fisher Stadium Wednesday.

Unfortunately, only one of them got on the field.

Jared Kujawa, a 2011 Bedford graduate, was Western Michigan's best player during a 12-4 loss to Michigan, going 2-for-3 with a sacrifice and three runs-batted-in.

Trent Szkutnik and Jackson Lamb could only watch their former teammate from the Michigan bench.

Szkutnik, a junior left-handed pitcher who starts league games for the Wolverines, was unavailable because he threw a game against Indiana on Sunday.

And Lamb, a freshman outfielder, was in the original starting lineup but was scratched just before game time because of a back problem.

"It was awesome to see some old friends and guys I played with," Kujawa said. "When I saw he (Lamb) was out of the lineup, I was a little disappointed."

But Kujawa was able to quickly put aside his disappointment and concentrate on playing baseball.

WMU's clean-up hitter came to the plate in the opening inning in a dream situation — bases loaded and no outs.

And, as he often does, Kujawa delivered with a sharp single to right that gave the Broncos a 2-0 lead.

Western had a runner on first base with no outs in the third and Kujawa was called upon to sacrifice. He did it



— Monroe News photos by TOM HAWLEY

Bedford graduates (left to right) Jared Kujawa, Jackson Lamb, and Trent Szkutnik meet near home plate after Michigan beat Western Michigan 12-4 Wednesday.

flawlessly, laying down a bunt to move the runner to second.

He grounded out in the fifth to drive in a run, then showed great hustle in the seventh to beat out an infield hit on what appeared to be a routine grounder to second base.

Kujawa raised his season average to .289 and the 3 RBI tied him with Brett Sunde for the team lead with 18.

"He is a clutch player," WMU coach Billy Gernon said. "We were looking at the stats the other day and his average with runners in scoring position leads the team."

"He burns the brightest in the big lights. He's a special kid. He brings it in so many ways."

Kujawa was an All-State catcher in high school, but plays right field for the Broncos.

Gernon says that is partially because of a knee injury he suffered in a home plate collision during his senior year in high school limits his flexibility behind the plate. The coach also likes having Kujawa's big arm in right field.

"It's a little different," Kujawa said of playing the outfield. "It was an adjustment. I was so used to catching where you are in on every play. I grew up playing quarterback and catcher. I am used to being in the middle of everything."

Gernon says the Kujawa is the Broncos' backup catcher and his bat is vital for his 10-11 team.

"He had a triple against Miami last week that drove in the game-winning run," Gernon said. "It's fun to watch him run. He is four away from the school record for triples. The

record is 15. He has five this season."

Szkutnik has suffered through a bit of tough luck this season. He has an 0-3 record despite the second-best earned-run average (3.49) on Michigan's pitching staff. He has 21 strikeouts and 14 walks in 28 1/3 innings.

He recently got a promotion from second-year coach Erik Bakich.

"I was pitching on Fridays, now I pitch Sunday games," he said. "You get tougher games that way. It feels good. I am just trying to improve my control and throw strikes."

Szkutnik was delighted when he found out Lamb would be joining him at Michigan.

"It's awesome," he said. "He's

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a great guy and a great player.”

Lamb got off to a blazing start with the Wolverines. He went 3-for-3 with two doubles and two RBI in his collegiate debut against Washington on Feb. 14 and wound up earning Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors.

“The next Tuesday I was in the weight room and I hurt my back,” he said. “They say I have a bulging disc.”

Battling the back problem has been frustrating for Lamb.

“I was never really hurt in high school,” he said.

Lamb has been fighting through the injury. He came into Wednesday’s game with a .244 average in 45 at-bats and was tied for third on the team with 8 RBI.

His diving catch in rightfield against Indiana Sunday saved a 4-3 victory for the Wolverines (9-14-1).

“That was probably one of the biggest catches of my career, given the situation,” he said.

Lamb was penciled in as the clean-up hitter Wednesday, but the coaches decided not to risk his tender back on a day when the temperatures were in the high 20s.

He enjoyed the chance to see Kujawa again.

“Seeing him at the ballpark brings back a lot of memories,” Lamb said. “He taught me a lot when I as a young’un at Bedford.”