Stepping Away

This letter is not an easy one to write, but I want to share—in my own words—the reasons my family and I have decided that it is time for me to step away from the Mankato American Legion Baseball program. Time is something we can never get back, and I have reached a point where I feel I need to dedicate more of it to my family. The hours given to this program have been meaningful and rewarding, but it is time for a new chapter.

For the past six summers, I have been proud to be part of this team. Taking over as head coach in 2021, we made our first run at the Minnesota State Tournament for the first time in a very long time —advancing out of pool play before falling in the opening round of bracket play. In 2023, we made another memorable run, one that those involved will never forget. We came within one game of the championship, holding a 2–0 lead into the sixth inning before ultimately falling in the 10th inning. That game was filled with moments—some great, some difficult—but we left everything on the field.

The following day, with pride still on our chests, we returned to play for third place. After a heartbreaking loss the night before, momentum was not on our side. Down 5–0 heading into the bottom of the final inning, I told the team how proud I was to coach them and asked only that they not go down easily—that they play with pride and see what could happen. What followed was something special. The team chipped away until the score was 5–4, and with the bases loaded and one out, on the fourth-pitch of the at-bat ended with a walk-off grand slam. An 8–5 win and a third-place finish at the Minnesota State Tournament.

Over six years, we reached the district championship game five times and experienced a great deal of success on the field. While those achievements are memorable, what I will cherish most is the team culture we built. Every player mattered. I had confidence in every individual, regardless of when their number was called. We consistently played our best baseball at the end of the season, and that speaks to the character and commitment of the group.

As a coach, you hope to leave a lasting impact. My goal was always to put players in positions where they could succeed and to ensure no one ever felt they were not good enough. Failure was part of the journey, but belief in each player never wavered. This team was never just nine names on a lineup card—it was 18 players contributing to our success. I hope they remember the passion, pride, and joy we shared, and that they carry forward the life lessons baseball teaches beyond the game itself.

These six years would not have been possible without the incredible support system beside me. First and foremost, Mitch Kleist—thank you for everything you did for this team and for me. Your time, energy, and dedication can never be fully repaid. Jared Grams, from being a leader on the field in year one to becoming one of the most reliable coaches I could ask for, your knowledge and commitment were invaluable. To Ben Snaza and Isaac Turner, thank you for stepping in when we needed you most—your contributions never went unnoticed or unappreciated.

And finally, the true MVPs—the women at home who made it all possible. Melissa and Heather, Mitch and I could never adequately thank you for the sacrifices you made to allow us to pursue our passion. This note is not enough, but please know your support never went unnoticed, and we are incredibly grateful to have you by our side.

Over the past six years, I have given everything I could to provide the best possible experience for these young men. The lessons, memories, successes, and failures will never be taken away. While I am stepping away from coaching, I will never be far—I'll always be a phone call away if needed.

To the coach who takes over next, know that this role is incredibly rewarding but not easy. There is so much you don't fully understand until you experience it firsthand. I wish you nothing but success.

Thank you to everyone who made these six years unforgettable.

Coach
Risting