

Just about everyone who followed American Legion baseball in 1978 thought the powerhouse team at St. Louis Thoman Boothe would win the state championship. When they found out they would be playing a team from a little southwest Missouri town called Republic, that didn't change anyone's mind.

Thoman Boothe had a 43-5 record, and included two players with ties to the St. Louis Cardinals. When they made the journey to Springfield for the championship series at Meador Park, they reportedly already had their bags packed for South Dakota and the national tournament. Mike Evans, coach of the Nebraska team awaiting the winner of the Missouri contest, called to get a scouting report on Thoman Boothe. He didn't bother learning anything about Republic.

After beating Republic 8-3 in eleven innings in game one on Friday night, it looked like Thoman Boothe wouldn't be returning home anytime soon. But Republic had other ideas, banging out 39 hits in two games on Saturday to win 10-6 and 14-8, taking the best-of-three series and the state championship.

In retrospect, maybe Thoman Boothe should have known what it was in for. The Tigers were 45-8 heading into the series. They had three hitters—Mickey Owen, Tom Trogdon, and Kent Russell—batting over .400. Number-three hitter Greg McCord was just below that mark, and only one starter was hitting below .300 for the season.

"We were fast. We hit a few home runs. Then we had this guy in the middle of the lineup (Trogdon), and he hit the ball harder than anyone. I've seen all kinds of good players, and he hit it harder than anyone I ever played with," McCord says.

Earlier in the season, Republic had suffered a blow when pitcher John Stockstill was drafted by the Cubs and left town. That might send a lot of teams into a funk. Somehow, Republic



The 1978 Republic Legion team is still Republic's only baseball state champion.

started playing even better. They added two players – Wes Towe and Russell – and went on a 22-game winning streak.

"No disgrace to John Stockstill, but after he left, I think we got better. We added two really good players," says McCord.

Winn, one of the pitchers who picked up the slack, ended up being drafted by the Pirates after college.

He looks back on the 1978 year with fondness.

"It was probably one of my best summers," he recalls. "I played ball with a bunch of good guys, good players, that came out to play hard every day. That was enjoyable. At the beginning, I had second thoughts about playing,

but I'm glad I did."

The trip to nationals featured a transportation snafu that put the team at their destination in the middle of the night. They had to play the next day without much rest.

"We got shelled. I think we were a little bit awestruck," says McCord.

Republic rebounded to win the next two games, and even turned a triple play, before being bounced from the tournament in their fourth game. Despite the disappointing end, McCord says his experience that summer was one he'll always cherish.

"Nationals was awesome, but the whole year was just an unbelievable ride with the camaraderie that we had," he says. "It was a bunch of guys who really like being around each other."

1978

You can learn more about the 1978 Republic American Legion team, and read about other Tiger Throwbacks, on our website. Just go to www.republictigersports.com/throwback.