

Article Last Updated: 7/07/2006 12:50 AM

It's crowded at the top of the S.L. Valley League

By Andrew Aragon
The Salt Lake Tribune
Salt Lake Tribune

Thanks to the emergence of some formerly mediocre baseball programs and an addition from Taylorsville, the American Legion's Salt Lake Valley League has its strongest field since 2002.

The Valley League features three region champions (Taylorsville, Bountiful and Tooele) and two teams (Woods Cross and Judge Memorial) that had magical state tournament runs last year. Although those teams aren't comprised of the exact same lineups that led them to success in the spring, they still are solid.

One thing is for sure: The Valley League is the deepest it has been since several high-profile programs left American Legion and formed the UABA in 2002.

"It's a tough league," said Taylorsville U-17 coach Kellen Carsey. "You have to come to play every day or you'll get beat."

Carsey's team has added to the depth of the Valley League. Taylorsville, which still fields two younger teams in the UABA, opted to send next year's varsity players to Legion for the first time since 2002. Carsey said the move was made to better prepare the players for next season.

"It's been good for us," he said.

Overall, the Valley League has tremendous depth. Five teams are clustered at the top of the standings. Taylorsville's team of graduated seniors and its U-17 team are both in contention. Kearns, which always seems to fare better during the summer than spring, also is strong. The Cougars are led by Andy Derksen, as well as Riverton graduates Ryan Lucero and Tyler Schick.

The surprise team of the season has been Cyprus. During the high school season, the Pirates' talent was undeniable. But the team played mostly sophomores and freshmen and made too many mistakes. Those same sophomores and freshmen are growing up fast this summer. The Pirates were in first place at the start of the week, but dropped into a first-place tie after losing to Taylorsville on Wednesday.

"Unbelievable," said Pirates coach Brooks Jones. "If someone would have told me that [early in the season] I would have said they were nuts."

Several players are playing well for Cyprus, including Miki Oshiro, a second-team all-state pick, who went through a recent stretch where he went 14-for-15 at the plate, and pitcher Taylor Jones, who struck out 29 batters in a 15-inning span.

The Salt Lake Valley League's annual all-star game is Saturday night at Kearns High. The state tournament begins July 29. The top 11 teams from the Valley League will qualify, as well as two Northern League teams and three teams from the south.

