



Legion Crew

Brian Ulness of rural Valders was among the umpire crew on Sunday at the American Legion all-star game at American Family Field in Milwaukee. From left are Ulness, Ryan Krcmar, National Commander Dan Wiley, Gary Zahn and Bill Ostrowski.

Umpire gets moment on MLB field

By Mary Thomsen

A local man was watching for outs at third base on Sunday at American Family Field in Milwaukee.

Brian Ulness of rural Valders donned his umpire uniform and hit the field at the home of the Milwaukee Brewers, but his moment came after the Brewers had dispatched the Minnesota Twins and a bunch of talented teenagers took the diamond.

Ulness was one of four umpires chosen to officiate at the Wisconsin American Legion baseball all-star game. He was among those recognized on the field before the Brewers game, a brief ceremony broadcast on the jumbotron scoreboard.

While he enjoyed the game—a competitive 4-2 outing won by the Stars squad over the Stripes team—and being

on the field at the Major League stadium, Ulness was most honored by being asked to join the umpiring team at the event.

A seasoned umpire at many levels, Ulness has worked Legion games for about 25 years. He said he got a phone call around a month ago asking if he would like to be on the crew for the all-star game.

He had never been chosen before and said he believes the organization chooses the umpires from a different region of the state each year. His crewmates on Sunday included Ryan Krcmar and Bill Ostrowski of Green Bay and Gary Zahn of Oconto. Ulness has worked with all but Zahn in the past.

The players, umpires and others involved spent much of the weekend in Milwaukee, with a banquet on Saturday

night, breakfast on Sunday morning and then going to the stadium for the recognition ceremony and to watch the Brewers game.

The all-star game started around 6 p.m. after the MLB players had cleared the field and the Brewers allowed kids to “run the bases,” a Sunday home game tradition. Ulness said it was a long day but a fun one.

The guest speaker at the banquet was Dan Wiley of Kansas, the national commander of the American Legion, who also threw out one of the ceremonial first pitches before the Brewers game.

A highlight of the game was a true out-of-the-park home run, the first at a Legion all-star game since 2015, hit by Chase Beahm of Waupun. Ulness said the dinger was a

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no-doubter.

“Oh, yeah, he nailed it,” he said of the homer.

The rules of the game included a full nine innings, instead of seven, and both halves of the ninth inning were played, regardless of which team was ahead, Ulness noted. This allowed the players maximum playing time and coaches a chance to get all the players into the action. Free substitutions are also allowed.

“So that way, each team had, you know, 27 outs,” Ulness said, pointing out the in-

tent of an all-star game. “... Because, really, who won the game, nobody’s gonna remember, right?”

The players and officials had to follow a few special rules set by the Brewers, including not wearing cleats, and umpires were told to stay off the infield grass.

Valders and Reedsville no longer have Legion teams, with the closest team in this area sponsored by the Manitowoc Legion Post 88. Among the all-stars was Aaron Stephany of Kiel.

Ulness, who has umpired at the youth and high school

levels, too, said he enjoys the elevated play of the Legion program, which draws talented high school-age players and recent graduates.

“They throw strikes and make plays,” he said. “The level of play is one step ahead of high school.”

He also praised the Legion program’s respect for the military and its commitment to teaching the players to become good adults.

The weekend also featured recognition of the Legion’s all-star girls softball players, who had their own game earlier this summer.