

statebaseball



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Eaton's Chris Swain dives after a ball hit down the third base line during the Reds' 5-0 victory over Burlington. With Friday's win, Eaton advances to today's Class 3A state championship game against La Junta at All-City Stadium in Denver.

Aces square off for title

BY T.M. FASANO
Greeley Tribune

DENVER — The best left-hander in southeastern Colorado takes on the ace up north.

Oh, baby, this should be a fun one to watch.

class
3A

La Junta Tigers' southpaw Sean Thompson, he of the fastball in the mid-80s with the nasty bender, takes on Eaton Reds right-hander Craig Ayers, he of the frightening knuckle curveball who has won 16 of 17 varsity decisions, in the Class 3A Baseball State Championship game at 9:30 a.m. today at All-City Stadium in Denver.

Both pitchers have microscopic earned-run averages — Ayers (0.76), Thompson (0.54). Both average nearly two strikeouts per inning — Ayers (100 strikeouts in 55 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings), Thompson (123

PITCHING SHOWDOWN							
Name	Team	W	L	IP	SO	BB	ERA
Craig Ayers	Eaton	7	1	55 $\frac{1}{3}$	100	20	0.76
Sean Thompson	La Junta	9	2	65	123	43	0.54

strikeouts in 65 innings).

It's the second straight year Eaton (22-2) and La Junta (21-4) will play for the 3A state title. La Junta stormed back from a 6-0 deficit in last year's championship game to win 7-6 for its fifth state title.

Thompson, only a junior, pitched the final three innings last year to pick up the win over the Reds. Ayers, a senior, pitched the day before in the Reds' 10-0 semifinal win over Buena Vista.

Neither pitched in the semifinals Friday at Regis University when Eaton beat Burlington, 5-0, and La Junta rolled over Lamar, 13-1, in five innings.

"Both of us took calculated risks. It should be a good

game going ace against ace," Tigers coach Mark Lowther said. "That's the way a state championship should be."

Danley is looking for a real low-scoring title game.

"It's a game where someone's going to have to stick out a bat and win it late in the game," said Danley, whose team went back to Eaton Friday. "High school hitters do not catch up with either Ayers' curveball or Thompson's fastball with any regularity. It should be a great pitching duel."

Thompson comes into the game with a definite swagger. He also has an arm that many think is one of the best in any classification from a part of the state that produces Major

League Baseball pitchers as fast as farmers grow melons.

"I'm ready. Definitely. I've been waiting for it all season," Thompson said. "We knew it was going to be us and Eaton. It was a given that Eaton would be there."

Thompson said he would have liked some innings in the semifinals, but he also likes the fact that he'll start today.

"I want Eaton. I want to start that game so there is no chance of us getting down," Thompson said. "We won it last year, but they pretty much gave up the game. We didn't win it by ourselves. They gave it to us. We're definitely going to take this one by ourselves this year."

Ayers enters the game knowing this will be his last game in an Eaton uniform.

"It'll be great. For the last year, I've been thinking that I might end up pitching in the state championship game," Ayers said. "We got here. Here we go."