MINNEAPOLIS – To the surprise of certainly no one here, Minnesota is going to the College World Series.

The Gophers won the title Sunday, walking through an NCAA Midwest Regional field that originally included Virginia Tech, Central Michigan and Florida.

The Gophers clearly had the best of both worlds. And while pitching and hitting might seem to be the bottom line in a school’s success story on the baseball field, there have to be other reasons why only 13 schools have won the College World Series in its 30-year existence.

It’s interesting to compare the baseball programs at Tech vs. Minnesota. And once that comparison is made, it no longer leaves one wondering how the Gobblers can win 31 straight games, then go to the NCAA playoffs and last less than 24 hours.

If Tech played Minnesota, the Gobblers would have about as much chance of winning as Mark Belanger would of hitting a home run off Tech Coach Bob Humphreys during the latter’s major league career. In other words, it could happen, because Belanger once “tattered” the man known as Hump. I wouldn’t bet money on the Gobblers in any kind of series with the Gophers.

Humphreys’ team certainly could play with Central Michigan—and did in a 2-1 loss. Only in the hitting department is Florida better than the Gobblers. But compared to those teams, Minnesota is a Secretariat winning the Belmont Stakes by 31 lengths.

To begin with, Minnesota has tradition. This will be the Gophers’ fifth trip to the final eight in Omaha. Dick “Chief” Siebert, a former American League all-star first baseman with the Philadelphia Athletics, is in his 30th year of coaching at Minnesota. Siebert’s teams have won 726 games, putting him second on the all-time coaching victories list to his friend and former Southern California legend Rod Dedeaux.

But tradition isn’t only a song and dance in Fiddler on the Roof. To establish a winning tradition, you have to win—and the best way to do that in collegiate athletics is with quality and quantity.

Bierman Field, the Gophers’ home park on the campus here, must rank with the finest in the nation. It has 3,500 seats, and many of these are under cover in the grandstands behind home plate. A press box accommodates 18 members of the press. The two bullpens are enclosed by fences, and out of the playing area. It’s a hitters’ paradise, with a 10-foot green wall behind the outfield and a 12-foot extension atop the centerfield wall to help the batters.

The dugouts are heated for cold Minnesota days in March and early April. The playing surface produced few bad hops during the tournament.

Comparing Tech Park with Bierman Field wouldn’t be fair, because Minnesota has a junior varsity diamond that is better than the field the Gobblers use at home. The tournament teams used the Jayvee diamond for batting practice. The Jayvee field is lighted.

At Blacksburg, Humphreys and his players roll out fire hoses and drag to sculpture a field that often has bounces you’d swear were caroms off the asphalt at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Neither Siebert nor his assistant—former major league George Thomas—would ever think of dragging the field.

Neither would the Gophers. When Tech finished its pre-tournament workout here Thursday, the Gopher junior varsity players moved in and cleared the field of the equipment. A custodial crew followed, manicuring the surface. Then, those same Jayvee players rolled out a tarpaulin that covered the infiel—just like the major leagues.

First of all, Tech doesn’t even have a tarpaulin, much less a junior varsity team to roll it onto the field. Humphreys uses a couple small pieces of tarp (which dry-rotted seasons ago) to cover the mound and home plate areas at Tech Park. Minnesota covers the plate and the mound—and then the field. The custodial crew—numbering a half-dozen—is able to store its equipment under the grandstand at Bierman Field.

Minnesota’s custodians obviously have been taught how to tend to a baseball field, because Bierman Field is a great place to play or watch a game. Humphreys is not only his own groundskeeper, but he doesn’t even have an assistant coach. Which means that if the Tech coach must go on the road to recruit during the season, there’s no one to oversee practice. Before Thomas arrived, Minnesota’s assistant was ex-Chicago Cub Jerry Kindall, now coach at national power Arizona.

Of course, Minnesota is helped by the fact that it’s THE state university in the Land of 10,000 Lakes. If Siebert wants a player from Minnesota, he gets him. If Humphreys wants a player from Virginia, he battles seven other Division I state schools—including strong Madison—for his services.

But players are not the base of a collegiate baseball program. And because baseball is still considered a “minor” sport (non-revenue) sport in college, most schools will not encourage improvement in their programs.

Humphreys says he has 11 baseball scholarships available. “The NCAA limit is 13,” said the Tech coach. But it’s not scholarships that will bring a baseball program to the status of Minnesota’s.

It’s money. One source who should know said Florida spent $100,000 on its baseball field alone this year. And that doesn’t include the lighting system donated to the Gators by New York Yankee’s Owner George Steinbrenner.

Minnesota played 45 games in its regular season, four more than the Gobblers—and the climate in Gopherland isn’t exactly conducive to Aubrey Doubleday’s invention. And Minnesota’s Jayvee team isn’t just a practice squad. The younger Gophers play a 36-game schedule against junior colleges and small college varsities in Minnesota.

Schedules plus scholarships are not the formula that adds up to success in college baseball. It’s not the number of coaches on the staff, although that’s a factor. But why should Humphreys wonder about an assistant when he can’t even get a tarp?

Minnesota’s program gets relief from other sources than the bullpen. And after the Gobblers have reached the final 34 in the NCAA playoffs two years straight—no small accomplishment—it’s time for the people doling out Tech’s athletic money to learn that baseball isn’t just another sport that goes on in the shadow of spring football practice.

And until Tech’s opinion of its baseball program takes a step in Minnesota’s direction, the Gobblers can expect to do no better in future NCAA appearances than they did in the last two