Madonna making 1st season a success

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

Eleven games into the season, Mike George isn't happy. Not that the team he coaches, Madonna College baseball, is doing poorly; the Fighting Crusaders were 4-7 after Monday's double-header loss at Siena Heights.

That's what bothered George. Madonna could've won both games; instead, the lost twice by 5-4 scores, the second in 13 innings. The Crusaders had leads in each game, but couldn't sustain them.

"I want things to happen yesterday," the impatient former Redford Bishop Borgess coach says of building the Madonna baseball program.

What George wants to happen — a winning team able to challenge the big boys, like the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan and the University of Detroit — may not be too far into the future.

"We've been in every ballgame," George claimed. "Our pitching is as good as I could hope for. Where we are right now is where I hoped we'd be at the end of the season."

WHERE THE CRUSADERS are right now isn't that bad. They outhit Siena 25-12 Monday, but lost because they also out-erred them, committing eight miscues to the Saints' one. In the opener, Rich Gierczak, Eric Terlicki and Shaun Hayward each had two hits, with Gierczak and Hayward driving in runs.

Siena won with a run in the seventh on an error by Gierczak, a single, a fielder's choice, an intentional walk and a walk by losing pitcher Greg St. John to Craig Matthews (from Southfield), which forced in the winning run.

The second game was another tight battle. Madonna took a 4-3 lead with a run in the seventh on Hayward's triple and a single by Mike Wieczak (from Livonia Franklin), but Siena tied it on a two-out base hit by Matthews in the bottom half of the inning.

Two errors in the 13th inning made the Saints' winners. An error by third baseman St. John put a runner on base, and another by an outfielder on Dennis Szczechowski's single scored the game-winner. Mike Hocking, pitching in relief of Hayward, was the losing pitcher.

BERNIE BOWLING had three hits in the game for Madonna, with Gierczak, Hayward, St. John, Steve Coffell and Wieczak getting two apiece. Ken Nuss had hits for Siena.

"We're killing ourselves," said George. "If we can just eliminate that one mistake that's killing us every game. I think our team took another step up the ladder today. We started on the bottom, and right now we could be using our status as a new team as an excuse, that we're not expected to win. But we're not."

Madonna didn't solidify its schedule quickly enough last fall to be able to challenge for the NAIA District 23 championship. That will have to wait until next year. But George's building process is proceeding according to plan — maybe ahead of it.

George, who coached the Borgess varsity for three seasons, had only six players when he took command in November. He has just 15 now, and two of them are injured.

BUT THE SUPPORT is there, especially from his assistant coaches: Ed Dreslinski, who played at Borgess, and Milt Wilcox.

Sound familiar? Yep, that's the same Milt Wilcox that tossed the American League pennant-clinching game for the Detroit Tigers in 1984. George met Wilcox at a baseball clinic a few years ago and, when George was applying for college coaching positions, he used Wilcox as a reference.

When George got the job at Madonna, he contacted Wilcox and asked him if he'd like to be his pitching coach. Wilcox agreed.

"Having Milt Wilcox in our program is a real plus," admitted George. "No, he's not at every practice or at every game (he's made seven or eight of 11). But he's taught the (pitchers) how to be aggressive, how to set up hitters. He has 19 years of pro experience, and he's very good relating to the kids. He's very down to earth."

That's a location Madonna may not be for long. The Crusaders are already looking skyward.

LAST SATURDAY, Madonna won a pair of games at Michigan Christian College. The Crusaders beat Great Lakes Bible College 14-4, then walloped the host team 20-5.

In the opener, Pete Berrios drove home five runs with a double and a fourth-inning three-run homer. Wieczak added a triple and a double, scoring twice; Steve Coffell had two hits and an RBI; Fred Cahill drove in two runs with two hits; and Jim Boucher ignited a seven-run fourth inning with a two-run double.

Eric Terlicki was the winning pitcher, lasting 4½ innings and surrendering four earned runs on seven hits and five walks.

In the second game, Madonna accumulated 22 hits, with Terlicki getting four (with one RBI); Boucher, Gierczak and Coffell adding three apiece (Boucher drove in five runs, Gierczak three); and Hayward and Kevin Krotcke two each (Hayward had four RBI).

Hocking was the winning pitcher in this one. The southpaw surrendered five runs on eight hits and a walk in five innings, striking out five.

Michigan Christian fell to 0-3 with the loss. Great Lakes Bible is 0-1.

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