

Baseball

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"We had our one and two go Saturday," Sontag said. "We felt we needed a fresh arm. He's like our third pitcher."

"But we went 13-1 in our league, and we did it with three pitchers. All three were ready, but Ely was obviously the one today."

The Hawks (28-7) had just two singles off Ely, who faced two batters more than the minimum. Danny Doig hit safely in the first, but Harrison didn't have another hit until Andy Wingert in the eighth. Both were erased on forceouts.

"It didn't seem like his pitches had much velocity, but the ball was moving and we couldn't hit it," Harrison coach John Herrington said of Ely's pitching.

Herrington downplayed the effect of a strong wind blowing in from center field.

"I don't think it was too much of a factor, because we hit mostly ground balls," he said. "We didn't hit any balls to the outfield that they had to play on."

"We had been hitting the ball great throughout the tournament, but we didn't hit today."

Rob Whipple started for Harrison and had a no-hitter through three innings, but he struggled a little by getting behind in the count.

Herrington brought in Drew Stanton after Whipple gave up consecutive hits to start the fourth. Stanton finished the game, giving up three more hits and three walks while striking out five.

"We struggle against a kid like Stanton," Sontag said. "He's the hardest thrower we've seen all

year. We don't see a guy like that. Any opportunity we get we're going to take it, and that was it."

That opportunity occurred in the bottom of the eighth, and the Bears (30-6) capitalized on it to win the game and advance to the semifinals Friday in Battle Creek against Essexville-Garber. Tyler Bondy hit a leadoff single, and Ryan Sontag bunted him to second; however, Stanton overthrew first base, putting runners at second and third.

Stanton issued an intentional pass to A.J. Eppler to load the bases. After a strikeout, Ely hit a flyball to short right field.

Harrison's Mike Sacha made the catch, but his throw to the plate was off the third base line bit; Bondy was able to slide in safely with the winning run.

"Obviously, we had a tough time scoring runs all day," Dave Sontag said. "We looked at it as an opportunity. It was a chance we had to take the third base line."

"We took a chance earlier on a flyball to left field and they threw us out. We're a club that likes to force the issue. We're not a team that sits back and waits to see what happens."

In the fourth, Jefferson ranners at second and third with one out. Richard Goltowski's flyball to left was caught by Danny Doig, who made a perfect throw to catcher Bill Richeson for the putout on Eppler.

Sacha fielded a hit by Ryan Wagner in the fifth and threw to second baseman Nick Vitanis, who relayed to shortstop Andy Wingert for an out as Wagner tried stretching it into a double.

Harrison third baseman Jake Ghanam also made some big defensive plays early in the game. He made long throws across the diamond for outs and had five assists in the first three innings.

"We played great defense," Herrington said. "We made a mistake, but the bottom line is we didn't score any runs."

"We won six tournaments and set a record for wins. The seniors did a lot for the baseball tradition. The good thing is we have eight or nine solid players coming back."

Each team made two errors. With Ely holding the line on the mound, the Bears were steady when they had to be.

"Defense and pitching have been the hallmarks of this squad all year, and we did it again today," Sontag said.

Hawks top Irish in regional final

By DAN O'MEARA

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Coach Angelo Gust thought three runs would give his Harper Woods Notre Dame baseball team a fighting chance Saturday afternoon against Farmington Harrison.

He knew Harrison pitcher Drew Stanton would be tough to be beat, which he was, but Gust didn't count on the Hawks getting 15 hits off four Fighting Irish pitchers.

That was more than enough to give Harrison a 7-3 victory in a Division II regional tournament final at Pontiac Notre Dame Prep High School.

It was the first regional championship for the Hawks since 1985. Harrison faced Monroe Jefferson in a state quarterfinal game Tuesday.

"We figured, if we could get three runs off Stanton, we'd be in the ballgame," Gust said. "But, unfortunately, they sat seven."

"In this game here, you can't give up the big inning. They maximized their inning and we didn't. With a guy like Stanton on the mound, that neutralizes things."

The inning to which Gust referred was a two-run fourth, which gave Harrison a 4-1 lead.

The Hawks started the decisive rally with three straight singles by Andy Wingert, Nick Vitanis and Rob Whipple, who put down a perfect bunt to load the bases.

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Eye on the ball: Harrison's Drew Stanton fields a bunt in Tuesday's quarterfinal.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREZLER

The Hawks added three more in the sixth to clinch the deal. Irish reliever Steve Schwartz departed after giving up a two-run double to Zerbo with Doig (single) and Stanton (double) on base.

The next Notre Dame pitcher issued consecutive walks and was quickly removed. The last one surrendered an RBI groundout to Rob Whipple before ending the inning.

Doig was 3-for-4; Ghanam, Stanton, Zerbo, Whipple and Hocking had two hits apiece. The other hits were from Andy Wingert and Nick Vitanis.

"The good thing about this team is that we can start a rally anywhere in the lineup," Herrington said, adding the Hawks also play good defense.

"The five, six, seven batters can hit and move the ball. If you're down one and have the last part of

the lineup coming up, usually you're dead in the water. But it's not like that."

Embree, Mike Maltese and Mike Melnyk had two hits each for Notre Dame.

As well as Harrison has done in baseball in recent years, it's image as a football school supercedes that success in the mind of others.

A half dozen baseball players were on the Harrison football team that won a record 12th state championship last fall.

Furthermore, the Hawks look more physically mature than most teams, especially with 6-foot-4 Stan pitching and hitting No. 3 in the order and 6-2 Zerbo batting cleanup.

"Take a good look at them," Gust said. "Do they look like a baseball team? I asked No. 99 (Anthony Faletti) if he was a

defensive end instead of a pinch-hitter.

"They're a Division I ballclub. They (The Michigan High School Athletic Association) have no business dropping them to Division II in baseball."

"They won Division I in football. Leave them in Division I and see how they do. They played in Division I all year and now they're playing Division II."

A reporter raised three fingers to indicate the Hawks actually won Division III in football, but it didn't matter; Gust was on a roll.

"There's no complaints, no crying," Gust added. "I've known John Herrington a long time. But they are a pretty mature ballclub. I guess I have to feed my kids more."

Depending on the sport, Harrison has always been either Division II or III since the MHSAA assigned schools to divisions.

While the Hawks have been Division II throughout the baseball season, they did play virtually all Division I schools, including every Western Lakes Activities Association opponent.

HARRISON 10, AVONDALE 0: Rob Whipple pitched a one-hit shutout Saturday in a regional semifinal game at Pontiac Notre Dame Prep. Whipple struck out eight as Harrison mercifully Auburn Hills Avondale in six innings. It was 2-0 until the sixth when the Hawks scored eight runs. Andy Wingert, Nick Vitanis and Bill Richeson had two hits apiece. Whipple helped his cause with three RBI. Harrison had no errors.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREZLER

He's outta there: Harrison shortstop Andy Wingert makes a forceout on Jefferson's Ryan Wagner in the quarterfinal game Tuesday.

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