

Panthers upset Shamrocks, state's No. 1 team

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BASEBALL

Redford Union coaches Rick Berryman and Shawn McGowan kept reminding their players afterwards: "It's only one game."

But who could blame the Panthers for being a little bit giddy and in the mood for celebrating following a come-from-behind, 4-3 victory over Michigan's juggernaut in high school baseball — No. 1-ranked Redford Catholic Central.

Down 3-1 after five innings, RU manufactured two runs in the sixth inning and scored the game-winning on a safety suicide-squeeze bunt with the bases loaded in the bottom of the seventh to snap CC's unbeaten streak at 20.

This was no ordinary non-league matchup between schools located within two miles of each other.

The Shamrocks had jumped into the No. 12 spot in USA Today and were rated among the top 20 teams nationally by Baseball America.

RU was 19-3 overall and ranked in the top 10 in Division I of the state coaches' poll.

"It's against a crosstown rival

who's ranked No. 1 in the state and I thought our guys were to the occasion," said Berryman, "especially after the way we lost our second game on Saturday (9-7 to Walled Lake Central).

"To come back this big with no practice in between (on Sunday), I have to commend our guys."

During Friday's school pep assembly on Friday, the RU baseballers made a pact toward team unity by dying their hair blonde.

Junior Mike Hayes proved to be RU's biggest bombshell, pitching 3½ scoreless innings in relief of starter Sean O'Connor to raise his record to 3-0.

The 5-foot-11, 158-pound Hayes also doubled to start the bottom of the seventh inning and eventually scored the game-winning run.

Hayes scored home from third when Mike Taylor's one-out push-bunt with the sacks full eluded CC pitcher Anthony Tomney.

"Mike is such a good shortstop, I don't like starting him," Berryman said of Hayes, who has eight mound appearances with

one save. "He came up real big today. He's probably one of the best 'gamers' you'll ever see. The bigger the situation, the better he seems to do."

Neither team powdered the baseball — the squads collecting just five hits apiece.

CC, known for its long-ball attack led by All-Staters Casey Rogowski and Bob Malek, came into the game hitting .331 as a team.

RU, meanwhile, was hitting an eye-popping .403 with a penchant for the long-ball too.

"I was proud of our pitchers (O'Connor and Hayes) because they changed speeds and kept the ball down," Berryman said. "It was a game where both teams had to create runs."

CC started its ace, Tomney, a 6-foot-3, 235-pound right-hander headed to Eastern Michigan University.

He went all seven innings in the 85-degree-plus heat, striking out 12 and walking six. Tomney, however, showed no signs of fatigue despite throwing a total of 124 pitches.

Although he was working under a regular ball-strike count instead of the Catholic League's 3-2 format, some of Tomney's

pitches were gunned as high as 92 MPH.

"Anthony said he wanted to finish the game and he felt fine — he's a competitor," CC coach John Salter said. "He hadn't pitched since Tuesday (May 11) so he had plenty of rest."

"We just messed up on a bunt and on a groundball. We just made too many mistakes against a good team."

RU jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the first when designated hitter Mike Macek doubled, took third on a passed ball and scored after teaming up with courtesy runner Eric Newton on a delayed double-steal. (Newton was running for catcher Matt Rigley after he had walked.)

CC got a run back in the second on Matt Loring's RBI single scoring Dave Lusky to tie it at 1-1.

The Shamrocks scored twice in the fourth.

Nick DiBella's RBI sacrifice fly brought one run home and Mario Diferin scored on an RBI infield error for a 3-1 CC advantage.

The Shamrocks appeared to be primed to increase their lead in the top of the sixth by getting two runners aboard with no outs, but a groundout and runner's

interference call at second base, followed by another groundout, got Hayes out of the inning.

"We had our chances early and guys on base, but couldn't seem to get the big hit when we needed it," Salter said. "Hayes did a real nice job."

In the sixth, RU loaded the bases with two outs.

Joel Halliday singled, Macek reached base safely on an infield error and Rigley followed with a sharp single to center.

Taylor then walked to cut the deficit to 3-2 and Macek scored on Kris Montanaro's groundout to knot the count at 3-all.

Tomney then struck out Nick Dye to end the inning.

RU then went to its bunt-game in the seventh after Hayes opened with a double to right field.

Halliday's sacrifice bunt was not fielded cleanly and Macek was intentionally walked to load the bases.

Rigley then dropped another bunt down, only to see it just dribble foul. (He eventually struck out.)

"We spent almost a whole practice one day last week working on bunts because at the end of the year it can be a real value

of ours," Berryman said.

The Panthers then rolled the dice again, trying and successfully executing the safety squeeze play with the very next batter — Taylor — laying it down on the first pitch from Tomney.

"We knew they wanted to put the ball somewhere in play and maybe we should have called a pitchout," Salter said. "It was a good play on their part."

Berryman defers all such decisions to his third-base coach — McGowan.

"The bunt was his call," Berryman said of his assistant. "It was a gutsy move to do it twice in a row."

It was also a game which proved CC to be human.

"They're disappointed to lose, but more disappointed not to play better," Salter said. "We'll see where we made our mistakes and hopefully we'll learn from them and not make them again."

Meanwhile, the victory elevated the Panthers as a state contender. They beat the Shamrocks without ace Halliday, who was being saved for Wednesday's Mega-White Division matchup with Trenton.

"They're a solid team, no doubt," Salter said.

Cobras start season with tourney triumph

The 14-year-old North Farmington-West Bloomfield Cobras travel baseball team started a new season by winning the first tournament of 1999 in Clarkston May 2.

The Cobras outscored their opponents by a combined score of 50-4 over five games. Solid defense, exceptional pitching and consistent hitting were the keys to the Cobras' success.

NFWB defeated the Rochester Yankees in the first game of pool play, 11-1.

Andy Wingert earned a win on the mound as he and reliever Bryan Smith held the Yankees to one hit and an unearned run.

Kevin Zerbo swung the big bat, going 2-for-2 with a home run and a triple while knocking in four runs.

In the second game, the Cobras defeated Hartland, 15-1. Nick Vitanis got the win as the starting pitcher before giving

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way to Danny Lentz and Doug Pickens in relief.

Danny Graham exploded at the plate with a home run and a triple and four RBI. Sam Grossman, Lentz and Wingert contributed two hits apiece; Lentz and Wingert knocked in three runs each.

NFWB advanced to the quarterfinal game against the Oakland Sox with a forfeit victory over their third pool-play opponent.

The Cobras defeated the Sox, 11-1. Graham picked up the win with Ben Darga pitching the last two innings in relief.

It was Darga's first appearance on the mound since suffering a broken knee last June when he collided with another player. It was apparent surgery

and extensive physical therapy allowed Darga to regain his former pitching form.

Lentz and Vitanis paced a balanced hitting attack with two hits apiece. Graham connected for a three-run homer, his second of the tournament.

The Cobras defeated the Michigan Wolves in the semifinals, 12-0. Lentz and Darga combined their pitching talents to accomplish the shutout.

Lentz, who moved into the leadoff spot after Grossman was injured in Game 3, went 3-for-5 with two RBI and two runs scored.

Zerbo collected his second home run with two runs on base. Matt Petry and Pickens had two hits apiece.

Smith made the defensive play of the game with a diving catch in right field to end the fifth inning with two runners aboard. The championship game ended

in an 11-1 victory for the Cobras over the Rochester Reds.

Petry and Lentz went 2-for-3 at the plate to spark the offense.

Matt Clark contributed a big single after Graham led off with a double, sparking a six-run rally that broke the game open.

Graham and Vitanis handled the pitching duties, holding the Reds to two hits while walking only one batter.

Lentz led the Cobras with a tournament batting average of .714 and was followed by Petry, who batted .545.

Vitanis led the team by scoring nine runs, and Zerbo led the team with nine RBI. The NFWB roster includes Evan Rodriguez, who didn't play in the tournament due to an injury.

The Cobras are coached by Dan Petry and Randy Rodriguez. The team is sponsored by Leo's Cony Island.

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the fourth inning on route to a 16-5 five-inning mercy-rule victory over host Walled Lake Central.

Stevenson, which captured its seventh straight, improved to 14-7 overall and 7-2 in the Lakes (tied with North Farmington).

The Spartans were defeated 2-2 after three innings, but exploded for 14 runs in the fourth as the first 11 batters scored.

Steve Anderson smacked a grand slam to spark the assault, while Brandon Gajda and Phil Szwedowski each added three-run shots. Pete Pinto contributed a solo homer.

Anderson finished with two hits and five RBI. Dave Siewko added two hits, including a two-run single. Dan Wilson was 2-for-2 with two runs scored.

Brad Buckler, the winning pitcher, gave up five hits and three walks over five innings.

STEVENSON 10, NORTHVILLE 0: In a MIAA crossover (Tuesday), the Spartans (15-7) won their eighth straight against the Mustangs (12-6) as Roy Rabe and Dan Wilson each went 3-for-4.

The game went only six innings because of the 10-run mercy rule.

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