

## 'Zach! Zach! Zach!' blanks Saints again

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 25 June 2014 21:50 -

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The Kennedy Cougars invented a new chant in honor of junior Zach Daniels Wednesday night after he pitched a shutout against Xavier for the second time this year.

"Zach! Zach! Zach!" they sang as Daniels emerged from the visitors dugout at Ken Charipar Field for a post-game interview.

"It's a little annoying," the honoree said, smiling, "but that's OK."

Daniels tossed a five-hit shutout as No.3 Kennedy blanked the Saints, 1-0, in the second game of a Mississippi Valley Conference doubleheader.

Earlier this season, he pitched a one-hitter against Xavier and beat Mitch Keller in the semifinals of the Metro Tournament. Kennedy won the opener Wednesday, 13-4.

Daniels has thrown 14 innings against the Saints this year, allowing just six hits and no runs.

"He's a good ballplayer," said Xavier Coach Dave Schemmel. "He's probably first team all-state, isn't he? Has he given up a run all year?"

Daniels (5-0) has given up just two earned runs in 37 innings for a sparkling 0.38 ERA in six starts. He's pitched four shutouts and is the ace of a talented young staff.

The Cougars raised their records to 18-2 overall and 14-2 in the conference. Kennedy pitchers

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have thrown 10 shutouts in 20 games.

"I'm ecstatic to be 18 and 2," said Kennedy Coach Bret Hoyer. "That's not something I would have expected at this time of year."

Daniels was not razor sharp against the Saints this time, unlike the Metro Tournament when he carried a no-hitter into the seventh inning. He was plenty good, however.

"Today I wasn't at my best locating pitches and throwing strikes, but I got enough outs and the defense made enough plays," he said.

Daniels was an effective pitcher for Kennedy last year, but he's taken his game to another level at 5-0 with the 0.38 ERA.

"I wasn't expecting this good," he said. "But I've been throwing strikes and our defense has really helped me out. I've got to give them credit."

Xavier had runners on first and second with two outs in the bottom of the fifth when Jake Robinson hit a rocket that appeared headed to left field.

Kennedy third baseman Ben Sass dove quickly to his left and made a sensational catch to keep the game scoreless.

"That saved a run right there," said Daniels.

Xavier left-hander Ryan Flaherty matched Daniels for five innings before the Cougars broke through in the top of the sixth for the game's only run.

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Derek Jacobus led off with a single, advanced to second on a balk, moved to third on a wild pitch and scored on a sacrifice fly by Matt Stevens.

Daniels got the first two outs in the bottom of the seventh, but then he hit Drake Wawro with a pitch to keep the Saints alive. Nolan Arp, a pesky left-handed hitter for Xavier, flied out to center field to end the game.

Daniels had a 5-0 lead in the seventh inning in the first game against Xavier this year. A 1-0 lead is a lot more exciting.

"The intensity is way higher," he said. "You know you want to go out there and close it for your team, so it's a good feeling."

Daniels enjoys pitching against the Saints. He went to school in the Catholic system from kindergarten through the fifth grade before switching to public schools. He likes facing his former school mates.

"It feels pretty good, especially since I grew up with most of them," he said. "So it's fun to get back and play against them."

The Saints (12-10, 6-10) jumped to a 3-0 lead against Sammy Lizarraga and the Cougars in the opener, but Kennedy battled back and won easily.

The Cougars took a 6-4 lead in the fourth inning on a two-run single by Tyler Dralle and they put the game away with a seven-run outburst in the seventh. Jacobus, Stevens, Daniels, Sass, Dralle and Jimmy Cunningham had two hits for Kennedy and Lizarraga had a two-run double.

Lizarraga (4-0) settled down and pitched a complete game. "I got stronger as the game went on

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and improved," he said.

### Game 1

Kennedy 002 400 7 - 13 11 3

Xavier 301 000 0 - 4 5 6

W - Lizarraga. L - Drahozal.

### Game 2

Kennedy 000 001 0 - 1 6 0

Xavier 000 000 0 - 0 5 0

W - Daniels. L - Flaherty.