

Appleget shines as Cougars claim Metro title

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 23 May 2012 23:53 - Last Updated Thursday, 24 May 2012 00:05

Nick Appleget left Veterans Memorial Stadium Wednesday night with bags of ice taped to his left elbow and right shoulder, but that's nothing.

His whole body has taken a beating during his career at Cedar Rapids Kennedy. He's had three operations on his left knee, including two for torn ACLs and one for a torn meniscus.

"All in three years," he said. "I haven't missed a baseball season yet, though. I had to give up all the other sports, so I'm banking on this one. It's the only one I've got left."

Appleget began his final prep baseball season in grand style Wednesday in the championship game of the Bob Vrbicek Metro Tournament, despite getting plunked by a pitch on his left elbow that caused numbness and left a nice little bump.

Appleget carried a no-hitter into the sixth inning as the top-ranked Cougars thumped Prairie, 9-0, to win their third straight Metro title and seventh in the last 12 years.

Jason Velvick lined a clean single to right field with two outs in the top of the sixth inning to end the no-hitter, but by then the Cougars were sitting on a fat 8-0 lead. Appleget got the final out in the sixth and retired for the night with nine strikeouts, one walk and one hit.

Zach Johnson pitched a 1-2-3 inning in the seventh with two more strikeouts, giving the Kennedy pitchers 11 for the contest.

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Until recently, Appleget wasn't sure if he'd be able to pitch in the Metro tournament due to soreness in his knee.

"I've had a rough past week with my knee. I couldn't walk up the stairs last week. My bad left knee," he said ruefully.

He's also had "issues" with his right elbow this year, but looked good and felt good against the Prairie Hawks. He threw his low-80's fastball and curveball for strikes and needed only 67 pitches in six innings.

Appleget had a tough act to follow in the Metro tournament after Alex Hayden and Adam Lloyd pitched exceptional games in the first two rounds for Kennedy. Hayden struck out 14 batters and allowed only two hits in 6.1 innings when the Cougars blanked Washington 4-0 in the first round, then Lloyd allowed only two hits in a five-inning 12-2 verdict over Linn-Mar in the semifinals.

"These three seniors have been terrific," said Kennedy Coach Bret Hoyer.

Kennedy pitchers have struck out 27 batters in 19 innings this season. They've allowed only five hits, six walks and two runs (one earned). The team earned run average is a miniscule 0.37 so far.

"They're throwing good and they're hitting their spots and keeping hitters off-balance," said Kennedy catcher Chico Lizarraga, who has been a rock behind the plate. "It's fun. The umpire loves it, too, because they just throw strike after strike after strike."

Kennedy assistant coach Jake Waddle calls the pitches, Lizarraga flashes the signs and the pitchers deliver. "I think they have a high degree of confidence and comfort in Chico Lizarraga as their catcher and coach Waddle calling pitches," noted Hoyer.

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The anticipated showdown between the No. 1 Cougars and No. 9 Prairie Hawks got out of hand early. Kennedy scored seven unearned runs in the second inning thanks to two infield errors, three walks, a hit batter (Appleget) and a two-run single by Cody Bell against Prairie junior Mitch Adams.

Appleget kept mowing them down as the game went along, and the only question was whether the Hawks would get a base hit before it ended.

This will be Appleget's final season of organized baseball. He plans to enroll at the University of Northern Iowa and major in graphic arts and design. He's already won awards in those areas and is looking forward to college.

"No baseball," he said. "I'm giving my body a break. I love the game, but I'm not ready to have a knee replacement."

PRAIRIE (0)

Velvick, cf, 3 0 1 0, Hammer, 1b, 2 0 0 0, Carlson, 2b, 2 0 0 0, Steffens, ph, 1 0 0 0, Butz, 3b, 2 0 0 0, Swanson, ph, 1 0 0 0, Votroubek, dh/p, 2 0 0 0, Adams, p, 0 0 0 0, Henry, ph, 1 0 0 0, Alberts, lf, 2 0 0 0, Peters, rf, 2 0 0 0, Pond, c, 2 0 0 0, Mouglin, ss, 2 0 0 0. Totals 22 0 1 0.

KENNEDY (9)

Jahlas, cf, 3 1 1 0, Ambrosy, rf, 4 1 1 1, Bell, 1b, 3 1 2 3, Devon Jacobus, 2b, 1 1 0 0, Appleget, p, 2 0 0 1, A. Johnson, cr, 0 0 0 0, Oltmann, ph, 1 0 0 0, Z. Johnson, p, 0 0 0 0, Derek Jacobus, ss, 2 2 2 1, Maiers, dh, 3 0 0 0, Hayden, lf, 0 0 0 0, Skow, 3b, 3 1 1 1, Lizarraga, c, 3 2 2 1, Lloyd, cr, 0 0 0 0, Jurgensen, ph, 1 0 0 0. Totals 26 9 9 8.

Prairie 000 000 0 - 0 1 2

Kennedy 071 001 x - 9 9 0

Adams, Votroubek (3) and Pond. Appleget, Z. Johnson (7) and Lizarraga. W - Appleget. L - Adams. 2B - Derek Jacobus. SB - Derek Jacobus.