

Prairie stopped in substate finals

Written by Jim Ecker

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The most successful season in school history ended a step too soon for the Cedar Rapids Prairie baseball team Wednesday night.

The Hawks ran into one of the hottest clubs in America and lost to Iowa City West, 5-2, in the Class 4A substate finals before an overflow crowd at the Prairie diamond.

Prairie smashed the school record with 31 victories this year and captured the first Mississippi Valley Conference title in school history, but the Hawks played the wrong dang club on the wrong night Wednesday.

Iowa City West, which dropped both ends of a doubleheader to Prairie earlier in the year, has won 19 of its last 21 games and is sizzling right now.

"They look a lot different," said Prairie center fielder Jalen Rima. "They got a lot better since we played them last."

Prairie hurler Drew Yanecek and Iowa City West pitcher Austin Miller were locked in a 1-1 game after five innings, but the visitors broke loose for four runs in the top of the sixth to take control.

Iowa City West (32-11) will meet Des Moines East (23-20) in the quarterfinals of the Class 4A state tournament next Wednesday in Des Moines

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"They're hot," said Prairie Coach Todd Rima. "And Miller is really good right now. Tip your hat to him. And every time they needed a clutch hit, they got it. They're playing lights-out.

"I would not want to play them in Des Moines right now if I was one of the teams qualifying."

Wednesday's battle between No. 5 Prairie and No. 8 Iowa City West was worthy of a state tournament, with both clubs ranked among the best in Iowa with more than 30 victories. Unfortunately for the Hawks, they got stuck with the Trojans in a tough substate.

There were a lot of bleary eyes and unhappy Hawks after they finished the year at 31-8, but a little sun broke through.

"I'm just proud of our team," said senior Trey Beckman. "I'm just proud of everyone. If you would have told me in April that we would win 31 games and we'd have a shot in the bottom of the seventh to win the substate final, I don't know if I would have believed you."

Prairie won 14 games last year and more than doubled that amount this season under Todd Rima in his first year with the Hawks.

"Everyone's head is down right now," said Beckman, "but I think in a week or two when this kind of wears off, I think everyone is going to be extremely proud of what we've done."

Prairie brought the tying run to the plate in the bottom of the seventh inning, but Iowa City West relief pitcher Izaya Ono-Fullard got a strikeout to end the game. The Hawks enjoyed several big comebacks this season, but they ran out of miracles.

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Prairie fans, excited by the club's success, began reserving spots at the diamond on Monday by placing their lawn chairs between home plate and the
Prairie dugout on the first-base side. All of the bleachers were full
Wednesday night, the lawn chairs were stacked several rows deep and fans lined the fences along both foul lines.

Coach Rima called it a great atmosphere for a high school baseball game and a tribute to his club.

"Twenty-eight guys brought into what we were trying to do and they made a lot of people proud," he said. "I couldn't be any more proud of them."

Iowa City West also brought a large contingent of fans to the game.

Iowa City West catcher Spencer Wiskus belted an RBI double to give the Trojans a 2-1 lead in the sixth inning. Oliver Martin followed with an RBI
single to make it 3-1 and chase Yanecek, and Tanner Lohaus gave Iowa City West a 5-1 advantage with a two-run single.



The Hawks, aggressive on the basepaths all season, lost three runners on the bases at pivotal times in the ballgame. Corbin Day was gunned down at
third base trying to stretch a double into a triple -- Rima gave him the green light -- and Beckman ran through a stop sign and was nabbed at third trying for an extra base after his single was booted by the left fielder.

Cal Clark was thrown out at second base after he hit an RBI single, but the Trojans got him on a throw from the catcher following a throw from the
right fielder.

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"That's who we are at Prairie," said Coach Rima. "That's how we've played all year, and we're not going to change the way we play in the substate final game."

It took a perfect relay to get Day at third base and Beckman was tagged after his hard slide carried him beyond the bag. "How do you fault somebody for giving everything they've got?," said Rima, who patted Beckman on the back after the play.

"I was safe. I just slid past the bag," said Beckman. "It was a mistake. It happens in baseball. I just wish it wouldn't have happened in the situation tonight. There's nothing that can be done now. It hurts a little."

Iowa City West was saddled with a 13-9 record after dropping both ends of a doubleheader to Kennedy on June 19, which was approximately the time that the IHSAA made the substate groupings and put the Trojans in the same substate with Prairie. If the IHSAA had waited a few more weeks, it surely would have placed the teams in different substates.

Iowa City West got healthy and caught fire, and now the Trojans are headed to Des Moines.

"We just kept battling and tried to get better," said Iowa City West Coach Charlie Stumpff. "We kind of got a second wind and feel real good about ourselves right now."

Kevin DeLaney, Ono-Fullard and Wiskus all had two hits for the Trojans at the top of the batting order. Wiskus, a strong catcher, collected two doubles.

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Iowa City West 100 004 0 - 5 9 2

Prairie 001 001 0 - 2 5 0

W - Miller. L - Yanecek. S - Ono-Fullard.