

Prairie slams 'Hammer' on Wahawks

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 19 July 2013 22:44 - Last Updated Friday, 19 July 2013 23:07



Brennan Hammer is still waiting to pitch his best game of the season for the Cedar Rapids Prairie baseball team.

It could come in the Class 4A substate finals against Xavier next week, if the Hawks continue to take care of business.

Hammer struck out eight batters in 4 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings Friday night as Prairie spanked Waterloo West, 9-2, in the substate opener at Prairie.

The sixth-ranked Hawks (26-12) will host Marshalltown (17-24) in the substate semifinals Monday at 7 p.m., with the winner meeting the 10th-ranked Xavier Saints in the substate finals Wednesday at Xavier.

Hammer enjoyed a terrific season last year as a junior when he compiled a 7-1 record and 2.76 ERA, with 63 strikeouts and only 13 walks in 45 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

His statistics are not quite as good this year, but the lefthander is still a tough cookie.

"Last year everything kind of went right," said Hammer. "I haven't thrown as well this year, but we're still winning ballgames."

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"It hasn't been a bad year, but it doesn't compare to the year I had last year."

Hammer has a 5-2 record and 2.86 ERA this season, with 62 strikeouts and 20 walks in 58 2/3 innings. It's been a good year, but he doesn't seem to have the same "bite" on his curveball that made him unhittable at times in 2012.

"Even when he's not consistent, he's still pretty tough," said Coach Matt Thede. "He has a lot of movement on his pitches, and that makes him tough to hit."

Thede said Hammer has not thrown as many changups this season, an effective pitch that kept batters lunging in 2012, but Thede said they've been using it more recently.

"That's going to be key for him," the coach said. "He hasn't been throwing it as much."



Mike Schwabe, a former Major League pitcher who had been Hammer's personal pitching coach, moved to California this year. Schwabe's absence may have hindered Hammer a little this year.

"That's not an excuse," said Hammer, "but it could be one reason."

Prairie jumped on Waterloo West (6-32) for four runs in the bottom of the first inning. Dylan Becker led off with a bunt single, Ty Mouglin belted an RBI double to left-center and Hammer singled to right field as the first three hitters all reached base.

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Caleb Davison drove in a run with a fielder's choice and Trey Beckman hit a two-out, two-run single to make it 4-0.

The Hawks made it 5-0 in the second inning. Becker led off with a walk, Hammer singled to left and Tyler Butz drove in Becker with a single.

Prairie grabbed an 8-0 lead in the third inning on RBI singles by Beckman, Becker and Mouglin. At that point, it looked like the Hawks were headed for a mercy killing and a quick night, but Waterloo West refused to quit.

The Wahawks scored twice in the top of the fifth inning to make it 8-2 and chased Hammer from the mound after 4 2/3 innings. Only one of the two runs was earned.

Spencer Dean, feeling good again after missing nearly a month with a sore elbow, relieved Hammer and collected three strikeouts with his mid-80's fastball in 1 1/3 innings.

Prairie scored its final run in the sixth inning on a single by Butz, a walk to Davison, a single by Tyler Votroubek and a double-play grounder.

Ben Milks pitched a scoreless seventh inning for the Hawks.

Thede liked the way his club played Friday night.

"I feel we have our confidence back," he said. "That's definitely a good win."

"I think we played pretty well tonight," agreed Hammer. "I'm confident we can go to state if we

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just play baseball.

"That's our goal. For us in the senior class, that's been our goal for awhile now."

Prairie will need to win six straight games in the postseason tournament to capture the state title.

"One down and five to go," said Thede. "Our team has some lofty goals."

WATERLOO WEST (2): Evans, cf, 3 1 0 0, Draeger, 2b, 4 0 0 0, Fricke, 3b, 4 0 2 1, Ohrt, 1b/p, 3 0 1 0, Wellner, cr, 0 0 0 0, Conrey, p/1b, 3 0 0 1, Ubbelohde, c, 3 0 1 0, Katz, cr, 0 0 0 0, Ticknor, rf, 3 0 0 0, Price, lf, 3 0 1 0, Medina, ss, 3 1 1 0. Totals 29 2 6 2.

PRAIRIE (9): Becker, 2b, 3 2 2 1, T.Mougin, ss, 4 1 2 2, Hammer, p/rf, 4 0 2 0, Benson, cr, 0 1 0 0, Milks, p, 0 0 0 0, Butz, 3b, 4 1 2 1, Davison, lf, 3 1 0 1, Votroubek, 1b, 4 1 2 0, Benson, pr, 0 0 0 0, Beckman, dh, 4 1 2 3, Peters, rf/cf, 3 0 0 0, Stallman, cf, 2 1 0 0, Dean, p, 0 0 0 0, Day, c, 0 0 0 0. Totals 31 9 12 8.

Waterloo West 000 020 0 - 2 6 3
Prairie 413 001 x - 9 12 2

Conrey, Ohrt (3) and Ubbelohde. Hammer, Dean (5), Milks (7) and Day. W - Hammer. L - Conrey. 2B - Fricke, T.Mougin, Votroubek.