

Michael picks off win for Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 25 May 2011 00:07 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 May 2011 00:09



The Kennedy Baseball Support Group bought a new tarp for \$4,300 three years ago to protect Kennedy Field from the elements and reduce the number of rainouts.

Griffin Michael and the Cougars are glad they did.

Michael pitched a complete game with 11 strikeouts Tuesday night as the top-ranked Cougars beat a thunderstorm and the Prairie Hawks, 5-4, in the semifinals of the Bob Vrbicek Metro Tournament.

The three other games in the tournament got rained out, including a scheduled losers bracket game between Jefferson and Mount Vernon at Kennedy Field, but the Cougars and Hawks waited until after 8 p.m. and got their winners bracket game in the books.

The tournament will continue Wednesday, weather permitting. Under one scenario, Xavier and Washington would meet in the semifinals at 5 p.m. at Veterans Memorial Stadium to see which team would face Kennedy in the finals at 7 p.m.

Tournament officials plan to make an announcement during the day on Wednesday. The Cedar Rapids Kernels are scheduled to play a home game at noon on Wednesday, and if that game is delayed they might move the semifinals and finals to Kennedy.

Losers bracket games featuring Jefferson vs. Mount Vernon and Linn-Mar vs. Marion may be played as well, if conditions permit.

Jefferson and Mount Vernon were scheduled to play at 5 p.m. Tuesday at Kennedy, but tournament officials decided to put the tarp on the field prior to 5 p.m. with a severe storm approaching. Once it became obvious they wouldn't be able to play until at least 8 p.m., they

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decided to postpone the losers bracket game and go straight to the semifinals between the top-ranked Cougars and Hawks.

The Prairie baseball team spent nearly two hours in the Prairie Middle School gym or on a bus, waiting to learn if there would be a game or not.

"When they got the call that said we're playing, our kids went absolutely bonkers," Prairie Coach Matt Thede said. "At this point in the season we need to play the top-ranked team and get better so we can be good come July."

Kennedy jumped on top 4-0, but Prairie scratched and pulled within 5-4 in the bottom of the sixth on an RBI double by Anthony Gagliardi with nobody out. Gagliardi moved to third on an infield grounder and was 90 feet from tying the game, but Michael picked him off third base for the second out.

Thede thought Michael balked by stepping toward home and throwing to third, but the umpires did not agree. "That's just the way it goes," Thede said.

Michael went the distance for Kennedy (2-0), but Coach Bret Hoyer got a relief pitcher ready in the bottom of the sixth just in case his senior needed help. Michael declined the offer.

"I told Coach I wanted to finish it out. I thought it was my game," he said.

Michael threw 98 pitches and had a 1-2-3 frame in the seventh to finish the game. His fastball was clocked at 85-86 mph for the entire game, with a couple of 88's tossed in as well.

"He wanted the ball," Hoyer said. "We were thinking about making a change going into the seventh and he said, 'Coach, I feel real good.' "

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Michael allowed six hits and only one earned run. He has signed to play at Southeastern Community College in West Burlington next season, primarily as a shortstop but perhaps as a pitcher as well.

"If they want me to pitch, I'll pitch," he said. "Whatever they want."

Michael helped his own cause by going 2-for-4 with an RBI. He also made several good defensive plays on the mound, including the key pickoff in the sixth with the tying run on third.

Prairie's motto this season is "The Time Is Now," and the Hawks came close to beating the No.1 team in the state.

"We made a lot of mistakes," Thede said. "It's encouraging to our kids to go out and make a lot of mistakes and be within one run of Kennedy."

KENNEDY (5)

Terrell Sykes, 2b, 4 2 1 0, Austin Christensen, 1b, 3 1 1 0, Griffin Michael, p, 4 0 2 1, Alex Hayden, cr, 0 2 0 0, Devon Jacobus, ss, 4 0 1 0, Cody Bell, 3b, 3 0 1 1, David Yancey, lf, 4 0 2 0, Matt Maiers, dh, 3 0 0 1, Jimmy Lizarraga, c, 0 0 0 0, Josh Jahlas, cf, 4 0 1 0, Logan Ambrosy, rf, 1 0 0 0, Colin Taylor, ph, 1 0 0 0. Totals 31 5 9 3.

PRAIRIE (4)

Jason Velvick, cf, 3 1 1 1, Brennan Hammer, 1b, 3 0 2 0, Eric Allard, cr, 0 1 0 0, Anthony Gagliardi, rf, 3 0 1 1, D.J. Utley, p, 3 1 1 0, Blaine Hilgenkamp, cr, 0 0 0 0, Dustin Carlson, c, 3 0 0 0, Chaz Boots, lf, 3 0 0 0, Brayton Carlson, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Nate Meyer, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Ty Mouglin, ss, 2 1 0 0. Totals 26 4 6 2.

Kennedy 202 100 0 - 5 9 2

Prairie 002 101 0 - 4 6 2

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Michael and Lizarraga, Maiers (6); Utle, Hammer (5) and D. Carlson. W - Michael; L - Utle.
2B - Gagliardi. 3B - Yancey, Velvick. SB - Yancey, Allard.