

Christensen belts 3 homers against Ottumwa

Written by Jim Ecker

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A total of 1,530 players were selected in the amateur baseball draft this week, but none of the 30 Major League teams decided to pick Austin Christensen.

Maybe nobody is paying attention.

Christensen belted three more home runs Wednesday night and drove in seven runs as top-ranked Kennedy clubbed Ottumwa, 16-6, in six innings at Kennedy Field.

Christensen is hitting .684 with 10 homers and 27 RBIs in 13 games, but nobody thought the 6-foot-4 slugger with the sweet swing was worthy of being drafted.

"I wanted to get drafted. I'm disappointed nothing happened," Christensen said after his powerful display. "But they (the scouts) knew what they were doing. They have other guys that they have more confidence in.

"That's OK," he said. "I'll go to college and hopefully in a couple of years, we'll look forward to it (the draft) again."

Christensen has signed with the University of Nebraska and probably would have gone to college even if he had been drafted. His brother, Chad, is the starting shortstop for the Cornhuskers and they're looking forward to being teammates next season.

Austin Christensen won't be eligible for the Major League draft again until June of 2014, assuming he stays at Nebraska and his college career stays on course.

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Ottumwa Coach Mike Egbert is confident Christensen will be drafted when he's a junior at Nebraska. "He'll be drafted up there when he needs to be," Egbert remarked. "He's a player."

Christensen hit a two-run homer onto the Kennedy tennis courts in the first inning and blistered another two-run homer to left-center in the second. He came up again in the fourth inning with first base occupied, but Egbert gave him an intentional walk with the Cougars holding a slim 7-6 lead.

"I wanted somebody else to take that hack there, because we were still hanging around," Egbert explained.

The Cougars (11-2) scored four runs in that inning for an 11-6 lead, and Egbert decided to pitch to Christensen when he came up again in the fifth inning with runners at first and second.

"It's a non-conference game, it's not a substate game, let's battle him and see what he can do," Egbert reasoned. "He's got talent, but you can't be afraid of him all the time."

Christensen promptly deposited a 2-2 pitch over the center-field fence for a three-run homer and a 14-6 bulge.

"I thought, 'Let's see what he can do,' and he did it again," Egbert said with a smile. "He does what great players do. He got his pitch and hit it. Three times."

Christensen was due to bat again in the sixth inning, but Kennedy Coach Bret Hoyer used Ryan Unash as a pinch-hitter with a 15-6 lead, depriving Christensen of a chance to hit four homers in one game, which would have tied for second-best in state history.

Corey Peck hit five homers in one game for Sioux City North in 2000 and two other players have slugged four homers in a single game.

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"That's OK," Christensen said. "Coach Hoyer is doing what's best for the team, giving everybody some at-bats."

Christensen has hit 33 homers at Kennedy, the school record, and he's got a shot at the Metro record of 42 homers that was set by his brother at Cedar Rapids Washington. However, Hoyer wonders how many opportunities he'll get as the season goes along.

"People aren't going to pitch to him much longer," Hoyer predicted.

Christensen said he felt good in batting practice Wednesday morning and it carried into the game.

"I'm just going up there with confidence. That's huge in hitting," he said. "Baseball is a very tough game. If you don't have confidence, you're not going to hit it. So I just try to stay as positive as I can up there for every at-bat."

Christensen rated his confidence level as "fairly high" right now.

"He's obviously one of the best players, if not THE best player, in the state," Egbert said.

Christensen had a terrific game as a hitter, but he struggled on the mound and was removed after just 2 1/3 innings. He was charged with five earned runs and allowed six hits, including a homer and two doubles.

"It was just one of those days where I didn't have anything on it," he said. "No velocity, no tight curveball or anything. It happens."

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Devon Jacobus went 2-for-2 for Kennedy and scored four runs. David Yancey was 2-for-4 with two RBIs and Matt Maiers was 2-for-3 with an RBI.

Zach Throckmorton and Lucas McIntosh hit homer runs for Ottumwa (8-2).

OTTUMWA (6)

Evans, 1b, 3 1 2 0, Schulz, p/lf, 3 0 0 0, Throckmorton, ss, 2 2 2 1, Salter, cf/p, 3 1 1 1, McIntosh, c, 3 1 2 2, Enloe, cf, 0 1 0 0, Ollum, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Johns, 2b, 3 0 0 0, McDonald, lf, 3 0 1 1, Brcka, rf/p, 0 0 0 0, Griffiths, rf/cf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 26 6 9 5.

KENNEDY (16)

Sykes, 2b, 4 1 1 0, Jacobus, ss, 2 4 2 1, Winters, ph, 1 0 1 0, Christensen, p/rf, 3 4 3 7, Unash, ph, 1 0 0 0, Michael, dh, 3 1 0 0, Jahlas, cf, 0 0 0 0, Hayden, p, 0 0 0 0, Taylor, p, 0 0 0 0, Appleget, ph, 1 0 1 1, Yancey, lf/p, 4 1 2 2, Bell, 3b, 3 1 1 1, Maiers, c, 3 1 2 1, Rhoades, cr, 0 1 0 0, Lizarraga, c, 0 0 0 0, Ambrosy, 1b/lf, 2 1 0 0, Benson, rf/cf, 3 1 1 1, Lloyd, cf, 0 0 0 0. Totals 31 16 14 14.

Ottumwa 114 000 - 6 9 1

Kennedy 241 432 - 16 14 1

Schulz, Salter (3), Brcka (4), McDonald (6) and McIntosh. Christensen, Hayden (3), Yancey (5), Taylor (6) and Maiers, Lizarraga. W - Hayden (4-0). L - Salter.

2B - Salter, McDonald, Sykes, Jacobus, Yancey, Maiers. HR - Throckmorton, McIntosh, Christensen 3 (10). SB - Ambrosy.