

Semler's walk-off homer lifts Marion

Written by Tom Fruehling

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It was a scene right out of 1940s movie or maybe a Clair Bee boys baseball book.

The bleachers and hillside were packed Friday night for a Class 3A district semifinals matchup between age-old rivals from Marion High and Center Point-Urbana.

It's been a pitchers duel from the start featuring of pair of Tylers, Hedtke on the mound for the Indians and Smith for the Pointers.

Bottom of the seventh, scored knotted at 1-1, two outs, a runner on third for Marion and up to the plate comes All-American hero Kasey Semler. (Did we mention it was starting to drizzle, making any extra innings doubtful?)

A pitching switch is made for the visitors, with freshman Logan Holtz taking over. He had been the winning hurler when CPU knocked off the Wamac Conference West Division co-champs, 7-5, earlier in the season.

Holtz spins a curveball that Semler takes for strike one. He unleashes another curve. And just as Chip Hilton would have done it in a Clair Bee tale, Semler blasts a long high fly to left-center that barely drops between the scoreboard and the outfield fence.

The senior four-year starter has rallied his team once more with a 3-1 victory, advancing them to the district finals Monday night at home against Union High (14-13) of LaPorte City.

"This was high school baseball at its finest," said exultant Marion Coach Steve Fish. "A great environment and a great game."

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"And what more could you ask for at the end but your leadoff hitter and all-stater at the plate. That's what you want, and he comes through."

Characteristically soft-spoken and modest, Semler said he wasn't trying to hit the ball out of the park (his fifth homer of the year).

"With a man on third, I just wanted to put the ball in play. I was 0-for-3 for the night, but I'd hit the ball pretty well.

"I took the first strike. Then he threw me the exact same pitch. It felt good. It was a blessing I could help my team."

Equally understated was winning pitcher Hedtke, who allowed just three hits and only one run in the third inning on an RBI double down the right-field line by the Pointers' Dustin Smith.

"I was feeling pretty good tonight, and I seemed to get stronger and looser as the game went on," said the junior right-hander, now 9-3 on the season.

Hedtke recorded nine strikeouts, with three of them coming as he struck out the side in the top of the seventh.

"Tyler was great tonight," said Fish. "The defense was as good as it's been all year. And we hit the ball, but we hit it right at 'em."

In winning, Marion collected just five hits, one of them coming with two outs in the first inning when senior Dusty Albaugh singled to center to score fellow senior Zach Nielsen from second.

Then there was the coach's own son, Byron Fish, another senior who could have - and maybe

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should have - won the game prior to Semler's last-gasp heroics.

With one out in the seventh, young Fish doubled to the fence in left-center. Next batter Josh Davila grounded to third, but the throw to first sailed into right field. On a bad hamstring, Fish tried to score from second and only a perfect throw nipped him at the plate.

"I thought he was safe," said the coach. "But then he's my son."

Still, Davila scampered to third on the bang-bang play, setting up the game-winning homer.

"This is a special group of kids," said Fish of his team, now 24-16. "We've been winning games by putting pressure on the other team. It would have been a crying shame to lose this one tonight."

CENTER POINT-URBANA (1)

D. Smith, cf, 3 0 1 0, Ashbacher, 1b, 2 0 1 0, Caraway, c, 3 0 0 0, Becker, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Holtz, ss/p, 3 0 0 0, T. Smith, p, 3 0 0 0, Kramer, 2b, 2 1 0 0, Jones, dh, 1 0 0 0, Roseberry, lf, 0 0 0 0, Lindsey, rf, 2 0 0 0, Totals 22 1 3 1.

MARION (3)

Semler, 2b, 4 1 1 2, Wagner, 3b, 2 0 1 0, Nielsen, ss, 3 1 0 0, Albaugh, rf, 3 0 2 0, Biery, 1b, 3 0 1 0, Johnson, c, 2 0 0 0, Charipar, cf, 3 0 0 0, Fish, dh, 3 0 1 0, Hedtke, p, 0 0 0 0, Davila, lf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 26 3 6 3.

Center Point-Urbana 001 000 0 - 1 3 1

Marion 100 000 2 - 3 6 0

T. Smith, Holtz (7) and Carraway. Hedtke and Johnson. W - Hedtke (9-3). L - T. Smith. 2B - D. Smith, Fish. HR - Semler (5).