

Prairie runs into buzz-saw at Mason City

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 21 July 2011 00:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 21 July 2011 00:25



MASON CITY - Matt Thede squeezed 26 wins and a bunch of records out of a Prairie High School baseball program that had struggled for years this season, but the Hawks fell short in their bid to make the state tournament Wednesday night.

Jake Peter tossed a tidy three-hitter as No.2 Mason City spanked Prairie, 6-0, in the Class 4A substate finals at Roosevelt Field in Mason City.

Prairie won only 13 games last season and had a 10-13 record at one point last month, but the Hawks won 16 of their last 19 games to finish 26-16 and set a school record for victories.

Thede shook hands with all the seniors and thanked them for a job well done. They led the Hawks from obscurity to their first winning season in 17 years.

"The seniors have set a precedent for us," Thede said. "I told our guys it would be a serious tragedy if we didn't celebrate our season with a huge banquet at the end.

"We're going to get together and celebrate the right way. I can't tell you how much I love them and how proud I am of these guys."

Peter handcuffed the Hawks and was never in serious trouble. Chaz Boots hit a soft single in the third inning, Anthony Gagliardi singled down the third-base line in the fourth inning and Tyler Mouglin singled to right-center in the fifth inning for Prairie's only hits on a hot night in Mason City.

Peter (7-2) went the distance and needed only 75 pitches to tame the Hawks. He struck out the side in the seventh inning and fanned five of the last six batters he faced.

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"Every pitch was working," said Peter, an all-state selection from 2010 who has signed with Creighton. "I was just trying to get them to put it in play and that's what they did, and my defense made plays behind me."

Peter has become the No.1 pitcher for Mason City with all-state hurler Brandon Platts sidelined with a sore right elbow. Platts was drafted in the 13th round by Pittsburgh last month, but he hasn't pitched since June 27.

Peter has picked up the slack.

"It was a special performance tonight, but it's been typical of him down the stretch," Mason City Coach Troy Rood said. "He's been really, really good down the stretch."

Peter struck out seven batters and walked only one.

"We ran into a buzz-saw tonight," Thede said. "My hat's off to those guys. They have a heck of a team."

Mason City (33-9) will face Des Moines Roosevelt (29-12) in the quarterfinals of the Class 4A state tournament next Wednesday night.

Gagliardi pitched five innings for Prairie and was touched for all six runs (five earned). The Mohawks scored an unearned run in the second inning, then Peter blasted a home run to right field to make it 2-0 in the third.

"To get that one run early was huge, because I really did believe that one run would win the game for us with Jake on the hill," Rood said.

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Prairie had only one runner reach second base all night and nobody touched third.

Mason City scored three runs on five hits in the fourth inning to take control at 5-0. The Prairie outfielders had a few problems with fly balls in the frame, turning possible outs into doubles.

Gagliardi (6-4) thought Mason City was beatable. "I didn't see anything special," he said. "They didn't really hit the ball too hard. They just found holes."

The Mohawks took a 6-0 lead in the fifth inning. Bryce Alberts pitched two shutout innings in relief for the Hawks with three strikeouts.

Thede stressed all of his team's accomplishments this season after the year ended with a loss, but the setback seemed hardest on senior Dustin Carlson, who did double-duty this year as a catcher and pitcher.

"I finally realized it's my last high school game," said Carlson, sitting sadly in the Prairie dugout. "It's kind of weird."

Carlson said he'll have good memories. "The records that we broke and the way we came together was awesome," he said. "Too bad it had to end today, but this was a good team that we played. I wouldn't be surprised if they win state."

Mason City reached the semifinals of the state tournament last year before losing to Cedar Rapids Kennedy. The Mohawks feel they have unfinished business in Des Moines.

"Definitely," Peter said. "We made the semis last year and we want to get over that hump. We want to be playing Saturday night (July 30) for the championship."

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By coincidence, Mason City could meet Kennedy in the semifinals again this year if they both win their opening-round games next Wednesday. Kennedy opens with Fort Dodge.

Rood is not sure if Platts will be able to pitch in the state tournament or not.

"He has a chance. I wouldn't rule that out," Rood said. "We need to get his bat back. He's our cleanup hitter."

Platts was not in the lineup against Prairie.

MASON CITY (6)

Peter, p, 3 1 1 1, Voves, cf, 4 0 1 0, Schultz, lf, 3 1 0 0, Overbeck, 3b, 3 2 2 0, Hrubetz, ss, 1 0 1 0, Weiss, rf, 4 1 2 2, Ring, 1b, 4 1 1 1, Stoeffler, 2b, 3 0 0 0, Swenson, c, 3 0 1 1. Totals 28 6 9 5.

PRAIRIE (5)

Hammer, dh, 3 0 0 0, Joens, cf, 0 0 0 0, Alberts, p, 0 0 0 0, Utley, 1b, 3 0 0 0, B. Carlson, 2b, 3 0 0 0, Gagliardi, p/cf, 3 0 1 0, Votroubek, rf, 2 0 0 0, Velvick, ph, 1 0 0 0, D. Carlson, c, 3 0 0 0, Butz, 3b, 1 0 0 0, Meyer, 3b, 1 0 0 0, Boots, lf, 2 0 1 0, Mougin, ss, 2 0 1 0. Totals 24 0 3 0.

Mason City 011 310 0 - 6 9 2

Prairie 000 000 0 - 0 3 1

Peter and Swenson. Gagliardi, Alberts (6) and D. Carlson. W - Peter. L - Gagliardi. 2B - Weiss, Ring, Swenson. HR - Peter.