

## Stroschein steers Linn-Mar to state

Written by Tom Fruehling

Wednesday, 24 July 2013 23:53 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 July 2013 00:24

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IOWA CITY – For a full six innings Wednesday night, Austin Stroschein all but willed his Linn-Mar baseball team into the Class 4A state tournament.

At the tail end of the seventh, he finally had to rest.

But with his strong pitching arm and big bat, along with a gutsy mind-set, he'd done enough by then to lead the heavily underdog Lions past second-ranked Iowa City West, 4-3, in the substate finals on the Trojans' home field.

The substate championship sends Linn-Mar (27-15) to a first-round state tourney date next Wednesday at noon against Johnston (26-12) at Principal Park in Des Moines.

"I felt confident the whole way, on the mound and at the plate," said Stroschein after his virtuoso performance. "I'm a senior, so I've been in these kinds of games before."

None, perhaps, when he played so well against such a good team with so much on the line.

The cover story was that the Trojans (33-8) were a lock to represent the Mississippi Valley Conference at state. They'd won the Valley Division title by six full games and had twice defeated Linn-Mar earlier this season.

The unranked Lions had gone through an up-and-down campaign.

"Iowa City is a tremendous hitting team," said Lions Coach Chad Lechner. "They're one of the

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very best in the state, bar none.”

Against the big Linn-Mar righthander, however, they were tame most of the night.

Stroschein allowed just two hits over the first four innings. He did seem to tire some in the fourth, loading the bases on three walks, but escaped danger.

He walked another batter with two outs in the fifth and finally got tagged with a hard hit when opposing pitcher Tyus Adkins doubled to deep center to bring home the first run of the game.

As the designated home team in the bottom of the inning, though, the Lions tied it up.

Again with two outs, Linn-Mar's Mitch Stickney singled up the middle. In a story-line right out of a boys baseball book, Stroschein came to bat and laced a run-scoring double to right field. It was his second hit of the night.

Seemingly gaining a second wind, having thrown close to 100 pitches by then, he mowed down the Trojans in swift order in the sixth.

The Lions' Brandt Ollinger was hit by a pitch to open the bottom of the sixth, was moved along on a bunt by Caleb Reimer and went to third on Ben Larson's single to left.

With one out, Kyle Mortensen hit a grounder to third and the second baseman dropped the ball on a double-play attempt, bringing home the go-ahead run for a 2-1 lead for the Lions.

“I was looking for a fastball and he threw me an off-speed pitch,” the senior Mortensen said. “I got out in front of it, but we got the run.

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“That seemed to pick us up. We got some momentum and didn’t stop.”

Larson scored on a bases-loaded single up the middle by Stroschein, and Jack Strellner came home on a wild pitch to put Linn-Mar ahead 4-1 going into West’s last chance at bat.

It got dicey at that point.

Pitching on adrenaline alone, Stroschein struck out the first batter, gave up a single to the second batter and fanned the third. With one out to go, he finally ran out of gas.

Running the count to 3-and-2, he walked the next three batters and allowed another run to score, making it 4-2.

“It’s too bad I couldn’t finish it,” he said. “But I was getting pretty tired.”

Justin Wyant, who tossed a complete game shutout against Kennedy Tuesday night, came on in relief and immediately threw a wild pitch to score one more and make it 4-3. He then walked the bases loaded again.

“They had some great at-bats in the last inning,” said Lechner. “They kept battling. They sure didn’t make it easy on us.”

In the end, though, Wyant got a strikeout to kill the rally. Lechner credited pitching coach John Heald with helping call pitches all night.

But it was Stroschein who was throwing the ball.

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"Austin pitched just a fantastic game," his coach said. "Iowa City is a great team, and he kept them off-balance all night. He showed a lot of heart.

"Our whole team showed a lot of heart tonight."

Linn-Mar will be making its fifth trip to the state tournament and second in a row. The Lions made the tournament in 1987, 1995, 2006 and 2012.

IOWA CITY WEST (3): Reiners, cf, 4 0 0 0, Bonner, 2b, 4 1 1 0, Doyle, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Raffensberger, dh, 2 2 0 0, Ludwig, 3b, 0 0 0 0, Adkins, p-ss, 2 0 2 1, Boland, lf, 3 0 0 0, Baker, c, 1 0 0 0, Hatzky, cr, 0 0 0 0, Scott, ss-p, 2 0 0 0, Wilson, rf, 2 0 0 0, Ewing, 0 0 0 0, Hakert, 1 0 0 0, Verry, 0 0 0 1. Totals 25 3 4 2.

LINN-MAR (4): Mortensen, cf, 4 0 1 1, Strellner, ss, 4 1 0 0, Stickney, rf, 3 1 2 0, Stroschein, p, 3 0 3 2, Roth, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Banks, c, 2 0 1 0, Ollinger, 3b, 1 1 0 0, Reimer, dh, 2 0 0 0, Kane, 1b, 0 0 0 0, Larson, lf, 3 1 1 0. Totals 25 4 9 3.

IC West 000 010 2 - 3 4 0

Linn-Mar 000 013 x - 4 9 0

Adkins, Scott (6) and Baker. Stroschein, Wyant (7) and Banks. W-Stroschein. L-Adkins. Sv-Wyant. 2B-Adkins, Mortensen, Stroschein. SB-Bonner, Hatzky 3, Ewing, Banks.