

Ollinger powers Lions in 4A opener

Written by Mike Condon

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Chad Lechner has coached long enough to not take any prep baseball tournament game for granted.

The veteran Linn-Mar coach was especially concerned about his team opening 4A substate play against Waterloo West, which the Lions had just swept Wednesday on the last day of the regular-season.

Senior catcher Brandt Ollinger quickly calmed Lechner's nerves.

Ollinger got the Lions' offense going with a lead-off home run to open the second inning as Linn-Mar went on to down the Wahawks, 8-1, at Linn-Mar.

The victory moves the Lions to 24-11 and advances them to a Monday 7 p.m. substate semifinal at home against Cedar Falls. The Tigers (21-13) moved on with a 5-4 win Friday over Marshalltown.

Monday's winner will play at Kennedy (28-11) at 7 p.m. on Wednesday in the substate final. The top-seeded Cougars earned a second-round bye, blanking Waterloo East, 8-0, on Friday.

"I'm worried about every first-round game," Lechner said. It doesn't really matter who the opponent is, but we had just seen them on Wednesday so I was even more concerned.

"It really helped us to get that first run with Brandt's homer," he continued. "It kinda relaxed us a

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little bit."

Ollinger's blast to left-center was one of three extra-base hits for the senior. He followed the homer with a pair of doubles.

"It was nerve-wracking because we just played them and we wanted to come out strong," Ollinger said. "We came out and played really good baseball today and that was important."

The Lions added another run in the second as Justin Wyant doubled and scored when Scott Mortensen's short fly dropped in left to drive home Wyant.

Ollinger doubled home Adam Stolley in the third to make it 3-0 Linn-Mar, but West (3-32), made things interesting in the fourth.

A walk and back-to-back errors loaded the bases for the Wahawks against Lions starter Sam Crawford.

"We got a little shaky in that inning," Lechner said. "I liked the way we settled down, got the double play and limited them to one run."

Crawford enticed Nick Joens to ground into a 6-4-3 double play with a run scoring. Crawford, who fanned five in five innings of work, struck out Jacob Tudor to end the threat.

Linn-Mar took control of the game in the bottom of the inning. Senior Andrew Gassmann's two-out, two-RBI single was the key hit in the inning.

Ollinger's highlights weren't limited to offense. Twice over the final three innings he threw behind unsuspecting West runners at first, the last one ending the game.

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"I love throwing the ball behind runners," he said. "When they get aggressive I like to take advantage of it when I can."

Next up for the Lions is Cedar Falls. The teams split a regular-season doubleheader in Cedar Falls.

"I like the way we are going right now," Lechner said. "Our pitching is set up well and we have a lot of arms we can go to. Cedar Falls has a couple of pretty good pitchers and they have a good team. We will have to be ready to go."

Waterloo West 000 100 0 - 1 5 3

Linn-Mar 021 311 x - 8 12 2

Anderson, Jobes-Ryan (4), Champion (5), Doering (6) and Champion, Brown (5). Crawford, Brandt (6) and Ollinger. WP - Crawford (4-1). LP - Anderson (0-8). HR - Ollinger.