

No. 1 Cougars, Lions headed for early showdown

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 21 May 2012 23:29 -

The Kennedy Cougars are ranked No. 1 and the Linn-Mar Lions look like they have the ingredients to make a run for the top as well this year.

They'll clash Tuesday in the semifinals of the Bob Vrbicek Metro Baseball Tournament at the Linn-Mar diamond at approximately 7 p.m.

Alex Hayden struck out 14 batters as the top-ranked Cougars blanked Washington, 4-0, in the opening game of the tournament Monday night to spoil Tony Lombardi's debut as the new head coach of the Warriors.

Linn-Mar scored 11 runs in the first inning against Jefferson and pounded the J-Hawks, 15-2, in five innings in the nightcap.

Kennedy was a little surprised to see itself in the No. 1 spot when the Class 4A preseason rankings were issued Sunday night.

"Honestly, I wasn't sure we were the No. 1 team on 42nd Street, because Xavier is really, really good," said Kennedy Coach Bret Hoyer. "And in the Metro, we have some fantastic teams.

"I think that's a compliment to the success we've had over the last few years. That's more of a tribute to the kids that graduated last year and some of the key people we have coming back."

The Cougars won the Class 4A state title in 2010 and reached the quarterfinals of the state tournament last season, finishing with a 31-9 record. Austin Christensen, the 2011 Gatorade Player of the Year for Kennedy, graduated and joined the baseball program at Nebraska. The Cougars also lost their double-play combination of Griffin Michael and Terrell Sykes, so the No. 1 ranking came as somewhat of a surprise.

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"That's nice that they ranked us that high," said Hoyer. "It certainly puts a target on our backs. And we certainly hope to be that good at the end of the year."

The Linn-Mar Lions will be aiming at that target Tuesday night in the semifinals. The Lions came out swinging and sent 15 batters to the plate in the first inning against Jefferson when they scored their 11 runs.

Michael Redmond collected a pair of doubles in the first inning and was 3-for-3 after two innings with four RBIs. Meanwhile, lefthander Jacob Stolley mowed down the J-Hawks with seven strikeouts in five innings.

"That's a great way to start off," said Stolley. "Like Coach Lechner said, it's the best first game he's ever seen."

The Lions hit line drives all over the ballpark in the first inning.

"It was great," said Redmond. "We were really excited going into this game. I was a little nervous, with first-game jitters or whatever. But we came out and we attacked early in the count and got our confidence up."

Hayden was nearly unhittable in the first game for Kennedy. He went 6 1/3 innings and allowed only two hits, an infield single by A.J. Puk and an opposite-field double by Noah Dostal that hugged the left-field line.

Hayden left after throwing 97 pitches. He struck out two batters in the first, second, third and sixth innings and fanned three batters in the fourth and fifth innings with an 87 mph fastball and sharp curveball.

"It felt good. I was hitting my spots pretty good, I thought," said Hayden, an all-state pitcher in 2011 who will play at Iowa Central Community College next year.

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Hayden relied exclusively on his fastball against the first seven batters, then began mixing in the curveball with great success. "They weren't hitting the fastball," he said. "Then they started catching up to the fastball and fouling a couple off, so I starting throwing curveballs."

Hoyer liked what he saw of his top pitcher.

"We saw that at times last year," said Hoyer. "We just need him to be more consistent and follow that up next time and keep improving."

Kennedy collected only four hits against Washington southpaw Grant Dostal, who pitched a complete game for the Warriors. The Cougars also committed a couple of baserunning mistakes, but Hayden was too much for Washington.

Linn-Mar scored two runs in the second inning for an early 13-0 lead against Jefferson. The J-Hawks scored twice in the top of the third, but the Lions responded with two more runs in the bottom of the third for the 15-2 bulge.

Linn-Mar was not ranked in the preseason poll, but the Lions appear to have a strong club. "The possibilities are endless, I think," said Stolley. "The ultimate goal is go to state and win state."

The Lions could make an early statement against No. 1 Kennedy Tuesday night. "It will be fun," said Redmond. "We're just looking forward to everybody we play."

GAME 1

KENNEDY (4)

Logan Ambrosy, rf, 3 2 0 0, Cody Bell, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Zach Johnson, pr, 0 1 0 0, Devon Jacobus, ss/p, 2 0 1 1, Nick Appleget, ph, 1 0 1 0, Ryan Unash, pr, 0 0 0 0, Chico Lizarraga, c, 3 0 0 1, Brock Skow, 3b, 3 0 1 1, Adam Lloyd, lf, 2 0 0 0, Josh Jahlas, cf, 0 0 0 0, Alex Hayden, p, 3 0 0

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0, Derek Jacobus, cr/ss, 0 1 0 0, Trenton Seubert, dh, 3 0 1 1, Joel Smetzer, 2b, 0 0 0 0, Andrew Johnson, cf/lf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 27 4 4 4.

WASHINGTON (0)

Noah Dostal, ss, 3 0 1 0, Matt Troendle, cf, 3 0 0 0, A.J. Puk, 1b, 3 0 1 0, Zach Gillis, dh, 3 0 0 0, Jacob Hand, lf, 0 0 0 0, Grant Dostal, p, 3 0 0 0, Will Rings, c, 2 0 0 0, Chris Harrington, cr, 0 0 0 0, Noah Burdt, rf, 1 0 0 0, Robert Hogg, 2b, 2 0 0 0, Zach Christensen, 3b, 2 0 0 0. Totals 22 0 2 0.

Kennedy 101 011 0 - 4 4 2
Washington 000 000 0 - 0 2 5

Hayden, Devon Jacobus (7) and Lizarraga. G. Dostal and Rings. W - Hayden. L - G. Dostal. 2B - N. Dostal. SB - Ambrosy, Derek Jacobus.

GAME 2

JEFFERSON (2)

Dylan Jellison, 2b, 2 0 0 0, Hunter Kloubec, ph, 1 0 0 0, Christian Knox, cf, 2 0 1 2, Sam Techau, 3b, 2 0 0 0, Austin Goodell, rf, 2 0 0 0, Ky Kramer, ss, 2 0 0 0, Jordan Dee, 1b, 2 0 0 0, Aaron Gruwell, lf, 2 1 1 0, Colten Jourdan, c, 1 0 0 0, Layne Sullivan, cr, 0 1 0 0, Chance Tiedtke, p, 0 0 0 0, Dylan Wright, p, 1 0 0 0, Ben Koering, p, 1 0 0 0. Totals 18 2 2 2.

LINN-MAR (15)

Travis Kvach, 2b, 1 3 1 3, Kevin Bogert, rf, 4 1 2 2, Michael Redmond, 3 2 3 4, Keaton Blackford, ph, 0 0 0 0, Mitchell Stickney, lf, 3 1 1 0, Nate Greve, ph, 1 0 1 0, Austin Stroschein, 3b, 1 2 1 1, Tyler Kane, ph, 1 0 0 0, Austin Banks, c, 3 0 0 0, Justin Wyant, cf, 0 1 0 0, Nick Jennings, ph, 1 0 0 0, Jimmy Roth, 1b, 0 3 0 0, Dakota Digmann, cr/ph, 0 1 0 0, Jacob Stolley, p, 2 0 1 1, Kyle Mortensen, ph, 1 0 0 0, Jack Strellner, ss, 1 1 0 2. Totals 22 15 10 13.

Jefferson 002 00 - 2 2 1
Linn-Mar (11)22 0x - 15 10 1

Tiedtke, Wright (1), Koering (3) and Jourdan. Stolley and Banks. W - Stolley. L- Tiedtke. 2B - Knox, Kvach 1, Redmond 2.