

Linn-Mar shares MVC title with split

Written by Jim Ecker
Monday, 09 July 2012 22:58 -

IOWA CITY - The Linn-Mar Lions left Mercer Park in Iowa City Monday night proud of their accomplishments this season but sad they didn't accomplish a little more.

The ninth-ranked Lions split a makeup doubleheader with Iowa City High and finished in a first-place tie with Kennedy for the Mississippi Division title in the MVC with a 22-4 mark in the conference.

If the Lions had swept the twinbill, they would have claimed the division title all by themselves.

Linn-Mar won the first game, 7-2, but dropped the nightcap 4-1 on a grand slam by City High slugger Josh Crosby.

"They're upset a little bit right now, and that's a good thing," said Linn-Mar Coach Chad Lechner after meeting with his club.

There were more frowns than smiles in the Linn-Mar dugout.

"Yeah, it's a sour taste. It will hurt for a couple of days," said Linn-Mar pitcher Nate Greve, who had a classic eight-pitch battle with Crosby before the Little Hawk hit his grand slam.

The Lions raised their overall record to 27-11, tying the school mark for most victories in a season (1995). They also won the most MVC games in school history, topping the old mark of 19 in 1995, and they won a Mississippi Valley Conference title for the first time in school history.

"I'm proud right now," said senior first baseman/pitcher Jake Stolley. "To go into substate like this, I'm proud."

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"We knew we had a special team coming into the season. This year was great."

Linn-Mar and Iowa City High began their doubleheader on June 29 and reached the third inning of the first game before lightning sent everyone home. They resumed Monday with the Lions holding a 2-0 lead in the top of the third, and Linn-Mar put the game away with a five-run uprising in the fourth inning for a 7-0 cushion.

That victory gave Linn-Mar a 22-3 record in the conference, a half-game better than Kennedy, and it looked like the Lions might grab an outright title with Greve throwing bullets. The little lefty collected nine strikeouts in four innings, but one fat pitch to Crosby cost the Lions the ballgame.

Iowa City High loaded the bases in the third inning on a single, an error and a walk with two outs. That brought Crosby to the plate with his hefty .482 batting average and powerful bat.

Greve got ahead in the count, but Crosby fouled off three different two-strike pitches to stay alive. "He was pounding curveballs the entire count there," said Crosby. "I was trying to fight them off."

Crosby worked the count to 2-2 when Greve tried to slip a fastball by him on the outside part of the plate. The ball landed about 400 feet away, over the fence in left-center.

"He was up at the plate. I threw it away (on the outside part of the plate)," said Greve. "It should have been a changeup."

"That's the spot you want to be in," said Crosby. "He finally threw me a fastball. I was surprised it went out. I didn't think it would."

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Crosby's blast, his fifth of the season, gave the Little Hawks a 4-0 lead. It stayed that way until Linn-Mar scored an unearned run in the sixth inning to draw within 4-1 against Iowa City High righthander Tyler Stika.

Stolley began the top of the seventh with a single to right, but Stika finished his complete game with a strikeout, a popup and another strikeout.

Justin Wyant pitched five strong innings in relief in the first game for Linn-Mar to get the victory and give his club a shot at the outright division title.

Lechner agreed the doubleheader was bittersweet for the Lions, but he was more happy than sad.

"I'm definitely proud of them. It's a great accomplishment for us," he said. "We would have liked to have won it outright, but we can't be too upset with sharing a title with a quality team like Kennedy. Tons of good things."

Iowa City West won the Valley Division title with a 22-4 mark, so all three clubs -- Linn-Mar, Kennedy and Iowa City West -- tied for the best record in the Mississippi Valley Conference this season.

Iowa City High finished the day at 18-8 in the Mississippi Division and 24-14 overall.

Linn-Mar hosts Burlington in the substate quarterfinals Friday night at 7.

GAME ONE

LINN-MAR (7)

Stickney, lf, 3 1 0 0, Bogert, rf, 4 2 2 1, Redmond, cf, 4 1 2 1, Roth, 1b/2b, 4 1 1 1, Stroschein, 3b, 3 0 1 1, Banks, c, 2 0 0 1, Mortensen, cr, 0 0 0 0, Stolley, p/1b, 4 0 1 0, Bettman, cr, 0 0 0

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0, Blackford, dh, 3 0 1 1, Strellner, ss, 0 0 0 0, Kvach, 2b, 0 0 0 0, Wyant, p, 2 0 1 0, Bettman, cr, 0 1 0 0. Totals 29 7 9 6.

IOWA CITY HIGH (2)

Frakes, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Duncan, cf, 4 0 1 2, Wieland, p/rf, 4 0 0 0, Crosby, c/1b, 3 0 0 0, Mrstik, ss, 2 0 0 0, Simpson, rf, 1 0 1 0, Stika, c, 2 0 0 0, Mills, lf, 0 1 0 0, Kenney, 1b/p, 2 0 1 0, Gevock, cf, 0 1 0 0, Hasler, 3b, 3 0 0 0. Totals 25 2 4 2.

Linn-Mar 011 500 0 - 7 9 0
Iowa City High 000 020 0 - 2 4 3

Stolley, Wyant (3) and Banks; Wieland, Kenney (3) and Crosby, Stika (3). W - Wyant (6-1). L - Wieland (2-4). 2B - Redmond, Blackford, Frakes, Kenney. SB - Bogert.

GAME TWO

LINN-MAR (1)

Greve, p, 3 0 1 0, Kvach, cr, 0 0 0 0, Blackford, p, 1 0 0 0, Bogert, rf, 2 0 0 0, Redmond, cf, 3 1 2 0, Stickney, lf, 2 0 0 0, Stroschein, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Roth, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Stolley, 1b, 3 0 1 0, Banks, c, 3 0 0 0, Strellner, ss, 2 0 0 0. Totals 25 1 5 0.

IOWA CITY HIGH (4)

Frakes, rf, 2 1 1 0, Duncan, cf, 1 0 0 0, Wieland, 2b, 2 1 0 0, Crosby, 1b, 2 1 1 4, Mrstik, ss, 3 0 0 0, Kenney, dh, 2 0 0 0, Reineke, c, 0 0 0 0, Stika, p, 2 0 0 0, Mills, cr, 0 0 0 0, Gevock, lf, 3 0 0 0, Hasler, 3b, 3 1 1 0. Totals 20 4 3 4.

Linn-Mar 000 001 0 - 1 5 1
Iowa City High 004 000 x - 4 3 1

Greve, Blackford (5) and Banks; Stika and Reineke. W - Stika (5-2). L - Greve (6-3). 2B - Redmond, Frakes. HR - Crosby.