

## J-Hawks can clinch title at home

Written by Jim Ecker  
Friday, 10 July 2015 23:08 -

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CEDAR FALLS - Whoever coined the phrase "You can't go home again" never met Kyle Rodenkirk.

Rodenkirk returned to his alma mater as the head baseball coach at Cedar Rapids Jefferson three years ago and has the J-Hawks on the verge of winning their first Mississippi Valley Conference title in 10 years.

The second-ranked J-Hawks split an MVC twinbill at Cedar Falls Friday and can clinch the Mississippi Division championship Monday night when they host Hempstead in the final conference games of the season.

Jefferson could have clinched a tie for the title Friday night by sweeping Cedar Falls, but the Hawks are still in good shape.

"Like I told these guys, we control our own destiny," Rodenkirk said after the split. "The ball is in our court. We can either slam-dunk it home or we can dribble it off our foot."

Jefferson is sitting at 19-5 in the conference. Iowa City West swept Dubuque Hempstead Friday night and has finished its conference season with a 20-6 mark.

If the J-Hawks sweep Hempstead Monday night, they'll have the division title all to themselves. If they split Monday night, they'll have to share the title with Iowa City West. And if they lose both games to Hempstead, well ... they don't want to think about that.

Rodenkirk, 31, graduated from Jefferson in 2002. He was an assistant coach in the J-Hawk

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program for five years, spent two years as the head coach at Anamosa and one year as an assistant at Linn-Mar.

He returned to Jefferson as the head coach for the 2013 season and finished with a 12-27 record his first year. The J-Hawks showed remarkable improvement last year and posted a 24-15 record and now they are 28-7 and ranked No. 2 in Class 4A.

"It puts a smile on your face, because - shoot - we haven't won the conference since 2005. Ten years," Rodenkirk noted. "It's good to get Jefferson baseball back on the map. I know a lot of West-siders are pretty proud of the boys. It puts a smile on my face."

Rodenkirk acknowledged that returning to Jefferson was a dream come true.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "Your alma mater and all that. Jefferson has always had pretty decent ballclubs. We've got good talent.

"It's just a blue-collar mentality. The boys work for everything they get, and that's really the mentality that I have, so I thought it was a perfect fit."

Jefferson took a 3-2 lead in the fifth inning of the opener on an RBI single by Tyler Roeder, but Cedar Falls scored three runs in the bottom of the fifth for a 5-3 lead and added another run in the sixth for the 6-3 victory.

Jarred Wood pitched 5 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> strong innings in the nightcap for Jefferson and Lucas Larson socked a two-run homer in the seventh to give the J-Hawks a 7-3 lead. Cedar Falls mounted a threat in the bottom of the seventh and pulled within 7-4 with the bases loaded and two outs, but Colton Knox relieved Zach Szabo at that point and struck out the only man he faced to end the game.

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Larson missed first base on his home run, but realized his mistake and went back and touched the bag before circling the rest of the bases.

"I knew I missed it," he said, smiling. "I wanted to make sure I didn't get called out."

Larson and the J-Hawks felt good about their chances of winning the conference title when they left Cedar Falls Friday night despite the split.

"It's a lot of fun playing for this team," said Larson, who will play ball at John A. Logan Community College in Illinois next year. "Having a shot at winning the MVC championship and playing the way we are and having a chance to go to state, it's a lot of fun.

"We've still got some work to do on Monday and get ready for substate."

The J-Hawks have a non-conference game at Burlington Saturday.

Cedar Falls is 19-13 overall and 15-11 in the conference.

### GAME 1

Jefferson 110 010 0 - 3 7 1  
Cedar Falls 000 231 x - 6 6 1

W - Corson. L - C. VanScoyoc.

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### GAME 2

Jefferson 023 000 2 - 7 9 0  
Cedar Falls 010 002 1 - 4 8 2

W - Wood. L - Schultz. S - Knox.