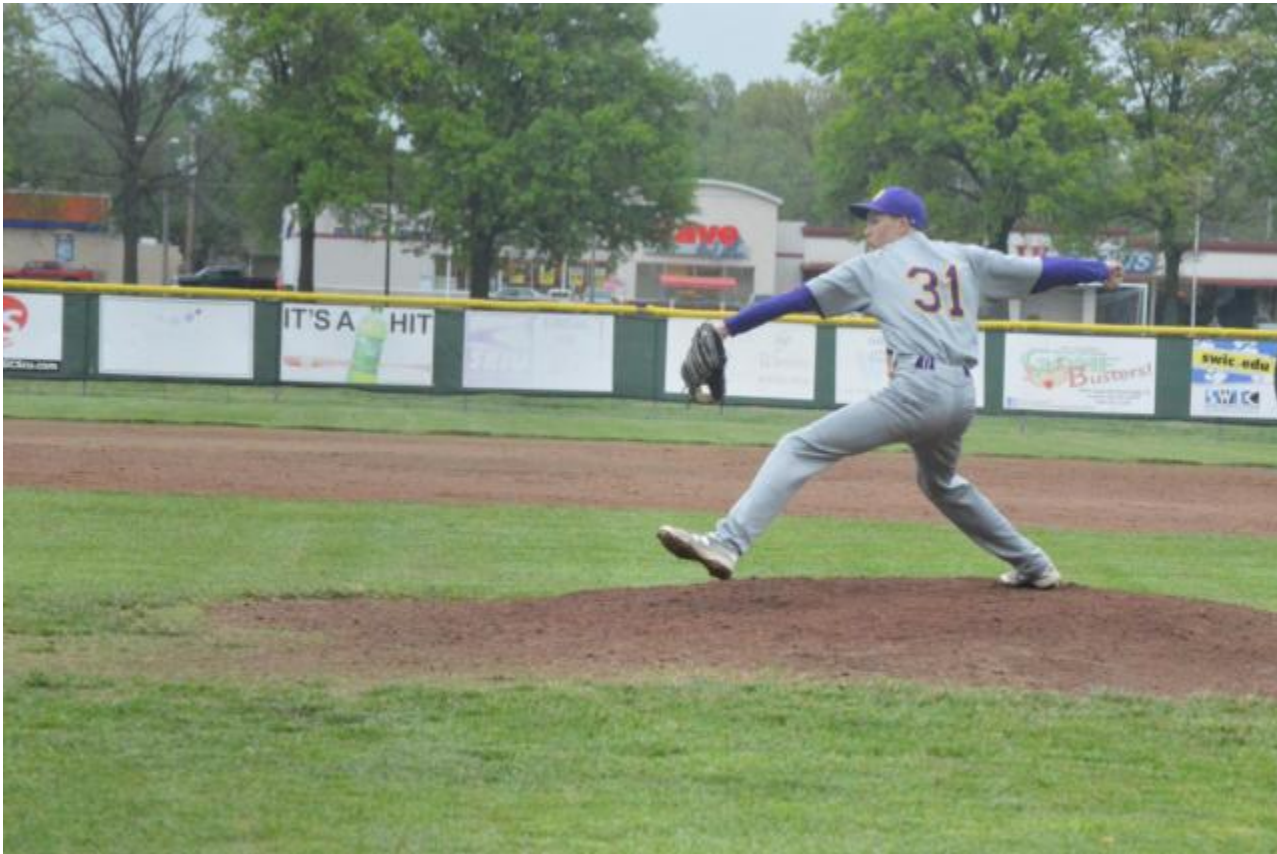


# Eagles get five in second, use Stawar's two-hit shutout to defeat Granite City 10-0

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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**GRANITE CITY** — It was a very wet, rainy day at Granite City's Babe Champion Field, and Civic Memorial's baseball team were able to use the conditions to their advantage, scoring five times on only two hits in the second inning to help lift the Eagles to a 10-0, five-inning win over the host Warriors in a non-conference game Friday afternoon.

The Eagles executed their bunting game very well in the conditions, which helped create the opportunities that CM cashed in on in the second inning.

“You know what, I think we did a pretty good job at executing at the plate,” CM coach Nick Smith said, “put some pressure on them by putting the ball in play. The grass was wet, so we decided we wanted to bunt a little bit, and we handled the bat pretty well. We can sacrifice, we can bunt for a hit, so we took advantage of what we’re good at.”

Eagle pitcher Christian Stawar only allowed two hits over the five innings — a leadoff single by Austin Bonvicino and a third-inning single by Matt Woods—while striking out four and walking only two to get the win.

“You know, he does a really good job of throwing strikes,” Smith said. “Our defense is on its toes when he pitches. He pitches to contact, so we know that we’ve gotta make plays behind him. He does a good job; he can throw multiple pitches for strikes. He had a inning or two where he wasn’t getting ahead of hitters, but when he does, he’s very effective.”

The Eagle aggressiveness led to four Warrior errors in the second inning, and it was a predicament Granite couldn’t climb out of.

“They took advantage of some wet conditions,” Warrior coach Scott Smallie said, “and bunted on us, and we didn’t have an answer those couple of times, threw the ball high, and it all snowballed after that. A couple of errors turns into five runs, and that’s a big hill for us to climb.

“We’re struggling at the plate right now,” Smallie continued, “and we’re getting a couple of runs a game, and that’s what we’ve got to keep them to right now until our offense breaks out, and hopefully, it happens sooner rather than later.”

The fateful Eagle second began with a Spencer Powell single, Geoff Withers reached on an error and a Caden Clark sacrifice bunt was thrown away for another error, loading the bases. A Konnor Loewen sacrifice fly to left field drove home Powell and advanced Withers to third. Clark and Withers then executed a double steal, with Withers scoring and Clark taking second.

After a walk to Dalton Myers, Brandon Hampton laid down another sacrifice bunt that was thrown high by the pitcher for another error, allowing Clark to score and Myers to move to third. Jaxson Helmkamp’s squeeze bunt down the third base line was thrown high to first for the fourth Warrior error of the inning, Hampton scoring on the play for the last Eagle run.

The Warriors' best opportunity came in the bottom of the inning, as Clayton Miller reached on an error by the third baseman to lead off the frame, advancing to third on a B. J. Niesporek ground out. Latrell Smith drew a walk, but Freddie Edwards hit into a fielder's choice, forcing Smith at second to end the inning.

The Eagles extended their lead in the fourth, Myers leading off with a single and reaching second on an error by the right fielder. He scored on Helmkamp's RBI single one out later. In the fifth, Powell lead off with a single, stealing second and advancing to third on a fly out to right. He scored on an errant pickoff throw by the catcher. Three walks later in the inning lead to the big blow, a bases-clearing double by Helmkamp to deep center, scoring Clark, Loewen and Hampton.

Stawar continued to pitch very well, retiring the final seven batters in a row to record the win.

The Warriors are a young team, with a number of freshmen and sophomores on the roster, and continue to play hard every night, something Smallie is very encouraged by.

"The kids haven't quit," Smallie said. "Shoot, we go 3-4 the first time through (the Southwestern) conference, and we haven't done that in a while. It's there, we're just young, and we've gotta learn how to deal with failure a little bit better; this game's based on it. We've gotta learn how to do that a little bit better.

"We're pretty young; we've got a lot of good senior leadership," Smallie continued. "But yeah, we're young in spots, but it's no excuses right now. We're halfway through the season, and we're not young anymore. We've played enough varsity baseball that we know the ropes, and we know what we need to have to do in order to be competitive."

For the Eagles, things are going well, and CM may very well be hitting its stride.

"You know, I think we're getting into a spot where I think we're finding our groove a little bit," Smith said. "I hope it's not too early. We want to be playing our best at the end of May, but right now, we're happy with the way things are going, and we're pretty consistent."