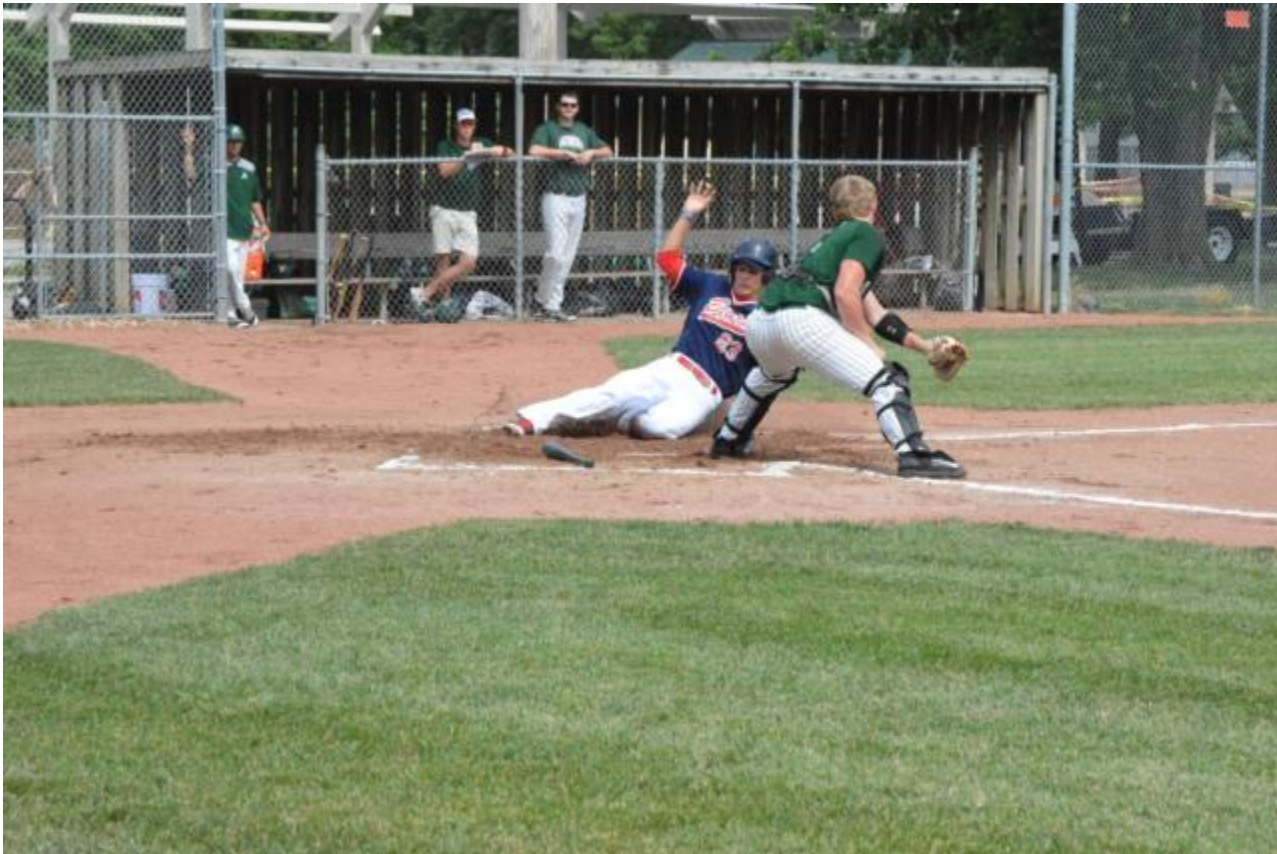
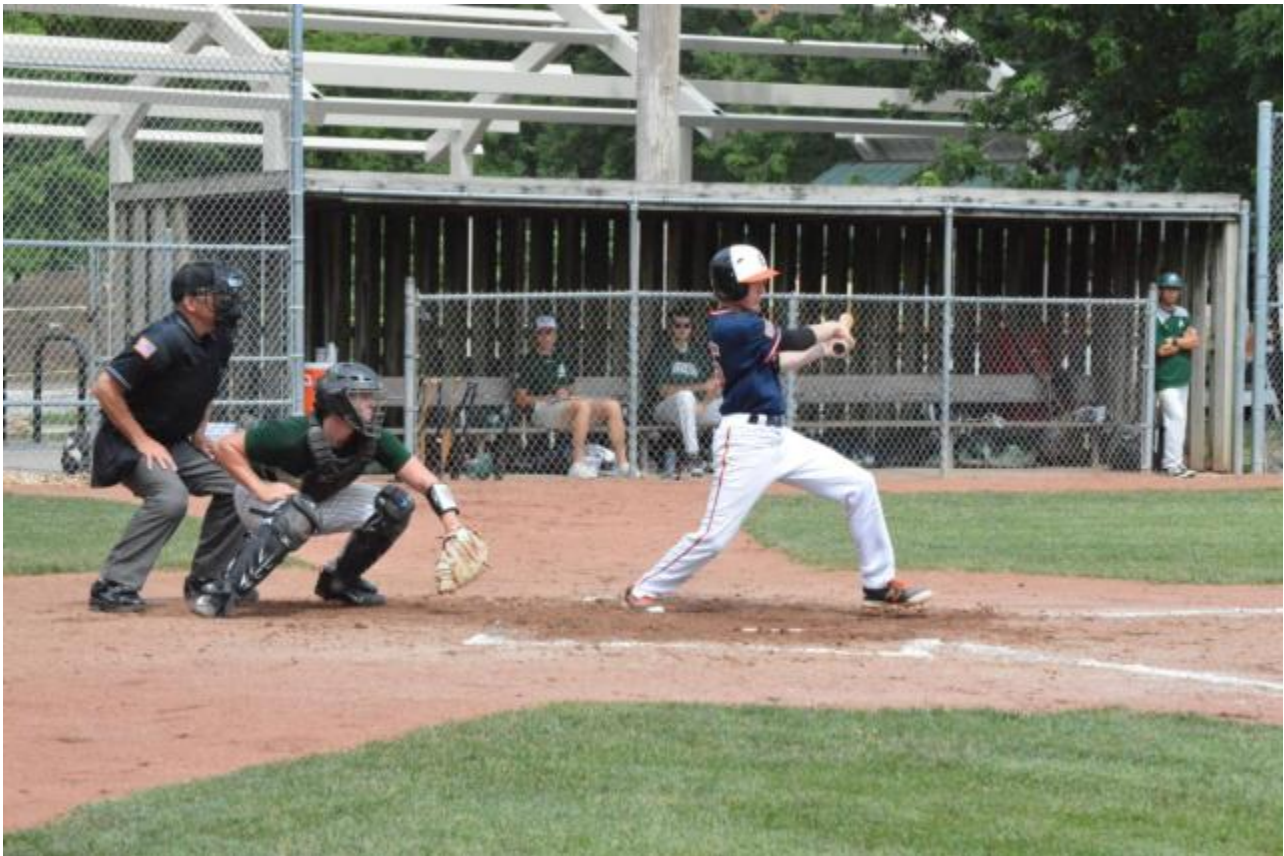
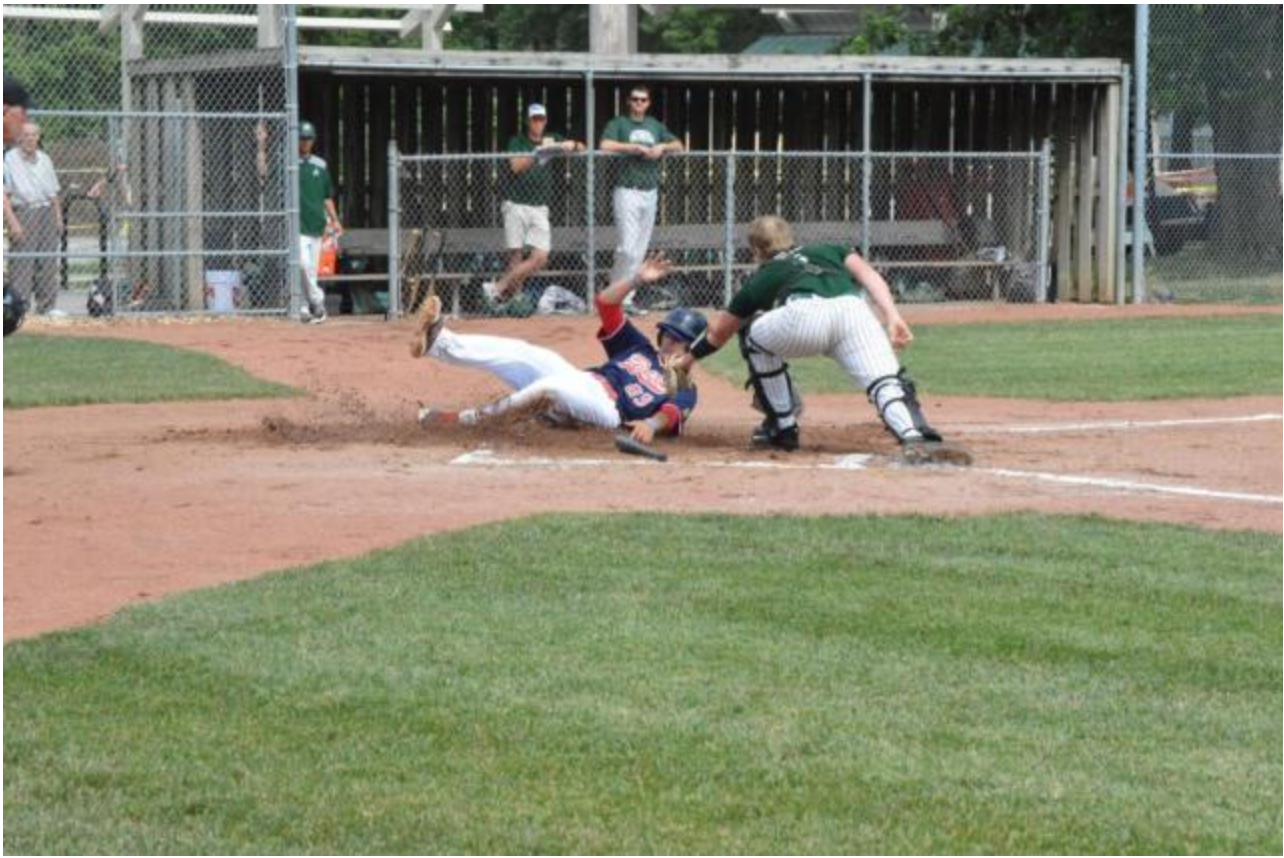




# Colley gets save as Bears hold off Aviston 5-4 in Firecracker opener

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS** – It was a great way to get a red hot tournament off on the right foot.

The Metro-East Bears got great pitching performances from Andrew Frank, who started, and Devin Colley, who got the save, as the Bears defeated the Aviston Express 5-4 in the opener of the Firecracker Classic baseball tournament Saturday morning at Longacre Park in Fairview Heights.

The Bears scored four times in the second, then held off an Aviston rally in the fifth in getting the win. The Express had defeated the Bears by the same score in nine innings earlier in the season.

“Aviston's a tough team,” said Metro-East manager Ken Schaaake. “We played them earlier in the year, and we knew they swing the bat really well. We lost to them 5-4 in nine innings last time, 5-4 this time, we turned out on top. We got a few runs early on, we're up 4-0, but that definitely was not enough to beat a team like this. They kept pecking away; pretty soon, they were really close to us.

“You saw, at the end of the game, they were right there, ready to go,” Schaaake continued. “We were lucky that our pitchers held, held strong for us. We got five real good innings from Andrew Frank, and then Devin Colley came in with two real good innings at the end to win the game for us.”

One could say that Metro-East bent, but didn't break in getting the win.

“Well, you kinda like to say that in a way,” Schaaake said. “Kinda like to say that we got ahead, we just couldn't tack on a few more runs a couple of times when we had the opportunity to get another run. We get a runner thrown out at the plate, and we leave a guy at third once or twice, and second once or twice.

“But take nothing away from Aviston,” Schaaake also said. “They've got hitters up and down the lineup that swing the bat. Our pitchers just did a real good job keeping them off the board. They had their opportunities early on, they had bases loaded, second and third, we had a double play at the end, and got one back to the pitcher for another double play that got us out of a situation.”

The Bears struck first in the second inning with four runs. Blake Vandiver got things started with a double to right center, scoring on an error by the shortstop when Corey Price's grounder to short was thrown away trying to get Vandiver at third. After a flyout and a walk, designated hitter Storm Coffman singled home Price with the second run. Kade Burns then delivered the big blow, driving home Will Messer, who had walked, and Coffman, who stole second with a base hit, Burns taking second on the throw home.

The Express got one of the runs back in the bottom of the inning, starting when Jared Niemeyer walked and stole second. Nolan Robben walked, and after a dropped pickoff throw by the first baseman, Niemeyer alertly took third. Aviston starting pitcher Carter Trulong singled home Niewmeyer, but Robben was thrown out at the plate to end the inning.

The Bears lost opportunites to pad their lead in the third and fourth, and in the bottom of the fourth, Aviston pulled another run back, all occurring with one out. Walks to Lukas Whitten and Trent Nunn, sandwiched around Niemeyer reaching on an error, loaded the bases. All three advanced on a wild pitch, with Whitten scoring, but Frank fanned Robben and caught Trulong looking on a third strike to end the rally.

Metro-East got what proved to be the winning run in the top of the fifth, starting with a Joel Quirin base hit. Vandiver singled Quirin to third, but when the shortstop's throw got away, Quirin scored and Vandiver advanced to third. Steven Patten flew out to Bryce Beckmann in center, who threw out Vandiver at the plate with a perfect throw to end the inning.

The Bears needed that run, as the Express cut the lead to 5-4 in the home half. It started when Kolby Schulte reached on an error by the third baseman, advanced to second on a passed ball, and scored on Beckmann's double to the right center field fence. Jack Strieker singled home Beckmann one out later, and went to third on a Whitten base hit. Niemeyer grounded back to the box for a 1-6-3 double play that got the Bears out of the inning.

Another double play preserved the lead in the next inning. Colley came in to pitch and walked Nunn, but Robben fanned, and Trulon's grounder to third was neatly scooped up by Patten, who started a 5-4-3 double play to end the inning.

The double plays really helped the Bears when they really needed them the most.

“It definitely helped us.” Schaake said. “We made a couple of errors in the field that led to a run or two. Both errors lead to a run, and we walked the leadoff guy in an inning; he comes around to score, and you never want to walk a leadoff guy, but that happens. But our kids hung in there, we made some real good plays defensively. Patten had a tough time on a couple of balls, had one error, but when it counted, he made the play, and we get a 5-4-3 double play to get out of an inning.’

The Express made one last run at the Bears in the bottom of the seventh. Schulte lead off with a base hit, and went to third one out later on a Brent Timmons single. Strieker flew out to center and Whitten was called out on strikes to end the game.

The Bears play Jackson, Mo. Saturday night at 7:30 p.m., then finish up group play with two more games Sunday, at 10 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. As far as what the Bears hope to accomplish in the tournament, Schaake keeps it simple.

“We definitely would like to win the games,” Schaake said with a laugh.

“You just want your kids to continue to play hard, and get good at bats,” Schaake also said. “And you want to have your pitchers get good work on the mound. So, I think we've got our pitching staff ready to go, and we'll just have to wait and see.”



