



Coffman, Hansel come up big when Bears need them

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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HIGHLAND – Cole Hansel and Storm Coffman came up big when the Metro East Bears needed them to in Tuesday's 5-2 win over Aviston in the Illinois American Legion Fifth Division baseball tournament at Highland's Glik Park/Optimist Field.

The win sent the Bears into a 7 p.m. Wednesday showdown against host Highland for a spot in Friday's championship round; the Bears have played Highland three times this summer.

The Bears wound up getting three runs off sacrifice bunts and those runs proved to be the difference in the win. “Anytime you can put up big numbers, it's always helpful,” Hansel said. “Those games that are 1-0, 2-1 – those are the stressful games, so it was nice to have a little insurance there.”

With the Bears having won their first two games of the tournament, the Bears have an advantage; other teams have to work their way through the loser's bracket to have a chance to win and advance to next week's state Legion tournament in Rantoul. “That's the ultimate goal, to get that day off on Thursday and get a day of rest, especially with the heat coming out,” Hansel said; the area is under an excessive heat warning for the remainder of the week. “We're going to be, just like today, coming out and swinging the bats, try to put some good swings on the balls, just doing what we've been doing all year.”

Coffman kept his pitch count down through the game, an important factor considering Tuesday's warm weather. “It helped me out,” Coffman said. “You don't get more tired, especially when it's hot; late in that seventh inning, I was tired a little bit but not too bad.

“That'd be great (if the Bears can get the day off Thursday); hopefully, we can come out and hit the ball and the pitching be there – we should be fine.”

Coffman threw his curveball quite a bit in the game. “I used my curveball a lot today to keep them off-balance,” Coffman said. “They're a pretty good-hitting team; I have to keep them off-balance, locate my pitches – that's what I try to do.”

“He just goes out there and just throws the ball,” Hansel said of Coffman. “He's just real laid-back with it; I think that's what makes him so successful with it – he doesn't stress himself out, he doesn't overthink anything – he just throws the baseball, which is what he's supposed to go out there and do. He's a special pitcher.”