

Bears advance in Legion state tournament

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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RANTOUL – A three-run top of the first inning set the tone for the Metro East Bears as they advanced in the Illinois American Legion state tournament with a 6-4 win over host Rantoul Wednesday evening at Rantoul's Wabash Park.

The win sent the Bears to a 5:30 p.m. Thursday game against Arlington Heights, 1-0 losers to Danville in Wednesday's opening game, with Thursday's winner advancing to Friday's winner's bracket final; that game will be played at either 2 p.m. or 5:30 p.m.,

with the final set for 10:30 a.m. Saturday. An Arlington Heights loss would eliminate them from the double-elimination tournament.

“We got three runs in the first and that set the tone,” said Bears manager Ken Schaaake. “Storm (Coffman) was in control and set them down, threw strikes and had confidence in his teammates to make the plays. They gave us a battle.”

The Bears got the bases loaded in the top of the first with one out on walks to Dylan Burris, Joel Quirin and Blake Vandiver before Burris and Quirin scored on a Rantoul error; Vandiver then scored on a grounder to second to make it 3-0 in the Bears' favor. Metro East added another run in the fourth on a Corey Price leadoff homer to right before Rantoul scored solo runs in the bottom of the fourth and bottom of the sixth to cut the lead to 4-2.

The Bears scored twice in the top of the eighth (Legion games at this level are nine innings) when Steven Pattan brought in Vandiver on a RBI single, with Pattan then scoring on a RBI single from Cole Hansel to increase the lead to 6-2. Rantoul scored twice in the bottom of the ninth but could not get closer to the Bears.

Price was 1-for-4 with the homer, three RBIs and a run scored for the Bears, while Vandiver was 1-for-3 with a double and two runs scored, Burris a run scored, Kade Burns 1-for-3, Quirin a run scored, Pattan 1-for-4 with two RBIs and a run scored and Hansel 1-for-3 with a RBI, Coffman went the distance for Metro East, throwing 125 pitches and giving up four runs (all earned) on eight hits while dismissing six by strikeout.

In Wednesday's other games, Danville's win over Arlington Heights came on a bases-loaded walk in the bottom of the ninth that brought home Chase Vinson while four runs in the top of the 10th gave Barrington a 5-1 win over Peoria to advance Barrington.

Besides the Bears' 5:30 p.m. game today, Rantoul takes on Peoria in a 10:30 a.m. elimination game while Barrington meets up with Danville at 2 p.m. in a winner's bracket clash. The tournament is being live-streamed in real time with play-by-play of each game available on the GameChanger web site at www.gamechanger.com under 2017 IL. Sr. Legion State Tournament; a basic GameChanger account is free, with a nominal monthly fee required to follow the play-by-play and box scores. GameChanger is also available as an app for iPhones and Android smartphones in the app store on your device.

