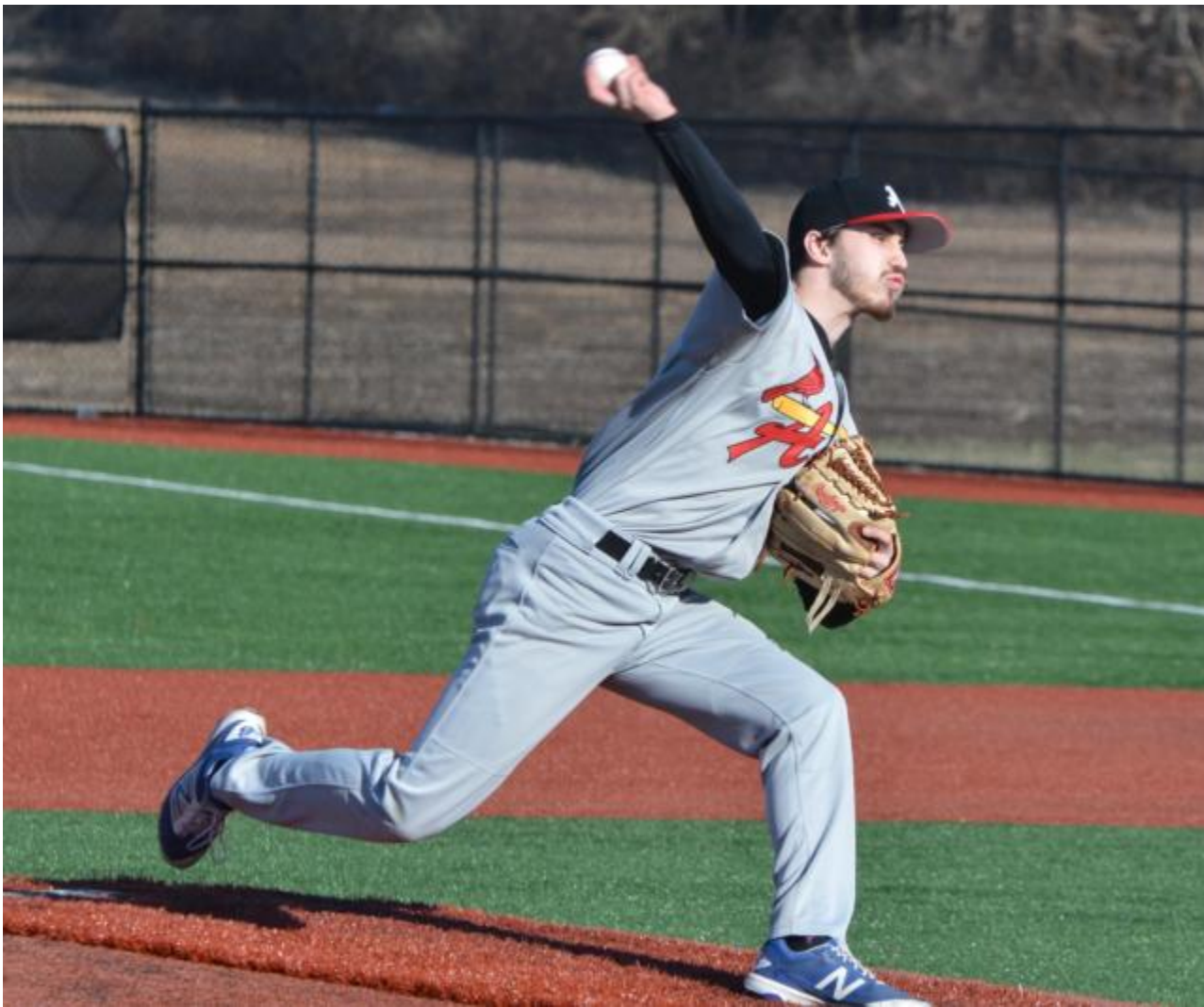
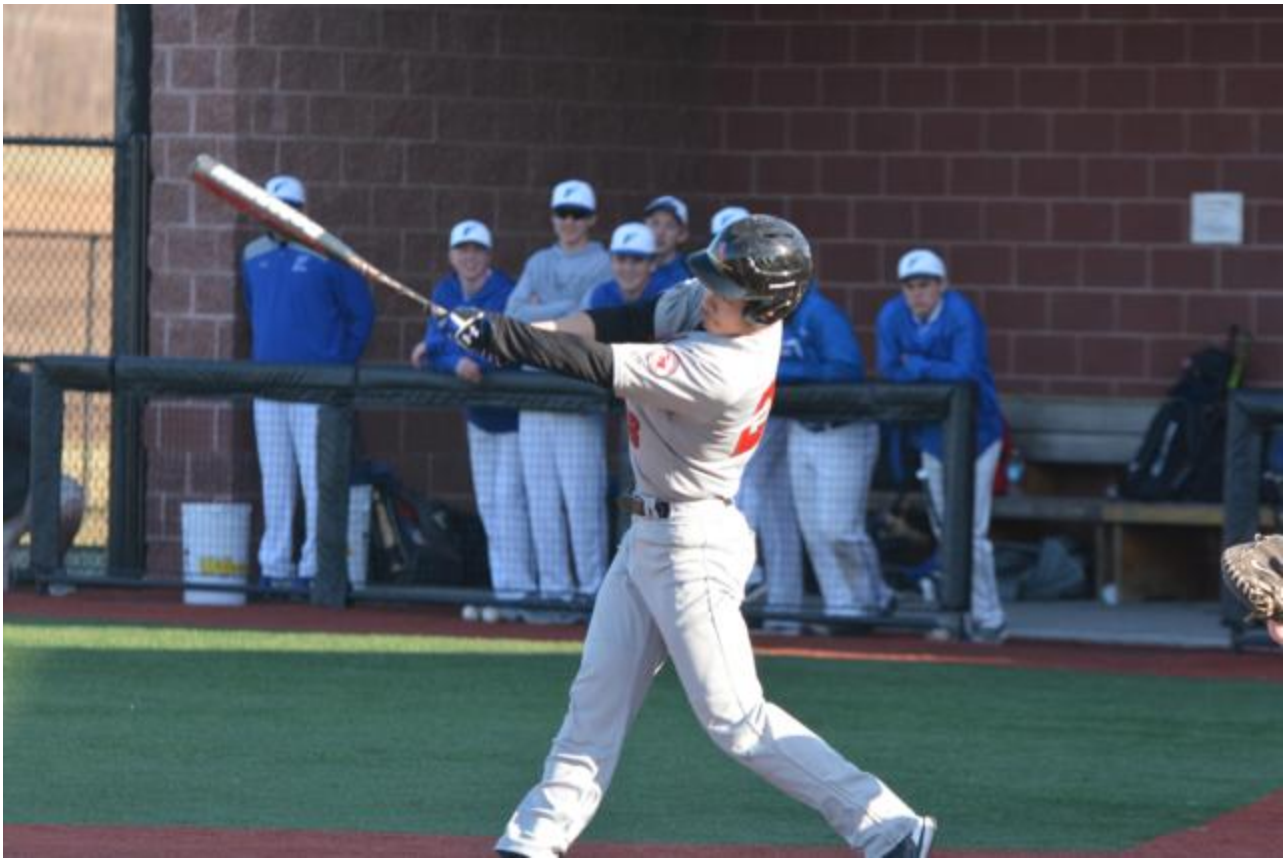


Redbirds lose opening game despite strong pitching

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - In their opening game of the 2018 season, the Alton Redbirds lost to the Freeburg Midgets 2-1 in the Kick-off Classic at Roy E. Lee Field on the campus SIU-Edwardsville on Wednesday afternoon.

“We did a lot of good things well, but for a good portion of the game neither team could steal first base,” Alton head coach Todd Haug said. “ played acceptable defense, not great. Again it’s early, and we’ll bounce tomorrow. That’s the great thing about this game.”

Charlie Erler allowed one run on three hits and struck out eight batters while walking two. He pitched five and two-thirds innings and didn’t give up a base hit until two there were two outs in the fifth inning.

“He’ll tell you he was good, but not great. Velocity is definitely there,” Haug said about Erler’s outing. “He had a couple of pitches working and a good curveball. On a nice day, he’ll be a tough foe to go against. His stuff gets a lot better when he keeps the ball down, and as the game went on, he did that.”

Freeburg starting pitcher, Travis Bergkoetter was just as effective as Erler. He pitched a shutout in five innings while striking out five batters, allowing no walks and gave up three hits.

Robby Taul and Riley Phillips each went 2-for-3 for the Redbirds.

Freeburg scored the first run of the game with a two-out rally in the bottom of the fifth inning. Carson Smith got an infield single and stole second base, which set up Ryan Schaller, and he hit a sinking line drive into right-center field to make it 1-0.

In the top of the seventh, the Redbirds got the run they needed.

Taul led off with a double that was misjudged by Freeburg’s second basemen and right fielder. Brandon Droste bunted Taul over to third base, and then Adam Stills hit a soft ground ball to Smith, who didn’t have enough time to throw Taul out at home plate but opted to first base.

Zach Knight, who came into relieve Erler in the fifth inning, retired four straight hitters but ran into trouble with the game on the line.

Tommy Speranzi got on base due to an infield error, and then Smith walked to put two men on with no outs. Schaller grounded out but advanced the runners to second and third, which gave Haug little choice to walk Jack Lugge to load the bases in hope for a double play. Alton wasn’t able to get it as Brady Schmitz worked his way to a walk-off bases loaded walk to win the game.

“Neither team hit the ball particularly well. We got a run off of one of their errors, and they scored their run off of one of ours. It was very similar,” Haug said. Zach pitching in his first varsity game did very well.”

The Redbirds face Carbondale at GSC Credit Union Ballpark in Sauget tonight against the Carbondale Terriers at 7 PM. Tomorrow night they’ll play Tinley Park at Tom Pile Field in Edwardsville at 7 PM as well.

“The expectations are the same year in and year out regardless of the talent. We play the game with respect,” Haug said. “Respect the game. Respect all of those that have played before us. Play the game with a certain amount of respect that allows us to represent our community well. We’re a young ballclub in general. Overall if we can put solid contact on the ball, we’ll be in most games because pitching and defense will be just fine.”

