

Fight to the end: Explorers come back in seventh only to lose in extras to Althoff in regional finals

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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O'FALLON - Marquette Catholic head baseball coach Tim Fahnestock had numerous situations to absorb.

The Explorers found themselves trailing Althoff Catholic 5-1 in the bottom of the seventh inning with three outs left in their season. They managed to rally getting men on base and with two outs got three runs to stun the Crusaders by tying the game forcing extra innings. However, Althoff's lineup brushed themselves off and came back with a lethal reply plating seven runs on seven hits in the top of the eighth.

"We left too many men on base early and let them hang around," Fahnestock said. "We battled back when we had to and we just couldn't finish it, couldn't capitalize."

The Explorers fell 12-7 to Althoff in the Class 2A Wesclin Regional Championship. The game was played in O'Fallon at Blazer Field due to Wesclin's field being unavailable due to the rain.

Althoff, a six-seed who upset Southwestern 4-3 in the semifinals improve their record to 13-14 and will face the Teutopolis Wooden Shoes in the Flora Sectional Semifinals this Wednesday at 4:30 PM.

Matthew Schroder was 3-for-5 with five RBI, including a double and a triple. Jack Yrusa and Josh Dima finished 2-for-5 with Yrusa plating two RBI doubles.

“battled and did what they had to do,” Fahnestock said. “It’s baseball, and it’s tough to look out there and see these guys their senior year. Every year you grow fond of these kids. Four years you get them, and you’re like a second dad to them, and it’s tough to say goodbye on that note, it hurts. I’m proud of the kids.”

The Explorers had plenty of opportunities to take get on the board first expand by getting runners on base in just about every inning. However, they couldn’t get the crucial hit they needed.

Sam Cogan finished 3-for-3 at the plate, and Jed Eggering was 2-for-3 with an RBI. Ethan Kopsie and Kaleb Ware were 1-for-2 reaching base four times each.

“We took some good at-bats, but we also took too many pitches in counts that we should’ve taken advantage of,” Fahnestock said.

Nick Hemman took the mound for the Explorers coming off a one-run complete game victory over Wesclin. Star pitcher Luke Simmons was unavailable for the Explorers due to a sore elbow he picked up last week.

“That changes everything. You lose your number one pitcher,” Fahnestock said. “We didn’t say too much and kept it quiet. We thought maybe we’d have him back by Wednesday to throw.”

Hemann and Dima, both left-handers, went toe-to-toe for four innings putting guys on base, but keeping zeros on the board.

In the top of the fifth, Schroder and Yrusa broke the deadlock hitting back-to-back doubles to give the Crusaders a 3-0 lead.

In the bottom of half of the inning, the Explorers got a run back on an outfield error, but, Althoff would respond by scoring two more runs off a couple of Marquette mistakes.

Dima was lifted due to this pitch count with two outs in the sixth. He struck out eight, walked six and gave up a run while allowing seven hits. Ysura came in and the Explorers bats heated up when they needed to in the seventh.

Kopsie led off with a double and scored after a ground ball by Ware snuck through first basemen, Caleb Laramore's glove. However, Ware was caught stealing at second base for the second out of the inning. Luke Schnaak drew a walk and with strikes, Eggering slapped a single to left field to keep things going. Kyle Begnel was hit by a pitch to load the bases for Maag who proceeded to draw a walk that made it 5-3.

After failing to get the clutch hit they needed to break an inning open, Marquette got it with Cogan at the plate. He ripped 1-0 pitch to left field scoring Eggering and the throw from left field beat Eggering, but it was offline, and improbably the game was tied.

Next up was Garrett Weiner, a .369 hitter coming into the game and due for a hit.

"We had Garrett at the plate and Jayce on third, and I'm thinking, "hey we're in the driver's seat, and this is it," Fahnestock said.

Weiner hit a shot up the middle, but Schroder was there in perfect position to knock the ball down and touch second base for the force out.

Marquette's season comes to a close at 20-10.

Despite coming up short of their goal of winning a regional, Fahnestock reflects positively on the season with his players and has plenty to look forward to next season.

"This group was blue-collar guys that go to work every day. They did everything I asked them to do. Any optional practice I ever had it was a full house. This group had great leadership, great heart, and were in pretty much every game, and played hard until the end."







