



Edwardsville comes from behind, defeats Belleville 6-3 to claim Illinois Legion District 22 crown

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Edwardsville American Legion Post 199 found themselves trailing Belleville Post 58 early on in their Illinois District 22 championship round game Friday evening at Edwardsville’s Hoppe Park.

Post 199 fell behind the Hilgards 3-0 in the middle of the fifth inning; undaunted, Edwardsville cut the lead to 3-2 by the end of the fifth and then came up with four runs in the bottom of the sixth – the big blow a two-run single from Mikey Hampton that gave Edwardsville the lead – and defeated Belleville 6-3 to advance to the Illinois Fifth Division Tournament in Aviston this week.

Edwardsville will play at 1 p.m. Sunday against the winner of a Saturday first-round game between Salem Post 128 and Orient Post 1961; the division champion advances to the Illinois state tournament in Alton beginning July 28. The state champion will represent Illinois at the Great Lakes Regional in Napoleon, Ohio, beginning Aug. 8.

“They (Belleville) put the pressure on us,” said Edwardsville manager Ken Schaake. “They got up 3-0, but as I told (starting pitcher Reid) Hendrickson, ‘I know you didn’t have your best stuff out there, but you could have very easily just blown a little bit out there on the mound, but you kept us at 3-0’.

“He kept us and where we needed to be; 3-0 isn’t an insurmountable lead for a team with three or four innings to go.”

Post 199 has gotten boosts from several different places when they were needed this season; Cole Hampton’s double leading off the bottom of the fifth seemed to ignite Edwardsville Friday. “He hits a double into right-center and gets over (Jack) Lanxon’s head and turns around and hits one (in the sixth) almost to the fence in right field that went off the end of the glove (that tied the game at 3-3).

“That’s my No. 8 hitter that did that, and I think even lined out one time before he hit that – he hit the ball hard. It’s been up and down the lineup; that’s what I’ve said all year long to these kids, it’s not just one guy. You can have the middle of your order not do anything and the bottom of the order picks you up, or the top of the order. I’m pretty confident with whoever’s up there.”

Hilgard manager Greg Eschman was proud of his team’s effort; Belleville had gotten out to a slow start at the start of the summer and battled to reach the final. “I was proud of them,” Eschman said of the Hilgards. “The battled; we gave them all we had and left it on the field; I’m proud of the guys.”

Belleville got to Hendrickson in the third to take the lead, starting with a Dillion Sunnquist single with one out and an error on an attempted sacrifice that put Justin Goerger on base; Hendrickson then struck out Buddy Gore for the second out, but back-to-back RBI singles from Matt Schroeder and Lanxon scored Sunnquist and Goerger to give the Hilgards a 2-0 lead; an additional run came across in the fifth when Gore singled with two out and Schroeder doubled home Gore to up the lead to 3-0; Lanxon kept the inning alive with a single, but Jack Ysursa grounded into a fielder’s choice to end the inning.

“We’ve been confident all week,” Eschman said about the run. “I really liked the kids approached it this week; we didn’t get too excited, we didn’t get too down and kept everything on an even keel. We showed up, we fought like dog and it is what it is.”

Edwardsville answered in the bottom of the fifth when Cole Hampton drew a walk to begin the inning and came around to score when Mikey Hampton hit a deep fly ball that was dropped for an error; Mikey Hampton ended up at second after the error that scored Cole Hampton. Joel Quirin then delivered a single that got Mikey Hampton around third and heading to home; he then dove across the plate to avoid a play at the plate and cut the lead to 3-2.

In the sixth, Will Messer singled with one out and went to second when a pickoff play went into left field to get him to second; one out later, Cole Hampton stepped to the plate and delivered a double that drove in Messer to tie the game before Konnar Loewen walked to put runners at first and second.

A Tate Wargo single then loaded the bases to bring up Mikey Hampton, who got ahold of a Sauls offering and doubled to right-center to score Cole Hampton and Loewen and give Edwardsville a 5-3 lead; Wargo added an additional run on a wild pitch. Issac Garrett then came to the mound in place of Hendrickson and retired the side in order to send Post 199 to the Fifth Division tournament.

Wargo went 2-for-3 with a run scored for Post 199, with Mikey Hampton 1-for-4 with two RBIs and a run scored, Quirin 1-for-4 with a key RBI, Messer 2-for-2 with a run scored, Cole Hampton 2-for-2 with a pair of doubles, an RBI and a run scored and Loewen a run scored on the evening.

Hendrickson went six innings on the mound and dismissed eight by strikeout while Garrett struck out the final two batters he faced.

Schaake had much to say about the team that won the district championship. “These kids have worked hard all year long,” Schaake said. “They’ve overcome some adversity, going to games with 10 or 11 guys and playing hard, doubleheaders and not quitting; that says a lot about them and you see it. They’re a good group of kids – they hang together, they’re not little factions; they’re a team.”