

Danville defeats Alton 3-0 in state Legion tourney opener

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Alton’s American Legion baseball team had several days off after being eliminated in the Illinois District 22 playoffs.

Post 126 knew, though, that hosting the Illinois state tournament would give them a second chance under Legion baseball rules that give host teams an automatic spot.

The Legionnaires, however, are facing elimination at 11 a.m. today at Redbird Field in Alton when they take on Milan Post 569 after falling 3-0 Saturday evening to Danville Post 210, dropping Alton to 25-17 on the summer.

“Give credit to their pitcher (Noah Nelson),” said Alton manager Nick Paulda. “He did an amazing job on the mound tonight, mixing up the speeds and keeping our hitters off-balance; he took advantage of the (strike) zone tonight too.

“Adam (Stilts, who got the ball for Post 126 and went the distance) kept us in the ball game; once again, he did exactly what we expected from him. He threw strikes, pounded the zone and got outs when he needed to. But when you make three errors and give up three runs, those things go hand-in-hand.”

Paulda felt having the time off between Post 126’s elimination from the district tournament and Saturday’s state opener may have hurt Alton. “Taking a week off looked like it kind of hurt us,” Paulda said. “We looked kind of slow out there; our reaction on several plays looked like, baseball-wise, we took time off.”

One key play in the bottom of the fourth may have told the story of the game; Alton got the bases loaded with one out and looked as though they were going to break through until Ryan Best hit a shot down the line to third, where Danville’s DeVante Hicks knocked the ball down, stepped on third to force Bryce Parish and threw to first to retire Best for an inning-ending double play.

“DeVante is one of my college guys,” said Danville manager Allen Shepherd. “If they’re going to hit to somewhere, they hit it in the infield – I trust our infield and DeVante’s going to knock it down.”

(Hicks) made two very good plays in that inning,” Paulda said. “He knocked the one ball down and made sure he got at least one out on that play and it ended up being two; their left side of the infield is very tough.”

Danville had taken the lead in the top of the first when Hicks led off the game with a single and went to third on an Austin Littleton single to put runners at the corners before Ernest Plummer grounded to Zaide Wilson; Hicks had drifted too far off third and was caught in a rundown before a throw got away to allow Hicks to score.

Nelson then doubled in Littleton to increase the Danville lead to 2-0 before Stilts got out of the inning. Alton had a couple of chances after that, but a pickoff of Best at first

ended the second inning and Ben Mossman was thrown out trying to get to second after a single cut out the heart of Post 126 chances before the inning-ending double play in the fourth.

Nelson then kept Alton at bay the rest of the way, with a third Danville run scoring in the fourth. Stilts kept Danville off the board but Nelson retired nine of the final 10 Alton hitters he faced, giving up only a walk to Wilson the rest of the way.

Parish, Wilson and Best had hits for Alton in the game while Stilts took the loss, dismissing one by strikeout on the evening.

In Saturday's other games, Newton advanced with a 6-1 win over Elgin in the tournament's opening game while Mount Prospect send Milan to the loser's bracket with a 3-0 win in the day's second game. Today's schedule begins with Alton facing Milan in an elimination game at 11 a.m., followed by Newton meeting Mount Prospect at 2 p.m. and Elgin meeting Danville at 5 p.m., with Elgin eliminated with a loss.

