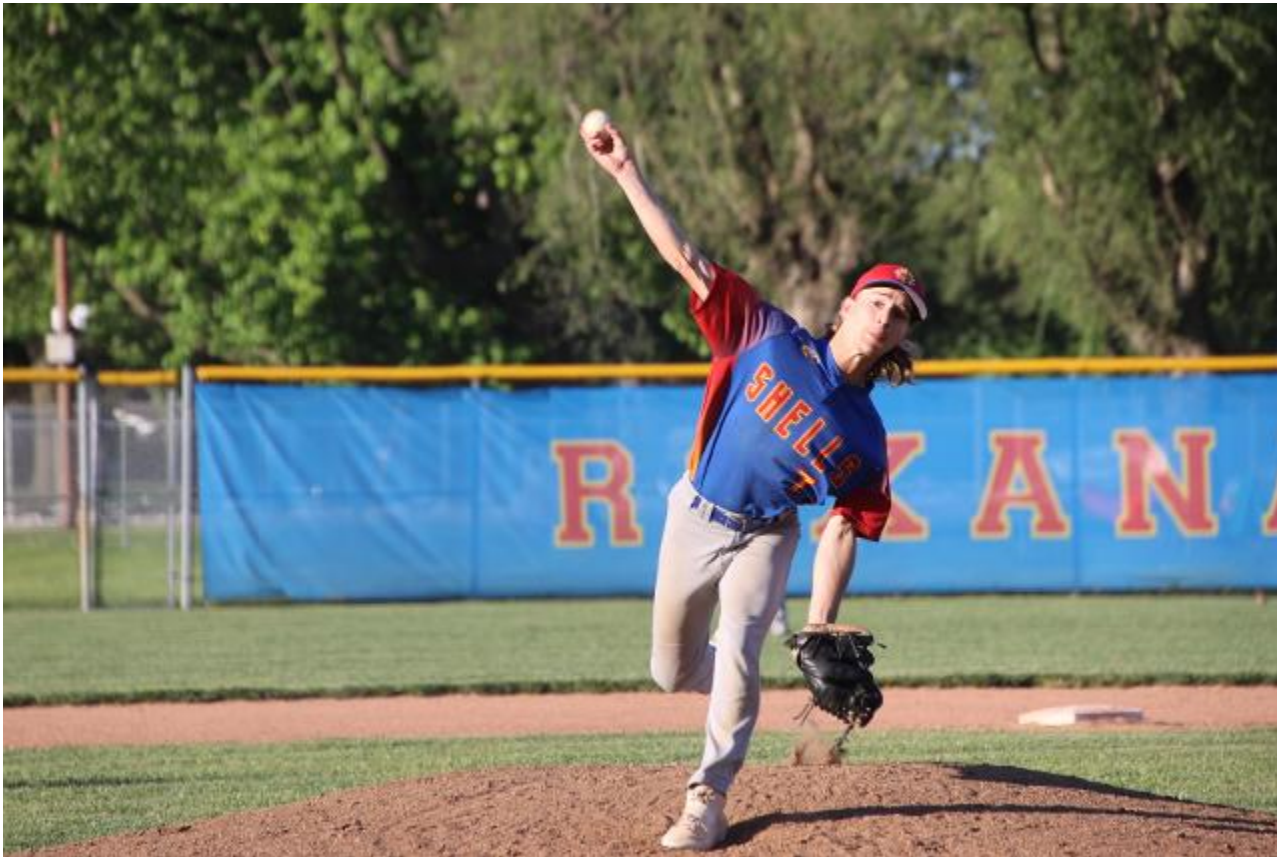


Roxana's Baseball Season Comes To A Close Against Staunton In Regional Quarterfinals

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ROXANA – After a grueling 32-game regular season, the Roxana High School baseball team’s season came to an end in the opening round of regionals. They fell to the Staunton Bulldogs by a score of 13-7 and finished their season with a 9-24 record.

Shells’ head coach Jerry Wheaton has said time and time again that he made this season’s schedule difficult on purpose, to make his young team better.

“We played 33 games this year and ten of them were against some of the best teams in the state of Illinois,” Wheaton said. “Playing teams we can beat all the time isn’t going to make us better and I thought we played some tough teams really well.”

The Shells are a very young team, only losing four seniors. The four that played in their final high school game were Connor House, Bryson Presley, Nolan Tolbert, and Jack Wieneke.

“We praised the seniors a lot because the four kids I had this year, they were top-notch kids. They show up each and every day, they do the right things when they’re supposed to, and are never ineligible, never in trouble. We can’t do anything but thank them for that,” Wheaton said about his seniors.

House and Tolbert have been regular starters all season and will be difficult to replace. Luckily, almost half of the Shells' team is underclassmen with a lot to learn still.

"It comes down to these young guys," Wheaton said. "They don't know how difficult varsity baseball is. The two guys we faced today from Staunton, both seniors who have played all four years, and they've been through the grind as well."

"But, at any given moment I have two or three freshmen out on the diamond," Wheaton added.

Whether it be the nerves from the young team or something else, the Shells came out a little shaky against the Bulldogs Monday afternoon (May 16).

Sophomore pitcher Elias Thies allowed nine runs in the first inning, but Wheaton was there to defend his starter.

"I put him in a big spot in the regional game and he didn't have his stuff today. When he has his stuff, he's really good. Sometimes that's part of baseball. Some guys it's just not their day," Wheaton said.

The Shells didn't pack things up and call it a season after just half an inning though. Instead, they came back and scored four runs in the bottom half of the first to make it 9-4.

"It was a crazy first inning and I've honestly never been a part of anything like that. The way the top of the first inning went is just a part of baseball sometimes," Wheaton said.

The Shells at one point only trailed by a couple of runs. In the bottom of the third, Thies stepped into the batter's box with the bases loaded. He cleared the bases with a triple and made it 9-7. At that point in the game, the Shells were right there in it.

Unfortunately for Roxana, Staunton came out and scored four more in the top of the fourth. The Shells weren't able to come up with anything offensively down the stretch and they fell 13-7 ending their season.

Wheaton is right about how hard his schedule was, playing the likes of some really good teams from the STL region including Columbia (21-7-1), Breese Central (29-4), and Father McGivney (30-4) just to name a few.

The Shells might not have finished with the best win-loss record, but it's a season that they know they can improve on, and one that helped them improve overall as a ball club. This young Roxana team can only get better.

"Our schedule is meant to make us better in the future, and that's what it's going to do," Wheaton finished with.



