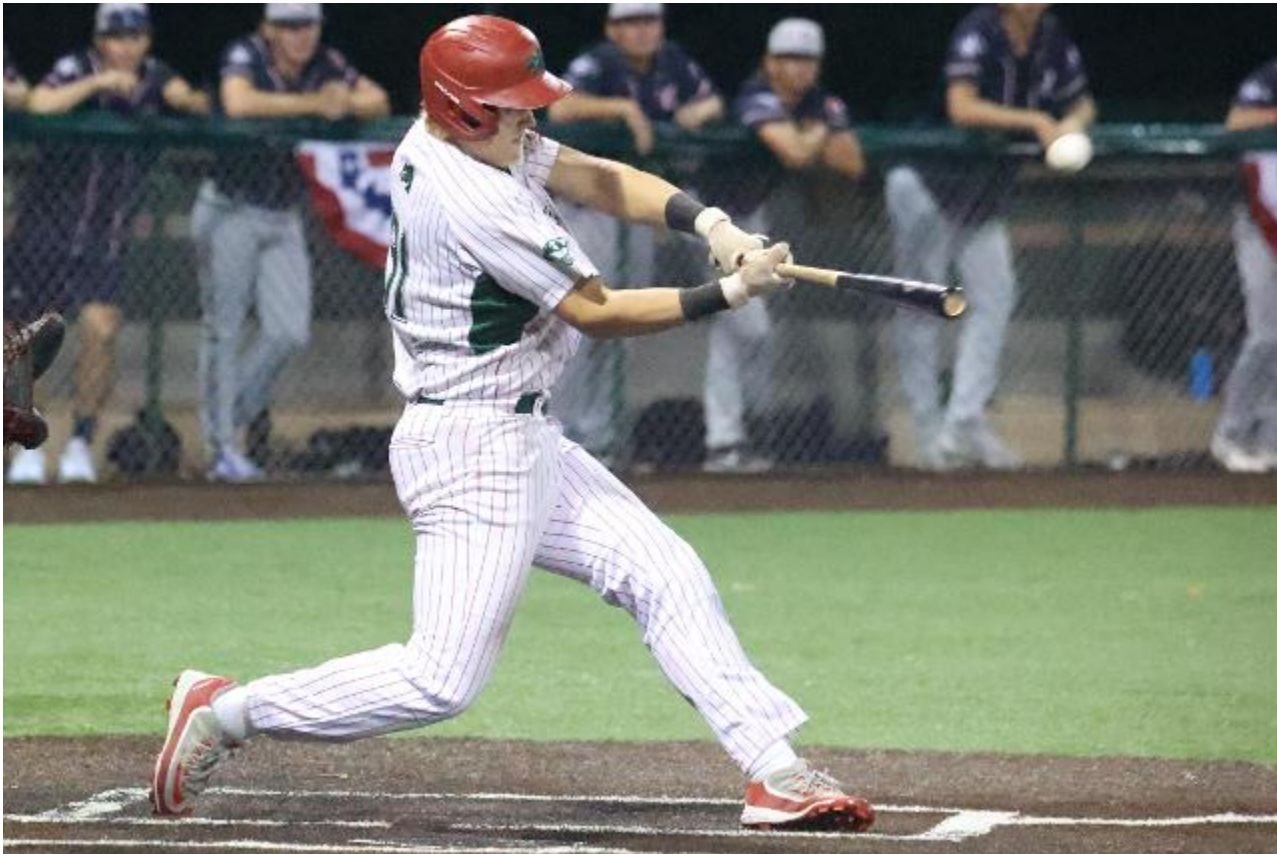


Broekemeier's Walk Off Grand Slam Leads River Dragons To Western Conference Championship

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON - It's the hit you dream of growing up playing whiffle ball in the backyard.

“I said a prayer to myself, ‘God help me come through in this situation and he did just that. I’m very blessed.’”

The situation was simple really.

Erik Broekemeier found himself in the batter's box with the bases loaded with one out in the bottom of the ninth. The River Dragons were trailing 7-4.

Broekemeier took a fastball over the fence in the opposite field to clinch the Prospect League Western Conference Championship in arguably the most dramatic way possible, winning by a score of 8-7 over the Quincy Gems.

"Couldn't have written it up any better than this. That's definitely one for the storybook there," general manager Dallas Martz said after the historic win.

"It's not how we drew it up," head coach Darrell Handelsman said jokingly.

The River Dragons trailed 7-1 during the seventh inning stretch but overcame the odds.

Quincy struck first in the opening inning and then again in the second. The Gems grabbed a quick 2-0 lead through two and a half innings.

Alton cut the deficit in half momentarily after Mike Hampton doubled and Blake Burris singled to bring him home.

A couple of scoreless innings went by, then Quincy broke the game wide open. They scored four runs in the top of the fifth to take a 6-1 lead. Another run in the seventh made it 7-1.

Things weren't looking too good for Alton, but they found a way to get something going.

Gunnar Doyle doubled with one out in the bottom of the seventh. Hampton got walked, so runners were then on first and second. Burris flew out to bring up Eddie King Jr. He cranked his 16th home run of the season into the opposite field to bring the game to 7-4.

That was enough to bring the River Dragons and the crowd back into the game. All of a sudden everyone believed.

Alton had the top of the order due up in the bottom of the ninth. Hampton drew a walk, King got hit by a pitch and Marcus Heusohn was also walked, loading the bases with one out.

Up steps designated hitter Broekemeier and as Martz said, "the rest is history."

“We were fighting all the way through that,” Broekemeier said after the extraordinary comeback win.





Pitching-wise for the River Dragons, Shane Kearbey started on the mound and went four and a third innings. He allowed the first five runs but did manage to pick up a couple of strikeouts. Carson Richardson came in to relieve him, but only faced two batters before being pulled.

Brady Salzman pitched an inning and two-thirds to help get out of a jam, but it was Colton Hunt who tossed the final three innings and he was dialed in.

“We got one of our best guys on the mound the last three innings,” Handelsman said about Hunt.

He struck out four batters and only gave up three hits and a run. He was awarded the win.

Hampton and Burris each had a couple of hits, but it was King and Broekemeier who raked in the RBIs, combining for seven of the eight earned runs. Burris was the other one.

It’s no doubt this win will go down in River Dragons’ history and will certainly be a game the many fans in attendance won’t soon forget.

“It’s hard for me to talk about our crowd without getting choked up and emotional. They’re incredible. Nobody left tonight. They were all in their seats, and they were all standing and cheering in the end,” Martz said about the home fans.

With the Western Conference Championship game won, it sets up a three-game series for the Prospect League Championship.

The schedule isn’t out yet, but the River Dragons will be taking on the winner of the Eastern Conference Championship, the Chillicothe Paints.

“Now we have an opportunity to win the whole thing and it’s just awesome,” Burris said.

“I think we’re the best team in this league and I think this is our time to prove that.”