

Smith's Three-Run Shot In First Inning Enough To Keep Griffins Undefeated – Alton Gives It Their All In Defeat At Home

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
April 14 2023 9:17 PM



ALTON – Coming off of a shock win against O’Fallon the day before, the Alton Redbirds hosted another high-caliber team Friday afternoon in the unbeaten Father McGivney Griffins.

The Redbirds wanted to put that streak to the test.

“I thought they threw the kitchen sink at us,” Griffins’ head coach Chris Erwin said about Alton’s efforts.

Riding a now 17-game win streak, Erwin and his team know that everyone they play is going to give them their best game.

“It’s good for us to get those tests, get into those battles, it’s going to make us better each game and progressively get better toward the end,” Erwin said.

Thanks to a three-run homer from clean-up hitter Gabe Smith, his Father McGivney Griffins went on to a well-earned 4-1 win over the hosting Redbirds.

Daniel Gierer got it started with a single. Smith wasn’t going to get an at-bat in the first inning had it not been for an error that allowed Nick Franklin to get aboard. A pretty routine pop fly was dropped in shallow outfield, sending Smith to the plate with runners at the corners and two outs.

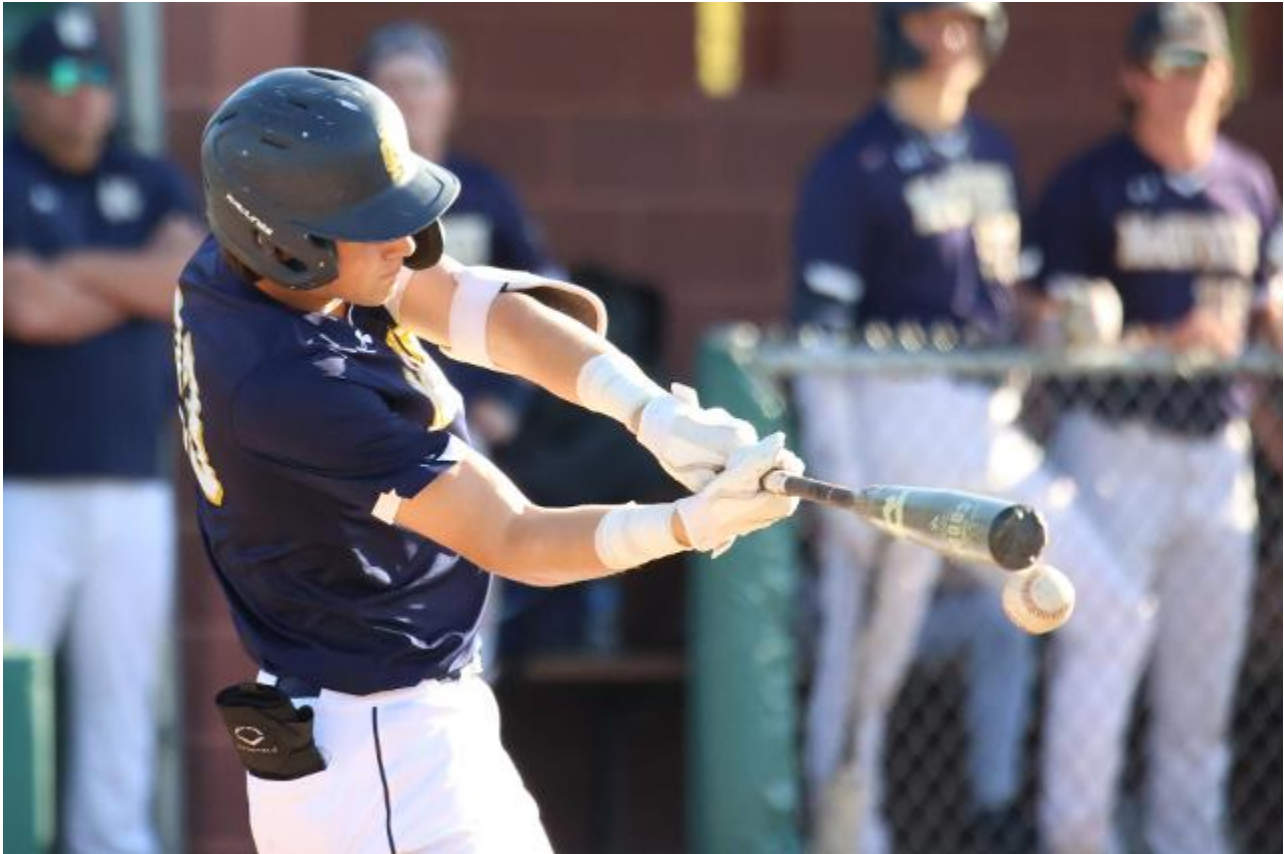
He took complete advantage of the situation and put one over the fence for his fifth home run of the season.

“That home run proved to be very, very big in this game, and to jump on them early was good, Erwin said.

For Alton head coach Scott Harper and his coaching staff, the three-run shot came as a great deal of disappointment.

“We competed well,” Harper said.

“Obviously gave them the extra swing by not catching the popup to get out of the inning, and he made us pay for it. They’re a good-hitting club, they came ready to swing, and he got the one he needed to knock it out.”



It was really the only slip-up from Alton's pitching rotation who had a great outing otherwise.

Smith hit the home run off starting pitcher Scott Bartow whom Harper was still pleased with.

"Our pitchers were dynamite today, and that's what we needed to do," he said. "That's the message we're trying to get with these guys, good improvement yesterday, and another step forward today."





Alton came into this game after an 8-5 win over Southwestern Conference foe O'Fallon the day prior.

On the mound for the Griffins was Jackson Rodgers. He threw six innings with three strikeouts, allowing six hits and only one earned run.

That one run came in the bottom of the fourth.

Logan Bogard got it started with a leadoff double then was batted in by Will Weirichs RBI-single to make it a 3-1 ballgame.

It was also during this stretch that Aaron Wooten was throwing on the mound for Alton. He pitched three innings and went nine-up, nine-down with a strikeout. Will Frasier tossed the sixth inning and was out of there with just seven pitches.

"That was the idea, to keep Scottie short, so maybe he can be back on Monday," Harper said. "Let some guys get in some innings and they threw dynamite. That's what we want."

McGivney's fourth and final run came in the top of the seventh against closer Reid Murray. The Griffins had runners on the corners with two outs. Rodgers would score from third after a wild pitch.

Ryker Keller came in to close out the game on the mound for McGivney and struck out his first two batters.

"Our pitching is still very strong for us," Erwin said. "Another great performance from our pitching staff with Ryker slamming the door and Jack extending himself, which was great today. He pitched a wail of a ballgame."





According to the latest Mx Preps Illinois high school baseball rankings, Alton just upset the No. 6 ranked Panthers and swam in deep waters with the No. 3 ranked Griffins.

“That’s what I’ve tried to explain to these guys, they’re good programs,” Harper said of O’Fallon and McGivney.

“I hope they go win state because then that just makes this game look that much better because they’ve got the horses to do it. That’s what I told our guys, we want to just come and compete.”

Come and compete, the Redbirds did. McGivney has scored 10 or more runs in 10 of their 17 wins this season, and Alton just held them to four, just couldn’t find the offense.

“We had our chances, had the bases loaded, and just didn’t get the big hit,” Harper finished with.



For the Griffins, this win streak isn’t something they haven’t already seen. Last season, after opening off to a 1-3 start, they proceeded to win 28 in a row, not losing in the month of April.

The energy around the clubhouse is just like a year ago.

“Honestly, nobody’s really talking about it,” Erwin said.

“Everybody’s just kind of trying to take it one game at a time. It’s really been our mentality, trying to get through each week undefeated and make sure we’re in every ball game. So far, that’s worked out really well for us.”

The Griffins immediately jump back into Gateway Metro Conference action against Maryville Christian and Christ Our Rock.

The Redbirds take on Granite City and the Bellvilles next week.