

# Smith Hits Solo Bomb, Pitches Four Scoreless Innings As Griffins Come Back To Beat Marquette

by Bradley Piros, Reporter  
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ALTON – The Father McGivney Griffins don't trail in a lot of baseball games, but when they do, they make sure to come back and keep their undefeated streak going.

That was the case Tuesday afternoon at Lloyd Hopkins Field when the Marquette Explorers (12-9, 5-3 Gateway Metro Conference) hosted the Griffins.

After being down 2-1 through two innings, McGivney's pitchers threw five straight shutout innings and the offense came alive to go on to a 6-2 win, improving to 25-0 on the season and 8-0 in the GMC.

Hayden Garner took the mound first for the Explorers and struck out lead-off man Jackson Rodgers, and popped up Daniel Gierer, bringing Gabe Smith, the Ole Miss commit, up to the plate.

The lefty swung on the first pitch he saw and took it deep the other way to immediately bring life into his team's dugout.

"That's always nice to see, especially when he's going the other way," McGivney head coach Chris Erwin said.

"When he's going the other way, I know he's letting it get deep, taking a good approach, and boy he smoked it out. That was a very good lift for him."

Once Smith caught his breath from taking his sixth home run trot of the season, he went to work on the mound.

Through five innings he allowed four hits, two runs (both earned), walked one, and struck out six.

"I think Gabe settled in nicely," Erwin said.

"I thought he had a little bit of a rough start, just didn't look in sequence. But, once he got in a groove, I think he did a great job."

Marquette's two runs came in the bottom half of the second when Charlie Fahnestock and Jack Rea both hit RBI singles.

McGivney tied the game back up at two apiece when Gierer hit a sacrifice fly ball that scored Isaac Wendler who got on with a walk to begin the inning.

After that, it was smooth sailing for McGivney's pitching staff.

Smith went nine-up-nine-down in his final three innings.

"Obviously, our setup guy (Mason Holmes) and closer (Ryker Keller) really shut the door. I thought they did a fantastic job today on the mound," Erwin said.

Things weren't so peachy in the home dugout.

Garner got himself into trouble in the top of the fifth, which allowed the Griffins to mount a comeback.

AJ Suttberry hit a lead-off single then stole second. Nick Franklin came up and hit a ground-rule double to trade places with him and take the lead at 3-2.

Wendler then singled to put runners on the corners with no outs. It was at this time Marquette head coach Tim Fahnestock made a call to the bullpen, bringing in Skyler Schuster in a tough spot.

Rodgers would hit an RBI single and Smith hit a sac fly bringing Franklin and Wendler across the plate to make it 5-2.

Jack Spain came into the game with runners on first and second with one out in the top of the sixth. He immediately got out of trouble with a double-play ball.

Unfortunately, Spain would still give up the final run when Drew Kleinheider hit a sac fly scoring Gierer to make it 6-2.

Going back to the top of the fifth, coach Fahnestock was in a tough position on when exactly to pull his starter. He arguably didn't pull Garner soon enough, but it all was part of the plan.

“We’ve got a busy week. We’re trying to maximize what we can get out of guys,” Fahnestock said.

“We had a pitch limit in mind for him . He was cruising, did a good job early, and we just let him go.”

The Marquette coach had no complaints postgame.

“I thought we had a good approach. We knew he was going to throw strikes. We wanted the guys to attack early in the count.”

“That was a good game, very happy,” Fahnestock ended on.

McGivney’s coach Erwin got the desired result but still expects a little more from his guys.

“We didn’t take good approaches early, I thought we were trying to be too aggressive; popped a lot of balls up. Typically that’s not us; let the pitch come to us, take a little bit better approach, and drive the ball. We didn’t do that early,” he said.

“I think there’s a tale of two games there,” Erwin continued.

“The first couple of innings, I don’t know if we had a good approach at the plate, but in the second half of the game, I thought we were excellent. We didn’t go after some pitches we were going after early. I thought we took good approaches and stayed within our game, and that’s when we started hitting line drives.”

The Griffins love hitting them over the fence, having hit 19 homers this season, but they strive to just put the ball in play. The team has a combined 83 extra-base hits and nine guys with double-digit RBI, two in the 30s (Kleinheider and Smith with 34 and 32 respectively).

Two-thirds of McGivney’s lineup is batting at least a .300 average and they all love to get on base, with most of the team in or around .500 OBS.

The anticipated rematch between the Explorers and Griffins will be at McGivney on Thursday starting at 4:30 p.m.





