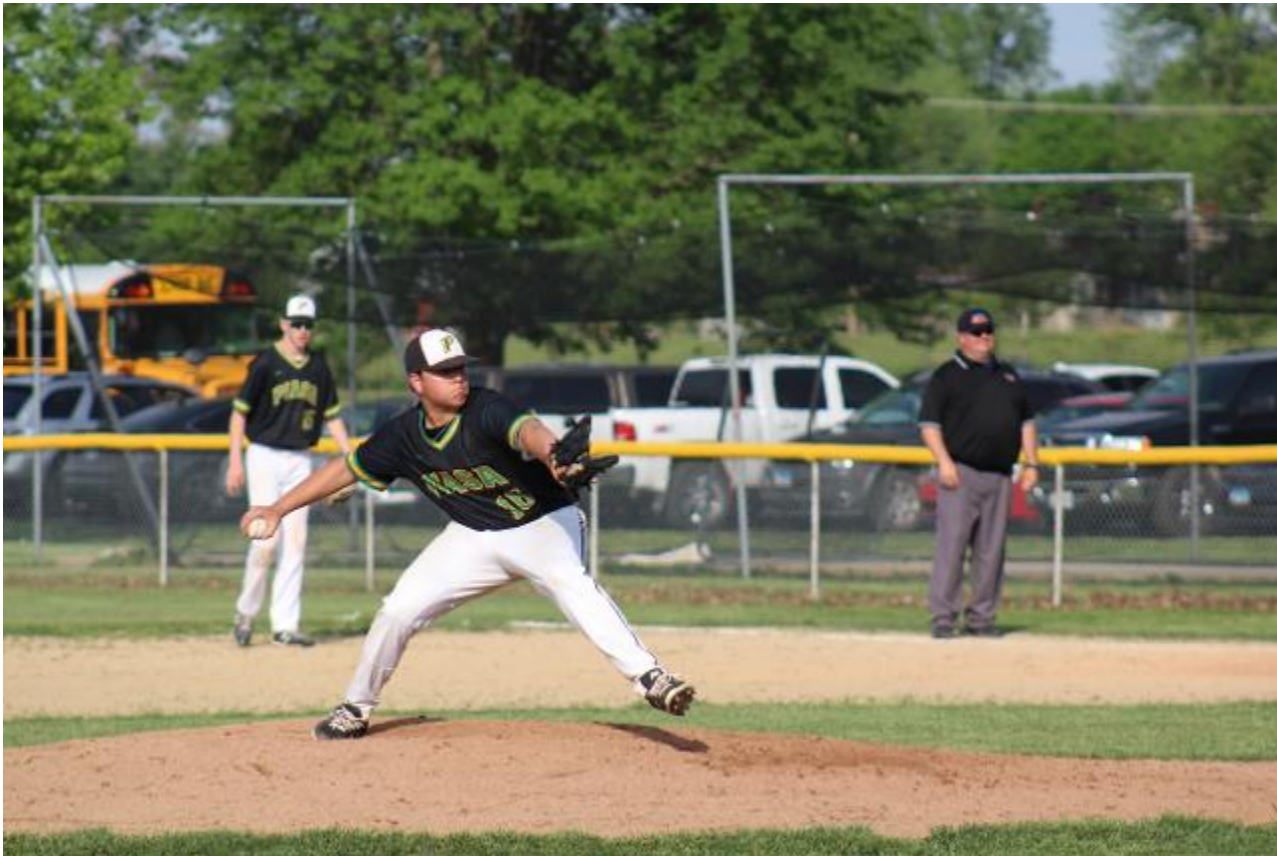


Southwestern Prevails In Pitchers Duel, Wins 3-1 Over Roxana

by Nathan Tucker
May 13 2023 10:50 AM



BRIGHTON - It's been a great season for Southwestern baseball, who hosted Roxana in Brighton on Friday afternoon. Once again led from the mound, the Piasa Birds notched their 24th win of the season with a 3-1 home win.

Marcus Payne, junior pitcher for Brian Hanslow's Piasa Bird squad, made only one mistake in his complete game. Freshman Roxana starter Mason Crump took Payne deep to start the second inning, sending a liner to the trees beyond the left field fence at Schneider Park.

"Mason (Crump) had been in a little slump at the plate," noted Roxana head coach Jerry Wheaton. "He's been missing a lot of pitches, but today, he didn't miss that one, he hit that ball hard."

Marcus Payne responded well to the homer he allowed, and didn't allow more than one baserunner in any inning until the seventh. The junior starter had five strikeouts on the afternoon, and was more than comfortable pitching to contact and letting his defense work behind him.

"Marcus had a really good game," said Piasa Birds skipper Brian Hanslow. "Did a really good job keeping (Roxana) off-balance. The only real threat they had all game was the very last inning where they put a little pressure on us."

As Hanson alludes to, Roxana didn't mount a true scoring threat beyond Mason Crump's home run and a seventh-inning rally that put the tying run on second base. A statement to how much control Marcus Payne had on the game from the mound.

"Marcus, he's a junior who really stepped up last year for us." Brian Hanslow said of his starter.

"He just mixes it up really well, he doesn't throw that hard. He's probably our third or fourth hardest thrower, but he mixes it up, has a good little slider, and he's a competitor. You can't teach kids how to compete on the mound, and he does that every batter."

Southwestern's offense came early, with a run in each of the first three innings. Piasa Bird courtesy runner Logan Crane came home on a sac fly in the first, sophomore Ian Brantley came home on a throwing error in the second, and batting average leader Colin LeMarr drove home Hunter Newell in the third.

"We're doing the right things, but we had a couple of errors over at first base, both resulted in runs," Roxana's Jerry Wheaton said. "Those two things were the difference in the game today. I hate seeing this stuff coming up with the postseason coming up Monday, but sometimes you have good days and sometimes you don't."

Despite his frustration on the fielding errors, Wheaton is optimistic about his Shells ballclub.

“I look at the overall spectrum of the day. This is the seventh or eighth or ninth 20-win team that we’ve played throughout the year and I’m just proud of our guys and our performance. Every day they come out here and compete.”

A good crowd followed the Shells from Roxana to Schneider Park. The split crowd in Brighton harkened back to when these teams were conference rivals.

“Roxana was our big rival,” said Brian Hanslow, long-time Piasa Birds baseball head coach. “It’s still a rivalry, we just play them only once a year now. They’ve got a really competitive team.”

Southwestern rounds out their season hosting Calhoun on Monday, and is gearing up for postseason play following their 24th win on the season.

“Well we got prom tomorrow, that’s always a little distraction,” joked Brian Hanslow.

“But they need to enjoy that, they’re kids. But Monday, we have Calhoun, we’ve already played them three times (winning by a combined score of 34-10), so we have to really get our bats going in that last tune-up before the regional starts.”