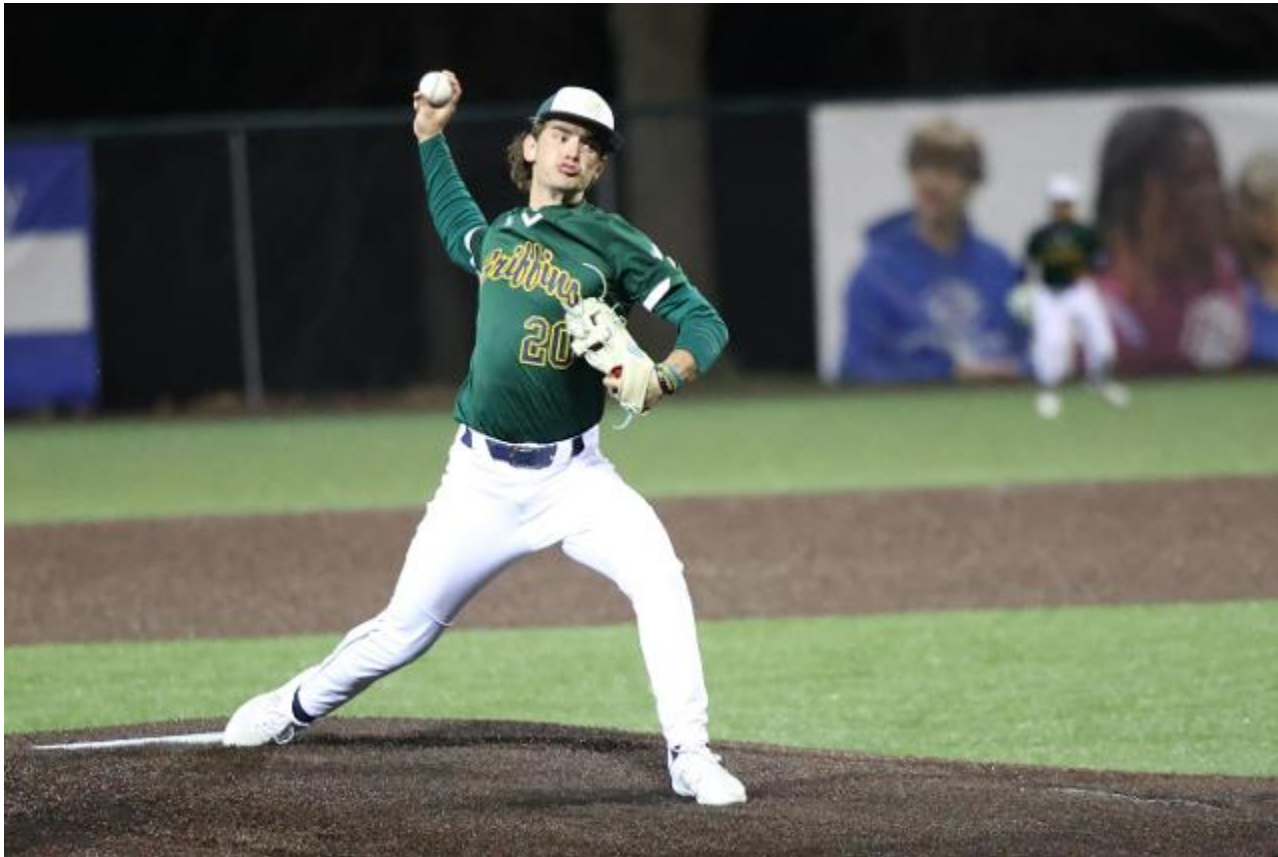


Griffins Stunned By Althoff's Late-Game Comeback - McGivney Loses Just Second Game This Season

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – Lloyd Hopkins Field played host to a Gateway Metro Conference baseball double-header Thursday afternoon into late evening.

Metro-East Lutheran was supposed to host Marquette, but the game was moved to the turf field instead. As was the game that Father McGivney was originally set to host against Althoff.

With an original starting time of 4:30 p.m. at Father McGivney, the game was pushed back to 7 p.m. at Lloyd Hopkins.

Unfortunately for the Griffins and Crusaders, game one went long having to be decided in eight innings as the Explorers beat the Knights 16-9 in a wild game that saw 15 errors and the first six runs scored on just two hits.

So, after the typical allotted warmup time, McGivney's Kannon Kamp finally delivered the first pitch at precisely 8:11 p.m. and the game was underway.

Coming off an 8-2 win over Althoff on Tuesday and riding a seven-game winning streak, McGivney seemed to be in the driver's seat.

That was until Hank Gomric's blast over the right field wall in the top of the first made it 1-0 Crusaders.

McGivney answered quickly with a run in the home half of the first when Kamp scored on a wild pitch from Braden Edgar.

The Griffins tacked on single runs in the third and fourth to gain a 3-1 lead.

Edgar gave up back-to-back walks, loading the bases and then walking in Ben Sink who had reached on a ground-rule double. Sink later tripled down the line to score Nathan Terhaar who reached via a walk.

That score stood until the seventh inning.

After six solid innings from Kamp, Ryker Keller replaced him to close out the game.

It just wasn't his day as the Crusaders put up a four-run inning, holding the Griffins in the bottom of the seventh to steal a 5-3 win, Althoff's first-ever over McGivney.

"It's a huge step for our program," Althoff head coach Justin Williamson said. "One thing we've been talking about since I took over is changing the culture. We're a young team and this is a big step in changing the direction for this program and putting Althoff baseball back on the map."

Most of the offensive work done by Althoff in the seventh came with two outs.

Evan Hoffman reached on an error before Ben Vosse struck out and Tyler Birdsong flew out.

Zach Winkeler hit a ground-rule double, putting Hoffman on third. Hoffman was then driven in by Bo Gomric's RBI single to make it 3-2. Hank Gomric singled, scoring Winkeler and tying the game at 3-3.

Finally, Matt Hesse hit a two-RBI single that scored both Bo and Hank Gomric to make it 5-3.

Hank Gomric threw the final two innings and was tasked with slamming the door on the Griffins, which he eventually did, as McGivney stranded two runners on second and third.

The Griffins left a total of 11 runners on the basepaths.

"This was a good test for us today," McGivney head coach Chris Erwin said. "I'm pleased with the way the guys battled today and you know, we're going to learn from it and we're going to grow from it."

It was just McGivney's second loss of the year, sending the Griffins to 14-2 on the season.

"Not all losses are bad," Erwin said. "I think I said the same thing against IMG . As long as you learn something from a great game like today. I'd rather play 10 of these than a different kind of game where we don't stay focused the whole time."

More importantly this game opens up the GMC title race a little bit. McGivney is 2-1 now in conference while Althoff is 4-2. McGivney still has two games against both Christ Our Rock and Marquette Catholic.

"We still control our own fate. We're still the only team with one loss and that's the message I gave to the guys, learn from it, run the table, and your conference champions again. That's our first goal that we can accomplish every year."

The outing was a rather unusual one for Keller who made five saves last season with a 1.14 ERA. Thursday was his eighth appearance this season.

“I love him to death; he’s such a great kid,” Erwin said about Keller. “He’s won so many ball games for us and saved so many ball games for us, that I just told him ‘so what?’ He’s still going to be our closer and I love him to death.”

“It just stinks in a game like that,” Erwin continued. “But that’s the life of a closer. You’ve got the game in your hand every time you go out there. Today it wasn’t his day, but I still trust the kid 100 percent.”

A kid that Williamson trusts 100 percent is Hank Gomric.

In his at-bats he homered to right, struck out, was intentionally walked, and RBI singled. He then threw the final two innings, only giving up a hit.

“Hank’s the guy for what he does on the field, but what a lot of people don’t see is what he does off the field,” Williamson said. “That’s what makes him so special, he’s just a great leader and that’s one thing you just can’t teach.”

“That wasn’t surprising,” Erwin said about Gomric’s homerun.

“I know wanted to challenge Hank and Hank’s such a great hitter. So, he was challenging him, and Hank got the best of him, but he got the best of Hank the next time up. The third time I wasn’t taking any chances, it just doesn’t make sense. There’s a guy in the lineup every game that you don’t let beat you, and it stinks because you want those guys to battle, but in the end it’s about winning baseball games.”

Keller was given the loss after Kamp went six innings with 10 strikeouts, only allowing a single run on two hits.

Althoff’s remaining two conference games are against Marquette. The Crusaders would have to sweep the series and then hope the Explorers can steal a game or two against the Griffins later this month.

McGivney has a chance to immediately right the ship when it takes on Metro-East Lutheran on Friday (April 12) at 4:30 p.m. in Edwardsville.