

Metro East Bears win 2-0 after quick start

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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The Metro East Bears' offense was pretty limited against Highland Post 439 at Gordon Moore Park/Lloyd Hopkins Field Wednesday night.

Maverick McSparin had the Bears' only two hits of the evening, both of them singles in the first and the third innings.

Fortunately for the Bears, that was all they really needed as some steady pitching and good defense helped them to a 2-0 win, Bear pitching limiting Highland to a pair of hits – singles in the second and fourth from Brendan Stanfield – and the Bear defense coming up with some big plays when they were needed.

“Our pitchers didn't walk anyone and even though we had a couple of errors early, they didn't hurt us and we were able to get around them,” said Bear manager Ken Schaake. “(Jacob) St. Peters did a nice job on the mound and we had guys who made some plays behind him.

“We wanted to keep (St. Peters) at around 65-70 pitches tonight, and we were able to do that. We know we're going to need some arms available when the postseason comes around and the games become nine-inning games, but if we can keep pitching down and keep the ball in play, we know we've got the defense to make the plays too.”

Because of Highland's run to the IHSA Class 3A state championship and the recent rains in the area, Wednesday was only their second game of the season, and Post 439 coach Harry Painter understood why. “What can you do?,” Painter said. “We had guys who won the state championship and then we had eight days off because of the rain. We were still in the game, so that was good to see.

“We'll get better, we just need some time to reboot.”

St. Peters' only real threat came in the first, when Will Greenconn reached on an error, stole second and went to third when Jimmy Smith grounded to second. But St. Peters struck out Cody Bentlage and got Andrew Winning to pop out to second to end the threat. The Bears got their first run in their half of the first, starting when Drake Hampton walked and went to second on a wild pitch. McSparin then delivered a one-out single to bring in Hampton to make it 1-0 in the Bears favor.

The other run came in the third when McSparin singled, went to second on a passed ball and came around on a pair of wild pitches for a 2-0 lead. From there, St. Peters, Connor Melton and Aaron Jackson teamed up to shut Highland down, Melton and Jackson going 1-2-3 in the sixth and seventh respectively to get the Bears the win.

The 9-1 Bears travel to Belleville for a District 22 clash with the Hilgards at 8 p.m. Thursday, then take Friday off before taking part in a tournament in Festus, Mo., Saturday and Sunday.