

Metro East Bears split in Legion games against Belleville

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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Baseball can be a game where missed opportunities can play a big role.

Metro East Bears manager Ken Schaaake was lamenting some missed chances for his team to score what could have been key runs in the second game of a American Legion doubleheader against Belleville's Hilgards at Gordon Moore Park/Lloyd Hopkins Field Tuesday night; those chances cost the Bears dearly in a 3-2 second-game loss after the had scored a 6-1 win in the opener.

“We didn't take advantage of our opportunities,” Schaaake said. “We could have survived the (sixth) inning, but we didn't do a lot of things right there. We had a missed play where we could have gotten an out, a couple of other things that went wrong.

“Still, that's baseball; things like that will happen.”

Schaaake was talking about a sixth-inning rally when the Bears (who were the visiting team for the nightcap) opened with a Maverick McSparin double; he went to third when Matt Zielonko grounded out to third, but an Aaron Jackson groundout and a Nick Paulda flyout ended the inning without McSparin getting home.

That failure to score cost the Bears dearly when Spencer Piquard reached on an error and Matt Klosterman singled to put two on. Luke Frazier then walked to load the bases

and Piquard came home when Drake Hampton, who was in to pitch after Ben Cusac couldn't get an out, barked home the tying run. Cal Kossina then grounded to second to bring in what proved to be the winning run.

“The kids play hard and they compete,” Schaake said. “That's a good team there (referring to the Hilgards); it's just a tough competition here.”

“We bounced back well in the second game,” said Hilgards manager Zach Rokowski. “We have a lot of difficult games still yet to play, but we'll be ready to play and play at a high level.”

The Hilgards got out to a quick lead in the opener, getting a leadoff double from John Dozier, who moved to third on a Kossina sacrifice. Luke Glaeser then singled in Dozier to put Belleville ahead. The Bears quickly answered when Matt Zielonko got ahold of the first pitch he saw and sent it over the fence in left-center to tie things up, and singles from Jackson, Matt Paulda and Anthony Kindle brought in a second run for a 2-1 Bear lead.

In the third, Jordan Hovey opened with a single and came home when McSparin doubled him home. A Jackson single with one out scored McSparin and Paulda struck a two-run homer to left to give the Bears a 6-1 lead. Jacob St. Peters shut the Hilgards down the rest of the way, striking out three and getting three big double plays to keep Belleville at bay.

The nightcap started off quickly as well, Hampton scoring on a pair of errors that allowed him to reach base and then score to put the Bears ahead. Piquard countered with a single with one out in the bottom of the first, followed by a Klosterman single and a Frazier walk that loaded the bases. Kossina then hit a sacrifice fly to right to score Piquard and tie the game.

Hampton opened the third with a single, stole second and came around to score on a Hovey single to put the Bears back on top 2-1, but Hilgard pitching shut them down the rest of the way, leading to the Hilgards' sixth-inning rally.

The Bears are off until Friday, when they will host games in the Firecracker Tournament co-hosted by the Alton, Edwardsville and Belleville Legion posts. The Bears will play at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. both Friday and Saturday at Lloyd Hopkins Field; the semifinals and final is set for Sunday at Longacre Park in Fairview Heights.

