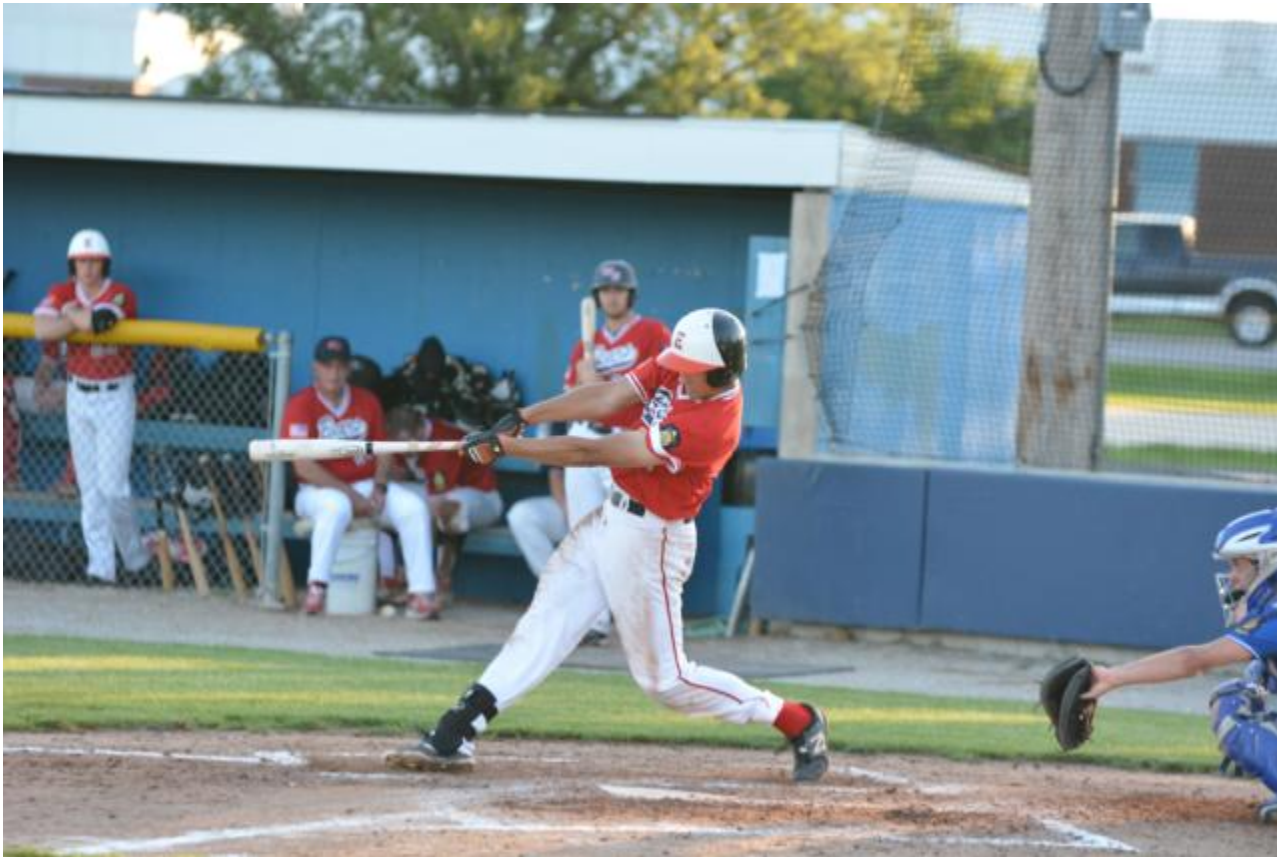


Metro East Bears split in games against Mt. Vernon, Jerseyville in Firecracker Classic

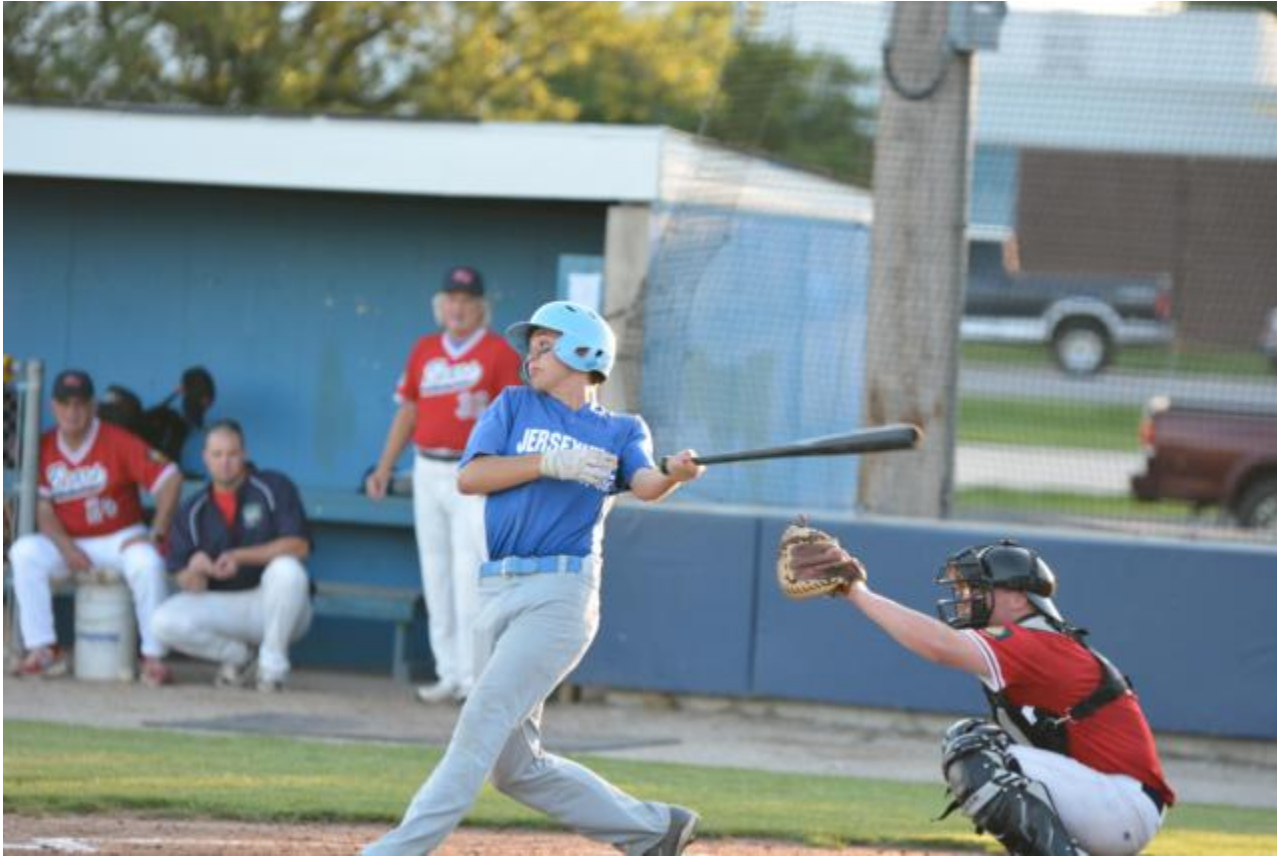
by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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Like a loss to Belleville Tuesday night in the second game of a doubleheader, Metro East Bears coach Ken Schaaque was lamenting missed opportunities.

Those missed chances to extend a 2-0 lead cost the Bears dearly in a 4-3 loss to Mount Vernon in the team's second game of the day in the Firecracker Classic tournament at

Gordon Moore Park/Lloyd Hopkins Field Friday night. Earlier in the day, the Bears had bounced back from a 1-0 deficit to defeat Jerseyville 5-1 in 11 innings in the opening game of Pool A.



The loss leaves the Bears at 1-1 in the pool going into Saturday play of the tournament, with games against Columbia, Mo., at 10 a.m. and Fulton, Mo., at 7 p.m. Mount Vernon, who had defeated Columbia 7-1 in the game prior to this one, enters Saturday play at 2-0; the pool winner advances to the semifinals Sunday at Longacre Park in Fairview Heights.

“We couldn't get the key hit when we needed it, and we hit a lot of balls right at people,” Schaake said. “Coming off an 11-inning win, it may have taken something out of us.”

The Bears were also stymied by some effective pitching from Mt. Vernon's Tyler Morgan; he struck out eight and, at one point, retired 13 Bears in a row. “They pitched very well,” Schaake said. “They were stringing hits together, and when we had something going in the sixth, (Morgan) got a couple of strikeouts.”

Mt. Vernon manager Pierce Borah thought his Morgan was coming up big when he needed to. “Tyler got into a rhythm and was really hard to hit,” Borah said. “We had a great response when they got a couple of runs on us in the second and played really well.

“(Metro East) was one of the best teams we've seen all year. We were able to get a couple of guys on and play the way we like to play. We're pretty aggressive and like to put pressure on the defense, get them moving and create holes, put the ball in play.”

The Bears did get ahead in the second when Aaron Jackson led off with a walk and Nick Paulda singled to put runners on first and second. Caleb Buhs then laid down a near-perfect bunt for a single to load the bases, allowing Anthony Kindle to bring in Jackson and Paulda with a double. Chance Foss struck out to bring up Drake Hampton, who lined out to Blake Jones in center. An alert Jones then saw Kindle had drifted away from the bag and threw to Blake McPherson to double off Kindle and end the inning.

Mt. Vernon bounced right back by stringing together singles from McPherson, Reed Millwood and Jones to load the bases. Zach Brookman then singled in a pair of runs to tie the game, and Darick Hayes followed with another two-RBI single to put Mt. Vernon ahead. Morgan then took over, shutting down the Bears until one out in the sixth, when Maverick McSparin singled and went to second when Morgan threw wildly trying to pick him off. Matt Zielonko was then hit by a pitch and Jackson singled in McSparin to cut the lead to 4-3. But with the tying run at second and lead run at first, Brown struck out Paulda and Buhs to end the threat, then retired the side in order in the seventh to preserve the win.

Against Jerseyville, the Bears rallied from 1-0 down in the top of the seventh when Zielonko tripled and was driven in by Paulda, then had to survive a bases-loaded, none-out scare in the bottom of the 10th when Jordan Hovey struck out two and induced a grounder that forced another runner at the plate. In the top of the 11th, Hampton led off with a double and Hovey and McSparin were both hit by pitches to load the bases. A wild pitch brought in Hampton and a Jackson sacrifice fly scored Hovey before Paulda singled and Buhs tripled to give the Bears the runs they would need.

Paulda was 3-for-5 with two RBIs and Connor Melton was 2-for-4. Drake Kanallakan was 2-for-4 with a double for Jerseyville.

Other Pool A games on Friday saw Jerseyville defeat Fulton 3-1 and Fulton defeat Columbia 3-2.



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)