

Aaron Jackson has big hit, Cusac strong on mound in Metro East Bears state tourney win

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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CAROL STREAM – Seven strong innings from Ben Cusac and a big three-RBI day from Aaron Jackson helped the Metro East Bears hold off elimination as they defeated host Wheaton 5-4 in an elimination game at the Illinois American Legion baseball tournament Thursday afternoon.

The Bears will have a rematch against Mattoon, who defeated them in their opener Wednesday, at noon Friday, with the winner advancing to a game at 7 p.m. Friday between the loser of the game between Elgin and Northwest. The final is set for Saturday, with the winner advancing to the American Legion Great Lakes Regional next week at Gordon Moore Park/Lloyd Hopkins Field. The Bears will be in the tournament regardless as host team.

“We bounced back after the loss and played great; we showed a lot of character,” said Bears assistant Nick Smith. “Our guys stepped up and showed exactly why we deserve to be here.”

Jackson's big hit was part of a 2-for-4 day; he doubled in a pair of runs as part of his effort at the plate. Caleb Buhs also made a big contribution with the game-winning RBI and Jordan Hovey and Chance Foss each had triples.

Ben Cusac had seven strong innings on the mound, striking out three while giving up 12 hits and four earned runs before yielding to Drake Hampton, who threw the final two innings. Cusac's cause was helped by three double plays and Hovey ended the game with a spectacular defensive play that dismissed Wheaton's last batter in the ninth.

“Jordan dove for the ball behind second and threw a strike to first,” Smith said. “That was a huge, huge play for us.”

With a rematch against Mattoon on the horizon, Smith and the Bears players are excited about the possibility.

“We're excited about playing Mattoon again,” Smith said. “We think we have something to prove.”