

## Phillips keys late Cat rally over Pirates

Written by Don Wallace

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Ethan Phillips belted an RBI hit in the bottom of the seventh to cap a late rally and lift Sulphur Springs over Crandall, 7-6 in a Monday afternoon non-district thriller.

The contest, played in two hours and 24 minutes in Sulphur Springs, had something for everyone with both teams staging late rallies. The Wildcats almost let the visitors escape town with a victory before the two-run outburst in the bottom of the seventh.

Crandall struck for four runs in the top of the seventh to go from trailing 5-2 to holding a 7-6 lead. The Pirates got the rally with help from the home team which issued three walks and hit one batter to keep Crandall supplied with base runners. The rally for the visitors started when Mark Atkins slapped a single to left after leadoff hitter Hunter Darst had been hit by a pitch. Starting pitcher Brad Jones was also struck by a pitch to load the sacks. Collin Chaney grounded out, but a run scored to make it a 5-3 game. Another run scored as a walk was issued and it the Wildcat lead now was down to a single run, 5-4. Designated hitter Garret Ogden singled in the tying run. Chandler Hill coaxed a walk to load the sacks again. Hill was the final batter of the game for pitcher Dillon Carpenter who was removed from the hill in favor of Phillips. Phillips walked in a run as Nate Brooks drew a free pass, now it was the Pirates up 6-5. Phillips ended the threat when he got the final out on an infield grounded.

But the damage was done, the Wildcats were down the final three outs as they came to bat in the bottom of the seventh, trailing 6-5 after they had held the lead the majority of the sun-splashed contest.

Landon Brock grounded out. Carson Hicks doubled to the outfield. Pryor hit a sinking liner to center that had plenty of spin on it as the baseball hit it slipped by the fielder as Pryor advanced all the way to third as Hicks scored to tie the game. Phillips, now the pitcher of record, pounded a shot to the outfield scoring Pryor to secure the win.

The Wildcats stormed the field, leaping and hollering to celebrate the hard-fought home baseball win.

In the early going, Sulphur Springs took the lead in the first inning. An errant pickoff move allowed Landon Brock to reach second. Brennan Brock had a bunt which moved the runner to third. The first run of the game scored on a wild pitch. The Wildcats had two other base runners in the opening frame, but could only push across one run.

Crandall tied the game in the top of the second. But starter Tyler Follis pitched out of the frame with no more damage and it was a 1-all game.

The Wildcats scored another run in the bottom of the second. C.J. Stephens was tagged out trying to score another run.

The Pirates stayed close, tying the game in the top of the third. Chaney lined into a double play to end the threat for Crandall and the game was deadlocked at 2-all.

Sulphur Springs had a two-run rally in the bottom of the third. Brennan Brock reached after being hit by a pitch. He made the most of the situation, advancing all the way to third when Crandall missed the pick off play. Landon Brock singled home a run and moments later moved up to third on another missed throw on the infield. Hicks and Pryor both went down on strikes. Phillips came up big with a double to left field to pad the Wildcats lead to 4-2.

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The Wildcats pushed across another run, this lone tally coming in the bottom of the fourth. Stephens walked, but was caught stealing. Follis singled. The fifth run scored when Landon Brock doubled to left.

In the top of the fifth, Carpenter replaced Follis on the mound. Follis left after allowing two runs off two hits, hitting one batter, walking two and striking out four.

Neither team scored in the bottom of the fifth, starting southpaw Davis of Crandall was replaced by Collin Chaney who started the game at third base. Chaney worked out of a jam with two strikeouts leaving two runners stranded on the bases for Sulphur Springs.

The seventh inning had lots of fireworks with the visitors sending 10 batters to the dish as they scored four times to edge ahead 6-5.

Sulphur Springs, with the game on the line, got several key hits, staging a two-run rally to win the game by the 7-6 final.

"I have mixed emotions, we are still struggling to put together quality at-bats. We are missing opportunities to score and we need to be able to finish a game with a three-run lead in the seventh," said Jerrod Hammack, Sulphur Springs head baseball coach. "With that said, I was proud of our guys for bouncing back in the bottom of the seventh and putting together three extra base hits to score two runs for the win."

Crandall fell to 10-4-1 in non-district play.

The Wildcats are now 9-4 overall and face a short road trip to North Lamar Friday for a 1 p.m. varsity game. Garret Hood is listed as the probable pitcher for Sulphur Springs.

In the junior varsity game, the Wildcats scored seven times in their last at-bat to win 10-5. Cole Cooper singled in two runs, Cain Cody added a two-run triple. Chase Harry was the winning pitcher according to coach Trent Ledkins.