

Wildcats lose district opener

Written by Don Wallace

Wednesday, 19 March 2014 11:06

Riley Greenlee's eighth inning grand slam powered Mount Pleasant to 9-5 win over Sulphur Springs in the district opener for both clubs.

While the Wildcats fell to 0-1 in district (10-5 overall), the home team fought back against Mount Pleasant overcoming an early deficit to force extra innings. The win gives Mount Pleasant a 1-0 district record, 10-7 for the year.

Michael Kopech, the hard-throwing, highly-touted senior right-handed pitching prospect for the Tigers, did draw a crowd at historic Eagle Stadium. More than 20 professional baseball scouts saw Kopech leave without the win, despite striking out a dozen. Kopech reached 92-95 mph on the radar guns at the game. But the Wildcats made contact and forced several deep counts with fouls. Kopech left after five innings and did not figure in the decision. Jordan Raney was the winning pitcher in relief, throwing the final three frames.

"Kopech is a very talented young man. Like I said, I thought we battled hard against him, put a lot of balls in play, and were able to get his pitch count up by the end of the fifth inning. I could not have asked more of our guys against such a great pitcher," said Jerrod Hammack, Sulphur Springs head baseball coach.

Starting pitcher for Sulphur Springs, Tyler Follis, struck out nine and left in the top of the fifth with the Wildcats trailing 4-1. Kade Hudgins finished the game on the hill.

The game came down to the final innings. Sulphur Springs fell behind 3-1 in the fourth, but came back strong.

In the top of the fifth, Hudgins came in on the mound and the new hurler retired the Tigers in order.

The Wildcats went to work in the bottom of the fifth inning. Ben Brooks reached base despite striking out, the MP catcher, Greenlee, was unable to come up with the third strike. Hudgins, in his first at-bat in the game, took a two-strike pitch to left field for a clean single. Sulphur Springs was in business with runners on base. Alex Burney belted a run-scoring single to center field to make it a 4-2 game cutting into the Mount Pleasant advantage. Landon Brock worked the count to seven pitches of Kopech before going down on strikes. Brennan Brock also struck out, but during his at-bat another Wildcat run scored on a wild pick off attempt by the Tigers. The Wildcats cut the lead to 4-3, the rally was ended when Carson Hicks went down on strikes with a runner on third base.

Hudgins had another strong frame sitting Mount Pleasant down in order. He got three outs on an infield roller and two fly balls to center.

In the top of the sixth, Kopech moved to shortstop and Raney took over on the hill. Junior slugger Larry Pryor greeted the new pitcher with a hit as he ripped a 2-2 pitch for a solid single. Ethan Phillips laid down a nice sacrifice bunt to move the runner to second. Carpenter grounded to deep short, but Kopech gloved the grounder and whistled off a nice peg to first, as the runner moved to third. Brooks came to the plate and reached base on a passed ball on a third strike. The errant ball also allowed Pryor to score with the fourth run which tied the game at 4-all. Hudgins went down on strikes to end the threat - Brooks was stranded on the bases.

It was a new ball game entering the seventh with the game all locked at 4-all.

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Mount Pleasant had two runners reach with two out, but could not score. Hudgins worked out of the jam getting Kopech to pop out to center field.

The Wildcats had an encouraging start to the bottom of the seventh as Burney reached on a single to the outfield. Landon Brock moved Burney to second with a sacrifice bunt, giving the Wildcats a runner in scoring position. Brennan Brock grounded out to second for the second out. Burney moved to third on a missed pickoff attempt. With a runner on third, Raney dug deep on the mound and sat Hicks down on three strikes. The scoring chances went by the boards for the home team.

The Tigers got two singles in their first three batters to start the top of the eighth. The runners were advanced to second and third with a balk. A wild pitch scored Kobe Raney and Mount Pleasant regained the lead at 5-4. Flanagan ends his at-bat with a walk as did T.K. Koontz. Greenlee hammered the 1-0 pitch deep over the left field fence for a grand slam. Hudgins got the next two batters on a fly ball and strikeout. But the damage was done with Mount Pleasant bolting out to a 9-4 lead.

Sulphur Springs would not surrender and went back to work in the bottom of the eighth. Pryor singled to start the rally. Dillon Carpenter knocked in the fifth run with a solid single. Brooks reached on an error. Hudgins and Landon Brock went down on strikes. The Tigers took the victory by the 9-5 final.

In the early going, Mount Pleasant scratched across a run to go up 1-0 in the first inning.

Sulphur Springs responded with a two-out rally in the bottom of the first. Fielding errors and a bad pick off throw allowed the Wildcats to tie the game at 1-all. Kopech retired Phillips on strikes for the final out, leaving two runners stranded.

Neither team scored in the second and third frames as the pitchers got into a rhythm.

Mount Pleasant struck for three more in the fourth. Sulphur Springs scored two runs in the fifth and one more in the sixth to tie the game at 4-all and force extra innings.

The Tigers erupted for a five-run eighth inning to go ahead 9-4. Sulphur Springs got a lone run in the bottom of the eighth and lost by the 9-5 final.

The Wildcats fell to 0-1 in district 10-5 on the season.

"I thought we battled a very good pitcher all night. We stayed close and gave ourselves a chance to win in the seventh but just didn't finish it. I am proud of our effort. We need to improve our bat discipline and our overall defensive play. We still have a long district season ahead of us and we will work hard to continually improve," said Jerrod Hammack, Sulphur Springs head baseball coach.

The Wildcats will trek to Texarkana for a Friday meeting with the Tigers at 7 p.m.

Texas High defeated Pine Tree, 7-4 in Tuesday action. In other district baseball scores state-ranked Hallsville steamrolled over Marshall, 12-2.