

Twice as nice

East claims its second straight title by winning two games in one day

By ERIC SMITH
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Bartlett and East didn't treat fans to flawless baseball Thursday night, but the teams provided plenty of thrills.

And the fans at Mulcahy Stadium got much more than their money's worth.

Part comedy of errors, part high drama, the championship game of the American Legion state baseball tournament turned into a nail-biting, almost 3½-hour gem that ended with a two-out, walk-off single in the bottom of the 10th inning.

Jake Plancich's infield single gave the Thunderbirds an 8-7 win over Bartlett, their second straight state title, and a trip to Roseburg, Ore., for next week's Northwest regional tournament.

For much of the game, it didn't seem like East would repeat. The T-birds trailed 7-2 and were guilty of eight errors heading into their half of the sixth inning.

But by scoring three runs in the sixth and two in the seventh -- and by making no more mistakes in the field -- East gave itself a chance to win it in the 10th.

With the bases loaded and two men out, Plancich swung at an 0-1 pitch from Bartlett's Doug Olson and drove a sharp, bouncing grounder to the gap between short and third.

Bartlett shortstop Nick Ridley, who had to run to his right to field the ball, couldn't make the throw in time. Tyler Waldron scored the winning run. And the East players mobbed Plancich, their unlikely but grateful hero.

"It's every little kid's dream to win state with that one hit," said Plancich, a catcher who bats No. 7 and went 2 for 5 and scored a run.

The game against Bartlett was part of a long day for the T-birds. East played itself into the championship game by beating Service 11-1 in a five-inning elimination game earlier Thursday.



East second baseman Nick Nading bobbles the ball while trying to start a double play, allowing Bartlett's Elliot Larsen to advance to the base.

Larsen went on to score. The Thunderbirds beat the Golden Bears 8-7 in 10 innings Thursday to advance to the regional tournament, which will be held in Roseburg, Ore., beginning Thursday. (Jim Lavrakas / Anchorage Daily News)



Players from the Bartlett dugout step out to high-five Erik Meneses, second from right, after he scored a run Thursday in the third inning of the Golden Bears' 10-inning loss to East. The Thunderbirds beat the Golden Bears 8-7 on an RBI single by Jake Plancich to win the American Legion state baseball tournament. (Jim Lavrakas / Anchorage Daily News)

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The championship game didn't start well for either team. East twice turned in three-error innings, which upset coach Tony Wylie.

"In the first part of the game it was like they were trying to give it away," he said.

Fortunately for the T-birds, they went the rest of the game without a mistake.

"They pulled down deep and showed the heart I knew was there," Wylie said.

Bartlett was also guilty of its share of miscues, committing six errors through the first six innings. The Golden Bears blew a two-run lead in the bottom of the third when a horrible three-error play spotted East a pair of runs.

With Plancich on second and one out, Trevor Harrison's line drive up the middle bounced right into the glove of center fielder Erik Meneses, who fired a perfect strike to catcher Kevin Knox.

But Knox missed the throw, allowing Plancich to score. Bartlett first baseman Tommie Knox, backing up the plate, fired the ball to third base to stop the streaking Harrison. But Olson, who was playing third at the time, couldn't handle the throw, and the ball went rolling into left field.

Then, Bartlett left fielder Jeff Donoho bobbled the ball, allowing Harrison to jog home and tie the score.

Though each team registered numerous mistake-riddled sequences that proved costly, neither committed an error in the final four innings and instead turned the game into a pitcher's duel.

Bartlett had its chances. The Golden Bears loaded the bases in the top of the eighth, but East ace Anton Maxwell -- who was allowed to pitch only 11/3 innings before reaching his maximum of 12 in two days -- came on relief and shut the Golden Bears down.

He struck out Donoho looking to end the eighth inning threat. In the top of the ninth, he retired the side with three strikeouts on 12 pitches.

Unfortunately, he couldn't give the T-birds any more work, giving the ball to Jon Poland in the top of the 10th. But Poland was almost as effective, retiring the first two batters. Catcher's interference sent Ridley to first; Ridley stole second; and Kevin Know drew a walk.

But Joshua Flowers popped up to third base, ending another good chance to grab the lead.

For Plancich, one of many heroes for East, the game came down to one simple difference.

"It was just who wanted it more," he said.

In their game against Service earlier Thursday, the Thunderbirds were never threatened, scoring a pair of runs in the top of the first inning and then erupting for seven in the top of the fourth.

East leadoff hitter Nick Nading went 3 for 3 with three RBIs and two runs. Waldron and Joey Scott added two hits apiece for the T-birds.

Maxwell pitched all five innings for East, striking out five and allowing just one run and one hit.

Service committed three errors, four wild pitches and two passed balls.

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American Legion Baseball State Tournament

At Mulcahy Stadium

Thursday's Results

Championship Game

East 8, Bartlett 7, 10 innings

Bartlett Post 29 020 032 000 0 -- 7 8 6

East Post 34 002 003 200 1 -- 8 9 8

Bartlett -- Hart, Ni. Ridley (7), Olson (10) and K. Knox. **East** -- Sherwood, Waldron (5), Maxwell (8), Poland (10) and J. Plancich. **W** -- Poland. **L** -- Olson.

2B -- Bartlett: T. Knox. **3B** -- Bartlett: Donoho.

Play-In Game

East 11, Service 1, 5 innings

East Post 34 211 70 -- 11 10 1

Service Post 28 000 10 --? 1 ?1 3

East -- Maxwell and J. Plancich. **Service** -- Ward, Haas (3), Stokes (4), Fenton (4), Cronin (5) and Varela, J. Rider. **W** -- Maxwell. **L** -- Ward.

2B -- East: N. Nading. Service: Stokes. **3B** -- East -- Sherwood, J. Plancich.