

Knights baseball takes 9-1 loss in state semifinal

Written by Brian Bassett

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BY BRIAN BASSETT

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COLUMBUS — The Newark Catholic baseball team did something to Crestview Friday in the Division IV state semifinal that no one else had this season - hit junior ace Damian Helm, hard.

The Green Wave put up six earned runs and nine hits on the Knight lefty en route to a 9-1 victory and Huntington Park in downtown Columbus.

“We were shell shocked,” admitted Crestview coach Jim Wharton. “No one has hit Damian like that. When this happens, it kind of gets everyone back on their heels. Unfortunately, we just weren’t able to recover.”

The Newark Catholic (23-10) offensive attack started in the top of the first when leadoff-hitting third baseman Mike Lohr reached on an infield single which was almost caught by junior shortstop Bryce Richardson.

Center fielder Hunter Nance later reached on a two-out single before Lohr and Nance stole third and second bases respectively.

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First baseman Chayce Crouch then scored Lohr when he grounded into a fielder's choice, and left fielder Aaron Jurden did the same to plate Nance and give the Green Wave an early 2-0 lead.

"If we make some of those plays early (it's a different game)," continued Wharton. They didn't go as errors on the scoreboard, but I thought we were a little bit tentative. In this environment against a very good hitting team, which they showed today, you've just got so compete."

The Knights picked up their first hit on Newark Catholic righty Drew Buchanan in the home second when junior third baseman Isaiah Simerman ripped a triple to the right center-field gap. He was stranded at third, however.

Catholic was back at it in the top of the third. Shortstop James Thomas doubled and Nance singled. Thomas later scored on a passed ball, and Nance was plated when Jurden hit into a fielder's choice to make the score 4-0.

Crestview (19-8) went down one-two-three in the home third, and the team managed only four hits all afternoon.

"I think a little bit of it was the deficit that we were dealing with. I thought (Buchanan) changed pitches and changed location on us pretty well. We were out on out front foot a little bit, and we just had some soft stuff up in the air," explained Wharton.

The Knights finally answered in the home fourth when senior first baseman Jake Harmon reached on a one-out single and scored on and RBI single by sophomore right fielder Jordan Roop.

That was the last time Crestview would dent the plate, however.

Meanwhile, The Green Wave put up two more in the fifth. Lohr and Nance single, and Crouch

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and Jurden each picked up another RBI to run the score to 6-0.

Senior Venice Roberts entered on the mound for the Knights in the top of the seventh, and didn't have any better luck facing the Green Wave. Catholic struck four four runs and four hits to add to its lead, including a two-run double off the bat of second baseman Mitch Cox to run the score to 9-1, which it would remain after Buchanan retired the side in the seventh.

Despite the loss, Wharton was extremely pleased with his team and how far it had come.

"Tremendous effort by our kids," he said. "I'm so proud of them. Our seniors have led us this year, and we are definitely going to miss them. We have a good core, a good nucleus, coming back (next season). We'll, at some point, reflect on that and start working on getting back to this beautiful venue."

Helm (9-1) took the loss for the Knights - his first of the season. He went six innings, giving up six earned runs on nine hits while walking none and striking out two.

"I think Damo didn't have the pop that he's had. Whether it's just the course of the season and the number of pitches that he's logged, of whether it was nerves. We'll take time to sit down and evaluate this. He's just a great player and a competitor for us. We're going to learn from this and he's going to be a better pitcher because of it," Wharton added.

Buchanan got the win for his four-hit outing in which he allowed an earned run, while walking none and striking out two.

Crouch and Jurden each had three RBIs for Catholic, while Nance was 3-for-4.

No Knights had multiple hits. Simerman had a triple for and extra-base hit, and Roop recorded the lone RBI.

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NEWARK CATHOLIC 202 020 3 - 9 13 0

CRESTVIEW 000 100 0 - 1 4 0

WP - Buchanan

LP - Helm

2B - Thomas (N), Cox (N).

3B - Roop (C).