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## Alpine leaves no doubt

July 08, 2009, 12:00 AM By Emanuel Lee, Daily Journal Staff  
Kodiak Conrad knows how to close the deal.

The Alpine-West Menlo Little League All-Star pitcher was the ace of the 9-10-year-old team that won district and sectional titles last year. This season the lefty was on the mound for the Menlo Park City Little League title game and the Alpine Little League championship, winning both of them.

On Tuesday, Conrad took the bump once again when the stakes were highest, as Alpine-West Menlo took on an inspired Hillsborough squad in the championship round of the District 52 10-11-year-old tournament at Arguello Park in San Carlos. And once again, Conrad guided his team to victory. Behind another stellar outing from Conrad and a powerful hitting display, Alpine cruised to a 24-6 victory.

"I think this one was better than all the other ones (titles) because we scored so much," Conrad said. "I wasn't nervous (before the game) because I knew I had to get the job done. (The early run support) really helped me and my teammates made some great plays."

Alpine advances to sectional play starting July 18. It went a perfect 5-0 in District 52 action, picking up a key 4-2 win over San Carlos in the winner's bracket semifinal. That proved key because Hillsborough needed seven innings and two days to finish off San Carlos to get to the championship round.

Against San Carlos, Hillsborough rallied from a 12-4, fifth-inning deficit in a game that was suspended due to darkness Monday and continued Tuesday. After Hillsborough finished off San Carlos, 14-12, it had about 30 minutes to get ready for Alpine. But without its top six pitchers, who were unavailable because of pitch counts and needed rest, Hillsborough had nothing left at the end.

Alpine racked up 19 hits, 10 of which came in a 14-run, sixth inning. Alpine led all the way, scoring three times in the top of the first. Leadoff man Matt Henniferth and Rylan Pade reached on singles and Jared Lucian walked to load the bases. One out later Travis Jones was hit by a pitch to force in Henniferth, and Mitch Martella followed with a run-scoring walk.

Alpine made it 3-0 as Lucian scored on a Hillsborough error, one of five committed from the home team. Alpine scored another run in the third, five more fourth and another run in the fifth to take full command.

While the final score indicated a blowout, a few plays here or there could've made this a much closer contest. Hillsborough had a runner gunned down at home plate — both were very close calls — in the first and third innings. Not only did the plays take a run off the scoreboard for Hillsborough, but it gave Alpine an extra out and a surge in momentum. If Hillsborough scores both times, who knows how many more times it scores in those innings to make a difference in the latter stages.

Hillsborough scored twice in the fifth and four more times in the sixth courtesy of a grand slam from Blake Marcus.

But Alpine simply had too much, and the difference was its potent lineup hammered Hillsborough's depleted pitching corps. After opening up tournament play with a loss, Hillsborough had to take the long road back to the championship. It won six straight games to reach the title round, and needed to beat Alpine twice in order to advance to sectionals.

Hillsborough coach R.J. Waldsmith had his ace and son, Alex, ready to go had Hillsborough forced a winner-take-all game that would've been played today.

"We had the gun loaded but we couldn't pull the trigger," said R.J. Waldsmith, who has guided Hillsborough's 9-10 and 11-12-year-olds to District 52 titles. "It was a tough road going through the loser's bracket, but our kids showed a lot of heart and that last inning typified what they're all about. We got as far as we could, but at the end we were running on fumes. All the credit goes to Alpine (for clinching it on the first try)."

Alpine coach Mark Martella said his team is a very offensive club, with 11 of the players having hit home runs during tournament action. Ten of the 13 kids on the roster were a part of last year's 9-10 championship-winning squad, and the experience they gained from that memorable run carried over to this season. Alpine's 14-run sixth showed just how devastating it can be. All told, 17 players came up to bat. There were 10 hits during the uprising, highlighted by a three-run homer from Lucian, who finished with four hits and six RBI.

Henniferth reached base in five of his six plate appearances, and Conrad helped his own cause with a three-run double in the fourth that made it 9-0. On the mound, Conrad was equally devastating, using a nasty curveball to record the majority of his seven strikeouts. Conrad went six innings, allowing just two runs and six hits in another sparkling performance.

"Kodiak doesn't get rattled," Mark Martella said. "He's got (plenty of) life in his arm."

Does he ever.



Nathan Mollat / Daily Journal Alpine starting pitcher Kodiak Conrad limited Hillsborough to two runs through five innings of work. He also drilled a bases-loaded double to clear the bases in a 24-6 win in the District 52 10-11 year-old championship.

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