

FEATURED

Hillsborough 10-11s' late rally falls short in 7-6 loss to Almaden

By Terry Bernal Daily Journal Staff 17 hrs ago



FREMONT — With a 7-6 loss in the opening game of the Northern California 10-11s All-Star Championship Tournament, Hillsborough now faces an uphill battle.

With the team rallying through the final three innings for a near comeback Sunday at Marshall Park, though, Hillsborough may have already found the spark needed if it intends to sweep through the elimination bracket's five games over the next five days.

Trailing 5-0 to Almaden Valley after three innings, Hillsborough got a two-run home run from its newest team member, Kyle Forrest. The blast marked the first of three straight two-run innings. But in the sixth and final inning, Hillsborough came up just short by stranding the potential tying and go-ahead runs at the corners to end it.

“We were just a little flat and we weren’t playing Hillsborough baseball,” Hillsborough manager Doug Robbins said. “We didn’t really get that spark until [Forrest] hit that home run. ... We needed it. It gave us a chance.”

Sunday was Forrest's first game after being added to the Hillsborough roster. And his fourth-inning homer in a pinch-hit appearance came in his first at-bat with the team.

Going up against Almaden Valley starting pitcher Nathan Tichy — the right-hander worked 3 1/3 innings to earn the win — Forrest was facing a two-ball, two-strike count then went into protect mode.

"It was a curveball," Forrest said. "I was just looking down the middle, trying to protect. It was a pretty flat swing."

Forrest is keen on his flat swing, and said he doesn't consider himself a power hitter. During his Hillsborough Little League regular season with the Reds, he saw plenty of games as the team's cleanup hitter, but hit just two home runs on the season. The total didn't even lead his team.

The soaring fly ball he sent over the left-field wall showed the righty has plenty of pop though. Not only was it the first runs Hillsborough managed off Tichy, the swing knocked the right-handed ace out of the game.

Almaden Valley answered back with two runs in the bottom of the frame though.

In fact, Almaden scored in each of the first four innings, getting an opposite-field homer from lefty Grayden Eister in the first inning amid a three-run rally against Hillsborough starting pitcher Dylan Kall (1 2/3 innings, 49 pitches), and adding single runs over the next two frames, an RBI fielder's choice by Dominic Poole in the second and William Fischer scoring on a third-inning wild pitch by Hillsborough reliever Thomas Egbert.

Then, after Hillsborough closed it to 5-2, Almaden Valley got a leadoff single from Tanner Kern and took advantage of an infield error on a potential double-play grounder to get its first two runner on. Three batters later, Joe Fuqua lined a two-run single to right-center to give Almaden a 7-2 advantage.

In the top of the fifth, though, Hillsborough established a rhythm through its batting order. The productive one-two punch of Kall, the No. 2 hitter, and No. 3 hitter Conrad Wilbur made some noise. The lefty Kall knocked a leadoff single to right field. Then Wilbur took a high fastball to the opposite field for a majestic two-run home run to right.

“We were kind of excited,” Forrest said of Wilbur’s home run.
“We needed those two runs.”

Then in the bottom of the fifth, the Hillsborough bullpen finally found a shutdown inning.

Right-hander Tyler Spitzer-Wu — who took over for Egbert with two outs in the third and worked 1 1/3 innings — departed after a leadoff single by Tichy. That’s when left-hander Nathan Balch stepped in and got a little bit of luck and a whole lot of velocity on his sharp fastball.

“When I was pitching I was thinking, ‘anything is possible if you try,’” Balch said. “So I tried as hard as possible. It was tough to throw strikes at first.”

Balch was greeted with an infield single on a bouncer to the left side that hit the cut of the grass and flattened out under the glove of shortstop Dean Dollosso. Then, facing a left-handed hitter at the top of the order, Balch got a jam-shot blooper just off the mound that he caught on a fly, then quickly threw behind the runner at first for a double play.

“After that double play, I knew that I had them,” Balch said.

Balch brought some high heat to finish the inning with a strikeout. Then, in the top of the sixth, leadoff batter William Robbins got his team thinking “comeback” with a four-pitch walk.

With one out, Dollosso reached on an outfield error. Then with two outs, Wilbur produced another clutch swing of the bat, this time being down to the final strike of the game before lofting a two-run double deep down the left-field line, closing the score to 7-6.

“On that last at-bat he wouldn’t give up,” Doug Robbins said.
“He was battling. And he won.”

Kevin Macy then reached on an infield error to put runners at the corners. But Almaden Valley’s reliever Poole finished off the game with a strikeout to end it.

Hillsborough kept Thomas Egbert under the 20-pitch cap, meaning he is available to pitch Monday against Redwood Empire when the two teams square off in an elimination game at 5:30 p.m. Egbert has served as Hillsborough’s No. 2 starter

throughout the summer. From there, Hillsborough will have to dig deep for pitching if it wants to advance to Thursday's championship round in the seven-team tourney.

"We'll look for good, efficient games out of them," Doug Robbins said. "But now, it's just one game at a time. We've got to win five in a row."