

FEATURED

Hillsborough 10-11s mash five home runs to surge to Nor Cal title round

By Terry Bernal Daily Journal Staff Jul 27, 2017 Updated 9 hrs ago



FREMONT — It was like déjà vu all over again. Only this time, Hillsborough came out on top.

For the second time in the Northern California 10-11s All-Star Championship Tournament, Hillsborough squared off with Almaden Valley. In the initial matchup between the two teams, in Sunday's tourney opener, Almaden prevailed to knock Hillsborough into the elimination bracket.

"They're a good hitting team but the first game we definitely didn't play to our potential," Hillsborough's Dylan Kall said.

Wednesday night at Marshall Park, Hillsborough responded with a vengeance, hitting five home runs in a thrilling 13-9 victory to eliminate Almaden Valley.

Kevin Macy, Dean Dollosso and Whitaker Tollmann — twice, for the first time in his career — each homered for Hillsborough. But none were more momentous than Kall's three-run blast in the second inning, a towering shot to the opposite left-center

power alley to overcome an early deficit with a 5-3 Hillsborough lead.

It was a lead Hillsborough would not relinquish.

“We never have our heads completely down,” Kall said of playing from behind. “We always think we can come back.”

Almaden also flexed its muscles at the plate, hitting three homers in the game, with a pair from Dominic Poole (3 for 4 with two homers and three RBIs) in consecutive innings. But it was a solo blast by Tyler Smith to lead off the sixth against closer Conrad Wilbur that had Hillsborough hearing footsteps.

After the play Wilbur turned in on the following at-bat, though, Hillsborough had to be feeling bulletproof — nearly literally.

Wilbur saw a one-hop bullet off the bat of Cody Hardtke deflect off his glove and right into the face. It hit him flush just to the left of his mouth with such force, the impact stopped the ball cold. Wilbur later said the pain lit him up immediately — this, he recounted during a postgame interview while a gnarly black bruise was busy swelling — but, in the moment, he reacted not to the pain, but to the ball at his feet.

Picking it without missing a beat, Wilbur fired to first for the out.

“Catcher ability,” said Wilbur, a natural catcher, but currently a valuable utility man who played five positions Wednesday while going 3 for 4 with two doubles at the dish.

It wasn't until after play was halted for several minutes with the Hillsborough infield huddled around a stern evaluation of Wilbur, by Robbins, that play continued. Wilbur remained in the game to induce two more groundouts — to Macy at third base and to second base for Tyler Spitzer-Wu, who finished off the night with a rangy play to his left — to close out the Hillsborough victory.

Wilbur's ironman moment seemed a fitting way to finish such a wild night of baseball.

With Kall taking the starting pitching assignment for Hillsborough, Macy gave his pitcher an early 2-0 lead with a two-run home run off the left-field foul pole. But in Kall's one inning of work, Almaden answered right back, first with a two-run bomb by Poole to tie it, followed by three hits, topped by an RBI double by Hardtke to give his team a 3-2 edge.

Sandwiched between those three hits, however, was an early game-changing defensive play by Spitzer-Wu at second. Having played remarkably solid defense at the keystone sack throughout the summer, Spitzer-Wu ranged toward the right-field line on a sinking popup off the bat of Joe Fuqua, spearing it at the last moment to help keep an already dangerous rally from spiraling out of control.

"Tyler has been a great middle infielder for us and made a lot of great plays," Robbins said. "But the big thing is his pitching has been lights out."

Indeed, after Kall's three-run blast in the second, the left-hander departed to keep his pitch count under 20, making him available as early as Thursday. Spitzer-Wu then emerged on the mound, soldiering through a two-out solo shot by Poole in the second, by finagling through a bases-loaded jam, to escape with a 5-4 lead. The right-hander then opened the third inning with a strikeout before departing after 1 1/3 innings of work.

Left-hander Nathan Balch bridged the game to Wilbur, working 1 2/3 scoreless innings, while striking out two. During the southpaw's dominant stint, Hillsborough was busy adding valuable insurance runs.

In the fourth, following a walk to Macy, the cleanup hitter Dollosso connected for a long two-run homer to center. Spitzer-Wu then drew a walk and moved to second on a wild pitch, followed by a sharp bounding RBI single to center by Kyle Forrest to make the lead 8-4.

In the fifth, Tollmann got in on the power show, opening the frame with a solo homer to center. Following walks to Wilbur and Macy, Dollosso delivered an RBI single to up the lead to 10-4.

Almaden, though, wasn't content to go quietly. Wilbur's first inning of work was a scuffle. Sending nine batters to the plate, Almaden threw up a four-spot, highlighted by RBI singles from

Tanner Kern and Grayden Eister. With Hillsborough's lead whittled down to 10-8, though, Wilbur left the potential tying run on base by stranding two.

Tollmann then seized the momentum with a fiery round-tripper in the top of the sixth. With one run already in — Forrest opened with a single, then pinch-runner Drew Lyons scored after an error, a wild pitch and another error — Tollmann smoked a line-drive, two-run blast to center. Nearly as loud as the crack of the bat, though, was the thud of Hillsborough's shortest player landing on home plate after accelerating around third base and toward his teammates huddled around the dish for a long jump that, in the moment, smacked of Olympic proportions.

"It was just really exciting," Tollmann said. "So, I just tried to jump as high as I could."

Now, too, Hillsborough has jumped as high through the elimination bracket as any team could. Rallying for three straight wins after dropping the opener, Hillsborough now advances to Thursday's championship round to take on Tri-City of Rocklin, which must be beaten twice. First pitch Thursday is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. If necessary — and Hillsborough is surely looking to make it necessary — the second game is slated for Friday at 5:30 p.m.

Robbins said the surge in Hillsborough's run production might have something to do with not using the unfamiliar batting cages at Marshall Park for two straight nights. The team, instead, has taken its pregame batting practice at its home yard Tuesday and Wednesday, prior to departing for its games.

"And obviously tomorrow," Robbins said.