

FEATURED

## Hillsborough D52 Majors fall to elimination bracket

By Terry Bernal Daily Journal Staff Jun 24, 2019



PALO ALTO — Hillsborough is in uncharted territory.

Coming off back-to-back District 52 championships — as 9-10s in 2017, then as 10-11s last season — the Hillsborough Little League All-Star Majors squad fell to the elimination bracket for the first time in three years with an 11-3 loss to host Palo Alto Sunday at Mitchell Park.

Hillsborough went undefeated in district play through each of the previous two seasons. The group of 11-12-year-olds must now win seven straight games in eight days to earn its third District 52 title.

“It’s a hard road but we can’t change the mindset,” Hillsborough manager Ben Coughlin said. “It’s a longer road. It’s a tough road. But one of the strengths of our team is we have a lot of pitchers.”

One of nine pitchers on Hillsborough's roster, left-hander Devin Saltzgaber took the mound Sunday. Palo Alto totaled 12 hits on the day, touching the southpaw for seven runs on eight hits through 3 2/3 innings.

"I thought Devin pitched well, overall," Coughlin said. "There were a couple pitches with a couple batters he probably wanted back. But we really didn't help him with our defense."

Palo Alto jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the first. Coco VanderHaar doubled and later scored on a wild pitch. Then through the middle innings, nearly everything that could go wrong for the Hillsborough defense did.

"Those were the mental mistakes we made that gave them at least four runs," Coughlin said.

A three-run, third-inning rally started when Cameron Owen struck out but reached on a wild pitch. Then Luke Sousa scorched a one-hopper right at second baseman Nate Coughlin, who hardly could react as the ball shot past him and all the way up the right-center gap to the wall for an RBI triple.

An alert play by Hillsborough third baseman Archer Horn prevented Sousa on a grounder off the bat of VanderHaar. Horn faked a throw to first and hung Sousa out to dry. Sousa committed to trying to score, and valiantly attempted to hurdle catcher Dillon Moss, but Moss took Horn's throw and applied to tag to Sousa at the apex of his jump for the out.

Daniel Kim followed with an RBI double, though, sending a deep fly ball that hit a Hillsborough outfielder in the glove but ended up on the turf. Kim later scored on an RBI groundout by Joey Kessler to put Palo Alto up 4-0.

In the fourth, Palo Alto added three more runs and knocked Saltzgaber out of the game. The Hillsborough lefty seemed to have escaped a two-on, two-out jam but an infield error allowed a run to score and prolonged the inning. Then VanderHaar shot an RBI single to the outfield that was misplayed, allowing both runners to score, giving Palo Alto a 7-0 advantage.

Trailing 9-0 in the fifth, Hillsborough finally got to Palo Alto starting pitcher Joshua Kao, sending nine batters to the plate in the inning. Nate Coughlin reached on an error to start the

frame. Then after a one-out single by Beau Schaffer, Mikey Vargas cashed in with an RBI single. Ryan Drake followed with a two-run double to right-center.

But after Hillsborough loaded the bases on a single by Collin Firestone and a walk by Saltzgaber, Palo Alto turned to Sousa in relief, who recorded one of his three strikeouts through 1 1/3 innings to end the inning.

Ben Coughlin said his team was more emotional during the game than after.

“Quite frankly, I thought they were more emotional during the game but they hung in there,” Coughlin said. “They got a little life ... but you’ve got to put this one in the rearview mirror. ... We’ve got to go grind.”

Hillsborough advanced to the second round of the winners’ bracket with a 7-1 win Saturday over Menlo-Atherton. One of Hillsborough’s best players, Anakin Manuel, has yet to make an appearance in the tournament due to injury.

“Hopefully he will be able to join the team soon,” Ben Coughlin said.

Hillsborough now falls to the elimination bracket. They resume play Wednesday at 5 p.m. at Mitchell Park, and will face the winner of Monday’s elimination game between Redwood City and Belmont-Redwood Shores.

“I give all the credit to Palo Alto,” Coughlin said. “They played well. They hit the ball. Their pitcher mixed it up a lot. They deserved to win.”