

FEATURED

Hillsborough's Robert Ramirez fires no-hitter in District 52 11s All-Star tournament opener

Terry Bernal Daily Journal staff
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What a way to start the District 52 Little League All-Star season. With Hillsborough Little League hosting the District 52 11-year-old All-Star tournament this summer, starting pitcher Robert Ramirez led quite the statement win in the opening game of the tourney Saturday morning for hometown Hillsborough.

Ramirez fired a five-inning no-hitter in an 11-1 mercy-rule victory over Redwood City. Of the 15 outs recorded by the 11-year-old right-hander, 12 were by way of the strikeout. And he saved his best two punch-outs for last, pitching through a bases-loaded jam to preserve his complete-game no-hitter.

Not that Ramirez considers himself a strikeout pitcher.

“I just consider myself as a pitcher,” Ramirez said. “I don’t like to think ahead. I just like to be in the moment and pitch.”

Staying in the moment helped Ramirez navigate a perilous fifth. A regulation Little League game is six innings. Entering the inning with an 11-0 lead, Ramirez had one run to give while looking to end the game right then and there via 10-run mercy rule.

Ramirez recorded a quick strikeout to start the inning, but then the Hillsborough infield made things interesting by committing three straight errors, all by different infielders, all three on routine groundballs, including one by first baseman Griffin Luceno.

This seemed to add a bit of velocity to Ramirez’s already impressive fastball.

“I was feeling a little frustrated,” Ramirez said. “I just wanted to finish it out.”

Ramirez added to the drama by issuing a walk to force home Logan Blackburn with RWC’s first run of the day. Had Ramirez allowed one more run to score, it would have forced a regulation sixth inning, which would have cost him the chance to finish it out.

He bounced back with a quick three-pitch strikeout for the second out of the inning. Then Ramirez locked horns with RWC’s leadoff hitter DeAngelo Palafox, who

ran the count full and battled through a seven-pitch at-bat. But Ramirez won the battle, finishing off the game with a swinging strikeout, his 12th of the day.

“He was at the end of what we were going to use for pitches today,” Hillsborough manager John Gall said. “So, that was his last batter, so we didn’t know what was going to happen there. But he threw some good pitches and struck them out. He was still throwing well and looked strong out there.”



Hillsborough shortstop Johnny Gall, left, tags out Redwood City base runner Cash Diashyn, as second baseman Tayden Flores backs up the play Saturday at Hillsborough Little League.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

John Gall knows Ramirez well. The 11-year-old played up during the regular season for Gall’s Hillsborough Little League 12s White Sox. As one of the younger players on the team, Ramirez wasn’t even the opening day starting pitcher for the White Sox. That honor went to 12-year-old Patrick Bala.

But John Gall’s decision to hand the ball to Ramirez for the 11s tourney opener was an easy one.

“He throws strikes,” John Gall said, “he has a great demeanor on the mound, and he doesn’t let any sort of error bother him in that way. I haven’t seen that happen

very often. So, he's a guy we're going to count on."

Prior to the fifth-inning jam, Ramirez never faced a stress inning. With Hillsborough playing as the visiting team on the scoreboard as part of the tournament draw, Ramirez didn't take the mound until the bottom of the first after the Hillsborough offense rallied for four runs in the top of the inning.

"I felt pretty confident because we had four runs already," Ramirez said. "Good run support. I was just ready to pound the zone."

The No. 3 hitter Luceno got Hillsborough on the scoreboard with an RBI double to score Johnny Gall. Luceno went on to reach base in all four of his plate appearances, going 2 for 2 with a pair of walks. But his first-inning double was critical in helping Hillsborough settle into the game.

"Before, the team was nervous, we all had butterflies in our stomachs," Luceno said. "Everybody was expecting a win. When I go up there ... I'm trying to square the ball up. I have a quote that: 'You miss a hundred percent of the swings you don't take.'"

After Ramirez got hit by a pitch, Parker Perotti followed with an RBI single. Then Tayden Flores lined a two-run single to center to make it 4-0. It might have been more, but RWC shortstop Cash Diashyn turned in one of the defensive highlights of the game, a rangy diving catch on a short popup behind the third base position, going into a knee slide to nab it with a backhand.

"I just saw it in the air, and I saw it over our third baseman's head, so I knew I had to back up," Diashyn said. "So, I backed up and caught it."

Hillsborough kept adding on, scoring single runs in the third and fourth before going large in the fifth.

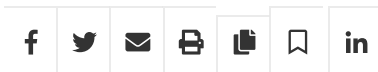
Flores produced a sacrifice fly to right in the third but got robbed of more he had the bases loaded with one out. His sinking liner to right was met by a diving catch from RWC's Jacob Erskine. In the fourth, Cole Callen led off with a double and later scored on a bases-loaded walk by Shep Folk. Then in the fifth, Hillsborough sent 11 batters to the plate, highlighted by a two-run double by Callen and an RBI single by Johnny Gall.

Hillsborough finished with nine hits, facing three RWC pitchers in starter Dominic Sigala, Brevon Doran and Zachary Shah.

"I think we can win state this year," Luceno said. "I'm really proud of us. Our team chemistry, we've been together for a couple of years now. We all are like brothers to each other. And we all pick each other's heads up. So, we're all in a good mood and if they make an error, they're ready for the next time they get an opportunity. ... Robert and I are leaders on this team, and we want to lead it as far as we can go."

Hillsborough advanced through the winners' bracket Sunday with a 14-1 win over Pacifica National. Callen delivered a complete-game victory on the mound, and added two doubles at the plate. Hillsborough now advances to play Alpine Thursday at 5:30 p.m.

RWC's next game is Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. in an elimination game with Belmont-Redwood Shores.



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