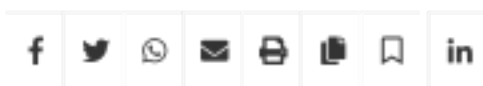


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FEATURED

Red-hot Hillsborough 10s advance to Section 3 Little League baseball finals

Terry Bernal Daily Journal staff
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Hills is really cooking — in more ways than one.

Hillsborough Little League advanced to the championship round of the Section 3 All-Stars 10s tournament, outscoring two opponents in the four-team, double-elimination tournament by a cumulative score of 16-1. And red-hot Hills had to

overcome the red-hot elements, with temperatures at Fallon Sports Park in Dublin touching 105 degrees Fahrenheit over the weekend.

“It’s been brutal in Dublin,” Hillsborough manager Chase Rowbotham said. “Very, very hot ... so it was just a grind.”

Grinding is what Hillsborough has been doing since the start of the District 52 tournament. After winning the district opener — 7-5 over Alpine, not exactly a walk in the park — Hillsborough fell to the elimination bracket with a 2-1 loss to San Mateo American. Hills went on to win five games in five days, including a stunning two-game sweep of San Mateo National in the championship round.

With sectional wins over Castro Valley 11-0, and Newark 5-1, Hillsborough has now won seven in a row.

“I think District 52 is so tough,” Chase Rowbotham said, “and coming out of the losers’ bracket ... obviously sections is a little bit bigger stage, so I was confident the boys were going to be big enough for the moment.”

Finn Rowbotham has been a force on both sides of the ball. In Saturday’s mercy-rule win over Castro Valley in the tourney opener, Hillsborough’s No. 2 hitter went 2 for 3 with four RBIs, including a two-run double in the third inning to break a scoreless tie. Then, in Sunday’s win over Newark, Finn Rowbotham dominated on the mound, working 3 2/3 shutout innings, allowing just one hit and one walk while striking out three.

Finn Rowbotham and Game 1 starter Jack Snethen have now combined for 6 2/3 shutout innings in the tournament.

Snethen opened the tourney with a breezy three innings of shutout ball, trading zeroes for two innings until the Hillsborough bats — quiet the first turn through the order — finally broke through.

“But Snethen held the fort,” Chase Rowbotham said. “And then when we came back around, that’s when things started to come around and we pulled away.”

Leadoff hitter Will Duffell continues to set the tone. After a standout performance in the District 52 tournament — capped by his go-ahead inside-the-park grand slam in the fourth inning of Hillsborough’s decisive 12-6 win in the championship finale — the sweet-swinging left-hander has gone 1 for 3 with two walks and three runs scored through two Section 3 games.

And like the wheel-and-fire bolt down the right-field line that was his District 52 grand slam, Duffell continued raking to his pull field in the Section 3 opener. After a bunt single by No. 12 hitter Jack Veach (Little League now utilizes a continuous batting order in All-Stars play) Duffell followed with a hard single to right between the first and second baseman.

“It’s great; great swing,” Chase Rowbotham said. “He’s our leadoff guy. When he gets on base, things happen He stirs the drink, so to speak. So, when Veach got on and Finn was coming up, I was pretty confident it was not going to be a 0-0 game anymore.”

Finn Rowbotham drove both runs home, as Hillsborough scored three runs in the third. Then in the fourth, Hills went large, scoring eight times to ensure the four-inning mercy-rule victory.

Sunday’s 5-1 win was nearly as comfortable on the scoreboard. Hills manufactured one run in the top of the first, then added three in the fourth and one in the fifth to take a 5-0 lead. Hillsborough was credited with just three hits in the game, but took advantage of six walks, four hit batsmen and some errors, provoked by a small-ball attack and a steady bunting approach.

Relief pitcher Will DeMartini bridged the game with 1 1/3 innings of work, before surrendering one run in the sixth. Duffell then entered to close out the victory with one scoreless inning.

Now, Hillsborough gets to enjoy an in-tournament off day, something it hasn’t seen since beginning its seven-game win streak June 30 with a dramatic 11-7 win over Half Moon Bay. Hills didn’t play Monday, awaiting a championship-round opponent between the winner of Newark vs. Dublin in the final game of the elimination bracket.

“It’s letting them sort of step away and sort of exhale,” Chase Rowbotham said. “Because it’s not just the physical, it’s also the mental toll.”

Navigating the winners’ bracket also keeps Hillsborough’s pitching fresh. Finn Rowbotham is the only pitcher who will be unavailable of Tuesday’s championship-round opener. He will, however, be available to pitch if the tourney advances to Wednesday’s if-necessary game.

“We’ve set it up,” Chase Rowbotham said. “That’s the advantage of winning. You get to rest your pitchers and have your full arsenal on hand. And that’s the teams playing tonight, they’re not going to have that. And we learned that from districts.”

Tuesday’s championship Fallon Sports Park is scheduled for a 5 p.m. first pitch. Hillsborough must be defeated twice to be denied the title. Wednesday’s if-necessary game is tentatively scheduled for 5 p.m.

Hillsborough 12s advance

Hillsborough’s Majors All-Stars advanced to the Section 3 Little League 12s championship round with an 11-0 win over Fremont Centerville in Monday’s elimination game in Fremont.

The Hills 12s will rematch with Bollinger Canyon in Tuesday’s finals opener at Marshall Park at 5:30 p.m.



Terry Bernal, Daily Journal staff