

Seniors' bats bailed out by Pierzchala

By SAM BLACKBURN • Staff Writer • July 28, 2008

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ZANESVILLE - Eric Pierzchala didn't get much help from his team's offense Sunday. Then again, he didn't need much.

ADVERTISEMENT Pierzchala, a knuckleball specialist, scattered four hits and struck out seven in a complete game, as the Senior Pioneers advanced to the semifinals of the Central Ohio League Tournament with a 1-0 win over Newark at Gant Municipal Stadium.

The Seniors (13-8) advanced to face the second-seeded Zanesville Vipers in the semifinals at 6:15 p.m. today.

The top-seeded Junior Pioneers, the regular season champions, play Cambridge (2-13) at 8:30 p.m., with the two winners returning for the finals at 7 p.m. on Tuesday.

Cambridge upset the Columbus Braves 9-4 behind Zach Zifzal's complete game in the other first-round affair.

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The Seniors won despite getting just one hit - Bryce Bednarczyk's single in the fourth - and striking out 11 times in seven innings against Newark left-hander Jason Tomlinson.

But Newark's only mistake came back to haunt them.

After allowing Bednarczyk's one-out hit, Tomlinson struck out the next two hitters. But the second resulted in a passed ball, which turned into a three-base error and the game's only run after the catcher overthrew first base, allowing Bednarczyk to score the game's only run.

"We got that unearned run but that's baseball," Seniors manager Blair Barclay said. "Baseball is a game of breaks and we were fortunate they fell in our favor."

Newark had a golden scoring chance in the second. But after getting runners to second and third with no outs after a throwing error, Pierzchala struck out the next three batters to escape any danger.

The way Tomlinson pitched, it proved to be a critical turn of events. It was even more substantial for Pierzchala, whose error was what put himself in the jam in the first place.

"After I threw the ball away I knew I had to pick the team up," Pierzchala said. "Second and third with nobody out, that's a tough situation to be in."

Barclay knew Newark wouldn't be a pushover with Tomlinson on the hill. He was Muskingum College's ace this past spring, and he didn't play when the Seniors drubbed Newark in back-to-back mercies last weekend.

He allowed only three base runners.

"He's their ace," Barclay said. "They're a totally different team when he's pitching. I knew if he was on it was

going to be tough. We just hoped Eric could match him pitch for pitch and that's what he did."

Barclay now must weigh his options for Monday - but there aren't many. One might be Pierzchala, despite pitching 19 innings since Monday.

Sunday marked his third appearance this week, which included a rare 10-inning showing early in the week.

"This is the fifth straight game he has pitched," Barclay said. "He's a gamer."

- All tickets for the tournament are \$3 each, with the proceeds benefiting the COL. The only free entry honored will be the Muskingum Valley Old-Timers' \$25 season pass.

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