



World Series Journal



AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL

Rowan County, NC locks up title game slot

The crowd favorites continued their roll in Shelby. Rowan County, N.C., Post 342 made it three straight American Legion World Series wins, rolling past San Mateo, Calif., Post 82 13-4 Monday in the series semifinals. Rowan County lost its tournament opener but has been on fire ever since, outscoring its opponents 30-6 and thrilling a partisan crowd. The win puts Rowan County (41-13) in Tuesday's national championship game, which will air live on ESPNU at 7 p.m.

"We've very confident right now," said Post 342 third baseman Juan Garcia, who was 2-for-2 at the plate with three runs, three RBIs and a stolen base. "We've been putting up good numbers, and we're definitely showing that we have an offense, (not just) a defense. That's definitely the main thing right now."

San Mateo was 3-0 in pool play and jumped on top 2-0 Monday before Rowan County scored eight runs over the next three innings to seize control. Five different Post 342 players had two or more hits, and six different players scored.

San Mateo (35-6) came out swinging, and connecting, in the bottom of the first. Tyler Villaroman started with a single and moved around to third on Angelo Bortolin's single. Ramon Enriquez and Kaleb Keelean followed with consecutive singles to plate both Villaroman and Bortolin to open up a 2-0 lead.

But the lead didn't last long. In the top of the second Lee Poteat walked and Juan Garcia walked. Jake Pritchard walked one batter later, and Trevor Atwood brought Poteat home after being hit by a pitch. Tanner File then brought Garcia home on a fielder's choice to tie the game. "I think the key was us coming back with two runs to tie it up," Rowan County coach Jim Gantt said. "I think that was big for us."



Rowan County was right back at it in the top of the third, bringing 10 batters to the plate while scoring four runs on five hits and three hit batters. Garcia and Pritchard each had RBIs during the rally, while Dalton Lankford scored on a wild pitch and Brandon Walton on an error.

Bortolin doubled home Villaroman in the bottom of the third to bring San Mateo within 6-3, but Post 342 came back with two more runs in the top of the fourth. Hunter Shepherd led off with a double, Poteat bunted his way on and Garcia drove Shepherd home with a sacrifice fly. Two batters later, Pritchard reached on a fielder's choice to score Shepherd, pushing Rowan County's advantage to 8-3.

A four-run sixth, keyed by Chandler Blackwelder's two-run double, extended the margin to 12-3. Alex Pennes drew a walk to score Felix Aberouette, drawing San Mateo within 12-4. Rowan County tacked on a run in the top of the ninth when Poteat drove home Lankford with a single. Rowan County pitcher Sawyer Strickland picked up the win, scattering 11 hits over 7.1 innings.

Rowan County, NC - 13
San Mateo, CA - 4

Texarkana, AR - 4
Rockport, IN - 1

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Arkansas reaches title game

Cole Boyd jump-started Texarkana, and Logan Vidrine and the Razorback defense took over from there. Boyd hit a first-inning home run, and Vidrine pitched a shutout thru 6.2 innings, leading Post 58 past Rockport, Ind., Post 254 4-1 in the American Legion World Series semifinals. The win put Texarkana (41-5) into the series' title game against Rowan County, N.C., Post 342 at 7 p.m. Tuesday night on ESPNU.

Vidrine (1-0) pitched into the ninth inning, allowing just three hits and one earned run to a Rockport squad that went 3-0 in pool play and finished 35-2. His defense committed just one error behind him. Vidrine said he knew he had strong stuff when he looked up on the scoreboard after the sixth inning and saw nothing but zeroes for Rockport. "I was really confident," he said. "I just felt good, felt great, on the mound. My teammates had my back. It was good. It was definitely a position I wanted to be in."

Texarkana manager Dane Peavy wasn't surprised by his pitcher's performance. "We've gone with him all year," he said. "He plays such a good defensive third base that we really don't pitch him that much. We knew he's capable of that."

Vidrine had the benefit of an early lead when Boyd went deep with one out in the first inning. It was his first home run of the national tournament. "It's a momentum shift," Peavy said. "I don't think at any point in the game ... that we relinquished momentum. I think we kept it all throughout the game."

The Razorbacks added two more runs in the top of the third when Matt Goodheart reached on an error and Blake Hall took first on catcher's interference. Will Smith then brought both home with a single, giving Post 58 a 3-0 lead.

Indiana starter Sammy Rowan kept Texarkana at bay the next two innings, but Rockport lost an opportunity to cut into the lead in the bottom of the sixth. Leading off, Zach Hopewell walked and then moved to third on an errant pick-off attempt. But Post 58 shortstop Riley Orr made a stabbing grab of Kobe Stephens' line drive for the first out, and Vidrine got a pop-up to first and fly ball to center field to end the threat.

Post 254 did break through in the bottom of the seventh. With two outs, Brenden Lewis walked and then came home on Hunter Rowe's double. Rowe advanced to third on the throw but was stranded when Vidrine got a groundout to end the inning.

Texarkana added an insurance run in the top of the eighth with another home run. With one out, Beau Burson's shot cleared the left-center fence, pushing the lead to 4-1. Vidrine allowed a lead-off walk to start the ninth inning and was replaced by Burson. A fly ball and two strikeouts later, Texarkana was in the final.

'It matters a whole lot'

Both San Mateo, Calif., Post 82 and Rockport, Ind., Post 254 had American Legion World Series games to play Monday. But rather than resting up, players and coaches from both teams instead decided to try to make an impact on local youngsters.

The teams visited students at Graham Elementary, a year-round Title I Cleveland County School in Shelby. Title I schools receive supplemental funding from the U.S. Department of Education to assist and meet the needs of at-risk or low-income students.

Graham Principal Nelsa Feaster said one of her teachers, Travis Strong, challenged Graham's data manager and a member of Shelby Post 82, to have the teams visit the school. Cox and another teacher worked with Legion reps to make it happen.

"It's been an awesome surprise for our students and staff," Feaster said. "Any time (older) students come into the school, they are treated like rock stars by our kids. Their faces light up. They're excited. Our kids just love that attention and extra time. It matters. It matters a whole lot."

"To some people it may seem like it was a really small thing. To our students, it means the world because somebody took time out and made them feel special. It's probably something they're going to remember for a really long time."

The players visited classrooms, answering questions and passing out American Legion baseballs. Students fawned over the players, letting loose with "oohs" and "ahhs" as they heard how far San Mateo had traveled to get to their city.

"Remember that the most important thing in life is education," San Mateo Manager David Fuata told one group of students. "Get that (diploma). And don't forget where you've come from." Fuata also stressed the need for everyone to be on the same page and how valuable a reputation is. "It takes 25 years to build a reputation," he said. "It takes about five seconds to lose it."

San Mateo pitcher Spencer Stewart told the students, "You have to control what you have to control. You can't focus on things you can't control. Focus on what you can control and keep at it."

Post 254 also presented Feaster with a \$100 gift card for the school. "I thought it was a great experience for our players," Rockport assistant coach Bob Sargent said. "It's just one of things that will maybe be a lifetime and maybe inspire them to do something great in life."

While the visit made an impact on the students, it also meant something to Feaster.

"Both teams showered us with so much love," she said. "To be the recipient of that – we're grateful and we're thankful."