

BASEBALL

Schoenrock, Hennen provide heroics against Storm

By Eric Morken

Alexandria Echo Press

Alexandria junior Jaxon Schoenrock smiled when asked last Thursday night how many home runs he has hit as a varsity baseball player. He also didn't have to think about it long.

The answer was none before a Section 8-3A playoff game with Sauk Rapids-Rice (12-9). He has one now, and it propelled the Cardinals (18-5) to a dramatic 2-1 victory over the Storm that sent them into the next round in the driver's seat of this section as the only team without a loss.

"The previous at-bat, I had a good at-bat and lined out to right," Schoenrock said. "I came up in the next at-bat and just had the same approach, just kind of choke up and sit on his fastball. He threw pretty hard. It was 1-1. He threw me a low fastball. I guess I like those. I just kind of swung and went with it and it went out."

Sauk Rapids-Rice senior Alex Harren shut

out Alexandria in a 5-0 win for the Storm on May 10. He was cruising again in the rematch as Sauk Rapids-Rice held a 1-0 lead through three innings after Jeff Solorz drove in the game's first run with a ground-ball single in the third.

Alexandria senior second baseman Brock Lerfald finally got to Harren in the bottom of the fifth. Grady Anderson walked to start that inning, and Lerfald delivered a two-out, hard-hit single that tied the game at 1-1.

That set the stage for Schoenrock in the sixth. He led off the inning and wasted no time as the lefty pulled a pitch over the right-center-field wall. Schoenrock shouted toward his teammates as he rounded second base as they burst out of the dugout to meet him at home plate.

"It's pretty sweet. It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing," Schoenrock said. "I'm not a home run hitter. I think anybody can see that, but it was a big moment. I was just going



Eric Morken / Alexandria Echo Press

Alexandria junior Jaxon Schoenrock lets out a scream as his teammates gather near home plate after Schoenrock's sixth-inning home run gave the Cardinals a 2-1 lead over Sauk Rapids-Rice in the Section 8-3A playoffs on June 2. That proved to be the winning run as Alexandria beat the Storm to move on to the semifinal round through the winner's bracket.

with the team, getting them fired up."

Sauk Rapids-Rice still had a chance to extend the game, but senior JD Hennen was not about to let that happen. Hennen had been dominant

all game around that third-inning run allowed.

He struck out 13 and was most effective in the seventh when it mattered most. Hennen struck out the side in the final frame around a two-out single by Keegan Patterson.

"Jaxon has a heck of an at-bat there," Hennen said. "Gives us the lead, and I'm like, 'OK, I got to close this out. We got to win this game right now.' That's what we did."

Hennen and Harren showed why they are two of the top pitchers in the section. Harren struck out nine as he too went the distance.

Alexandria struggled to make solid contact early against him, but that started to change during the middle innings. In the fifth when Lerfald singled in a run, Alexandria also squared up two other pitches that went for outs on nice running catches by Storm outfielders.

"Just really sit fastball," Schoenrock said of eventually breaking through against Harren. "He mainly throws fastball, so that was our approach. If he gives you a first-pitch strike, swing at it."

Hennen never got into trouble late in the game. He allowed five hits, but just one of those came after the third inning.

"Early on, it was lots of fastballs. That's my best pitch," Hennen said. "That 2-seam fastball that runs into a hitter. Then later on I got my curveball going, some changeups too."

Hennen piled up strikeouts using all three of his pitches. He was confident that the offensive would eventually come if he could keep the Storm from doing any more damage.

"I trust my guys for sure," Hennen said. "We've seen (Harren) multiple times. We finally got going at the end there. I just knew I had to go up there and throw strikes and give my team a chance to win, get a lot of soft contact and let my defense make the plays."

SAUK RAPIDS-RICE 001 000 0 - 1 5 2
ALEXANDRIA 000 011 X - 2 5 1
ALEXANDRIA PITCHING - JD Hennen - W, 7IP, 5H, 1R, 1ER, 2BB, 13SO; SAUK RAPIDS-RICE PITCHING - Alex Harren - L, 6IP, 5H, 2R, 2ER, 2BB, 9SO
ALEXANDRIA OFFENSE - Reed Reisdorf - 1-3; Brock Lerfald - 1-3, RBI; Caleb Runge - 0-2; Lake Hagen - 0-3; Jaxon Schoenrock - 1-3, HR, 1 run, RBI; Hennen - 0-2, BB; Nate Hammerback - 1-3, 2B; Grady Anderson - 0-2, BB, 1 run; Devin Cimbara - 1-3, 2B

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BASEBALL

Osakis sees strides after season-ending loss to Kimball

By Eric Morken

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KIMBALL — The Osakis baseball team has a young nucleus of players that wanted to see improvement from a 5-13 record in 2021, and the Silverstreaks saw some strides they wanted to see despite their season ending in the Section 6AA opener on May 31.

Osakis got the 11th seed in the 16-team tournament and opened on the road against sixth-seeded Kimball Area.

The Cubs (15-7) held on in a 3-2 game to end the Silverstreaks' season with an 8-9 record. Kimball entered this week still alive in the 6AA playoffs as the Cubs played an

elimination game against Eden Valley-Watkins (13-10) on Monday after a 6-0 loss to Wadena-Deer Creek (20-3) and a 9-5 win over Melrose (10-10) in the following rounds.

"Our team played a full seven-inning game against Kimball," Osakis head coach Kendell Proell said. "We came up short as we left runners stranded on bases early in the game. Kyle Mages pitched a really good game for us as he went the full game. Kyle was 2-4 from the plate with a home run in the 7th inning to pull within one run of the lead. Grant Mages also was 2-4 from the plate and had two really nice plays at second for us."

Proell talked earlier in the season after a win over Pillager about how important playing clean defensively was for this group to make a jump in being competitive this spring. He liked what he saw in that regard.

"We have really minimized the mistakes on defense," Proell said after the loss to Kimball. "We were able to get out of the long innings with only giving up a run or two. This year's group really matured from last season and wanted to compete in every game. They really seemed to have fun playing the game of baseball."

Proell now expects to see another jump next

spring after a summer of playing more baseball.

The Silverstreaks will return plenty of experience that should include most of their pitching staff in athletes like soon-to-be sophomore Seth Staloch, and juniors Ben Berger, Grant and Kyle Mages and Mekai Hoelscher.

"I think we will see similar improvements going into next season," Proell said. "Our pitching staff knows the importance that this summer is crucial for development and arm strength. That is one area that we need to improve on going into next season."

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Eric Morken / Alexandria Echo Press

Osakis sophomore Kyle Mages makes a play at shortstop during a win over Pillager on April 28. Mages threw a complete game on the mound and also hit a seventh-inning home run in a playoff game at Kimball Area on May 31 that ended in a 3-2 loss for the Silverstreaks. Osakis finished the season 8-9, and Mages is one of many players who gained experience this spring who are expected back to help lead this program in 2023.

GOLF

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He made it back to his home in Alexandria and could only keep refreshing the live-scoring app and get updates from family members who were following along on the course.

In the end, Alexandria persevered and shot a two-day score of 628 in what were high winds on day one and then challenging pin locations on many holes on day two. Brainerd finished just four shots behind with a 632.

"It was tough for me not being there," Brady said. "They sent me some messages in text saying we're going to win this for you type of deal. That was cool. They knew I was in a tough place, but at the end of the day, they know how to play golf. There was nothing I was going to do that day that was going to win or lose it for them. I think what got them through was just their preparation throughout the entire year and knowing how to han-

dle it when things get a little tighter than they want."

Alexandria made up ground on Brainerd early in round two and found itself up seven or eight shots near the midway point. The Warriors rallied and had things tied with a few holes left.

Cardinals' senior Andrew Swedberg made a big par on the par-three 17th when the Brainerd player in his group got a double bogey.

"There was a two-shot swing," Brady said. "That was a huge turning point, and then Bennett Olsen made birdie on his final hole that basically clinched it. He birdied 18, a par five, he got it up and down from about 40 yards to make birdie."

Junior Braeden Sladek was Alexandria's top scorer with a two-day total of 154 after shooting an 80 in round two. That left him in third place on the overall leaderboard.

Andrew Swedberg is the one player on this team who was not a part of last year's section and state-tournament team. He lost a close qualifying round against a teammate for

the final spot on the 2021 section roster.

He let that drive him in the offseason, and on Friday, Andrew was rewarded by finishing fifth overall at the 8-3A meet as the Cardinals' second scorer with a 156.

"It was pretty awesome," Brady, who is also Andrew's uncle, said. "I told him the night before the second day via text just how proud I was of him for working so hard this year. He worked hard last year too, but it stung for him what happened last year, in a playoff against a teammate, to miss the section team."

"He had two options. He could have kind of hung it up, cruised through his senior year and maybe not improved much. What he did is flip a switch and worked even harder than he ever has. That pays off. When you work hard and are dedicated to what you're doing, moments like this happen. Full credit to him for taking that route."

Freshman Carver Larson was Alexandria's third scorer with a 157 to finish eighth, while Olsen shot a 161 to tie for 14th.

Sophomore Jack Holtz shot a 166 and freshman Ashton Sladek rounded out the Cardinals' lineup with a 168.

"The last thing I wanted to do is be a distraction and also not be there for them when it matters most," Brady said. "Day one with Derek there, they're super comfortable playing with Derek. Derek is a great coach. Once he was gone too, honestly having all the parents there and them figuring things out from transportation, who's doing what, all the little things, that was great."

Brady, who said he was feeling much better by Friday evening, is excited to get back with his team soon as Alexandria shifts its attention to the Class AAA state tournament at the Bunker Hills Golf Club in Coon Rapids June 14-15.

The boys have morning tee times on both days of the state meet, while the Alexandria girls tee off in the afternoon. The Cardinals will work on getting into that early routine by doing morning practices leading up to the tournament.

The Cardinals did what they had to do at the section meet to

give themselves a chance. They know they need to play their best golf of the season now to have a chance at a state title where the winning team often has to shoot a two-day score in the 500s.

This will be Alexandria's 21st trip to the state tournament as the team seeks its second team championship after winning in 2006.

"At Bunker, you have to drive it well," Brady said. "It's not crazy tight, but the rough is usually up a bit and once you get off the fairway, there's lots of big, healthy trees. When you get off the fairway, there's a good chance you're just punching out. We are going to spend a whole bunch of time making sure everyone is dialed in with drivers and three-woods, and then a ton of work with our wedges. We have to give ourselves a lot of birdie looks in those two days to give ourselves a chance to win that golf tournament."

SECTION 8-3A TOP-SEVEN TEAM SCORES - Alexandria - 628; Brainerd - 632; Moorhead - 641; Sartell - 644; Bemidji - 644; Buffalo - 663; Detroit Lakes - 664

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BASEBALL

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It was the first time all game that Alexandria senior pitcher Parker Jendro had been challenged, and he got Cullen Gregory to fly out to Grady Anderson in right field for the second out. Willmar sent the runner from third as Anderson's throw home brought Hagen a little bit up the third-base line as he caught the ball and placed the tag.

The runner was initially ruled out to end the threat. But both umpires talked things

over and ultimately ruled that the runner was safe.

Alexandria head coach Jake Munsch vehemently disagreed with the overturned call as he talked with the umpires before both teams got back on the field. Jendro struck out Brandt Sunder in the next at-bat to get out of the inning with two Willmar runners left on.

"They said I was guarding the plate," Hagen said of the play at home. "I was playing the ball and it came right to me. He slid into my leg and the call was overturned."

That could have been a big moment in the game

for Willmar. Instead, Alexandria came right back and put up the four runs in their next half inning to all but end it.

"For sure (it motivated us)," Hagen said. "We came into the dugout, had a little talk. I think it did motivate us, yes."

The eight runs were plenty for Jendro on the mound. The senior right-hander was dialed in from the get-go as he did not allow a hit until the fourth inning when Ian Koosman singled.

All five of the base hits Jendro allowed were singles. He struck out five and pounded the strike zone without allowing Willmar to

make much hard contact all game.

After being used primarily as a reliever on the mound in 2021, Jendro has stepped up as a starter and become a huge part of an Alexandria pitching staff that has a team ERA of 1.89.

Jendro has thrown a team-high 37 innings, striking out 34, with an ERA of 2.27.

"He's a beast," Hagen, Alexandria's catcher, said. "He paints corners. He was painting them all day. He made me look good. He did his job today."

The win puts Alexandria in a

good spot heading into Wednesday's championship round. If Little Falls were to win game one, the two teams would play again right after that to determine the Section 8-3A champion.

Alexandria won the regular-season matchup with Little Falls, but it was a 1-0 game through five innings before the Cardinals struck for three runs in the sixth. Flyers' senior Zachary Gwost threw six strong innings that day to keep his team close, but JD Hennen and Jendro combined to allow just one hit with 11 total strikeouts.

"They had a pretty

good pitcher," Reisdorf said of Gwost from that game. "We struggled with him right away, but once we got going a little bit, our team is really good at rallying around each other. Once one person gets going, everyone gets going."

Alexandria's state tournament appearances came in 1972, 1975, 2017 and 2018. This group is motivated to add another section championship to the record books going into Wednesday.

"It's a dream we've all wanted to do," Hagen said. "I think this will be our year."

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