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LITTLE LEAGUE

Flagstaff-based Little League All-Stars advance in district tourney

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Continental Little League's Chino Ventura-Gomez (11) makes a catch during a game against Page on Thursday at Mark Grace Field.

Hattie Loper, Arizona Daily Sun

Continental and West Flagstaff Little League's 8-10 All-Star teams began play in the District 1 Tournament on Thursday afternoon. Mark Grace Field was the venue for the beginning of this year's tournament and saw 49 total runs cross home plate during the first day of games.

WFL was responsible for a majority of those runs with the help of aggressive baserunning, defeating Payson 28-2 in a run-rule shortened game that capped off the night.

Continental was also victorious and had little trouble putting runs on the board in a tight, 10-9 win over Page.

Continental defeats Page, 10-9

Page struck first. The first three Page batters walked and came around to score off of from passed balls and one with the assistance of an RBI base hit from the Page cleanup hitter.

Before all the fans could get settled, Continental trailed 3-0.

Slowly, Continental clawed back and stayed within striking distance of their opponent.

Kinley Brawley reached on a hit to begin the bottom half of the first inning. Brawley soon advanced into scoring position on a passed ball and scored when Hudson Alger roped a double into right field.

A second run came in the next inning in the form of Wesley Riffle. He led off the Continental half of the second with a walk and rounded the diamond on passed balls to put his team back within one after two innings.

Two walks from the bottom of the Page lineup and two base hits from the top propelled them farther ahead in the top of third inning, but Continental adamantly responded with two more runs in their half to cut the Page lead down to 6-4.

Declan Lundberg and Sam Shaw scored Continental's third-inning runs after being hit by a pitch and walking, respectively. Each player crossed home with aggressive steals of home on balls to the backstop.

The fourth frame entertained more rollercoaster antics as Page struck back with two runs of their own after two walks and a catcher's interference call. The catcher, Raylon Gillespie, appeared to signal that the bat hit his glove in a show of sportsmanship.

Walks and mistakes aside, Continental responded with two more runs in the bottom of the fourth to cut the deficit to 8-6.

Hunter Rusconi reached on a hit-by-pitch and came around to score the first run of the inning. Tucker Callan then stepped to the plate with two outs and drove a ball hard into the right field corner for a triple, and scored on another ball to the backstop.

Down by two runs and with two innings left to play, Continental turned to Brawley on the mound to keep the Page bats at bay.

Brawley had entered in the previous inning to record the last out, successfully doing so by tagging out a Page runner at home to limit damage.

The first three Continental pitchers -- Alger, Callan and the starter Felix Garcia -- combined to throw 3 and 2/3 innings, allowing two hits, eight runs and eight walks, while also striking out eight batters. However, it was Brawley who stayed in to keep Continental's hopes alive.

Brawley worked a scoreless top of the fifth inning, assisted by a highlight play at shortstop from Alger, who was able to recover the ball after a high bounce off his glove and step on second for the force out, giving way for the Continental bats to take their first lead of the game.

It was Bennie Fisk who walked and stole second base to begin the bottom of the fifth, giving Continental an early opportunity in the inning with no outs.

Lundberg followed, belting a base hit into the outfield to score Fisk and put Continental within one.

Declan Van Dyke walked after Lundberg and the pair of base runners both scored on a combination of passed balls and throwing errors, putting Continental up 9-8 before an out could be recorded in the inning.

Continental manager Michael Gillespie III was most jovial about his team's fight when trailing for so much of the game.

"The kids just kept trying," he said. "They beared down and fought through it, even when we got behind they kept fighting. I'm really proud of them for that."

Two consecutive strikeouts from the top of the order put Alger at the plate with one last chance to extend the Continental lead, and he took advantage. A base hit and throwing error put Alger at second base for Gillespie, who knocked an RBI double into left-center field and gave Continental a 10-8 lead heading to the final frame.

Alger and Lundberg were both catalysts for Continental. Alger ended his night going 2 for 2 at the plate with an RBI and a run scored, while Lundberg scored two runs, drove in a run and was 1 for 1.

The first Page batter in the sixth walked and scored, but three strikeouts from Brawley in the inning shut the door on an eventful opening round game.

Continental's 10-9 victory over Page places them in a game on Saturday where they will play either WFL or Winslow with the opportunity to advance to the final stage of the district tournament.

West Flagstaff defeats Payson, 28-2

Aggression on the base paths was the name of the game for the West Flagstaff 8-10 All-Stars in their dominating win over Payson on Thursday.

WFL manager Gary Kirkman joked that his players were probably tired of him after three consecutive weeks of practice, but the quickness on the base paths that had been taught over most of a month were on full display when his team took the field.

"We do a lot of work reads," Kirkman said. "You gotta read the ball if it's down and then you make the decision if you can make it or not, then you read the ball; if they back pick you, you're going. Anytime you can get a 10-year-old to make an extra throw, the odds are in your favor."

West Flagstaff began the game at the plate and wasted no time in what was an onslaught of scoring over three innings.

The first 10 West Flagstaff batters reached base and scored in the first inning.

Riley Bruce led off with a walk. Bennett Burcar followed with a base hit and scored after Bruce on a combination of errors.

Landon Brown then walked, setting the table for Tad Whitney.

Whitney wasted no time at the plate, swinging early in the count and blasting a ball into the trees and over the left-center field wall for a two-run home run.

The next five West Flagstaff hitters mimicked a merry-go-round as they sprinted around the bases on an assortment of stolen bases and passed balls. This gave Barrett Jay a chance to put his team up by double digits before his own pitcher had taken the mound.

Jay delivered with an RBI base hit, driving in two runs and padding his team's lead.

Sixteen batters were sent to the plate in the inning and after the first three outs were recorded West Flagstaff led, 10-0.

Kirkman explained that part of his staff's coaching style includes trusting players to make their own decisions and allowing them the freedom to play loose.

It takes time to ingrain and the players have to prove themselves, but over weeks and years of practice, the dividends seem to pay off for both players and coaches.

"They know they have to be alert or they're going to not be out there," Kirkman said. "They rise to the occasion, they like to read (pitchers) and we give them a little trust and let them make some of their own decisions. If they're paying attention you give them a little more leash and they want a little more leash."

Payson stepped into the box facing a difficult task in every inning they played.

Burcar started for West Flagstaff, allowing one hit, one walk and one run in just one inning of work. He also recorded three strikeouts against the five batters he faced.

A walk of Payson's Tucker Goodman and a stinging RBI double down the right-field line off the bat of Briggs Burke scored the first Payson run, but it was all they could muster off of Burcar.

The cavalcade of West Flagstaff runs continued in the top of the second inning.

Seven consecutive batters reached and scored following a strikeout of Vaughn Barber to begin the frame. Another strikeout sandwiched the seventh run of the inning, but by the time Payson could record a third out the deficit had expanded and West Flagstaff held a 17-1 lead.

Barber pitched the bottom of the second for West Flagstaff, walking three batters and allowing one run in his one inning of work on the mound.

Levi Armstrong was the lone Payson batter to score in the second inning, plating his teams second and final run on a steal of home.

No relief was offered in the top of third as West Flagstaff continued scoring in droves, their legs carrying them around the diamond with no hesitation.

The first four West Flagstaff batters reached base and scored in the inning before an out was recorded, but it was temporary as the next six that stepped to the plate all rounded the bases and scored. For the second time in three innings, West Flagstaff batted around their order and sent 16 batters to the plate.

West Flagstaff tallied more than 33 total bases off of steals and passed balls. On multiple walks the runner rounded first base as if they had hit the ball to the fence and ended up at second base easily. The pressure was continuous and base runners were off to the races with every ball that rolled away from a defender.

Every West Flagstaff batter scored at least two runs. Six scored three runs and five scored two runs.

The charge was led by Whitney, Jay, Bruce and Cole Joralman.

Whitney's home run propelled him to a 2-for-3 night at the plate with three RBIs and a walk. Jay was 3 for 3 with three RBIs. Bruce did not record a hit, but walked four times and scored three runs. Finally, Joralman went 3 for 4 with four RBIs and a walk, including a two-RBI double to drive some of the final West Flagstaff runs.

The final frame was pitched by Whitney, who faced five batters and struck out three while walking one.

For Kirkman, his team's performance was reminiscent of players from years past, some of which serve as role models for the younger generation who are eager to continue representing West Flagstaff in the only way they know how.

"They want to represent," Kirkman said. "They know the kids in front of them and want to keep that going. Then they look up to a lot of those kids and want to emulate that aggression and how those kids play the game."

With West Flagstaff's 28-2 victory, they advanced to play Winslow on Friday. The winner of that game will face Continental on Saturday.

Tags

Base On Balls	Stolen Base	Glossary Of Baseball Terms	Baseball Field	Strikeout	Batting (baseball)
Run (baseball)	Base Running	Major League Baseball Teams	Seasons In Baseball	Ball Games	
Lawn Games	Major League Baseball	Major League Baseball Seasons	Grass Field Surfaces	Sports	
Athletic Sports	Outdoor Sports	Team Sports	Baseball	Ball And Bat Games	Turf Sports
Major League Baseball Postseason	Team Activities	Seasons In American Sport			
Major League Baseball Competitions	Baseball Positions	Baseball Playoffs And Champions	Catcher		
Hit (baseball)	Positions (team Sports)	Pitcher	Baseball Statistics	Batting Order (baseball)	
October Sporting Events	Force Play	Sports Rules And Regulations			