

https://azdailysun.com/sports/local/west-flagstaff-little-league-8-10-all-stars-beat-winslow-at-home/article_f6b5e8ee-3631-11ef-8317-0fc0b15db9d4.html

TOP STORY

LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL

West Flagstaff Little League 8-10 All-Stars beat Winslow at home

NATHAN ECKER Special to the Daily Sun
Jun 29, 2024



The West Flagstaff Little League 8-10 All-Stars huddle after a game against Winslow Friday at Mark Grace Field.
Nathan Ecker, courtesy

A monsoon of runs on Thursday was promptly followed by a flood of competitive energy on Friday as the West Flagstaff and Winslow 8-10 Little League All-Star teams faced off in the District 1 tournament at Mark Grace Field.

Scoring was hard to come by early for either squad as strong pitching performances and stellar defense controlled the first two innings of play, but a rapid shift in momentum led to an explosive third inning with West Flagstaff walking off the game via run-rule in the fourth inning and securing a 10-0 victory over Winslow.

West Flagstaff was the home team and turned to the lefty Landon Brown on the mound.

The echoing tink of an aluminum bat opened the festivities on Brown's first pitch of the game. At the plate for Winslow was Mason Dalton, who saw just two pitches on the night and drove each of them into the outfield without hesitation.

Dalton's swing pushed the ball deep into center field, allowing him to reach third with a leadoff triple.

Within seconds of first pitch, West Flagstaff was in danger of trailing for the first time in the tournament

Joseph Stewart was Winslow's second batter and lined a ball on the ground to third where a shallow playing Josiah Craver held Dalton back, but allowing Stewart to reach first base.

If Brown was nervous, he did not show it, as he proceeded to strike out the next two batters. Brown then hit Winslow's Carlos Quezada with a pitch, loading the bases, but worked ahead of the next batter and forced a pop up back to the mound to end the first frame unscathed.

West Flagstaff threatened in their first turn at the plate against Winslow pitcher SJ Smith with a Bennett Burcar single and Brown walk. However, Smith punched out two consecutive batters to escape the jam and stifle the top of the West Flagstaff

order.

In the second inning Brown continued to induce off-balance swings against the Winslow lineup, working out of a two-out bases loaded jam with a swinging strikeout to keep the game scoreless.

After all was said and done, Brown finished the game having given up five hits and one walk, while striking out six in four innings of work.

West Flagstaff head coach Gary Kirkman applauded his young starter for his presence on the mound and was ecstatic about Brown's ability to stay composed in difficult situations wherever he is on the field.

"He's money at first base, he's dependable throwing strikes, he's awesome," Kirkman said. "You know he's not going to get rattled in his head, he's not going to freak out. He's the same all the time; whether he hits it out or whether somebody hits it off his shin or whether he strikes somebody out, he's never going to show any kind of emotion."

The bottom half of the second inning provided more promise for West Flagstaff as Boden Kirkman led off with a base hit to left field.

A Cole Joralmon walk two batters later set the stage for Kingston Carrillo with a runner in scoring position. Carrillo laid down a bunt between home plate and the pitcher's mound, but quick reactions allowed Winslow to cut down Boden Kirkman at third, keeping West Flagstaff at bay for one more inning.

Despite being chased later in the game, Smith provided Winslow with two strong innings of work against West Flagstaff's potent lineup, including two strikeouts against the heart of the order.

No runs were scored through the first two innings, a major shift from West Flagstaff's prior game where they plated 17 runs and sent 27 batters to the plate in their first two innings against Payson.

Dalton led off the third inning for Winslow, swinging at Brown's first pitch and dunking it in right field for a lead off single.

This time Brown made sure the situation did not get out of control, striking out Stewart and forcing Smith and the Winslow catcher Leo Gonzales to make outs in play.

After being talked down by his coaching staff, Gary Kirkman also settled into the rhythm of the game during the third inning, trusting his defense to make plays behind Brown who is prone to giving up contact.

With a hot snag of a linedrive to third and an easy read of a high flyball to center field, West Flagstaff raced to the third base dugout ready to swing away.

"When your pitcher's throwing strikes and you make plays for him, you come in jacked, ready to go and it absolutely shifts momentum," Kirkman said.

Riley Bruce led off the bottom of the third inning with a walk and Bennett Burcar followed with another as the result of a long at-bat, fouling multiple balls into the crowd.

With runners in scoring position and no outs Brown stepped to the plate with an opportunity to give himself and his team a lead. He did so, tripling on a hard hit ball down the left field line and putting West Flagstaff up 2-0.

Tad Whitney hit a triple of his own on the heels of Brown's clutch hit, scoring Brown and eventually crossing home plate himself on a passed ball.

Barrett Jay joined the extra-base party next, doubling and forcing Winslow to make a pitching change.

Dalton took the mound for Winslow and quickly recorded the first out of the inning, but a walk of Vaughn Barber led to more West Flagstaff runs.

Joralmon, the RBI leader from West Flagstaff's win over Payson, continued his hot tournament hitting with a drive to right-center field that split the Winslow outfielders and easily scored Barber. The speedy Joralmon was not far behind, dashing around the diamond and crossing home with a little league home run.

Carrillo scored the eighth and final run of the inning on his own accord with a single, stolen base and nab of home on a passed ball.

In the blink of an eye West Flagstaff took a commanding lead and smothered a Winslow retort in the top of the fourth inning with stellar defense.

Brown recorded a strikeout of the first batter of the inning, but it was Burcar's athleticism at shortstop that kept Winslow from getting any more runners in scoring position.

Soft contact off the bat of Winslow's Emilo Vargas pushed the ball past the mound and the extended glove of Brown. Vargas was halfway down the first base line as Burcar charged behind the mound and toward the ball rolling over the infield grass in front of second base.

Quickly.

A glove.

A ballerina like spin.

A dart to an outstretched Whitney at first.

An out.

Burcar gathered himself off the dirt and managed his wrist that appeared to take a twist on the play, but he remained in the game without any issue.

Gary Kirkman was exuberant about the defensive display his team showed during the game, crediting it as a main reason West Flagstaff was able to secure a victory.

“We knew our pitcher was going to throw strikes, but people put it in play, we know that too,” he said. “(We told) our defense ‘you gotta go make plays for your pitcher,’ and they did. There were some great plays and that’s part of being alert and knowing what to do with the baseball.”

Riley Bruce reached base once again to begin the bottom of the fourth. Burcar then showed that his roll from the previous half inning had no ill effects as he platted Bruce with a single to left field.

Fittingly, Brown stepped to the plate after Burcar had advanced to third on a combination of errors and passed balls. He drove the ball high into center field, allowing Burcar to tag up and score the tenth West Flagstaff run, resulting in a four inning run-rule walkoff win.

Joralman and Brown led the way for West Flagstaff with three RBI’s each. They both had flawless nights at the plate on top of that, Joralman going 1 for 1 with a walk and run scored, and Brown going 2 for 2 with a walk and run scored.

Outside of a web gem play, Burcar also ended his night going 2 for 2 at the dish with a walk, an RBI and two runs scored.

Whitney provided one RBI of his own as well, along with a run scored.

West Flagstaff’s win propels them into the final winners bracket game on Saturday where they will face Continental Little League to decide who advances as the No. 1 seed from group A of the District 1 tournament.

Tags

