



April 24, 2009

Baseball: De Pere plays small, wins big over West De Pere

8-run fourth lifts De Pere to 8th straight win

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DE PERE — The De Pere baseball team can play small ball after all.

The fourth-ranked Division 1 team in the state displayed some forgotten fundamentals in an 8-1 nonconference win over West De Pere Thursday afternoon.

The Redbirds scored all eight of their runs in the fourth inning, turning a 1-0 deficit into a rout and their eighth straight win to start the season.

"We had been just bunting horribly all year," De Pere coach Dennis Riddle said. "We are mashers. This is the simplest team I've ever had to coach, because we don't run very well. We don't bunt very well. We just go out there and swing away.

"But I told the guys, 'You know, we are going to get into a game where we are going to have to bunt. We are going to run into a stud pitcher.' We spent the last three days just bunting and bunting and bunting."

The extra practice paid off against the Phantoms after West De Pere took a 1-0 lead in the top of the third inning.

De Pere shortstop Joe Betcher started the bottom of the fourth with a single and moved to second on a walk by Mikole Pierce.

Senior infielder Garret Greenway attempted to sacrifice the runners over, but reached first safely after laying a bunt down the third base line that West De Pere had no chance to defend.

Designated hitter Brent Jorgensen followed with a single to left that drove in two runs and opened the floodgates.

De Pere sent 14 batters to the plate in the eight-run inning, finally knocking West De Pere starter Michael Schneider from the game.

The left-hander was sharp up until that point, striking out six through the first three innings and allowing just one hit.

"That's kind of where we are at right now," said West De Pere coach Joe Rukamp of a young Phantoms team that lost most of its starters from last season's WIAA Division 2 state title team. "We are playing ball, playing ball, playing ball and then we kind of run into an inning like that.

"We've got to be a better team. Those are things we've got to learn to overcome. We've got to get more experience and do it." The big inning was more than enough for De Pere starter Nick Schadrie, who allowed two hits and struck out five over five innings to earn the win.

"I started off pretty good and then hit a rough patch in the second and third," Schadrie said. "I tried to work through it and just got going again."

Senior pitcher Kory Guns threw two perfect innings in relief. The Redbirds retired the final 11 batters of the game.

The Redbirds entered the season with high expectations, and so far they've lived up to them. Although it's only April, Riddle isn't downplaying what De Pere's ultimate goal is in 2009: to reach the Division 1 state tournament for the first time since 2006 and the fifth time in program history.

"Hey, it's a long season," Riddle said. "We literally take one game at a time, but our goals are always lofty."

"They are to win the conference and go to state. But it's a great group of kids, and they love baseball and know how to play the game. That's the key."
