

SPORTS

GOUGH

Continued from B1

despite the disappointment, losing a game at least gave the team a chance to step back and come to terms with what work needed to be done against top competition.

Once Easter break was over, the Pirates went right back to being themselves, dominating their way to a 12-0 FRC title and a No. 1 seed in the east playoffs.

The Pirates had their 15th-and-final mercy-rule win in the first round and the pitching staff went back to another shutout streak with three straight wins to make it back to the regional championship series.

Perquimans would sweep No. 3 Bear Grass Charter in two games to reach another state cham-

pionship.

Then came a couple of state championship series performances that the Perquimans community should remember for years.

Senior Tanner Thach carried Perquimans to a Game 1 win on the mound. Seven innings, one hit, two walks, no runs and 12 strikeouts.

When the Pirates found a way to bring their only run of the game home in the bottom of the fourth, the left-hander didn't allow a single Cherryville hitter on base over the final three innings.

Game 2 on Saturday afternoon just didn't go the Pirates' way, but Game 3 came later that night and Perquimans got a lift from another senior, Jakob Meads.

Meads fought his way through 4.1 innings, allowing just one earned

run, had a couple huge run-scoring singles and came back to the mound to record the final out of the season.

So how did the Perquimans baseball program pull off back-to-back state championships?

Look no further than the senior class.

Nine Pirates played their final high school baseball game on Saturday night and they are, of course, very responsible for this year's state title.

Ty Nixon, Jackson Russell, Eli Gregory, Colby Brown, Jakob Meads, Mason Byrum, Jett Winslow, Trent Byrum and Tanner Thach will go down as back-to-back state champions in their upperclassmen years.

I was not here to cover the 2021 version of the state champion Pirates, but it's no surprise they were able to go back to

back after this large group of seniors found a way to win it all by coming into their own as juniors and added one more year of experience in 2022.

Those nine seniors left a mark that Roberson, who just finished his 10th year as Perquimans' head coach, said will be tough to move on from.

"All nine of them, I love them like sons and they're always going to be a Pirate," he said. "They are going to be missed. They cannot be replaced. They cannot be replaced for what they've done for this program."

A three-peat is always an incredibly difficult task and without this graduating senior class, the task will be even harder.

But it's possible. You have to win two first and that's where they are.

You'll have guys like Macon Winslow and Tren-

ton Sawyer, who were already major pieces to this team, come back as seniors next year.

Winslow was the best overall hitter on this year's team and after Thach, Sawyer carried a lot of the weight on the pitching mound.

There will also be some rising sophomores who will likely see their roles grow next season. Maddux Thach and Cameron Goodrow showed potential for expanded mound duties in 2023.

Roberson also made note of the freshmen who didn't get a ton of playing time this season, praising them for the energy and passion they brought in the dugout, especially during the state championship series.

"We have a lot of guys in that dugout that will be back next year," Roberson said. "We're not going

to have a lot of the big names. We're not. But we're still going to have what we wear on the back of our shirt, 'Tradition,' and the expectation isn't going to change. The expectation to win is going to still be there.

"So we have a lot of work to do getting to that, but we're going to enjoy this right now."

Go right ahead and enjoy it, coach.

Same goes for the Perquimans community, which, I might add, showed up in Holly Springs in a way Cherryville just couldn't match.

The two-year run your school's baseball program just went on is special. It deserves that time to be celebrated.

David Gough is sports editor of The Daily Advocate.

GAME 2

Continued from B1

bottom of the third with two of its first three hitters reaching base with singles. That led Perquimans head coach Justin Roberson to make a pitching change, bringing in Jakob Meads.

Meads struck out his first batter for the second out, but Collin Huss singled to left to drive in two

runs and a 5-0 Ironmen lead.

Perquimans finally broke through in the top of the fourth with a Russell infield single to the shortstop that scored Jett Winslow.

Winslow was hit by a pitch earlier in the inning with one out and made it to third when Meads lined a single to left-center, bringing life into the Perquimans fans in atten-

dance.

The Pirates, however, ran into a little more controversy when an Eli Gregory grounder to shortstop was thrown to third.

To many in the crowd, Meads appeared to be safe, but the third base umpire ruled him out. Roberson, who was in the third base coaching box, appeared visibly upset by the call.

Cherryville added another run in the sixth as Rob-

erson went with multiple pitchers to close out the game and keep the pitch counts for what increasingly seemed to be an inevitable Game 3 Saturday night.

Maddux Thach pitched the fourth and fifth innings, while Cameron Goodrow and Connor Futrell split the sixth inning.

For Cherryville, Willis didn't strike out anyone until the final batter of the game as he pitched three-

hit complete game to push the 1A NCHSAA state championship series to a final deciding game.

Roberson noted after the game that he likely would use multiple pitchers, including Tanner Thach, who pitched a shutout Friday night in Game 1 and had 32 pitches left of eligibility.

Despite scoring only two runs in the first two games of the championship series, Roberson said

he expected the Pirates' bats to be ready to break out at any spot.

"We're still the same group of kids," Roberson said. "We've had two games in a row where we didn't hit it, but it's a small sample of our season. We're still the same team that can score six or seven runs in one inning. It's still who we are and we have to shake the funk and get after it."

STEAMERS

Continued from B1

pitch. The next hitter struck out, and then it was all left up to Hipp. Boone brought in a second reliever, Travis

Shumate, but Hipp didn't wait him out, lining an early count base knock to center scoring the tying and go ahead runs.

Edenton manager Justin Hill went to his bullpen to close out the game.

"We are a little short on arms right now and Gage Riddick just joined the team. He said he was ready and he did the job."

Hill has used all his position players in the first two games of the season as the

team is getting to know each other and finding their chemistry.

Riddick, a 6-foot-4 right-hander from Gates County, stranded a runner at third base, but got the final three outs for the save.

On Sunday, the Steamers rode Jackson Hipp's clutch bat for the second straight night in a 3-2 comeback win over the Virginia Beach Sea Dogs. The win pushed the Clams to 3-0 overall, and 1-0 in

Premier Collegiate League play.

The Steamers had an off day Monday, and were scheduled to be back on the diamond Tuesday night in Tarboro against the River Bandits.

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