

SPORTS

Seniors made title run feel like destiny

What a run. What a Run. What the Perquimans baseball team accomplished in the last two years is as remarkable as it gets.

That's back-to-back 1A NCHSAA state championships and a 49-4 combined record in that time. As I covered more and more Pirates games



DAVID GOUGH

throughout this season, that the second straight title, which came to fruition in Holly Springs just before 11 p.m. on Saturday night, seemed to be destined for this group.

It's easy to think that when a team loses just once in the regular season, but the teams they beat, the outstanding performances they had and some of the special moments that came along for the team and community in Jim "Catfish" Hunter Field, all played a role.

The second game of the season, on March 4, provided a pretty good omen for the Pirates when the team finally received their 2021 state championship rings at a pregame ceremony and played to that hype immediately after.

They beat up on defending 3A state champion J.H. Rose 6-1.

Perquimans then was far and away the superior team in the newly-formed Four Rivers Conference.

At one point, for 10 consecutive games the Pirates shut out their opponent.

The final game of the shutout streak was a special night as well, not because of the 15-0 win over Bertie, but because Catfish Hunter Field had a new look.

It was the Pirates' first game with a new 300-person capacity grandstand behind home plate with a press box at the top of it. (I appreciated the new press box and used it well when I came to more games the rest of the season.)

The Perquimans community packed the new grandstand well that night as the Pirates won their 15th game of 19 straight victories to begin their defense of the 2021 title.

Any hope for a potential unbeaten season ended in Gatesville when Perquimans lost to Camden 4-2 in the Albemarle Easter Tournament championship.

Head coach Justin Roberson said at the time that

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Thach throws one-hit shutout, Pirates take Game 1

Pirates 1
Ironmen 0

BY DAVID GOUGH
The Daily Advance

HOLLY SPRINGS — The last-ever high school start on the mound for Perquimans left-hander Tanner Thach was a good one and the Pirates needed every bit of it.

Only one run came home for Perquimans during Game 1 of the 1A NCHSAA state championship series against Cherryville Friday night, and it wasn't the most exciting way to score either, but it was enough.

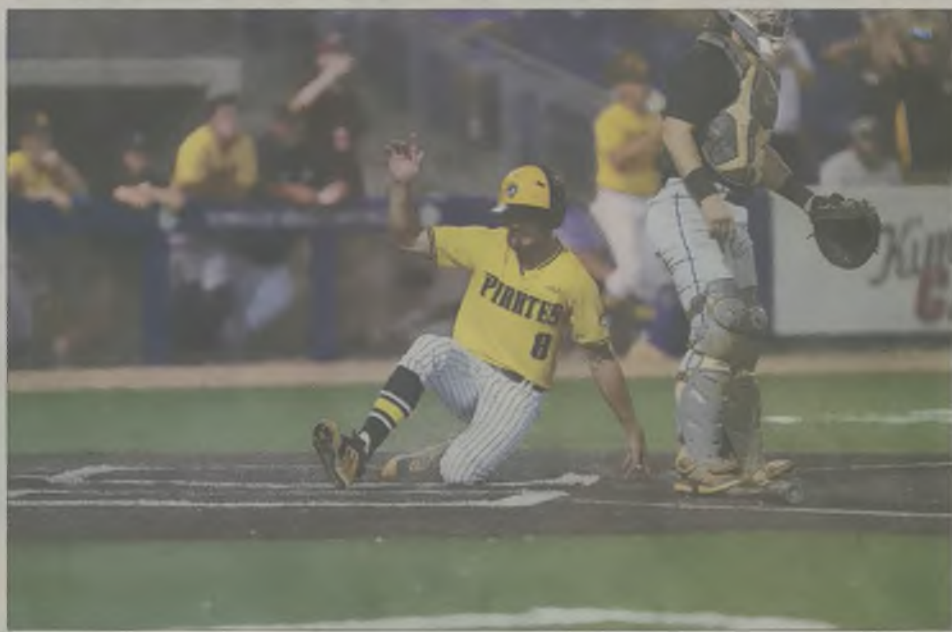
Thach tossed a complete game one-hitter against Cherryville, propelling the Pirates to a 1-0 victory and to within one win of a second consecutive state title.

"Sometimes it's like that. You're not going to score seven or eight every time you go out, so I'm proud of the guys," Perquimans head coach Justin Roberson said. "We fought hard and we have to come back and do it again tomorrow."

As rain in the forecast fortunately held off Friday around Holly Springs' Ting Stadium, Thach began a dominant day on the mound with a first-pitch ground out to shortstop of Cherryville's Landon Hahn.

Colby Brown made the play between second and third base, firing it to first a little off line, but good enough for first baseman Jett Winslow to put the tag on Hahn easily for an immediate first out.

Two pitches later, Brown backed up his pitcher again with an impressive sliding play to his left to haul in a Collin Robinson grounder. That throw to first was perfectly on target for the second out and the Perquimans fans who made the two-plus hour trip roared in



PHOTOS BY JOEL SUTTON

Perquimans' Jakob Meads (8) scores the Pirates' only run in their 1-0 Game 1 victory over Cherryville High School in the 1A NCHSAA state championship Friday night at Holly Springs' Ting Stadium.



Perquimans' Tanner Thach delivers a pitch during the Pirates' 1-0 Game 1 win over Cherryville High School in the 1A NCHSAA state championship series, Friday night in Holly Springs' Ting Stadium. Thach would deliver a one-hit, 12-strikeout performance en route to his second straight Championship Series Most Valuable Player award.

appreciation.

The only hit Thach gave up on Friday was a one-out line-drive single to center by Kanon Willis in the second inning, but he then recorded his first two strikeouts of the game to avoid any other threat.

Thach pitched a clean 1-2-3 third before having a little trouble hitting the strike zone in the fourth. He walked back-to-back

hitters on five pitches each with one out, but again the threat didn't escalate as he battled and struck out the next two batters.

That's when the offense finally found a way to give him some support after coming up short earlier.

Perquimans had runners on first and second in both the first and third innings thanks to a combination of four hits, but Cherryville's

Brayden Reynolds got out of both jams unscathed.

Jakob Meads breathed some life into the offense and the Perquimans crowd, however, ripping a 3-1 pitch into left-center field for a line-drive double that reached the fence to begin the bottom of the fourth.

After numerous pickoff throws back to second base from Reynolds, Jackson Russell laid down a bunt that the pitcher came up to field.

Reynolds decided to throw to third in an attempt to catch Meads, but the Perquimans left fielder made it in safely.

Eli Gregory then hit a chopper to third that Cherryville's Willis fielded and threw to first for the out, but it was a run batted in for Gregory with Meads making his way to home plate for the first and what would ultimately become the only run of the game.

"We have guys who have come through all year in pressure situations at the plate and we didn't really do that tonight, but we did

it once and it was enough," Roberson said.

Trenton Sawyer singled after that and landed on second base for two runners in scoring position when a throw went toward home plate, but back-to-back outs in foul territory kept Cherryville within one.

Thach came back out to the mound in the top of the fifth with the lead and didn't look back.

Nine batters came up for the Ironmen in the final three innings and not one of them reached base.

Thach struck six of them on his way to 12 on the night, including the final two batters he faced to finish the game.

His strikeout of Chase Miller in the top of the seventh was the finishing touch on an outstanding way to close out his final appearance on the mound in a Perquimans uniform.

"It's so much better pitching with the lead," Thach said. "You just feel so much more calm and peaceful on the mound, so it helps so much. I actually felt like my stuff was better as the game was going. I couldn't command my fastball great early but toward the last few innings, I commanded it so it was really a game-changer in the end."

Roberson certainly expressed his appreciation for what Thach did Friday night, but also pointed out the defensive effort including Brown's early plays and a nice catch in foul territory from first baseman Jett Winslow as his body faced the outfield.

"Unbelievable performance from an outstanding individual on the mound, but a great team win," Roberson said.

Macon Winslow led Perquimans with two of the team's seven hits Friday night.

Ironmen force Game 3 as Pirates drop 2nd game of season

Cherryville 6
Perquimans 1

BY DAVID GOUGH
Sports Editor

HOLLY SPRINGS — The Perquimans Pirates dropped Game 2 of the 1A NCHSAA state championship series to Cherryville 6-1 Saturday afternoon at Ting Stadium.

It was a game that Perquimans was playing from behind in even before its first defensive out.

Cherryville leadoff hitter Landon Hahn hit Trenton Sawyer's fourth pitch of the day to the left-center field gap for a triple and Collin Robinson followed by legging out a looped RBI double that dropped just in front of Perquimans center fielder Jackson Russell.

Eventually, with two



PHOTO BY JOEL SUTTON

Perquimans' Jett Winslow is hit by a pitch in Game 2 of the 1A NCHSAA state championship series against Cherryville in Holly Springs' Ting Stadium, Saturday afternoon. Perquimans lost the game 6-1 to the Ironmen, setting up the third and final game of the series Saturday night.

outs, bases were loaded after Chase Miller was hit by a pitch.

That was the first of two controversial overturned calls in the Iron-

men's favor. The pitch originally was ruled to have hit Miller's bat first

but a congregation of the umpires reversed the call.

Tobias Miller then hit an infield dribbler for a single for a 2-0 Ironmen lead and a wild pitch later Cherryville led 3-0 before the end of the first inning.

The second overturned call that went against Perquimans happened in the top of the third on a Tanner Thach grounder to first with two outs.

Cherryville's first baseman misplayed a scoop of the ball, leading pitcher Kanon Willis to pick up the ball and attempt to tag Thach just before he reached the first base bag.

Originally, the first base umpire called Thach safe, but another meeting of the umpires reversed the call into an out.

Cherryville began the

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Steamers come from behind to win first two games at home

Edenton 4
Boone 3
Edenton 3
Virginia Beach 2

BY MIKE WOOD
Correspondent

EDENTON — Don't bang the drums slowly, strike up the band. Let the trumpets roar and the fireworks fill up the night sky. The Clams are back in town!

The Edenton Steamers won their home opener in dramatic fashion Saturday night, coming from behind with a three-run rally in the bottom of the 8th inning to defeat the Boone Bigfoots by the final score of 4-3.

The big clutch hit was



delivered by Jackson Hipp who lined a two-run single to center field with two outs and the bases loaded. Hipp, from Alexandria, VA, and a student at Brown University, was asked about his approach in the crucial situation.

"I wasn't trying to do too much, just get a pitch that I could drive back up the middle. A fastball up and over the plate, and I just met it squarely," said the Steamer outfielder.

The game in the early

going was dominated by pitching.

Bryce Stephens started on the bump for Edenton, and he retired the first nine Boone batters in order.

The Steamers got on the board in the first inning. Leadoff hitter Chase Bruno reached on an infield error. Alden Cottle hit back to the pitcher Jack Bachmore, who forced Bruno at second, but Cottle was safe at first on the fielders choice.

The next Edenton hitter, Houston Wright, lined a curveball through the left side to put runners at first and second with one out. Cleanup hitter Jeremiah Boyd smacked a low strike into the gap in right center, easily scoring Cottle and sending Wright to

third base. That was all, however, as Bachmore struck out the next two hitters to limit the damage.

Boone came into the game as defending champions of the Textile League where they posted a record of 26-5 last summer. The big left-hander Bachmore, out of the University of Lynchburg, looks like he will help them win a few games. Working quickly, he would give up no more runs over six innings, recording nine strikeouts with a live fastball and a sweeping, down breaking curve.

The Bigfoots broke through with a long ball in the top of the fourth inning. Tylan Reese got their first hit of the game, a double down the left field line.

Stephens, from Tifton, GA., bore down, getting the next two hitters on strikes, but Boone third baseman Tyson Bass connected, sending a drive over the left field wall for a 2-1 lead. Stephens would strikeout the next hitter giving him seven K's in his four innings of work.

The visitors would again threaten in the fifth inning off new Edenton pitcher Camron Lewis. Having a little control trouble, Lewis walked the first hitter, and hit the second batter to put runners at first and second with no outs. However, the next Boone hitter grounded sharply to third baseman Jared Beebe who stepped on third and made the strong throw to first for the double play. The third out was retired

on a grounder to shortstop Bruno.

Boone increased their lead to 3-1 in the eighth inning when Reece doubled to the wall in left, a two out hit that scored a runner who had reached on a hit by pitch.

Bruno got it started in the bottom of the 8th with his second hit of the night, a hard hit single off the second baseman's backhand glove. A wild pickoff attempt moved the Edenton sparkplug to second base. Bruno would take third on a passed ball as Cottle worked a base on balls. The Boone reliever then balked to score Bruno, and move Cottle to second. After one out, Case Kermode walked, and then Beebe was hit by a

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