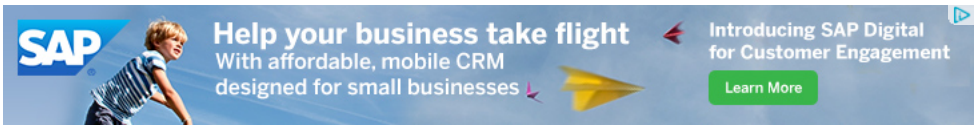

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District 52 tourney opens with a bang

June 29, 2015, 05:00 AM By Terry Bernal Daily Journal

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PALO ALTO — Opening day for the District 52 Majors Tournament certainly went San Mateo's way.

One of five cities in District 52 to be represented by two teams in the 16-team pool, San Mateo's squads each scored in double-digits Saturday at Hoover Park. San Mateo National opened the tourney with a 10-0 victory over Palo Alto. San Mateo American followed that with a 14-0 drubbing of Belmont-Redwood Shores. Both games were abbreviated to four innings due to the mercy rule.

American kept rolling in Sunday's second-round matchup, downing Menlo-Atherton 15-1. National, however, fell 4-3 to Hillsborough Sunday at Middlefield Park; the outcome is something of an upset considering the same National team won the 11-year-old District 52 tournament last season.

San Mateo American manager P.J. Jeremiah gave a respectful nod to his crosstown rivals when asked, hypothetically, what kind of team San Mateo could field if they combined the two teams.

"They're serious over there," P.J. Jeremiah said. "It would be really good, but it would be tough to pick guys."

P.J. Jeremiah's team has been surging with the offensive presence of Peter Halpin at the top of the batting order. American's No. 2 hitter has gone 7 for 8 through his first two games, blasting three home runs, including a grand slam to straightaway center field Sunday.

Halpin also earned the win on the mound in Saturday's opener, firing 3 2/3 innings, allowing just two hits while striking out four. Right-hander Terence Loville entered with two outs in the fourth to get the game's final out.

"I've seen [Halpin pitch] better," P.J. Jeremiah said. "He tries to throw too hard sometimes when he doesn't have to. But he's a talent."

The mercy-rule was in effect Saturday after American rallied for six runs in the top of the fourth. Entering into the inning up 8-0, American sent 10 batters to the plate. Pinch hitter Alika Woon had the decisive swing of the bat, drilling a two-run home run to center to give American an 11-0 lead. Halpin added a two-run blast later in the inning.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal
San Mateo American's Alika Woon drills a two-run home run in the fourth to put a mercy-rule win on ice.

San Mateo National's Nico Button fires a four-inning shutout in Saturday's mercy-rule win.

American leadoff hitter Jace Jeremiah was perfect at the top of the order in Saturday's opener, going 4 for 4 with a pair of doubles, scoring all four times he reached base. The right-handed hitter shot both opposite-field doubles into the right-field corner.

"I use the whole field," Jace Jeremiah said. "I felt good today. I felt ready."

Loville added three hits, including a two-run homer in the first. Jack Fitzgerald was 2 for 2 with a walk, two RBIs and two runs scored. American totaled 17 hits as a team. In Sunday's win, Justis Daily earned the win on the mound, firing a four-inning complete game.

SM National goes large in opener

San Mateo National also won via mercy rule Saturday, banging out 14 hits, capped by a walk-off RBI single by catcher Isaac Pineda. But Pineda's biggest contribution came behind the plate in handling ace right-hander Nico Button, who cruised through four scoreless innings to fire a three-hit shutout.

Button is one of 10 players on National's roster entering into his third season with the squad. All three years, he's been elected team captain by his teammates. That's quite a resume for a National team that last season advanced to District 52 Sectionals in the 10-11-year-old bracket. Two years ago in the Minors Tournament they did even better, winning Sectionals before advancing to the Northern California Divisional semifinals.

No one is more aware of Button's capabilities on the mound than National manager Dave Villar. With the youngest of his five sons playing for National, this is Dave Villar's ninth year as a District 52 All-Star manager. So, the veteran coach knew he could count on the calm and cool demeanor of his ace right-hander.

"He's just a gamer," Dave Villar said. "He throws the ball hard and for strikes, which is a great combination for victories."

Button's demeanor is the same as it was on opening day of the San Mateo National regular season when he threw a complete-game shutout for his Cardinals against Dave Villar's team, the Orioles. And Button approached the high-profile District 52 opener just as calmly.

"It's just another game," Button said. "We've been here before. We've won [two years] in a row. It is just another tournament."

National took a 5-0 lead into the fourth inning Saturday, but rallied for five more to score the walk-off victory. Seven players batted in the inning, and all came through with productive at-bats.

Jason Villar led off the frame with a double. Jake Willerup followed with an RBI single. Tyler Berkson then tabbed an infield single

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and cleanup hitter Jacob Kalaveras got hit by a pitch to load the bases.

Parker Crouse then produced a sacrifice fly to score Jason Villar. Button followed by drilling a bases-clearing triple to set the stage for Pineda. With the winning-run on third base and one out, Palo Alto brought the center fielder in to play up the middle of the infield to align a five-infielder defense. But Pineda challenged it, shooting a single through the middle and clipped off the center fielder's glove for the game-winning RBI knock.

“I just wanted to hit the ball hard,” Pineda said. “Even though they had their center fielder up the middle, I just wanted to hit it hard through the middle.”

Willerup was 3 for 3 in the game with two RBIs. Conor Dorgan, Jason Villar, Kalaveras and Pineda added two hits apiece.

“They swung the bat well today,” Dave Villar said. “One through 12, they all swung the bat well”

In other first-round games Saturday, Hillsborough downed Redwood City East 12-1; Menlo-Atherton edged Alpine-West Menlo 3-1; Half Moon Bay downed San Carlos National 7-3; Pacifica American topped Foster City 4-2; Palo Alto National defeated Redwood City West 12-6; and San Carlos American beat Pacifica National 8-1.

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