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Alpine wins District 52 Minors Superbowl banner

By Terry Bernal Daily Journal Staff
Jun 23, 2021

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Alpine pitcher Logan George certainly found a unique way to fire up his teammates.

Alpine and Hillsborough were locked in quite the pitching duel in the District 52 Minors Superbowl championship game Tuesday night at Sea Cloud Park. It didn't look like Alpine was going to muster enough offense to overcome a 1-run deficit. But in the fifth inning, with Alpine in the field, George made a spectacular diving catch, leaping from the mound like a cat to nab a short popup along the first-base line.

"Just leaped off my feet and just fully laid out, just put my glove out and just hoped for the best," George said.

George's teammates rode the momentum to a five-run rally in the bottom of the inning to claim a 6-2 victory and make off with the 2021 Minors Superbowl banner.

Alpine outscored its previous two opponents in the three-day tournament 28-2. So, five-run rallies — the Minors Superbowl, by rule, has a five-run maximum per inning in the 10-and-under tournament — weren't hard to come by Sunday and Monday. Tuesday night was a different story, however, as Hillsborough starting pitcher Joshua Chou had opposing hitters on lockdown through the first four innings.

"I felt really good," Chou said. "Everything was working for me until that very last inning."

But George's tremendous diving catch had calls of "ESPN top 10 web gems" from the crowd at Sea Cloud Park. And it certainly had a fiery effect in the Alpine dugout.

"Logan was pitching great on the hill and, also, that diving catch on that short popup, it's a great play," Alpine manager John McGrory said. "But maybe more

important is it just fires up the team. Everybody was so fired up after that play. Then he was still able to keep his composure and finish it off after that.”

Alpine never made an out in the bottom of the fifth. Eight straight batters reached base, forcing the end of the inning by reaching the five-run maximum.

“One person makes a great play, everybody makes a great play,” George said. “It’s contagious.”

Kai Aalfs led off with a single and stole second. Aalfs then scored on an RBI single by Roman Trujillo. Henry Husak followed with an infield knock. George then reached on a fielder’s choice after grounding a ball on the infield, and two runs scoring on the play on an errant throw to home plate. Rayden Garcia then worked a walk and Noah Kinion produced an RBI single. Oliver Morgan then finished the rally with an RBI single to left.

George then closed out the three-inning relief effort with a 1-2-3 inning in the top of the sixth.

Alpine right fielder Kaleo Pepper opened the sixth with another defensive gem, running down a shallow fly ball with an all-out sprint to close on it down the right-field line.

“That’s why we put him there,” McGrory said. “He is one of our best fielders overall, he can play any position on the field. With this wind blowing in the outfield, we needed some guys who could cover the ground and make the plays, and that’s what he did.”

And just as George’s great play in the fifth pumped up his Alpine teammates, so too did Pepper’s sweet running catch pump up George.

“It pumps me up,” George said. “You come up with one out, he makes a great catch, and it definitely helped us win that game.”

Facing Alpine starting pitcher Blake Budelli — who went three strong innings — Hillsborough got on the scoreboard early with a run in the first. Tyler Yung led off the game with a double to center. He then scored after two consecutive wild pitches. In the third, Hillsborough added to its lead. After a one-out walk to Christiano Morrone, he advanced into scoring position on a throwing error and scored on an RBI single by Tyler Tan.

Alpine scratched out a run in the bottom of the third when Budelli scored on a throwing error. But in the bottom of the fourth, it was Hillsborough’s defense that shined as third baseman Austin Rodde made back-to-back plays on grounders at the hot corner. The sharp defense allowed Chou to get back in the dugout after having thrown just five pitches in the inning.

“The team, they were feeling really good,” Chou said. “They had the lead. Austin felt fired. ... We just felt good.”

Chou has been quite a postseason arm this season. In the Hillsborough Little League playoffs for his regular-season team, the A’s, the right-hander emerged with a complete-game victory in the championship game, a 9-1 victory. It was the only CG he’s thrown all year.

“We’ve got a lot of strong arms on our team,” Hillsborough manager Chad Forrest said. “I had Josh on my regular-season team, and he pitched us to a championship. So, he’s a total gamer. We had who we wanted out there today in our No. 1 pitcher, and they were the better team today.”

Hillsborough advanced to Tuesday's championship game with a dramatic 6-4, extra-innings win in Sunday's opener against Belmont-Redwood Shores, then a 19-7 win over Menlo-Atherton in Monday's semifinals. Ethan Kim and Chase Zander were Hillsborough's other starting pitchers in the tourney.

"It was a great outing by both those kids to get us here today," Forrest said.

Alpine opened the tournament with a complete-game shutout win from Wyatt Stern in the opener, a 15-0 win over Foster City. In the semifinals, Pepper started and got the win with George entering in the final inning to close out a 13-2 win over Pacifica National.

"We were very fortunate to have a lot of pitching," McGrory said.

Hillsborough's roster rounded out with: Fletcher Fritts, Gus Loomis, Nate Daly, Joey Cronin and Jeremy Byrne.

Alpine's roster rounded out with: Diego Lopez, Matt McGrory, Nathan Hoch and Conner O'Malley.

