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Arnav Prathipati leads Belmont-Redwood Shores to fast start in District 52 Little League All-Star Tournament

By Terry Bernal Daily Journal Staff

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Complete-game gems have been Arnav Prathipati's bread and butter this season. Mashing home runs? Not too much.

Belmont-Redwood Shores' starting pitcher, Prathipati didn't quite reach complete-game status in Saturday's District 52 Little League All-Stars 11-12s Tournament opener. But he didn't need to, considering his team's 13-0 win over Hillsborough.

Prathipati joined the hit parade for Belmont-RWS in a big way though, blasting a solo home run over the right-field wall in the third inning at Mitchell Park. Even though Prathipati said he squared up the ball, however, an array of disappointing outcomes ran through his mind as he watched the towering flight of the ball while sprinting up the first-base line.

"I thought it might go foul ball, and it was really high, and the right fielder was so tall I thought he might catch it," Prathipati said. "After [the first-base coach] said it was gone, I thought it was gone."



Arnav Prathipati jumps on home plate after hitting his first home run ever in organized baseball, his reward waiting for him at home plate in spirited congratulations from his team, Belmont-Redwood Shores, in the District 52 Little League All-Stars 11-12s Tournament opener Saturday in Palo Alto.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

It's hard to blame Prathipati for his pessimism. The home run was the first he's ever hit at any level of Little League. Not that he hasn't come close. With his regular-season Belmont-Redwood Shores A's team this season, he knocked several deep shots to the wall, including one to center field he thought was a no-doubter, only to have it bounce on the warning track.

Despite the power show at a critical juncture — it gave Belmont-RWS a 5-0 lead when the game was still in reach for Hillsborough — it was still Prathipati's pitching that stole the show. The right-hander worked five-plus innings, allowing four hits and two walks while striking out four.

And Prathipati had plenty left in the tank in the sixth. He only departed because it prevented him from surpassing 65 pitches, which will allow for him to return on two-days rest instead of three.

"He's our top pitcher, he's our ace, so we wanted to make sure that he would be available in our third game," Belmont-Redwood Shores manager Joe Revels said. "We have a game [Sunday] which, obviously, he can't pitch in. But we would love to have him in the next game (after that) whether it's in the winners' or losers' bracket."

Belmont-RWS gave its star starter plenty of runs to work with in the top of the first, sending 10 batters to the plate amid a four-run rally. Hillsborough starting pitcher Yu Suefuji opened the game with a live fastball, but a bout of wildness and some bad luck left him in the frustrating position of never settling in.

The critical play came with two on and one out — he walked two and struck out one to open the game — when Belmont-RWS cleanup batter Jordan Rice hit routine grounder to second base. Joey Revels, the runner at first, got a good jump and was dashing past Hillsborough's Ben Sakal just as the second baseman fielded the ball. Sakal

windmilled around to attempt a swipe tag, but Joey Revels responded with just enough speed and evasive maneuvering to avoid the tag to load the bases.



Hillsborough second baseman Ben Sakal fields a grounder but baserunner Joey Revels will avoid the tag in the first inning of Belmont-RWS' 13-0 victory at Mitchell Park.

Terry Bernal/Daily Journal

"I just ran through my hardest and kind of avoided his glove," Joey Revels said.

Then the floodgates opened. Zayden Luzzo and Joey Revels scored on an infield error. Orion Gurskis later drew a bases-loaded walk. But it wasn't until No. 9 hitter Cole Leong chopped an RBI single into left field to make it 4-0 that Belmont-RWS got a ball out of the infield.

"They're athletes; they're really fast," Coach Revels said. "So, they don't need big hits to get around the bases. ... Then when they loosen up, they start barreling up the ball, they get the ball into the outfield, and that helps a lot too."

While Suefuji was working at an excruciatingly slow tempo on the mound, Prathipati climbed the hill with a four-run lead and was absolutely rock and roll.

“It just comes naturally,” Prathipati said. “I used to take lots of time and then when I’d take lots of time, I used to come out just OK. Sometimes I’d pitch a bit wild. Now, the umpire’s strike zone was a bit smaller, so I went faster and did my mojo and then it came out well.”

And the right-hander’s rapid work rate was rewarded by his defense as Belmont-RWS turned two double plays in the early going, one in the first inning and another in the second.

Hillsborough managed just one extra-base hit on the day, a fifth-inning double by Holden Benson. It was a 0-ball, 2-strike count that Benson whacked into the left-center field gap.

“I usually get more aggressive on [0-2 pitches],” Benson said. “It’s like I just drank coffee in the morning. So, I just swing at anything. And he threw me a medium-high pitch ... so I was able to get under the ball.”

But Belmont-RWS broke it open in the final inning, sending 13 batters to the plate amid an eight-run rally in the top of the sixth. Kai Hoogerbeets opened the inning by reaching on a strikeout-wild pitch. Hector Marquez highlighted the rally with a pair of two-run doubles. Leong added a two-run single.

“Our team is good,” Joey Revels said. “But I wasn’t expecting 13 runs.”

Relief pitchers Rice and Ryan Kelly closed it out for Belmont-RWS.

Sunday, Belmont-RWS advanced through the winner’s bracket with a 5-1 victory over Half Moon Bay.

Prathipati homered for the second time in two days in two days. But it was a two-run blast by Gurskis that broke a scoreless tie in the third inning to give Belmont-RWS the lead for good.

Starting pitcher Nathan Webinski earned the win, working three innings. Gurskis worked three innings in relief to record the save.

Belmont-RWS advances through the winner's bracket and will return to the diamond Thursday to face Alpine at Mitchell Park at 4 p.m.

In Sunday's other 11-12s action, Alpine topped San Mateo American; Menlo-Atherton defeated San Mateo National 7-6; and Foster City won a thriller 6-5 over San Carlos with a walk-off home run by Rylan Yates.

