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FEATURED

From the Daily Journal archives

# King of the hill: Landon King leads San Mateo American to District 52 10-11s title round

By Terry Bernal Daily Journal Staff  
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San Mateo American's pitching just keeps getting better.

In winning their first three games in the District 52 Little League All-Stars 10-11s Tournament, American has allowed just two runs, one in each of their first two victories. Tuesday evening at Lakeshore Park, right-hander Landon King upped his game to fire five shutout innings as American blanked Hillsborough 7-0.

King was cool and in command from the outset, utilizing a methodical tempo on the mound to neutralize the top of the Hillsborough batting order. King allowed just two hits while striking out eight before exceeding his 85-pitch limit and giving way to reliever Max Yeh in the sixth.

"I thought he threw fantastic," San Mateo American manager Paul Witten said. "He can be an emotional kid but it's because he cares about winning. He's very competitive."

It was King's second appearance of the tournament. He also started Saturday's opener, a 2-1 victory over Foster City, and struck out five despite lasting just 2 1/3 innings. King said he was overamped for the opener because it was his first pitching appearance as an All-Star. He previously played for the American 9-10s team as an 8-year-old but did not pitch for that team.

"I was nervous before the game because I knew this team could hit," King said. "So, after the first inning I just settled in and went from there."

King paid particular attention to the top three hitters in the Hillsborough batting order — Colt Crawford, Charlie Chesnosky and Ryan Duffell. His biggest challenge, he said, was navigating through them, and making certain to keep the ball away from each of them, and not challenge their hot zones toward the inside of the plate.

“For the first three batters ... I tried to go on the outside corner with them because I know if I pitched it inside they’re going to connect and hit it far,” King said. “And with the rest of the lineup, I trust in my defense. (Shortstop) Evan Gilbert made a lot of nice plays. I didn’t throw it as hard as I could to them because I definitely trust in my defense.”



Hillsborough’s Charlie Chesnosky connects with a third-inning single, one of just two hits his team managed against San Mateo American Tuesday night at Lakeshore Park.

After King navigated through a walk and an infield error in the first inning, Gilbert bailed him out of trouble in the second by starting a crisp 6-4-3 double play. Then in the fourth, Gilbert turned in a sweet defensive gem by nabbing a backhand by going into a knee slide, then throwing across the infield from a crouch to rob Scotty Comelius of a hit.

King almost didn’t get to pitch beyond the third inning though. Witten and his coaching staff discussed removing their ace early to preserve him for the championship round starting Thursday. He was on the verge of surpassing 50 pitches, at which point he could have conceivably returned if American plays an if-necessary game Friday.

Witten, however, decided to ride the hot hand.



“Winners want the ball, and he wanted the ball,” Witten said. “And we have confidence enough in the rest of our staff to get the job done on Thursday or Friday if necessary.”

The American offense got the bats going in the second inning, rallying for two runs. Jake McGee drew a one-out walk, Gilbert singled, and Nick Loew drew a walk to load the bases. Yeh followed with a two-run single.

In the third, American scratched out another run. King led off with a walk and DJ Ruiz singled with one out to move King to third. Then McGee produced an RBI groundout to second base to up the lead to 3-0.

It stayed that way till the fifth when American broke it open, sending 10 batters to the plate amid a four-run rally. Dylan Erlandson had the big swing of the bat with Apollo Lee at third and Alex Yoshino at first, floating a double down the right-field line to score them both.

“I was just trying to push through it to go to the opposite field,” Erlandson, “because I knew the people on base were super-fast, so I knew that I could drive them in. I was just hungry for hits and when I swung, I knew I hit it good, so I just kept running to second.”



San Mateo American base runner Alex Yoshino low-flies around second base to score all the way from first on a fourth-inning double by Dylan Erlandson, not pictured, in his team's 7-0 victory to advance to Thursday's District 52 10-11s title

round.

Yoshino showed some serious wheels on the play, sprinting all the way around from first base to score standing up.

“He’s a good baserunner,” Witten said. “And we actually just went over reading difficult catches and realizing what you think you can get away with. And ... he picked up there was no way that the right fielder was going to make that play. So, he took a chance. It really wasn’t much of a gamble. He read it right. And he’s a great baserunner, he’s fast enough, so it was pretty easy.”

Hillsborough’s biggest threat came in the bottom of the fifth, loading the bases after a leadoff single from Hiro Wong, and walks to Dane Smolinski and Charlie Chesnosky. But King won the battle, striking out the side. It was the first time in the tournament Hillsborough left the bases loaded, according to manager Mike Chesnosky.

“Guys have been getting on,” Mike Chesnosky said. “The top three guys have been great. Even the top four guys have all been making really good, solid contact. But today was just one of those days. When a guy is dealing the way he was dealing, you’ve just got to tip your cap and say: ‘Hey guys, it was his day.’ ... That’s tough. But that’s baseball.”

Hillsborough now falls to the elimination bracket and will take on Belmont-Redwood Shores Wednesday night. The winner of that game advances to the championship round starting Thursday.

“It’s like I told the boys, with a tournament you’ve got to go one game at a time,” Mike Chesnosky said. “After a game like this, being our first loss, you’ve got to have short memory loss, and don’t worry about it, and come ready to battle tomorrow and the next day and be ready to go.”

American will turn to its Game 2 starter, Ruiz, Thursday.

“I don’t want to get too overconfident, but I trust my team because they’ve been hitting well,” King said. “We have one of our best pitchers on the mound on Thursday. ... When he throws strikes, he gets outs, and that’s what we need.”

## **Belmont-Redwood Shores takes out San Mateo National**

Belmont-Redwood Shores scored four runs in the first and kept adding on to eliminate San Mateo National with a 10-3 victory Tuesday night at Lakeshore Park.

Jack Lang fell a triple shy of the cycle, going 4 for 5 with a double and two moonshot home runs. Each of the homers at Martens Field South landed in the outfield of Martens North, facing from the opposite corner of Lakeshore, and caused the San Mateo American-Hillsborough game to be halted momentarily both times.

Alex Jordan and Jeremy Yam added two hits apiece for Belmont-RWS. Kai Castro had two hits for National.

Lang, Jordan and Karam Kayali handled the pitching duties for Belmont-RWS, each staying under 50 pitches, meaning each will be available should the team survive until Thursday’s championship round.

