

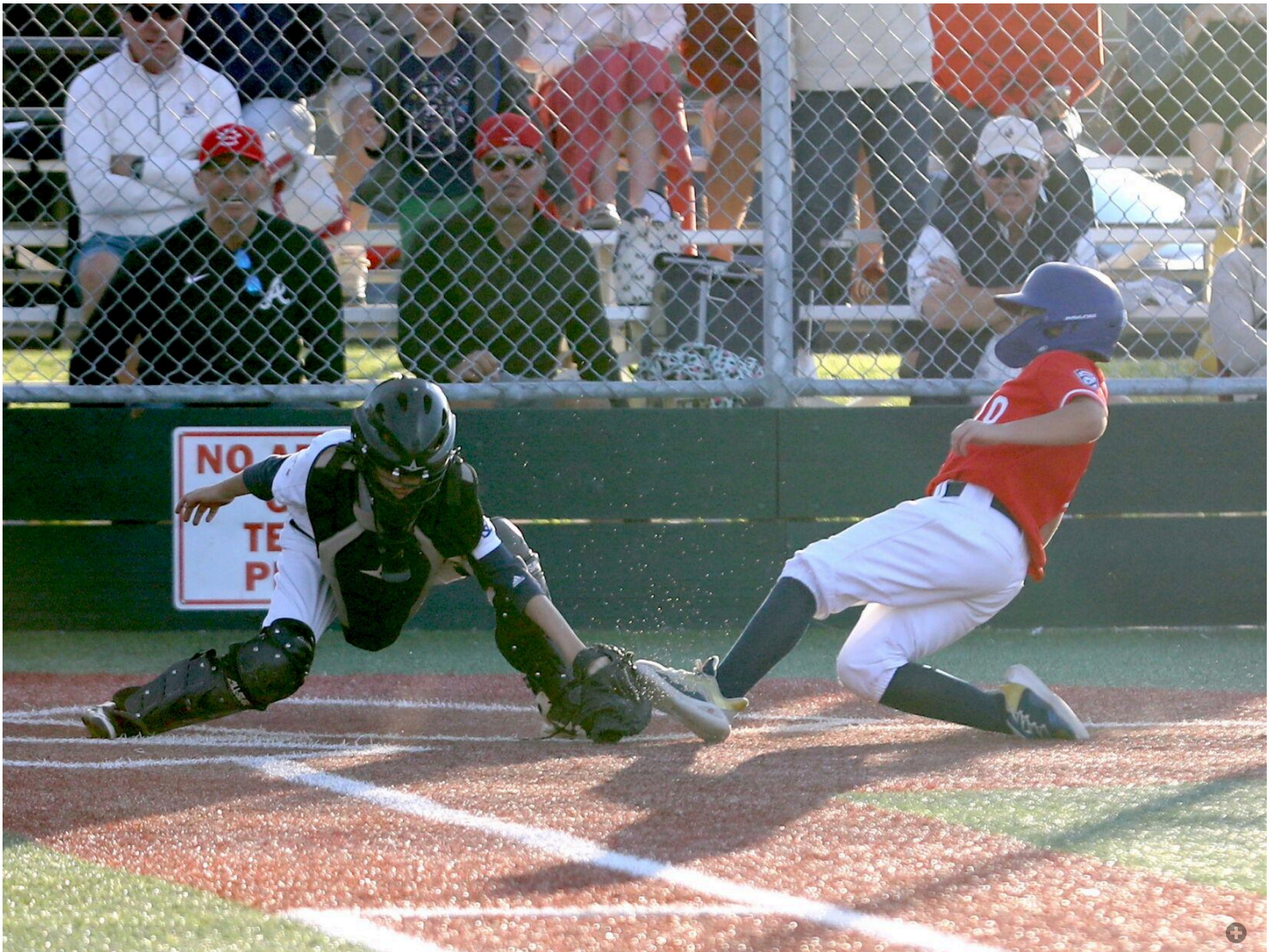
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FEATURED

Offensive landslide nets Minors Superbowl title for Alpine

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After four-and-a-half innings, it looked as if the District 52 Minors Superbowl tournament championship game was simply going to be a coronation for the 9-10 Alpine Superbowl All-Stars.

Having stormed to a pair of 10-run, mercy-rule wins in the first two games of the tournament, Alpine scored three runs in the top of the fifth to build a 5-0 lead, with starting pitcher Jack Kraft pitching a no-hitter.

But Hillsborough showed a heart of a champion, scoring five runs over the final two innings to tie the game at 5-all and send it into extras.

Alpine's offense finally got loose in the top of the ninth, scoring nine times to post a 14-7 win Tuesday evening at Foster City's Sea Cloud Park and continue Alpine's surge in District 52 play over the last several years.

"One of the most fun games I've ever coached," said Alpine manager Tim Katz. "Bummer someone had to lose."

Both teams showed incredible resiliency. Hillsborough didn't get its first hit until a Dom Friis single to center in the bottom of the fifth, which jump-started a three-run rally. Hillsborough added two more in its final at-bat to extend the game.

"We came back from 6-nothing Sunday, so we knew we had it in us," said Hillsborough manager Aaron Barulich. "[This] was a lot of fun. Can't ask for much more than extra innings in a championship game."

Alpine could not have been set up any better. It got a first-round bye and needed to win two games to reach the title game of the single-elimination tournament. Having played a total of nine innings over two games, Alpine had plenty of pitching left.

"When we constructed the team, we made sure had enough pitching depth," Katz said.

Alpine staked their starter Kraft to an early lead, going up 1-0 in the top of the first after just three batters. With one out, No. 2 hitter Matthew Hochstetler hit a screaming line drive off the fence in center field for a triple and scored on Jalen Smith's single to left.

Alpine made 2-0 in the second when Sam Kroll reached on an error and later scored on a Dylan Alfaro infield hit.

That was enough support early on for Kraft, who despite having a no-hitter for four innings, had plenty of traffic on the basepaths. He walked the first two batters of the game, with the leadoff hitter getting thrown out trying to steal third.

Kraft got out the inning and went on to strike out the side in the second. In the third, Hillsborough had three base runner, thanks to an Alpine error and two fielder's choices.

But Alpine was getting outs and Kraft got a strikeout to end the inning before needing just 10 pitches to get through the fourth.

Hillsborough, on the other hand, was deep into its pitching staff, as four of the 12 players on the roster were ineligible to throw because of pitch limits.

Justin Ng, who was No. 4 on the Barulich's depth chart, did a great job keeping his team in the game through the first four innings, as well. He allowed the only the two runs through four innings, weaving around seven hits.

But Alpine ended Ng's outing with three runs in the top of the fifth, with Elliott Altick and Keegan Wolf each driving in a run and Hochstetler scoring with some heads-up baserunning to put Alpine up 5-0.

But when Friis gave Hillsborough its first hit to lead off the fifth, it ignited its first rally of the game. Jacob Barulich followed with a walk and Spencer Simon had an infield hit to load the bases.

Easton Straessler followed and came through with a booming two-run double to right-center and end Kraft's outing. Simon would eventually score on the backend of a delayed double steal and Hillsborough cut its deficit to 5-3.

Alpine managed to get runners to second and third in the top of the sixth, but Hillsborough reliever Simon eventually struck out the side. In the bottom of the frame, Hillsborough's rally continued, scoring two runs with two outs. With the bases loaded, Jacob Barulich lifted a flare that dropped in no-man's land in shallow right field, behind first base, with Josh Aaronson and Cole Knoss scoring, with Knoss' run tying the score at 5-all.

The international tiebreaker rule was implemented in the top of the seventh, with the final out of the previous inning starting at second base. Both teams had their chances, but no one could come up with the clutch hit. Alpine had runners on second and third in both the seventh and eighth innings, but came up empty.

Hillsborough, meanwhile, had runners at second and third in the seventh and then left the bases loaded in the eighth.

In the ninth, Alpine's offense finally broke out as it sent 13 batters to the plate, scoring nine time on four hits. Kroll, Charlie Katz and Tommy Masters all had back-to-back RBIs singles for an 8-5 lead. Altick added a run-scoring single before Hochstetler put the exclamation point on the uprising, drilling a two-run triple to right.

Hochstetler went 3 for 5 with a double, triple and two RBIs.

Jacob Barulich added his third RBI for Hillsborough in the bottom of the ninth and Friis scored on the backend of a delayed steal of home, but Hillsborough would get no closer as a groundout ended the game.

"I was proud of boys to battle and stay resilient," Tim Katz said.

Said Coach Barulich: "We fought. We fought to the very end. ... We ran up against a really tough team."



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