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Article published Mar 22, 2007

Key hits boost Knights over North Marion

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Star-Banner

Ocala - Match an ace surrounded by an experienced cast against a rebuilt battery and the result is a victory for the former - which in the case of the Vanguard-vs.-North Marion baseball game was the host Knights, who made the most of their three hits in defeating the Colts 6-4.

Despite its status as a non-district contest, there were a number of firsts in this game. Vanguard's J.R. Rekully stayed atop the county's wins list, improving to 7-0 with the complete-game pitching triumph. Rekully allowed three earned runs on five hits and one walk, striking out seven as Vanguard improved to 9-4 overall.

The game was also a first for North Marion's Mike Fort, a senior relief pitcher who was behind the plate catching his first high school game. The reason: two starters, starting pitcher Vince Spaulding and catcher Albert Black, were dismissed from the team, according to head coach Dale Hall.

"Tonight we gave Vanguard a couple of outs," said Hall, his team now 7-6 overall. "You can't do that against a team of that caliber. We've got some guys who are just learning the game right now.

"We have some pitchers who are very athletic, who can play other positions, and they come to play every day."

Still, Hall was hardly surprised that Vanguard pounced on whatever chances that were presented, and created some whenever possible.

"I would have done the same thing," he said.

Cody Scully, who started for North Marion, allowed six runs (four earned) on three hits and five walks in four innings. Two of the Knights' three hits in the game plated runs: an error on Eric Grabe's grounder was followed by a stolen base and Matt Wright's RBI single in the first, and a pair of one-out walks preceded Grabe's double to left-center field that scored two in the fourth.

"We got some key hits when we needed them," said Vanguard's Ed McPadden. "That first inning single, then that double in the fourth."

The Knights also created runs, getting two in the second and one in the third without a hit playing a part. A walk followed by an error got one run in in the second, with a walk and a double steal scoring another. A walk, a couple of wild pitches and a ground out scored the run in the third, making it 4-0.

"You've got to put pressure on the defense," said McPadden.

North Marion battled back, scoring four times in the top of the fourth. Scully and Zane Bowman started the inning with singles and, one out later, Matt Young singled in a run. James Smith followed with a double up the alley in left-center field to score two more, taking third on a bad throw to the plate and later scoring on a passed ball, tying it at 4-4.

Grabe's double in the bottom half of the inning put the Knights back in front, and Rekully's pitching kept them there. He got some help from his defense, with Bowman's hard grounder to short with runners at first and third converted to a double play by Andy Paul to end the Colts' fifth.

"That huge double play was really the back-breaker," McPadden said.

Vanguard next hosts Leesburg in a District 5A-4 game at 7 p.m. Friday, while North Marion plays at Belleview in a District 4A-6 game at 7 p.m. Friday.