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## Vanguard wins the Big Sun Challenge

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STAR-BANNER**

OCALA - After 16 years of frustration, tournament director Ed McPadden finally got himself a Big Sun Challenge championship trophy.

The Vanguard skipper watched as pitchers Matt Bevis and Eric Grabe combined on a three-hit shutout to knock off crosstown rival Forest, 6-0, Thursday night at VHS in the Big Sun finale.

"I've got a whole pile of second-place trophies between here and Lake Weir," McPadden said. "I told the kids I'm planning on taking all those second-place trophies and make doorstops out of them. And we'll hang (the championship trophy) up."

Offensively, Matt Wright launched two bombs over the center-field wall - a two-run shot to open the scoring in the third and a solo homer to pad the lead in the fifth - to pace a seven-hit Knights attack.

The center fielder, who might weigh 150 pounds soaking wet, stroked his first homer over the 360-foot sign in center - clearing the fence halfway up the flag pole.

Two innings later, his second towering shot cleared the wall about eight feet to the left of his first.

"He's really worked hard, seeing the ball out of the (pitcher's) hand and he's learning to go to the opposite field," McPadden said of his slugger. "He and Bevis really carried us tonight."

Wright deflected the praise, choosing to redirect it to the pitching staff, which allowed



Zoom

**Vanguard's Eric Grabe slides into home for the third run of the third inning for the Knights.**

ANTHONY SMITH/STAR-BANNER

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just four runs over the final three days of the four-day tournament.

"It felt good," Wright said of his fourth and fifth homers of the season. "I saw the ball well.

"Matt Bevis did a great job pitching and Eric (Grabe) did a good job of coming in and shutting them down."

Grabe relieved Bevis in the sixth, striking out all six batters he faced to nail down the victory. The right-hander employed an exploding cut fastball and a nasty slider that lefties swung through.

The left-hander Bevis faced 20 Wildcats over five innings, allowing three hits and striking out four.

"The difference tonight was (Vanguard's) pitching," Forest coach Wayne Yancey said. "We had runners in scoring position a couple times early with our 3-4 guys up, and we weren't able to make things go.

"Our best hitters have got to make things go, and when that doesn't happen, we struggle a little bit scoring runs."

In two games against Vanguard this year, the Wildcats are 0-2 and have yet to push a run across, losing a district game 3-0 at Vanguard back on Feb. 23.

First baseman B.J. Robinson reached base three times to lead the Wildcats, sandwiching a third-inning single with bean balls in the first and fifth.

Forest pitcher Tyler Carpenter (1-1), the everyday catcher for the 'Cats, pitched effectively in just his second start of the season. The right-hander allowed seven hits and didn't walk a batter. He allowed four runs - three earned - and posted one of three Forest hits at the plate.

J.R. Rekully followed Wright's first blast with an RBI single that scored Grabe, who reached on one of four Forest errors on the night.

Shortstop Andy Paul drew a bases loaded walk and Timmy Guinn - who was 1-for-2 with two runs - scored on a wild pitch in the sixth to round out the scoring.

McPadden couldn't hide a proud smile after the game, pointing to the extra duties asked of the host Knights during the tournament.

"It's very difficult to do all the work day in and day out over a four-day span," McPadden said. "First of all, just getting to the championship game, and then to come out and perform well in it when we're the ones who are in the sun all day long doing all

that work.

"A lot of it's a testament to these kids on how well they performed this week - emptying the trash, raking (the field) - and their performance on the field."

Both teams will be back in 5A-4 play next Tuesday with Vanguard (13-5) playing at Leesburg and Forest (10-8) traveling to Lake Weir.

**LAKE WEIR 8, MOUNT DORA BIBLE 4.** At Wildwood, the Hurricanes scored their third straight win at the John Carpenter Memorial Tournament.

Tyler Schacter pitched the win, giving up four earned runs in six innings and driving in two RBIs from the plate. Dakota Conroy went 1-for-3 with two RBIs and Ryan Slyke was 1-for-2 with two RBIs.

Lake Weir (6-10, 4-6) hosts Forest on Tuesday at 7 p.m.

□ **VILLAGES 5, TAVARES 1.** At The Villages, Josh Rixie was 2-for-3 with two RBIs to lead the Buffalo to a five-run second inning and the win.

Kurtis Mancauskas picked up the win, giving up two hits and striking out 11 batters in the complete seven innings.

The Villages (11-5) hosts Seven Rivers on Thursday at 6 p.m.