Seahawks batter Rams

By JIM SEIMAS

APTOS — Nat Hamby and Scott Mercer produced monster outings as Cabrillo College’s baseball team routed visiting Gavilan 7-2 on Tuesday to maintain its Coast Conference Pacific Division lead over Monterey Peninsula College with one game remaining.

Hamby threw eight shutout innings and Mercer, a freshman third baseman, went 3-for-4 with four RBIs as the Seahawks inch closer to their first conference title since 2001.

“Huge win,” said Hamby, the winning pitcher. “We had to come out with authority, battle through everything right, and not make any mistakes.”

The youth-laden Seahawks — who started just two sophomores Tuesday — remain the conference’s hottest team after starting the sea-

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son 5-15 overall.

“We got big win after big win, got that streak going, and look at us now,” said Mercer, who hit a bases-loaded triple in a four-run fifth inning. “I think it was internal. We all knew we were better than 5-15. We just had to go out and play our game, and figure it all out.”

Pitcher Zach Settles will take the mound for Cabrillo (17-18, 13-10) in Thursday’s regular-season finale against visiting Cañada (16-18, 12-11) at 2:30 p.m.

A Cabrillo win Thursday brings the Seahawks the conference title and an automatic postseason berth. The Seahawks made the postseason last year by earning an at-large berth.

Monterey Peninsula (22-18, 13-10) — an 8-4 winner over last-place Skyline on Tuesday — closes with a home game against Hartnell (15-20, 10-13) on Thursday.

Gavilan’s loss essentially removes the Rams (18-17, 11-12) from the playoff picture.

“It meant as much to us as it did to them,” said Rams outfielder Brandt Burns, a Monte Vista Christian School alum. “Our intensity level was not there today unfortunately.”

Hamby, a freshman right-hander out of Soquel, and Gavilan’s Gabe Katch were locked in a pitchers’ duel through four scoreless innings Tuesday.

But things unraveled for Gavilan in the fifth.

After Cabrillo’s Tyler Silva sacrificed runners to second and third with a bunt, John Evans — playing his first game in a month after recovering from a hand injury — delivered an RBI single to put Cabrillo up 1-0. Drake Yoshikawa was hit by a pitch to load the bases, and after Nick MacFarland reached on a fielder’s choice, Mercer looped a fastball down the first baseline to clear the bases.

For good measure, the Seahawks loaded the bases again in the sixth. Mercer had an RBI single in an inning full of odd bounces that favored Cabrillo. The Seahawks’ Eric Vegas reached on a ground ball to shortstop that took a high hop and nailed shortstop Gilbert Gonzalez in the shoulder. But the bigger doozy was JQ Foleno’s infield single on a chopper that never got past the pitcher’s mound. The ball rolled off the infield grass toward foul territory, took more turns than San Francisco’s Lombard Street, and stayed fair.

Hamby watched with delight from the bench. On the mound, his focus helped him record seven strikeouts without a walk.

“Nat stepped up and pitched his best game in college.” Cabrillo coach Bob Kittle said. “And that’s what you’re supposed to do. It was a great game.”

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