Seahawks advance to Super Regionals

By JIM SEIMAS
jseimas@santacruzsentinel.com

APTO'S — Cabrillo College's baseball team has experience succeeding in dire situations this season. It proved that after opening the season with a 5-15 record and then rallying in the second half of the season to earn a share of the Coast Conference Pacific Division title and postseason berth.

So in a first-round NorCal playoff series against College of San Mateo on Saturday, when the Seahawks needed closer Mike Murano to hold a one-run lead in the ninth inning, he did just that.

Murano stuck out the side on 10 pitches — and the Seahawks stormed the mound to celebrate a 6-5 win over the Bulldogs in the decisive game of the teams' best-of-three series. With the victory, the Seahawks (22-19) are headed to Super Regional play for the first time since 1982, when the school won the Division II state title.

"This is insane," said Seahawks' outfielder Tyler Olivet, who scored the game-winning run in Game 3 on Scott Mercer's high pop that never left the infield grass.

The Seahawks will play the remainder of their season on the road. The double-elimination Super Regionals — likely to be held at No. 1 Santa Rosa — begin Friday.

"That was incredible," Seahawks coach Bob Kittle said of Saturday's doubleheader sweep. "They've bought into being selfless and winning is a good feeling. Winning is addictive and when you do it as a group, it's even more addictive."

No. 9 San Mateo (23-18) — the runner-up to Chabot in the Coast Conference's Golden Gate Division — routed the No. 8 Seahawks 13-3 in the series opener on Friday, forcing Cabrillo to win a pair of games Saturday to keep its season alive.

Zach Settles and Cabrillo delivered in Game 2. Settles threw 123 pitches and nearly posted a complete-game win, but he was pulled in the ninth when he ran into trouble. Murano closed that game too, stomping out the Bulldogs' three-run rally for an 8-6 win. Cabrillo took advantage of four walks, five-run second inning and held on to even the series.

Thirty minutes later, the teams squared off in a winner-take-all game.

The Bulldogs chased Cabrillo starting pitcher Hayden Hibbard with two runs in the first inning and extended their lead to 5-2 in the third inning with a three-run third inning against Seahawks reliever Julian Garcia.

CSM's Logan Trowbridge, an Aptos High alum, delivered the big blow in the third with a two-run double.

The Seahawks stormed back, scoring three times in the bottom of the third on three hits and two walks.

Trailing 5-4 in the sixth, the Seahawks scored twice and stayed ahead for good. Mark Ortiz singled and later scored on a wild pitch to tie the score and Olivet singled and scored the game-winning run on Scott Mercer's infield single.

"I saw it was high," Ortiz said of the chopper. "I knew I was getting (home) right off the bat — no doubt in my mind."

Despite running into trouble in the third, Garcia settled down and pitched through the eighth inning by retiring the final 12 batters he faced in order — thanks in part to a pickoff of Dwayne Guchie in the sixth.

"They just find a way to get it done," Kittle said of the Seahawks' offense. "We've done nothing pretty today."

Cabrillo finished with 10 hits in the nightcap. Olivet, the leadoff hitter, was 2-for-3 with two runs and a walk scored. Eric Vegas was 2-for-5 with a RBI and run scored and Mark Ortiz was 2-for-3 with a run scored. Tyler Silva and Drake Yoshia also scored for the Seahawks.

San Mateo — which stranded three runners in the first — got runs from five different players: Vande Guchie and Brandon DeFazio in the first inning and Ryan O'Malley, Kalen Robinson and Trowbridge in the third.

"We're heartbroken," Trowbridge said. "We've really come together as a team. We have all the talent in the world, but couldn't find the backdoor to stay in the game. We could've played defense better. Our pitching didn't hold up. We just didn't back them up."

San Mateo had one player ejected in the ninth for arguing a called third strike. And the Bulldogs coaching staff was also angered. Emotions were running high.

Trowbridge's bloody knuckles were proof of that.

"You got to let it out somehow," he said of his frustrations after grounding out in the eighth.

Trowbridge said Cabrillo hosting the series was huge. He said his team felt after nearly eight hours of play.

"They did a hell of a job setting the tone," Trowbridge said. "But we let it get away. You gotta tip your cap to Zach Settles."

In addition to Settles' heroics — two runs allowed over the first eight innings with six strikeouts — Olivet and Ortiz shined in Game 2 by each scoring two runs. Olivet, Mercer, Vegas and Josh Thorpe each had two hits.