

# Terrific season, tearful ending for Willowbrook

By KEVIN DRULEY

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SCHAUMBURG - Willowbrook baseball players solemnly shook hands June 3 while digesting a season-ending 4-1 loss to South Elgin in the Class 4A sectional championship game at Boomers Stadium.

Moments before convening along the left-field line, the Warriors thought the left arm of catcher Marshall McDonnell might have provided the latest spark in the program's best season in generations. Instead, it served as the fulcrum of a controversial call that Willowbrook would not let speak for its overall body of work.

"These guys, we just push each other all the time," Warriors senior shortstop MJ Ranieri said. "There's a lot of competition, so in practice it's more you've got to keep your spot so you've got to work hard. It's everyone. Even the younger guys, just pushing everybody."

Willowbrook (26-9) fell one victory short of its first sectional title since 1973.

South Elgin (25-4) grabbed the first lead of the game on Nate Smith's sacrifice fly in the top of the second inning. The Warriors promptly responded in the bottom half when Jack Hines singled to score Mike Dembowski.



Tearful Willowbrook senior MJ Ranieri gets a hug from teammate Alec Michaelson after a 4-1 loss against South Elgin in the Class 4A sectional final June 3 at Boomers Stadium in Schaumburg.

David Toney - For Shaw Media

Answering for South Elgin's next offensive surge wasn't in the cards, however. The Storm scored a pair of fourth-inning runs behind two hits and three Warriors errors, the lone sloppy sequence in a sharp and briskly-paced game in which Willowbrook sophomore pitcher Ryan Mintz and Jack Stancl of South Elgin both went the distance.

"It was a tight one," Ranieri said. "It was good pitching on both sides."

Stancl scattered three hits and four walks and had seven strikeouts and one hit batsman. Ask the Warriors tomorrow or 10 years from now, and they'll likely contend Stancl hit another one of their teammates, too.

South Elgin was ahead 3-1 with two on and two outs when McDonnell batted in the sixth inning. The sophomore worked to a full count and awaited the payoff pitch, a curveball that hit McDonnell's

left arm to apparently load the bases for right fielder John Taylor.

Not so fast.

South Elgin argued that McDonnell had voluntarily placed his arm in the path of the ball, a point the home plate umpire discussed with his two counterparts working the bases when Storm coach Jim Kating requested an umpires conference. The final call favored South Elgin and thwarted any Willowbrook rally.

McDonnell was called out for leaning, sparking protest from Warriors coach Vic Wisner, his players and Warriors fans in the stands.

Wisner felt the base umpires, who stood at angles to home plate, lacked the clear view of the home plate umpire.

"The only person who straight-on could tell is the home plate ump, and you know, he got help," said Wisner, who watched from the third-base coaching box. "They thought they saw it. So, I guess, I've got to live with it. It's just a tough time and tough place for that to happen, that's for sure. I was just saying that if you don't have the perfect angle, you can't make [the call]. But if they were dead set that he leaned, then he leaned. I mean, that's not the ballgame. That's a part of it, but there were other opportunities that we didn't take advantage of."

South Elgin second baseman Cameron Kovanda, who had one of the team's five hits against Mintz and scored a seventh-inning insurance run, called the Storm's collective elation "just an amazing feeling."

Willowbrook ultimately fell short in its bid to seize more of the same.

"My kids worked so hard," Wisner said. "I'm sure every coach says that, but it just tears your heart out at the end. They're like sons. So it's hard."

## Montini 'will be back' after falling in softball supersectional

By BILL STONE

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ROSEMONT - It was the third straight year in a Class 3A supersectional for senior third-year starter Devyn Zuro and the Nazareth softball team, but the feeling this time was different.

"Right when we got here, we were confident," Zuro said. "I don't think we had any fear at all. We trusted each other so much and we executed so well."

Now comes a completely new feeling as the Roadrunners are going downstate for the first time after beating defending Class 3A champion Montini Catholic 3-0 June 5 at the Ball Park in Rosemont.

Nazareth (31-6-1) scored all three runs in the top of the first inning to unseat Montini (27-8), which won last year's supersectional meeting 8-2.

The Roadrunners came out swinging this time around

with singles by seniors Gloria Corona, Taylor Gipson and CJ Mardirosian, a run-scoring sacrifice fly by sophomore Jordan Barnes, and a two-out, two-run, opposite-field double by junior Julia Dallmann.

"It was a duck snort, but it worked. That gave us some extra room," Dallmann said.

Nazareth coach Emily (Hajduk) Matthews is a 2003 graduate and former softball standout for the Roadrunners.

"Just to give back to the school and coach these girls, I can't put it into words because it's always the goal to get downstate. I'm so happy for them," Matthews said.

Zuro fired a four-hitter with three strikeouts and three hit batters and escaped unscathed from Montini rallies the final two innings.

Montini captured a fifth straight regional title and had just three senior starters in the

supersectional: Naomi Alonzo, Tia Sondej and Serena Almodovar.

"We wanted to two-peat [at state], but I'd say I'd rather have one than none," Alonzo said.

"I told the girls that would be the challenge, to get back to this spot. To their credit they did," Montini coach Mike Bukovsky said. "It's too bad when you lose a game this way. I don't feel we played a clean game. We'll be back."

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