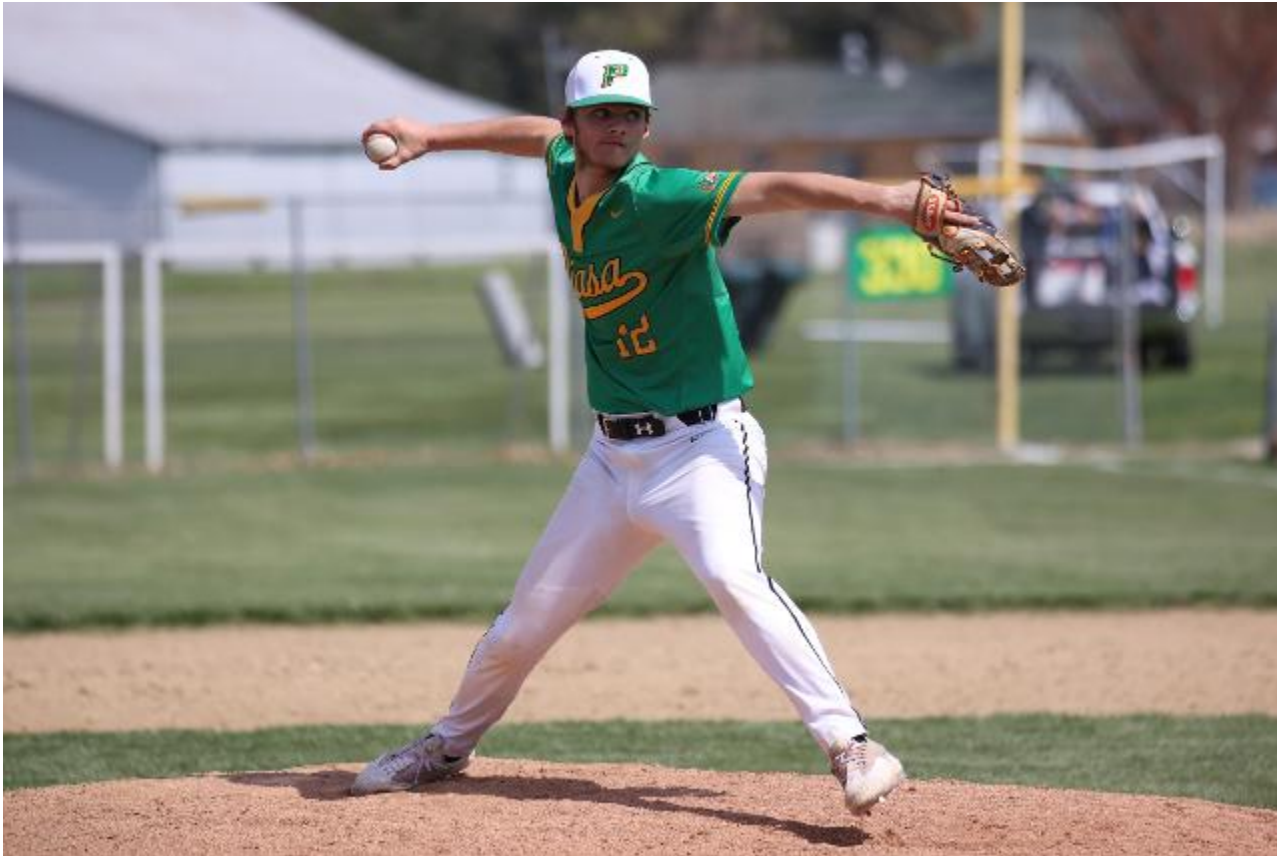


Piasa Birds Sweep Rout Catholic In Saturday Doubleheader - Continue Fantastic Start To Season

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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BRIGHTON – The Piasa Birds know that this is their year.

A team with nine seniors who are all looking to have a record season, and it has been just that so far as Southwestern is off to a 7-1 start.

“We’ve been talking about this for a while now,” Piasa head coach Brian Hanslow said after sweeping Class 1A powerhouse Jacksonville Rout Catholic in a doubleheader Saturday afternoon.

“I’ve coached these guys since middle school. We were good in middle school, and they know. Most of these guys have been varsity starters for three years. We’re not putting pressure on ourselves; we expect to do good. We came in today expecting to win two games and that’s what we did.”

Game one’s first pitch came at 11 a.m. from Marcus Payne. He led his team with a complete game, allowing three runs on 10 hits with six strikeouts through eight innings.

The Rockets got on the board with a single run in the top of the first, but the Piasa Birds answered in the bottom of the second with a run.

Both teams scored two runs in the fifth to make it 3-3 and that’s how it would stand after seven innings, forcing extras.

Payne held the Rockets silent in the top of the eighth, then the Piasa Birds walked it off for the 4-3 win.

Logan Keith got the inning started with a leadoff single, followed by another hit from Logan Crane. Rocky Darr was walked to load the bases and then Jacksonville pitcher Brock Runyon hit Colin LeMarr with a pitch, sending Kieth home as the game-winning run.

After about a 15-minute break between games, game two started around 1:30 p.m. This time it was Adam Hale on the mound for the Piasa Birds.

He went six innings, allowing two runs on seven hits. He struck out four along the way. While it got a little worrying at the end, he was awarded the win after Southwestern held on for an 11-8 scoreline.

A high-scoring game was kicked off in the bottom of the second as Piasa put up a six-spot.

They had some help from the Rockets to get things going.

Hunter Newell hit a leadoff single and then Hale was walked. The first run was plated after Reed Campbell put a ball in play, forcing an awkward throw to second base that went awry, allowing Newell to score.

Crane laid down what turned out to be a two-RBI bunt after another bad throw in the infield allowed two more runs to cross.

Darr hit an RBI triple scoring Crane and then LeMarr hit an RBI single to score Darr. Finally, Payne grounded out, but brought in LeMarr to make it 6-0.

Rout answered with single runs in the third and fourth innings before Piasa put some more runs across in the bottom of the fourth.

LeMarr had a sacrifice RBI followed by an RBI single from Payne. Newell's RBI double made it a 9-2 ballgame after four.

Two more runs came in the fifth thanks to RBI singles from Darr and Ryan Lewis to get it to an 11-2 scoreline.

After six solid innings from Hale, Keith went out to the mound to try and close out game two, but things went bad quickly.

He started off by walking Nolan Turner who stole his way around to third and then scored after a wild pitch. Conrad Charpentier then doubled and made it to third after Keith baulked. Isaac Long hit an RBI single to score Charpentier and make it 11-4.

Talon Thompson would have an RBI single before Brady Turner scored on another wild pitch. A second baulk would send Eli Olson home and it was suddenly 11-7 and Keith's day was done.

In came Lewis to hopefully get the final two outs and he eventually did after allowing another run on a wild pitch. A wild ending, but a win was a win as the Piasa Birds made it four in a row.

"We played good today," Hanslow stated when all was said and done.

"We hit pretty well. The first game was a bit closer. We struggled there in the last inning, but we came out and got the runs we needed to. It was everybody in the lineup and that's what we needed. That's probably the best hitting we've done so far this year. Adam Hale pitched a good six innings and kept us in the game holding them to two runs, you can't ask for more than that."

The wins over Rout came off the back of another eight-inning slugfest win against Civic Memorial the day prior, a game that Piasa won 11-9.

Saturday's results are even more impressive considering the Rockets were a 30-win team a season ago. Jacksonville made it the Class 1A super-sectional where it lost 7-3 to Waterloo Gibault Catholic, the eventual state champions.

Piasa lost 7-1 to Rout in 2023.

Hanslow loved the challenge.

“We want to be challenged every game,” he said. “There’s no way we’re going to get better playing some team and winning 10-0. I’d rather lose than win 10-0, because we can get into many more pressure situations. Anybody can hit when its 8-0, it’s easy then. When it’s you need to get a hit to tie the game, that’s when you get better.”

Piasa will play arguably it’s toughest-ever schedule and Hanslow wouldn’t have it any other way. He said it himself that he knew this year was supposed to be a successful one.

“We are. These guys, they’re all seniors. We have one junior and all seniors,” Hanslow said.

“They’ve been through this; they know what it is. They’re going to fight til the end and that’s the best thing about having a senior-led team.”

The Piasa Birds play three away game next week. They’ve got Jacksonville on Monday, Columbia on Wednesday, and then open up conference play at Hillsboro on Friday; all games starting at 4:30 p.m.

They’ll then finish the week at home on Saturday with a triangular double header against Calhoun at 10 a.m. and the St. Louis Homeschool Patriots at 2 p.m.