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St. Charles North baseball survive Geneva's rally

ST. CHARLES – A three-hour game that included a combined 18 bases on balls, costly defensive breakdowns and a furious Geneva rally in the late innings ended Thursday with the St. Charles North baseball team exhausted and victorious, 12-11.

And to think, the teams will meet again – twice – in an Upstate Eight Conference River doubleheader on Saturday.

"I look forward to it, actually," North coach Todd Genke said. "We might be playing till Sunday."

On Thursday, the North Stars and Vikings played until near dark, even without extra innings. Geneva, which trailed, 9-2, before a six-run sixth inning, flirted with extending the game further.

After the Vikings slashed the deficit to 9-8 in the top of the sixth, North regrouped to tally three in the bottom half. Junior shortstop John Brodner's solo home run made it 10-8, and designated hitter Nick Gilmore (3-for-3, home run, five RBIs) rewarded Genke for the rare start with a two-run double to move North ahead, 12-8.

"You can look at a lot of different things in that game and be negative, but you know what, a win's a win," Genke said. "They were [8-1 in the conference] and we're not at this point, so we'll take it. ... We added on when we needed to, and we always talk about how important that is, how good teams add on when you have a lead, and as you can see, we needed every one of those."

That's because the Vikings (10-4, 8-2 UEC River) used two hits and two errors in the top of the seventh to again make the North Stars squirm. First baseman Brad Bernhard's two-run single brought the Vikings within 12-10, and Geneva scored its final run on an error following a dropped-third strike throw to first that would have ended the game.

Instead, Vikings sophomore shortstop Mitch Endriukaitis – who had reached in each of his first four at-bats, once on an error – came up with two runners aboard, and poked one to center field, snared by North senior Jake Bergren, to end the game.

North senior Andrew Elliott described the game as "a little bit of a circus," and that might have been an understatement.

"That's almost a microcosm of the season," Geneva coach Matt Hahn said. "We've had all the rainouts, and the cold-outs, and you-name-it-outs – it just seemed that every odd thing that could happen in a game was today."

That included the Vikings losing despite drawing 12 walks. Winning pitcher Phil Warner (3-1) walked four Vikings in the fifth inning – his last – but still yielded only one run in the frame, and left with a 5-2 lead.

"This is high school baseball – I'm all for making the guy swing the bat," Genke said. "But, hey, it was his zone, and it was tight for both teams."

North relievers Colin Peterson and Carl Formento struggled to protect the lead, with minimal help from their defense. Formento navigated the final 1 2/3 innings to cap the victory for North (10-5, 5-2 UEC River).

Gilmore's performance was a revelation for the North Stars. North's backup catcher made his first start at the designated player spot, and counted his first home run of the season – a two-run, opposite field shot off Geneva starter Jordan Touro in the third – among his contributions.

"It felt good to get in there and show what I got," Gilmore said.

Gilmore said he just tweaked his batting stance during the past couple days. Genke likes Gilmore's pop, and thought the wind blowing out made it a good day to turn to the junior.

"Each ball he hit was hit harder," Genke said.

Geneva's John Swiderski and Bernhard each walked three times in the game, with two of Bernhard's bases on balls coming with the bases loaded.

Although both teams had some dicey moments in the field, Elliott (2-for-4) made a pair of diving catches in right field to end innings. One of them robbed Geneva's Eric Melin of a potential double down the line with two Vikings on base in the

top of the fourth.

Elliott said his mother, Lisa, wasn't happy about how dirty he came home after a recent practice at East Side Sports Complex. After his hustle plays Thursday on a wet, chilly day, his white uniform pants were just as filthy.

"I came home [after the practice] and my mom said, 'What happened to you?,' and I was like 'Sorry, mom,' and then here again, I looked up at her in the stands, and she was just laughing, so it was kind of funny," Elliott said.

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