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St. Charles North blasts Batavia

By

While his teammates talked during batting practice prior to Thursday's game at Batavia about some of the home runs they had belted this year, Derek Backer had to admit he had never hit one.

The St. Charles North senior first baseman must have had a premonition. He blasted a fifth-inning, leadoff homer against Batavia starter Michael Rutas that ignited a six-run outburst.

It broke open a close game and sent the North Stars home with a 9-2 victory that kept St. Charles North in the hunt for an Upstate Eight River title.

"No lie, I have never hit a home run in my life and everyone else in batting practice was talking about their homers," said Backer, who also hit a double as part of the North Stars' nine-hit attack. "But it wasn't like I predicted it or anything."

The North Stars bench erupted with joy after Backer's ball cleared the 360-mark in center field, and they followed his lead by belting two more homers in the inning, one of them a towering two-run shot by John Brodner. While Backer and Brodner got balls high up into a brisk breeze that was blowing out of Batavia's field, Dirk Schmitt chose to go the bazooka route — hitting a laser-beam line drive for a two-run homer over the left field wall.

"This was Derek Backer's day to today," St. Charles North coach Todd Genke said. "It (his first homer) really ignited us and gave us some energy and that was a huge inning for us, and it's funny how hitting can be contagious.

"As for Schmitt's homer, he's just a very strong kid," Genke said. "But I think Brodner's might have actually carried farther."

The explosive inning was just what North Stars' hurler John Munyon needed to keep his record unblemished at 4-0 because Batavia had scrapped to a 2-1 lead after four innings on the strength of an RBI single by Joe Sortino and RBI double by Sam Burnoski.

St. Charles North (16-6, 10-3) chased Rutas (4-2) during the fifth-inning onslaught, and added two insurance runs in the top of the seventh inning off reliever Brandon O'Kray when Jake Bergen cracked a two-run double into right field.

"This was a big win for us, to win a series (2-1) against Batavia, because we had been scuffling a little bit the last two games," Genke said. "It was nice to see the ball leave the yard, and it let us breath a little easier and John Munyon just pitched a great game today."

Munyon registered 11 strikeouts during his six innings, while Justin Wrightman pitched a scoreless seventh.

"The jet stream didn't take those balls out, they hit them pretty hard," Batavia coach Matt Holm said of the North

Stars sudden burst of power. "Rutas had pitched a good game (six strikeouts in four innings), but once they knew what to sit on, and we left the pitches up, they took advantage and that's what a good team does.

"They just really stayed away from his breaking ball, and when they saw a straight one, they were hitting it."

Batavia (8-13, 5-9) committed four errors in the contest, but Holm felt the North Stars bats were more damaging.

"The errors made us look sloppy and it didn't look good, but they didn't really hurt us today," Holm said. "The issue today was that they had one inning where they really hit the ball, and we didn't hit much at all."

St. Charles North faces Larkin on Friday before taking on Streamwood Saturday in a key doubleheader against another Upstate Eight front-runner.

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