

Steubenville Halts Musketeers 4-2 in 1994 State Semi-Finals

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Fort Jennings baseball team had advanced through the tournament trail behind strong pitching and solid defense. In Friday's Division IV state semifinal at Ohio State's Trautman Field, the solid pitching was once again present, but the defense showed it was vulnerable to mistakes.

The Musketeers committed four errors Friday that led to four unearned runs in a 4-2 semifinal loss to Steubenville Catholic. The win propelled Steubenville (23-6) to the state finals where they dispatched Crestline 7-2. Fort Jennings saw their season end with a 15-11 record and their first ever trip to a state tournament.

"We had a couple of plays that we didn't want to happen," Fort Jennings coach Dan VonSossan stated. "We thought we had gotten away from those innings. We had a lot of those (innings) last year where one bad inning cost us."

"We're not a strong hitting team, so we can't afford mistakes. We had stayed away from them, but today they cost us. Ryan (VonSossan) made a comment after the game that it was the one inning that hurt us."

Steubenville's run in the second was set up by a Musketeer throwing error to start the inning. Michael Kuczykowski led off the inning hitting a sharp ground ball to short. When the throw to first skipped in the dirt and past the Fort Jennings first baseman, Kuczykowski went to second. A fly ball to right field and a sacrifice fly to center field by K.C. Kirlangitis scored the run.

It stayed that way until the fifth inning when the Crusaders scored three times. Kirlangitis led off the inning with a single and Josh Bracone reached first when his bunt single was just out of the reach of VosSossan. After a wild pitch advanced the runners to second and third, Kirlangitis scored when JoJo Aulet hit a sharp ground ball to short and Fort Jennings didn't get an out as the first baseman was not covering the bag.

Bracone scored the Crusaders third run as Eric Gasser attempted to pick him off third and his throw bounced into leftfield. After an out Steubenville pitcher Bobby Sismondo was hit by a pitch and Aulet, who stole second and moved to third on the error, scored on the back end of a double steal. The four runs were more than enough as Sismondo was in complete control.

Sismondo (11-1) kept the Musketeers off balance all game with a good fastball, a curveball and a changeup. He

finished the game allowing just one hit, striking out 15 and walking two.

Sismondo struck out seven of the first nine batters he faced and recorded four strikeouts in the fifth inning, as after one strikeout a wild pitch allowed the batter to reach first.

"He was getting the first pitch in low and worked his way up the ladder, VonSossan said of Sismondo. "We were impatient and went after the high stuff. He is a tremendous pitcher."

Fort Jennings broke through in the sixth inning as Brian Schroeder walked, stole second and went to third on a fly ball. He scored on a groundout to second by Ryan VonSossan.

With Sismondo entering the seventh innings with a no-hitter looming on the horizon, Keith Ellerbrock ended that possibility with one out when the tripled off the left centerfield wall. He then scored on a sacrifice fly, before Sismondo ended the game with a strikeout.

While Sismondo stole the spotlight, VonSossan also pitched well as he allowed four runs, none earned, on five hits. He struck out six and didn't walk a batter.

"Ryan pitched well, but the other side was just a bit better," the elder VonSossan said. "I'm extremely proud of this team. I told them they have nothing to be ashamed of. We beat some good teams to get here, but lost to a team that was just a little bit better."

"Ryan, Brian and the rest of the seniors did a good job of guiding this team. They will be hard to replace. Helpfully there will be someone to pick it up and we can take a shot at coming back."

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WP-Sismondo (11-1). LP-VonSossan (8-2).