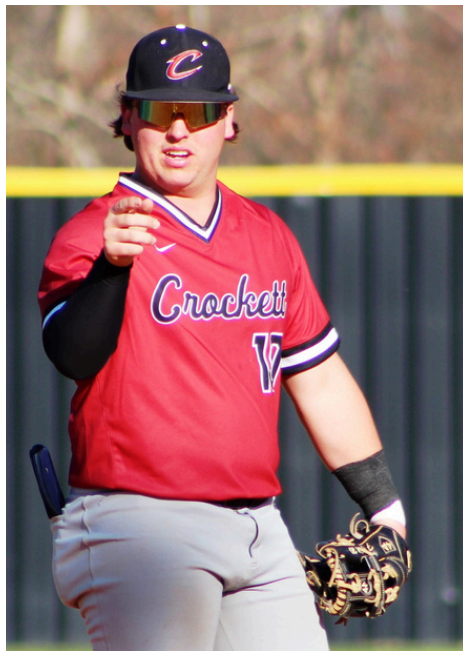


CAVALIER BASEBALLERS DROP PITCHING DUEL TO PADUCAH TILGHMAN AT UNION CITY



Above: Cavalier junior Carter Winders pitched an outstanding game against Paducah Tilghman, but a third-inning leadoff walk came back to haunt him. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Any pitching coach worth his salt will tell you that just about the worst thing that can happen in a low-scoring game is a leadoff walk.

When it happens in a 0-0 duel, there's often a domino effect. The pitcher gets just a seed of doubt in his mind; the defensive players may feel a bit of additional pressure; the opponent's offense sees a glimmer of hope.

Wednesday night in the Union City Tournament opener, Crockett County's Carter Winders pitched a tremendous game. He went five strong innings, allowed just two hits, and struck out nine.

But in the top of the third inning, he walked the leadoff man on a full-count pitch. It was pretty much his only mistake of the night.

For the Cavaliers, however, this is a particularly hazardous situation for one very unique reason: When Carter Winders is pitching, that also means he's not catching. And one of Crockett's usual defensive strengths - perhaps its top defensive strength - is the catching prowess of Carter Winders, as one would expect from a player who already has a travel ball national championship under his belt as his team's primary backstop, which he collected while still just a sophomore.

When Winders is behind the plate, most opponents don't challenge his arm as base stealers. He's going to catch or block virtually every pitch his teammates throw, low or high, bouncing or sailing away, inside or out. The only Cavalier pitcher who doesn't get the benefit of his ability behind the dish is... Winders himself.

And this isn't a knock against the other Cavalier catchers. Unless you can stick Yadier Molina back there for another game, you're likely not going to maintain the level you get from Winders.

So... back to the third inning. Crockett is playing Paducah Tilghman, a school with a long tradition of athletic excellence from Kentucky. It's 0-0. The Blue Tornado leadoff man, Stone Crowe, works his walk.

On the very next pitch - a strike - he steals second. Unfazed, Winders goes on to strike out the batter. On the first pitch to the next guy, Michael Daniels drops down a well-placed bunt for a single that moves Crowe over to third base. The next pitch gets away for a passed ball, and Tilghman takes a 1-0 lead.

And that would be all the scoring between both teams for the night. Crockett would finish with just three hits in the contest, one more than the Blue Tornado. But the Cavs could string nothing together against Tilghman starter Elijah Hamilton and two relievers in dropping to 7-3 on the season.

Winders and Crockett closer Bryson Vance combined for 13 strikeouts and yielded just the two hits and three walks over the seven-inning tilt. But offensively, things went sideways for the Cavs.

They had two men on with no outs in the first and got nothing out of it when a runner was thrown out trying to tag on a fly ball. In the third inning, another runner was thrown out at third trying to advance from second on a ground ball to the shortstop. In the fifth, a runner was caught stealing second.

In the seventh, Crockett's George Randall drew the magical leadoff walk, and Aiden Austin came in to run for him. After a strikeout, Grayson Lambert pushed a bunt single that gave the Cavs men on first and second with just one out. But Tilghman made a pitching change, and Brandon Dutton struck out the next two Crockett batters to end the ballgame.

Randall, Lambert, and Callan Willis managed the only Cav hits. Crockett will continue play in Union City Thursday, facing Dresden at 4:30 and Carlisle (KY) County at 6:45.



Above: Bryson Vance gave the Cavs two excellent innings of relief in support of Carter Winders, but the Crockett offense couldn't get on the board. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Freshman third baseman George Randall had a single and a walk as the only Cavalier to earn his way on base twice in the 1-0 contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)