

CAVALIER DIAMONDERS WIN BIG IN OPENER OF PHIL CLARK MEMORIAL CLASSIC



Above: Nash Kilburn pitched out of a two bases-loaded jams to get the victory Thursday at USA Stadium in Millington. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Phil Clark was a legendary figure in the world of high school baseball in Tennessee, and it is entirely fitting that a memorial classic be played this week to honor his legacy after his death from colon cancer 14 months ago.

Crockett County is participating in the event, largely due to the fact that first-year head coach Brad Smith spent a considerable amount of time in the Memphis area in which Clark's influence was so prominent.

Clark retired from Bartlett High School in 2013 after a 33-year career in which he was Tennessee's winningest coach and the only mentor to win state titles at three different schools: the now-closed Sky View Academy (two state crowns in 1981 and 1986), Germantown High (championships in 1995 and 2001), and Bartlett (the 2007 victor). He also coached the USA Baseball junior team that captured a gold medal in Taiwan.

As a player, his jersey was retired at the University of Memphis after he hit .328 as a senior and sparked the Tigers to a 40-9 record, still their best season in history. His first two collegiate years were played at Jackson State Community College. At the time of his death, Clark was an inductee of seven different Halls of Fame.

And what everyone who knew him would probably agree upon: It's a good thing he didn't have to watch the Cavaliers' opening game in the Phil Clark Memorial Classic Thursday.

It wasn't Crockett's fault. Smith's club did what it had to do in producing an 11-0 triumph over Andrew (IL) High School for its sixth consecutive victory by the mercy rule, improving the Cavs' season record to 11-2.

It was the often-excruciating performance by Andrew that marred the enjoyment on a day perfectly suited for a baseball game to honor a legend.

Victor J. Andrew High School has a 2,200-student body and is located in Tinley Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. It has a spectacularly varied array of athletic offerings, including water polo. But its baseball team might as well have thrown their gloves into the pool or Lake Michigan on Thursday, when they committed nine errors and two balks in assisting Crockett to its easy win.

The Cavs honestly didn't need the help, banging out nine hits in the five-inning contest and getting a combined shutout from Nash Kilburn, Rylan Redding, and Carter Winders. Kilburn went the first three, pitching out of bases-loaded jams in the first and third. Crockett's trio allowed just two hits and struck out seven.

Callan Willis jump-started the Cav offense in the first inning with a leadoff double to left. Kilburn dropped a sacrifice bunt which was misplayed by the first baseman, putting runners at first and third. When courtesy runner Myles Perkins stole second, Willis came home on an errant throw by the catcher.

Brady Fronabarger drew a walk and Winders reached on a ground-ball error to load the bases, and when George Randall smoked a hard grounder toward first base, another Thunderbolt error allowed two runs to score, giving the Cavs a 3-0 edge after the opening frame.

Crockett struck for five more in the second after initial singles by Sam Proctor and Willis. Two balks against the pitcher allowed Proctor to score, and Kilburn then drew a walk. Winders singled to center, chasing Willis home, and after stolen bases by courtesy runners Perkins and Davis Porter, the unnerved Andrew hurler uncorked a wild pitch that scored Perkins. Randall then lined a single to right to bring Porter home. A walk to Karson Kail and another booted ground ball reloaded the bases, and Proctor drew another walk to force in the eighth run.

The Cavs ended the contest with three tallies in the bottom of the fifth. Kilburn reached on yet another Thunderbolt miscue and Fronabarger followed with a single that was kicked around in the outfield, bringing Kilburn home. After Winders was hit by a pitch, Aiden Austin belted a two-RBI triple to right field.

Willis, Fronabarger, and Randall all collected two hits for the Cavs, who will continue play in the Clark Memorial Classic Friday at 10 a.m. against Maine East, another Illinois team.



Above: Third baseman George Randall lined two hits and brought three runs home for the victorious Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Aiden Austin ended things with a two-run triple for Crockett's sixth straight mercy-rule triumph. (Photo by Ron Barry)