

A hot start for Phoenix

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TSA 5, MSJ 3: Sharon wins first playoff game in program history

HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL

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CHELSEA — A season that almost didn't happen was highlighted Wednesday by the Sharon Academy baseball team's first-ever playoff victory.

The No. 8 Phoenix (3-7) defeated late-surgingly Mount Saint Joseph, 5-3, at Roberts-Gould Field in Chelsea, and will face top-seeded Black River in Friday's VPA Division IV quarterfinals.

TSA fielded its inaugural varsity program a year ago, then graduated eight seniors, leaving the program's future in doubt. But thanks to the help of multiple transfer students, the VPA's member-to-member program and a host of eighth-graders, the Phoenix returned.

Sharon athletic director, Blake Fabrikant — on hand for Wednesday's win — said it was a miracle the team was even formed.

"I thought maybe we were going to have to go JV, or if we were even going to have a team," Fabrikant said. "And we were able to pull some Chelsea kids obviously over to the high school, which helped. And then we pulled a few eighth-graders and then getting Josh (King) over here. We made it work, it's just like a mish-mash of players. Today was definitely the best we played all year, and I'm glad we did it."

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"His toe is not on the bag!" Mount Saint Joseph's Keaton Wright-Chapman shouts after Sharon's Alex Olszewski dives back to first base during Wednesday's VPA Division IV playoff game at Roberts-Gould Athletic Field in Chelsea. Wright-Chapman was given a warning not to argue, and Olszewski was safe.

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Sharon's Ronald Johnson makes contact with the ball during Wednesday's game.

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finally shut the door by striking out Cole Blanchard.

"It's frustrating only being one out left, but I was happy with my performance," Leonard said when asked about being denied the complete game. "I wasn't really upset."

King attends Mid Vermont Christian School, which doesn't have a baseball team. He previously played for Chelsea, but the Red Devils are defunct after last year's school closure.

"It's crazy," said King, who led off the game with a home run over the fence in rightcenterfield. "I got signed up with Sharon kind of late in the preseason. I'm glad I was able to be part of this team; it made it all worth it. We've had some long games, but to have it all come together now with all these kids from different schools, it feels good."

The lefty's high drive was a no-doubter that bounced off the asphalt beyond the fence.

"That was my first high school home run," King said. "(Teammate Ron Johnson) and I played here for our varsity career, and we wanted to put one over. I watched the first pitch go by and I knew I could do something with it, and he pitched it middle-in and I just put a swing on it."

King went on to walk in the third inning, hit an RBI triple in the fifth and single in the sixth. He also made several key catches in center field.

Taylor Leonard pitched a gem for Sharon, striking out 12 batters. The sophomore was yanked with two outs in the seventh, however, after he reached the 120-pitch limit mandated by the VPA.

Things got dicey for the hosts down the stretch when Jacob Gilman came on and gave up back-to-back walks and a single before Chance Passmore reached on an error. The No. 9 Green Wave (113) rallied for three runs before Gilman

Leonard, a transfer from Chelsea, has struggled with shoulder pain throughout the season but said it was largely absent against MSJ. The starter said he wasn't worried about handing the ball to Gilman.

"I had faith in him," Leonard said. "He's only an eighth-grader, but he's good."

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Notes: Black River's coaches attended Wednesday's game with several of their players in tow. ... Two TSA graduates — Aiden Trimble and Cal Hale — have completed their freshmen years at college and are now helping with coaching duties. ... The Green Wave had to play the final three outs of the sixth inning with eight players after first baseman Keaton Wright-Chapman was ejected for arguing with the first-base umpire. The visitors dressed 10 players, but one had already been used as a pinch hitter before being taken out of the game. ... Alex Olszewski and Parker Bogardus both drove in runs for the Phoenix.



Sharon's Taylor Leonard pitches during Wednesday's VPA Division IV playoff game against Mount St. Joseph in Chelsea. The host Phoenix won, 5-3.

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