

SOUTHERN A DISTRICT TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONSHIP



ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE

Belgrade Bandits' Chris Gilbreath, right, scores as Gallatin Valley Outlaws' catcher Kohler Briggs blocks the plate during the championship game of the Southern A District Tournament at Weimer Field in Livingston on Sunday.

BLAZIN' BANDITS

Belgrade routs GVO in championship, enters state on a roll

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LIVINGSTON — Unprecedented and unparalleled success. The Belgrade Bandits won their second consecutive Southern A district tournament championship with a 17-7 win in seven innings over the Gallatin Valley Outlaws in the championship game Sunday. The Bandits did it behind 12 hits, eight walks and three Gallatin Valley errors.

Bandit hurler Chris Gilbreath was on the mound for his second Southern A championship game victory in two years. In addition, at least five Belgrade players on the roster in 2012 were on the championship team in 2011.

That, however, is where the comparison between the Bandits of old and present cease.

Belgrade (38-17) put together a run at the 2012 Southern A district tournament not seen in prior years. Four victories in four games has certainly happened before. But has the champion team scored 60 runs on 55 hits in those four games? Has the champion team mercy-ruled each opponent and used the minimal amount of innings (28) in doing so?

The 2012 Bandits did. It was a bit tricky for Johnny Graham's club on Sunday, and he knew it would be. Gallatin Valley, despite losing four of five to Belgrade, never dropped a contest by more than three runs.

The Outlaws (33-21) found themselves down 10-2 at one point, but clawed back. The No. 2 seed put itself in a steady position after a three-run fifth (RBI doubles by Justin Woodward and Conrad Schnur) and a two-run sixth (RBI triple from Gianfranco Filippini and RBI double from Tanner Johnson) to slice the deficit to three runs at 10-7.

Graham's No 1-seeded ball club just took a collective breath and responded with a one-out rally in the bottom of the sixth.

A walk, single and walk loaded the bases against Outlaw reliever Billy Mourer. It was a tenuous position for anyone on the mound, much less a 15-year-old eighth grader called on to suppress the bleeding in a district championship game.

Then came a call that turned the balance of the contest.

Jamis Olson slapped a grounder to the mound, and Mourer shuffled the ball back to his catcher Kohler Briggs. The ball was bobbled slightly, but two concrete things are known: Briggs touched the plate while he had control of the ball, and the home plate umpire called Gilbreath — the inning's leadoff walk — safe.

Gallatin Valley head coach Duwayne Scott and his fanbase were close to apoplectic. Scott argued the play should have been a force out, since

Southern A Sunday Championship	
Belgrade 17, Gallatin Valley 7, 7 innings	Loser Out
Gallatin Valley 15, Dillon 0, 7 innings	Loser Out
Dillon 14, Livingston 6	

the bases were juiced, and no tag was needed to put out Olson. The argument was for naught, however.

Scott later alluded to playing "error-free baseball, your best game, when you play those guys" and

admitted Mourer's six walks and two hit batsmen in that frame didn't help matters. However, Scott was visibly upset that the play was not called a force out, but he couldn't calm his pitcher down after visiting him just before Gilbreath's at-bat.

"The call at the plate kind of changed the tone of the game, I thought, a little," Scott said. "We had a 15-year-old on the mound and I think he kind of let it get to him. But we'll learn from it"

Mourer alternated between walks and hit batsmen through six of the next seven batters, and an error by Filippini on a fielder's choice plated three runs. All of a sudden, it was a 17-7 game and the Bandits were in the catbird seat again.

"They're a quality baseball team, and we know it," Scott said. "They took advantage of our mistakes — we walked too many guys. Good teams take advantage of mistakes; we were able to do it a couple times this tournament and Belgrade did it every game."

Graham obviously echoed his counterpart.

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"We've stayed the course, and that's what we've talked about all year long," Graham said of his team's dominating tournament. "We didn't change a thing, we didn't want to change a thing; we followed a similar game plan.

"We stuck to the process and what we believe in, and it worked out."

Belgrade collected its first 10 runs on nine hits, three walks, three hit batters and two GVO errors. The Bandits also stole four bases and used their familiar array of situational batting tactics (hit-and-run, delayed steals and squeeze plays) to advance runners. Four runs scored due to two errors and one scored on a Mourer wild pitch.

"We just have confidence we're going to score runs every game," Belgrade catcher Conner Switzer noted after a 2-for-4, two-RBI game. "Once we get on base, we're going to score. All year, we've had lots of success with run support for our pitchers."

Gilbreath struggled, allowing seven hits and five earned runs while walking seven, and had to be relieved in the Southern A championship for the second year in a row. Yet it seemed of little consequence, especially after his sixth-inning leadoff walk reopened the floodgates for Belgrade's 14th mercy-rule win against Southern A competition this summer.

"We had to stay the course, and just win battles," he said. "Run support was the name of the game today and all tournament.

"I think we made a statement to the rest of the state." The State A American Legion tournament begins in Great Falls on Thursday. Both Belgrade and GVO advance.

Championship - Belgrade 17, Gallatin Valley 7

Gallatin Valley 101 032 0 - 7 9 3
Belgrade 152 207 x -17 12 0
 Brock Bitterman, Billy Mourer (4) and Kohler Briggs. Chris Gilbreath and Conner Switzer. W- Gilbreath (8-2), L - Bitterman (0-1).
Gallatin Valley (33-21) - Kohler Briggs 0-3, Ryder Kulbeck 1-3, Gianfranco Filippini 2-3, Tanner Johnson 3-3, Justin Woodward 2-2, Conrad Schnur 1-2, Jordan Carlson 0-4, Dayne Allen 0-3, Conner Van Dyken 0-3
Belgrade (38-17) - Brett Franklin 2-4, Chris Mitchell 1-4, Trevor Mahn 0-3, Conner Switzer 2-4, Chris Gilbreath 1-3, Chris Schreckengost 3-4, Josh Gier 0-1, Jamis Olson 1-4, Koby Ruff 1-2
2B - Woodward 2, Johnson; Franklin, Olson. **3B** - G. Filippini. **RBI** - Woodward 3, Filippini, Johnson, Schnur; Olson 2, Switzer 2, Ruff 2, Franklin, Gilbreath, Mitchell Schreckengost. **SB** - Franklin 2, Mitchell 2, Ruff 2, Gilbreath, Gier, Ruff.

Loser Out

GALLATIN VALLEY 15, DILLON 0: Scott wasn't taking any chances. The Outlaws were one game away from qualifying for the State A tournament, and Scott called upon ace Johnson to get them there.

Johnson didn't disappoint, twirling a complete game no-hitter in the loser-out contest. Johnson struck out 16, including the first 10 Dillon Cubs, and allowed just six base runners, three via walk. Dillon recorded just one out to the outfield.

Gallatin Valley 15, Dillon 0

Dillon 000 000 0 - 0 0 4
Gallatin Valley 350 214 x -15 17 2
 Cole Miotke, Dillon Womack (4) and Dillon Starkel. Tanner Johnson and Dante Filippini.
Dillon - Eathyn Peterson 0-3, Cole Miotke 0-1, MJ Simkins 0-3, Dillon Starkel 0-2, Dillon Womack 0-3, Gunner Laffrentz 0-2, Michael Walsh 0-1, Logan Wilson 0-3, Jamey Richardson 0-2, Christopher Olson 0-1, Nate Simkins 0-2
Gallatin Valley (33-20) - Kohler Briggs 1-4, Ryder Kulbeck 1-5, Gianfranco Filippini 4-5, Tanner Johnson 2-4, Justin Woodward 4-5, Dayne Allen 1-3, Jordan Carlson 3-4, John Holmes 1-4, Dante Filippini 0-2
2B - G. Filippini 3, Woodward. **RBI** - G. Filippini 4, Johnson 3, Carlson 2, Woodward 2, Briggs, D. Filippini. **SB** - Allen, Carlson.

DILLON 14, LIVINGSTON 6: In the continuation of the suspended game, which Dillon led 8-5 in the eighth, the Cubs added six runs in the final 1 1/3 innings. Both teams combined for 31 hits and 12 errors as the No. 6 seed continued its upset run.

Dillon 14, Livingston 6

Dillon 230 020 142 - 14 17 5
Livingston 010 010 310 - 6 14 7
 MJ Simkins, Nate Simkins (8) and Dillon Starkel. Tanner Hall, Mike Severson (1), Skyler Carroll (3), Hayden Darr (5), Zach Petrich (8), Austin Carroll (9) and Skyler Carroll, Mike Severson (2).
W - MJ Simkins. **L** - Severson.
Dillon - Eathyn Peterson 1-4, Cole Miotke 3-5, MJ Simkins 2-4, Dillon Starkel 3-6, Dillon Womack 2-5, Gunner Laffrentz 1-5, Logan Wilson 2-5, Jamey Richardson 1-4, Nate Simkins 2-4, Chris Olson 0-1
Livingston - Zach Petrich 3-5, Austin Carroll 2-5, Mike Severson 3-5, Hayden Darr 2-5, Nolan Darr 1-5, Skyler Carroll 3-4, Colton Landreth 0-5, Gunnar Lehrer 0-3, Jordan Darr 0-5
2B - MJ Simkins; A. Carroll, H. Darr, N. Darr. **3B** - Starkel. **HR** - Miotke. **RBI** - Miotke 2, Peterson 2, MJ Simkins, Starkel, Womack; Severson 2, H. Darr, J. Darr, N. Darr. **SB** - Peterson 2, N. Simkins.