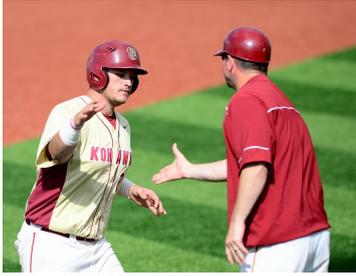


Coe's terrific season has unhappy ending

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 17 May 2015 18:29 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 May 2015 19:20



LA CROSSE, Wis. - Maybe it was the day off on Saturday that killed the Kohawks when they had all that momentum.

Maybe trying to beat Wisconsin-La Crosse on its home field again was too much to ask.

Or maybe the baseball gods simply decided to smile on somebody else for a change.

Whatever it was, it doesn't matter now. The dirty deed is done.

The Kohawks lost twice to 20th-ranked Wisconsin-La Crosse, 5-4 and 15-4, Sunday in the championship round of the NCAA Division III Midwest Regional Tournament at Copeland Park.

Coe was hoping to reach the NCAA D3 World Series for the first time in school history. They came close, but the Kohawks are coming home and the La Crosse Eagles are heading to Appleton, Wis., for the national tournament for the first time in their history.

Coe bopped La Crosse Friday night, 11-5, in the winner's bracket final, but the tournament ran behind schedule due to rain and the Kohawks hung around Saturday with nothing to do.

"They were better than us today, we were better than them the other day when we played them. That's baseball," said Coach Coach Steve Cook.

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"They deserved to get the trip to Appleton, because they did it on championship day."



The Kohawks set a school record with 34 wins this year and reached the regional finals for the first time in school history, making it a special year despite the final disappointment.

"Honestly, it's been just like a dream. It didn't feel real," said Coe senior Jack Hoffmann, one of the post-season heroes. "Every great thing comes to an end."

Cook spent a long time with his team after the games, then spent more time with the senior class that helped turn the Kohawks into big winners this year following a disappointing campaign in 2014.

"I'm just so proud of them," he said. "You always are, any team, but this group really did some special things. It's definitely a great positive for the program, for Coe baseball."

The Kohawks began the Iowa Conference regular season with four straight losses to Wartburg, but they ended the year by beating Wartburg twice to win the Iowa Conference tournament before winning three straight games in the regional tournament against quality competition.

"We made a heck of a run," said AJ Reuter, another of Coe's many stars in the postseason. "I couldn't ask for a better group of guys to make this run with."

"It's going to hurt now, but hopefully we're going to look back and look at how much fun we had and everything."

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Coe missed its big chance to win the regional title in the first game Sunday. They had a 2-0 lead in the seventh inning with relief ace Hoffmann on the mound following a strong start by Connor Alberhasky, but Hoffmann's magical run ended.

Hoffmann was touched for four straight hits as four runs came across the plate, giving La Crosse a 4-2 lead. The Kohawks rallied and tied the game, 4-4, in the eighth inning, but the Eagles scored in the ninth for the 5-4 victory.

Hoffmann had collected four straight saves for Coe in the postseason - twice in the Iowa Conference tournament and two more in the regional tournament - but he finally proved to be human.

The Kohawks grabbed a 4-2 lead in the second championship game on a pair of two-run homers by AJ Reuter and Jory Heckenberg in the fourth inning, but the generous Kohawks let La Crosse promptly tie the game 4-4 with an errant throw on what should have been an inning-ending double play in the top of the sixth.

The floodgates opened after that.

The Eagles poured across seven runs in the sixth inning for an 11-4 bulge and the route was on.

Coe was seeded No. 5 in the eight-team regional tournament and was not supposed to reach the championship round. The Kohawks defied the odds, yet it was little consolation when the season ended in dismay.

Hoffmann, Reuter, Michael Goerdts and Craig Konrardy made the all-tournament team for Coe.

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Hoffmann said he'll remember how the Kohawks grew as a team this year. "On the field, off the field, it's just a completely different team this year," he said. "Everybody improved. I can't think of one person who didn't improve."

GAME 1

La Crosse █ 000 000 401 - 5 12 2

Coe █ █ █ █ █ █ 000 200 020 - 4 █ 8 █ 1

W - Sadowske (4-0). L - Becker (2-1).

GAME 2

La Crosse █ 101 027 211 - 15 18 1

Coe █ █ █ █ █ █ 000 400 000 - █ 4 █ 10 2

W - Boushley (5-1). L - Kragenbrink (3-3).