

Davenport West ousts Linn-Mar

Written by Chris James, Q-C Times

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DAVENPORT - If anyone can appreciate the strike zone as a batter, it's a pitcher.

Davenport West's Thomas Dorton used that to his advantage in his first at-bat with the bases loaded in the first inning Friday.

Dorton fought back from an 0-2 count to draw a walk for the Falcons' first run and helped sparked West to four more runs in the inning. It helped West to an eventual 5-2 victory over Linn-Mar in a Class 4A first-round substate game at the Falcons' complex.

West (26-6) advances to host Bettendorf in a regional semifinal at 7 p.m. Monday.

"I just had to foul (pitches) off and just try and get on base," Dorton said of his first at-bat. "The (umpire) had a pretty tight strike zone so I kind of knew where the balls and strikes were.

"I kind of knew it was coming. It's 10 times better as a pitcher because you know where everything is at."

Linn-Mar starting pitcher Ryan Wyant got the first two outs of the inning but the Falcons strung together three straight singles to load the bases when Dorton came up. He took a strike, then fouled a pitch off. Then Wyant suddenly could not find the zone.

After Dorton forced a run in with his walk, teammate Kyle Verdon took the same selective approach. Wyant walked him on five pitches to give West a 2-0 lead.

"We got (Wyant) frustrated and that's the point," Dorton said.

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The Falcons then got some help from shaky defense by the Lions (16-22).

West's Bradley Belz popped a high fly ball 20 feet behind third base. But it baffled Linn-Mar's shortstop, third baseman and leftfielder enough that none of them could decide who should take it.

The Lions' Manny Jeffery, who was playing left field, had to dive at the ball at the last second and although he initially grabbed it, the ball popped out of his glove and two runs scored to make it 4-0.

Verdon later came home when Linn-Mar's third baseman could not handle a ground ball to give the Falcons a 5-0 lead.

Dorton took it from there, going all seven innings. The senior allowed five hits, all singles, and one earned run. He struck out eight and did not walk a batter to move his record to 9-0 this season.

His defense did not exactly help him as West committed four errors, but Dorton used great location to keep the Lions' hitters off balance. He caught four Linn-Mar hitters looking at strike three.

Dorton said getting those early runs made things a lot easier.

"I was able to relax, it was not as stressful," he said. "I was just trying to hit my spots and let my defense do everything."

Falcons Coach Chad Jones was glad to get the win but thought his team kind of took its foot off the gas after getting the five early runs.

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"I think it kind of worked against us. We all thought, 'We got five, (Thomas) is on the hill, here we go.'

"But you know what, when you get to this point in the season, you get a 'W' and that's all that matters. (Thomas) did an excellent job on the mound with the strike zone.

"Defensively, we need to tighten things up. We have not done that much this year (committing errors). But we had some guys come through in that first inning, put the ball in play and that's what you have to do."

Jeffery and Andrew Gassmann had two hits for Linn-Mar.

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Davenport West 500 000 x - 5 4 3

W - Dorton. L - Wyant.