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Going into the bottom of the ninth inning Friday night with the score tied 2-2, Jefferson Coach Kyle Rodenkirk was as calm as if his team was nursing a 10-run lead on Prairie.

“I just told the guys to loosen up and have fun," he said afterward. “They were a little uptight, especially since they tied the score on us in the seventh.

“I said,‘This isn’t life or death. It’s baseball. Have some fun.’”

The first three batters in the ninth inning took him at his word and loaded the bases on three straight hits, then a suicide squeeze did not pan out.

But sophomore designated hitter Jared Eivins, playing with a fractured left shoulder that will need surgery after the season, sliced a sharp two-strike single to right to bring Manny Olutunde home for a 3-2 win.

The home field victory for the J-Hawks (24-14-1) doubled their total from last year and sends them to the substate semifinals Monday night at 7:30 against Burlington (21-15) at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

“All I was trying to do,” said Eivins, seeing his first action in a month, “was make contact and try to get the ball in the air.

“With one out, I didn’t want to ground into a double play. I wanted to get under the ball and maybe get a sacrifice fly.”

The ball dropped instead and Eivins had his first game-winner since knocking in two runs with two outs in the bottom of the seventh of a game last year.

In a game in which the teams combined for 11 errors, play was not always precise or real pretty.

“It was ugly,” admitted Rodenkirk, the second-year Jefferson mentor. “But our guys hung in there. In the past, Jefferson has had a reputation of being one and done in the tournament. This time we weren’t going home.”

For the first eight innings, it was a mistake-prone pitchers’ duel.Until they gave way to relievers late in the game, starters Drew Yanecek of Prairie and Ben Koering of Jefferson pretty much handcuffed the hitters. Neither allowed an earned run, while Yanecek gave up five hits and Koering three.

The Hawks scored once in the second when Cooper Reittinger doubled in a run and threatened again in the fifth after putting men on second and third with one out.

J-Hawk shortstop Lucas Larson, who booted a ball to begin the rally, saved the day by throwing out a runner at home after fielding a sharp grounder.

“I was just going to look the kid back to third,” said Larson. “But he took off. I knew he was fast, and we just barely got him.”

Koering saved himself the next inning by diving head-first off the mound to snag a bunt popped in the air and, from his knees, throwing to first to double off the runner.

“My eyes got real big when I saw the ball pop in the air,” he said. “I just knew I had to make the play.”

Considering the rash of defensive blunders, Rodenkirk said both plays were keys to victory.

“They were huge,” he said. “Lucas made a nice throw. And Ben, that kid will run through a brick wall for his team.”

Jefferson took a 2-1 lead in the fifth without a hit thanks to three Prairie errors. But the Hawks rallied back in the seventh when Cal Clark doubled, stole third and waltzed home on a wild pitch.

J-Hawk ace pitcher Spencer Van Scoyoc, who’s been on the shelf in recent weeks with a sore arm, shut out Prairie the rest of the way and notched five strikeouts in the last three innings.

He was the on-deck hitter when Eivins roped the winning hit.

Prairie ended its season at 14-22 in Coach Matt Thede’s final game. He announced recently he was leaving to take an administrative job at Mount Vernon High School after five years and more than 100 victories with the Hawks.

“I wondered if either team deserved to win this one,” he said of his finale. “It could have gone either way. But they got the last hit.”

Prairie 010 000 100 - 2 5 5

Jefferson 000 020 001 - 3 10 6

W - S. VanScoyoc. L - Milks.