

SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Mustangs playoff win too close for comfort

By STEVE LeBLANC
Special to The Champion

Milton District High School's boys baseball team defeated the Lester B. Pearson Patriots Tuesday at Brian Best Park, but the opening-round playoff match was almost too close for comfort.

The heavily favored Mustangs — who had moved up to top spot in the Toronto Star's Metro Poll last week — needed all seven innings to dispose of their Burlington opponents in a heart-stopping 5-4 come-from-behind victory.

In the end, it was Pat Lynch who stroked a timely single to left field, which brought home catcher Andrew Mercier for the winning run.

Mercier, who had reached base safely in three previous plate appearances, made it to first when Pearson's first baseman dropped an easy pop fly. He later stole second and then moved up to third on a sacrifice bunt by Nick Aalbers.

Lynch was not only the hero of the game but the star as well. In two separate stints on the mound, the ace pitcher collected six strikeouts and retired all eight batters he faced with some outstanding relief work.

He came in during the third inning after a shaky start by Jeremy Ridley, who gave up four hits and three runs in the second. A throwing error by shortstop Shayne Ridley resulted in the Patriots' fourth run in the third.

Both Ridley brothers redeemed themselves later on. Jeremy came back to pitch the seventh and had a three up, three down inning while Shayne came in to score on a sacrifice bunt by Kevin Wilson in the sixth for the tying run.

He also made a nice snag and throw out in the top of the sixth to help keep Pearson's offense at bay.

Next to Lynch's game winning RBI, Jeff Langille had the highlight of the game with a home run to left field in the second for Milton's first run. A wild throw brought Mercier in later that inning. Their other run came in the fourth when Mark McPhail hit an RBI single that scored Jim Fay.

The Mustangs took on Oakville Trafalgar yesterday (Thursday) in Milton while QE Park hosted M.M. Robinson. The two remaining teams will battle it out for the Halton crown Tuesday afternoon at Nelson Park in Burlington.

A well engineered comeback

Despite allowing the first seven batters to score on nine consecutive hits in the first inning, Spencer Engineering fought back to beat Bruce Hood Travel, and claim their initial victory of the season.

Rebounding with five runs of their own in the bottom of the first, the Engineers got three hit performances from Jim Wedgewood, Terry Young, Dennis Gluck and "head-surveyor" Mait Spencer to down the Travellers 15-8.

Solid defence was obviously the key factor in this win; as the Hood Gang only managed one run over the final eight innings. Brent McArthur's perfect three for three outing went for naught, while Lucky Leslie and Larry Barker, each with a pair of safeties, provided the balance of the Hood attack.



Slo Pitch

with PAT GRANT

Batting from the number 14 hole, Maitland's solid three for three was definitely an inspiration to his mates, a team that is finally rounding into shape.

To keep the trend alive, the following evening saw the only undefeated team so far this year, The Royal Canadian Legion, absorb their first loss. Held to only six runs by a stingy Waltzing Weasel defense, The

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College ball matures young Milton prospect

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For most young pitchers, the transition from high school to college baseball can be a rocky one. For Milton hurler Shayne Ferrier however, the transition has been as smooth as his delivery, which has already established him as one of the area's top prospects in recent history.

Ferrier, 20, recently completed his rookie season at Lincoln Trail Junior College in Robinson, Illinois, where he made an immediate contribution in the Statesmen lineup.

After accepting a full scholarship with the school last year, Ferrier went into the fall training camp and raised more than a few eyebrows among the team's coaching staff and player roster. His confidence, poise and sound mechanics earned him the number two spot in the four-man starting rotation. "Earning a spot in the starting rotation was a great feeling, especially being a rookie," said Ferrier.

Once the actual season began in March, he proved himself worthy of his rotation placement with a regular contribution to the Statesmen's 1996 campaign in the Division I Great Rivers Athletic Conference (GRAC).

He led the team in innings pitched (66) and posted a strong 2.17 earned-run average, along with a 5-4 record. He collected 65 strikeouts and allowed a mere 24 walks.

"With DHs used in college ball, I was able to concentrate solely on my pitching. Along with my regular role as starter, I saw some relief work in tournament play. I'd say my greatest moment over the season was in a 3-0 win over Chicago's Mary Mach, when I worked a complete game and threw a one-hitter," Ferrier recalled.

Unfortunately, the Statesmen didn't enjoy the same amount of team success this year. They did finish over .500 with a 30-28 record for sixth place in the 11-team loop, but fell 4-3 to Olney College in the GRAC Sectional finals.

Ferrier, who led Milton District High School to its first regional baseball championship last spring, said he learned a lot from his rookie season, most notably the importance of hitting the corners with his fastball. "It doesn't get by like it use to, you really have to find your spots."

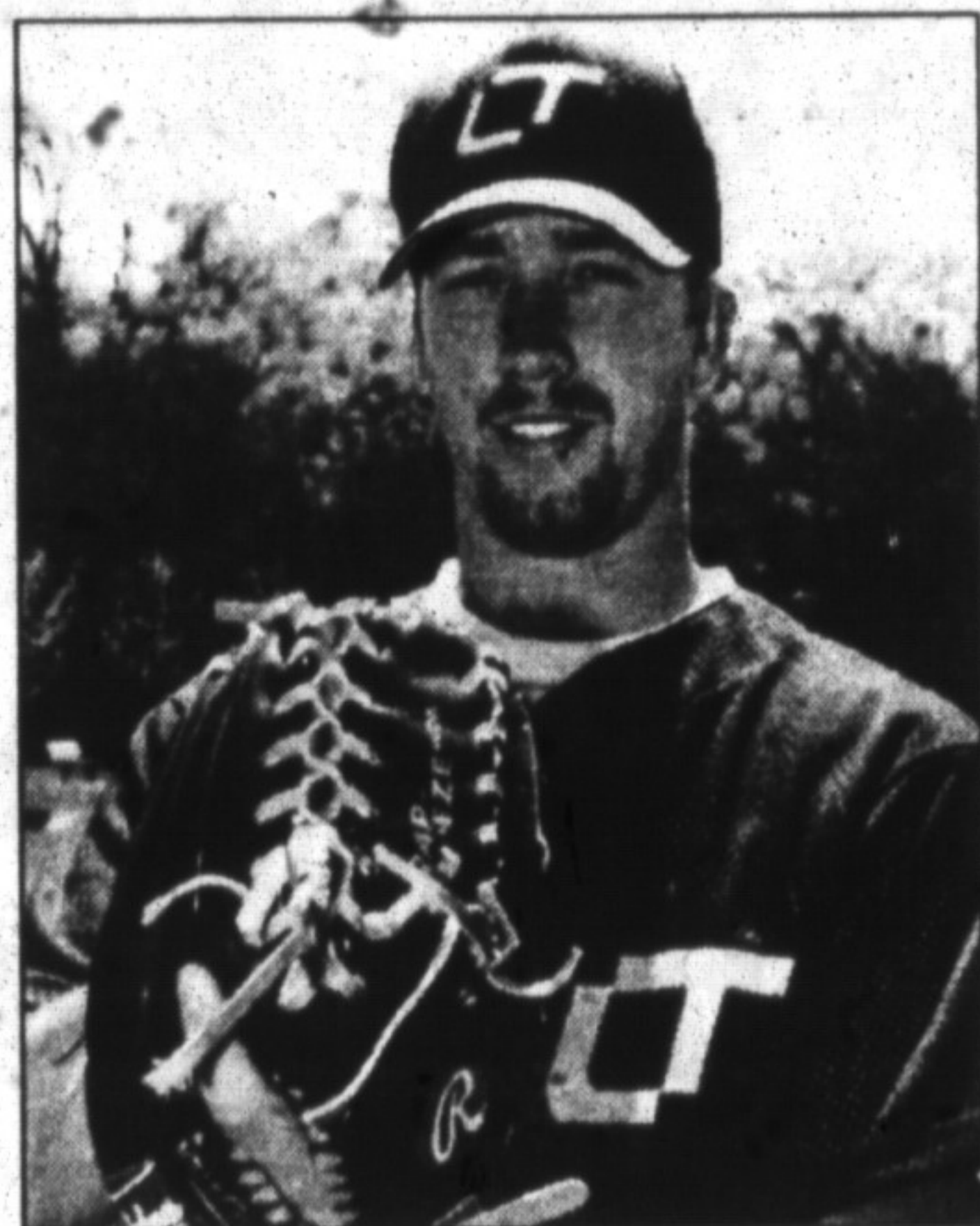


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Shayne Ferrier has improved his pitching mechanics so that he comes over the top in his delivery more consistently, and boasts a wider variety of pitches.

He was able to get his fastball up to a consistent 88 miles per hour and developed his curve ball and change-up. He is also working on adding a split-finger fastball into his arsenal. "My composure and mechanics are a lot better now. Before this year I was almost throwing sidearm but the Statesmen coach showed me how to use my whole body in the delivery so now I'm throwing right over the top."

Ferrier will now show local ball enthusiasts his stuff as he prepares for a season with the Hamilton Senior team. One local baseball expert who will be paying particular attention to his efforts is Blue Jays scout Jim Ridley, who appears impressed with what he has seen over the past couple of years.

"Shayne was the kind of player who didn't realize what he had at first, but I like the way he's been maturing. I'm anxious to see him pitch now," said Ridley. "If he really works hard over the next three years, I think Shayne has a real future in baseball if he wants it."

And while not looking too far ahead, Ferrier certainly intends to make every effort to go beyond the college level. "I'll be watching the Olympic baseball games closely this summer. It'll be about time for the 2000 Olympic trials when I finish school, so that's something to consider. I'm also hoping to eventually get drafted. I guess that's what every player really wants."

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