

Four home runs power East win

THUMPERS: Antoine McLeod collects his first homer of the year.

By Josh Niva
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Antoine McLeod has played organized baseball for 10 years, and he's always played it at full speed.

So when the lightning quick East High center fielder lifted a high shot to right field Monday, he flew out of the box like he always does, wheels churning, head up, sniffing for the extra base. He was expecting to shift gears between first and second base -- he just didn't think he'd have to shift down.

McLeod hit the first home run of his career during a fourth inning that featured four roundtrippers as the T-birds dropped an 8-2 decision on the Service High Cougars in Region IV play at Kosinski Fields.

McLeod, Corey Madden, Grant Bledsoe and Chad Sherwood each went yard in a wild inning that took a tight 1-1 game and turned it into a home-run derby video game.

McLeod's dinger wasn't exactly the first of his life -- he hit an in-the-park job earlier this season. It was the first home run he could enjoy with a trot around the bases, though. Too bad he was streaking halfway between first and second when the ball landed in the grass just beyond the right-field fence.

"I knew I hit it hard, but I don't know the feeling of hitting a home run," McLeod said with a smile and a shrug of his sprint out of the box.

Before McLeod could say anything else, Bledsoe welcomed him to the big boy club in typical baseball fashion.

"Well, he had the short porch in rightfield," Bledsoe said with a laugh.

"Thanks," McLeod replied.

McLeod's shot might have been the least expected, but Madden's had the most impact.

Madden, the team's starting pitcher, had allowed a run on a pair of hits in the top of the fourth that pulled Service into a 1-1 tie. He got himself and his team back on top in a hurry with one out in the bottom of the frame when he cranked a no-doubt-about-it solo shot to deep left field to put East back on top.

"We all knew Corey's was gone," Bledsoe said, getting nods from McLeod and Madden after the game.

The home run marked the T-birds' first hit of the game off Service lefty Ryan Callaway, but it wasn't their last. Jordan Farkas followed Madden with a single leading to Bledsoe's two-run home run to right-center one batter later.

After a Brant Jensen flyout for the second out, Jim Obermeyer singled to bring McLeod, the team's leadoff hitter, to the plate for his home-run heroics. The T-birds were barely back in the dugout from congratulating McLeod when the next hitter, Sherwood, followed with his home run to right-center. Callaway ended the inning by fanning Chris Tuck, the ninth batter of the frame.

So how does a team that hasn't had a hit in three innings pound out six hits and four home runs in the next eight at-bats? Simple baseball philosophy, of course.

"They just hit the ball well," Service coach Steve Nerland said. "No magic."

McLeod retorted with his own theory.

"Hitting's contagious," said McLeod, who later had an RBI double in the sixth. "Corey started us off, and everybody else followed. It pumped everybody up."

Including Madden, who returned to the hill and retired six of the next 10 batters he faced before being pulled with one out in the seventh for Sherwood.

"I came back after that inning, and I was pumped," said Madden, who finished with six strikeouts, three walks and four hits allowed. "After that, I kept them where I wanted them."

Service pieced together a run in the top of the seventh but had the rally cut short when Tristan Varella was thrown out at the plate trying to score from second on a single by a throw from McLeod. It was just another downer in a frustrating offensive night for the Cougars.

"I just don't think we got into a rhythm," Nerland said. "And Madden did a good job on the mound. He kept the hitters off-balance."

Callaway allowed eight runs on nine hits, striking out four and walking just one.

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East 001 601 X -- 8 9 1

Service -- Callaway and Miller. East -- Madden, Sherwood (7) and Tuck, Baldwin. W -
- Madden. L -- Callaway. 2B -- Service: Rider. East: Baldwin, Gregg, McLeod. HR --
East: Madden, Bledsoe, McLeod, Sherwood.