BA scrambles for title

Wild play helps Eagles halt Unicoi

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CHATTANOOGA — Brentwood Academy's football team will even have a hard time living up to this one.

The Eagles first Class AA baseball championship couldn't have been more dramatic than their 5-4 victory yesterday over Unicoi County (32-4) at Engel Stadium.

With Brentwood Academy (26-14) leading 5-1 going into the bottom of the seventh, Unicoi County battled back with three two-out runs and had the bases loaded.

Cleanup hitter Jonathan Johnson swung and missed at reliever Brooks Rutledge's first pitch, but it bounced off catcher Lance Phillips' glove and rolled toward the backstop on the third-base side.

Running down the ball with Unicoi pinch runner Jerad Huskins running for home, Phillips delivered a strike to Rutledge at the plate, the out was called and Brentwood Academy had its first baseball state crown.

"It just went off the top of my mitt," Phillips said. "Luckily, I got it before it got to the dirt and I just turned around and threw it. I was going to throw it no matter what."

"I was just hoping Lance would get to the ball in time, and he gave me a perfect throw," said Rutledge, who struggled to get the final out after winning pitcher Wyatt Allen lasted 6⅓ innings. "I got there and I just sat at the plate. Anyway you can get an out, it didn't matter to me. I just wanted to win."

Allen struck out seven before letting Rutledge earn his second victory of the state tournament.

Allen left with two outs, the bases loaded and the score still 5-1.

Rutledge, who got a complete-game victory over Unicoi Thursday, allowed a single to Ryan Hyder to make it 5-3. He hit a batter, and a wild pitch resulted in another run. Brentwood Academy Coach Buddy Alexander had Unicoi's Nick Lingerfelt walked intentionally to load the bases, but the next pitch was the one that ended the game.

"I thought it was a heckuva play by Lance," Alexander said. "He's the starting quarterback on the football team the last two years. I would say he's got the athletic ability and the awareness to come through on a play like that."

Lingerfelt's wild pitch scored Rocky Robinson in the first inning, and he walked Benjamin Walker and Jon Pirtle to force in another run. Jim Clark's fielder's choice put the Eagles up 3-0 before Allen ever took the mound.

"That first inning was good for the team and good for me because it made me concentrate knowing we had a lead to take care of," Allen said.

In the bottom of the fifth, Robinson made a catch off a line drive by Tim Hensley and doubled off Josh Bailey at first.

"If that goes through its first and third nobody out," said Allen, "Instead it's two outs and nobody on. It killed their momentum and picked us up."

In the sixth, Robinson hit a two-out double to score Eric Settle.

Phillips said this means more than the two Eagle state championship football teams he quarterbacked.

"We've got I don't know how many football championships, but this is the first in baseball," said Phillips. I don't think people even know if we have a baseball team."

They do now. ■