

Warriors finish third in state

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The Del Norte Junior All Stars put up a total of 28 runs through its first three games at the Oregon Little League State Tournament in Bend, Oregon this week but in the semifinal on Tuesday the Warriors bats went quiet. That allowed LeGrande, which Del Norte beat 8-6 on Sunday, to advance to the championship round with a 6-2 victory over the Warriors in Tuesday's rematch.

"We just had one inning where we scored, and other than that our bats were dead," said Del Norte head coach Levi Thomas. "We only had four basehits all game. We had a lot of good pitches to hit, but we just kept popping them up. They just weren't making solid contact."

It was a tough finish to an otherwise impressive State Tournament appearance in which the Junior All Stars advanced the farthest of any of the four Del Norte teams who competed at state this summer.

"I know that we were better than the team that we were playing. Our bats were just dead, so they were a better team today," Thomas said. "I told them that it is a big accomplishment coming in third. I mean, third in the state? That is nothing to sneeze at. So they need to keep their heads high."

The hits didn't come like they did in the first couple days of play in Bend, but Thomas said the team's effort stayed consistent.

"I am proud of the kids. They worked hard and they played hard, but that's baseball," Thomas said. "Some days you hit and some days you don't. Today they put in the effort, they worked hard, it's just that the bats weren't working. So I am proud of every single one of those kids. They laid it out on the line, and we just came up a little bit short — that's baseball."

Although the bats were quite, Del Norte did manage to make some noise in the field with solid defense to go along with some spectacular plays.

"We had a lot of good stops but we made a couple throwing errors. Other than that they didn't play bad in the field," Thomas said. "Gavin Skerik started the game and he pitched a really good game. They just had some really good hits on him. He went four strong innings, then Ethan (Thomas) closed out the fifth and six."

"Willie (Bommelyn) had some good defensive plays, Giancarlo DeSolenni had some good plays in the outfield, Ethan had some good plays at shortstop, and Isaiah Parsley had a nice tag-out at third where the kid took him completely out but he held onto the ball with the tag. We played a pretty good game defensively."

Offensively Del Norte was led by Ethan Thomas, who finished the game with a single and a double. Brody Mattz had a two-RBI single, and Willie Bommelyn also had a single.

"Jacob Dane was awarded Most Valuable Player for our team by the district down here for his effort behind the plate catching," Thomas said. "His effort behind the plate stood out — stopping the ball, blocking the ball, and not letting it get by. He just worked hard back there. He had a couple throw downs and he just worked well behind the plate."

With the All Star season now at an end, Thomas said that most of the kids on the Junior All Stars will be playing for the Del Norte High School program next year, along with possibly playing in the Senior League during the summer.

"One of them is already in high school and they are all going up to the high school level next year, so the JV should have a strong team," Thomas said.

In honor of Zach Hegelmeyer

Throughout the tournament, Del Norte Little League had a couple special fans on hand cheering on the Warriors in Dave and Michelle Hegelmeyer. Although the Hegelmeyers now live in Bend, they are former Del Norte residents, where their son Zach Hegelmeyer grew up. Zach played Del Norte Little League baseball and went on to play baseball and basketball at Del Norte High School. After graduating Zach played baseball at George Fox University.

Following Zach's death in February 2018, at the age of 26, the Del Norte Little League dedicated its season to Zach's memory. This year both the Del Norte Major Baseball All Stars, and the Junior Baseball All Stars

played in the Oregon State Tournament in Bend which brought the Dave and Michelle Hegelmeyer back out to the ballpark to cheer on Del Norte.

“At the end we gave the Heglemeyer’s one of our actual All Star hats, and it was signed by the team and the coaches,” Thomas said. “We dedicated the whole tournament to them and we did the best that we could for Zach Hegelmeyer and his memory. That is really important to us.”

Although there was a significant age gap between Zach and the players on the Junior All Star Team, Thomas said everyone on the team knows who he was.

“There are a few of them that had personal relationships with Zach Hegelmeyer that I know of, and the rest of them knew of him,” Thomas said. “Basically baseball was that kid’s life. He had a big impact on our town so we just wanted to remember him in a good way and dedicate this tournament to him.”