

Major baseball drops first 2 at state

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The Del Norte Major Baseball All Stars ended up making an early exit from the Oregon Little League State Tournament in Bend, Oregon over the weekend. The Warriors started the tournament with a 4-2 loss against host North Bend on Saturday, before being eliminated from the tournament with a 5-2 loss against Medford American on Sunday.

“Bend North is pretty good,” said Del Norte head coach Cris Rice. “I feel like they are going to make it back to the championship game even though they lost to Sprague (on Sunday). We had a tough draw, we played really good teams. We put a lot of time and energy into getting prepared but it is just one of those things. They are 12-year-old kids. Sometimes they show up and sometimes the nerves and the tension gets to them. I just felt like we made too many mistakes and they ended up costing us.”

Rice said the early exit was disappointing because the Warriors believed that they had the talent and experience to make a deep run at State.

"I didn't want it to end," Rice said. "I've been with the kids for a long time, it was a fun group, and we put in a lot of hard work. So to come up here and go two-and-out was probably the furthest thing from our minds. If we played seven more weekends the outcome may have been different each time, it just wasn't meant to be."

Rice said the team's pitching was outstanding throughout the weekend, but Del Norte committed at least three errors in each of its two games, and couldn't muster up enough offense to make up for it.

Del Norte's first game of the tournament against North Bend drew a large crowd with fans of the home team and travelers from California looked on.

"That was a pretty cool environment," Rice said. "It was the home team that we were playing so there were between 250 and 300 people, including a lot of people from Crescent City watching the game."

Rice said starting pitcher Preston Daniels managed to keep Del Norte in the game throughout, despite several costly errors. Saxon Taylor also pitched well in a relief effort.

"Daniels pitched a gem," Rice said. "He got the hitters off balance and he got lots of compliments from other coaches afterwards."

The game came down to the final at bat. Del Norte trailed by two runs, but managed to take advantage of a couple errors by North Bend to load up the bases. The Warriors just couldn't get the hit that they needed to push them over the top.

"We had a chance to win with a double, or a chance to tie it with a single," Rice said. "It just didn't happen for us. But we were in position to win that first game, which is all that you can ask for in the tournament. If you don't win the first game you have a really hard time coming back and making it all the way. So it was going to be almost impossible for us to come back and win it after the first game, but we still had a good mindset going into game two."

Against Medford American Del Norte sent Taylor back to the pitching mound, and Rice said he also pitched well before reaching his pitch count. Collin Tromble then went to the hill to get the last two outs for Del Norte. Once again, however, Rice said the Warriors made a few errors that turned into runs for Medford, and the team couldn't string together enough hits.

"Saxon and Preston pitched about 95 percent of the games for us and they were really impressive," Rice said. "Only scoring four runs in two games makes it tough. It is a lot to ask of your pitching and defense to keep teams to one or zero runs."

Although Warriors ended up being knocked out earlier than they had hoped, Rice said he told the team that it shouldn't take away from all that they have accomplished this summer.

"I just told them that I was super proud of all that they have done in baseball," he said. "I want them to remember that one tournament, or game, or play doesn't define who you are. They have a lot of baseball left in them, and we want to encourage all of them to continue on in Junior League next year, or come back to the

Major program. I just want them to love baseball and play. Win, lose, or draw there are always going to be more games. It was a high-stakes tournament and every team was good.”