

Floyd County product propels Louisville baseball team into Super Regional

Written by George Browning

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In recent years there has been a direct connection between Floyd County and the success of the University of Louisville baseball team.

Floyd Central's Jeff Thompson was a three-year player for the Cardinals before being taken in last year's draft.

Thompson pitched in big game after big game.

This year New Albany High School produce Josh Rogers hasn't been the go-to guy, but he has found himself on the mound in crucial moments.

One of those moments was during the regional championship game against the University of Kentucky.

Rogers, who is the son of Bobby and Eldora Rogers, was solid throughout his six innings of work.

"The first couple of starts I had were real early coming off my arm surgery," Rogers said. "I feel like since then I've grown as a pitcher. I have a lot more confidence in both the running game and making pitches when I had to.

"I think that was the difference for me tonight – just having more confidence and more

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experience on the mound.”

In those six innings, Rogers allowed just one run on four hits. He didn't walk anybody and struck out five Wildcat hitters.

While he admitted to having solid stuff and being able to locate his fastball when he needed to, he credits the play of his defense behind him in helping secure the win.

“Having these guys behind me makes my job that much easier,” he said.

The defining moment for Rogers came in the fifth inning when he found himself in trouble against the UK offense.

U of L Head Coach Dan McDonnell headed to the mound for what looked like a pitching change and Rogers remained in the game.

“I was locked in and I wanted to stay in the game and I told Coach Mac this was my hitter and I wanted him,” Rogers said. “He told me to go get him!”

In a game full of big plays none was bigger than the one made by Cole Sturgeon in the bottom of the seventh inning.

Cole Sturgeon made a sliding catch on a Kyle Barrett ball and hoped in one motion and threw Thomas Bernal out at home when he tried to tag.

“I got a good jump on the ball and came up ready to throw,” Sturgeon said. “I kind of felt like they were going to be aggressive and force the issue, because they had done that earlier in the tournament. Gibbie (Kyle Gibson) made a great play on the ball.”

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Had the run scored, UK would have been down just two runs, instead, U of L headed into the eighth with its 4-1 lead intact.

There were a few ninth inning moments that had the faithful fans who remained holding their breath including the seven straight balls thrown by the Cards' closer Nick Burdi.

Burdi followed the seven straight balls with five strikes in a row and settled down to get the save, his 16th of the season.

For Rogers, he improves to 3-3 on the year and may get another shot to start this week in the Super Regional, which will also be played in Louisville.

The winner of the Louisville Regional was slated to travel to Tallahassee to take on Florida State, but the Noles lost, allowing the Cardinals a chance to host this weekend's super regional.

The stakes will be high as this week's winner will advance to the College World Series. If Louisville finds a way to get the job done, it will be the first ever back-to-back trip to Omaha.

Alex Chittenden, who was three for five with a run batted in, said consecutive trips to the College World Series would be even bigger considering the players U of L lost last year.

"It would be huge," he said. "Having a chance to get back there has been one of our goals all year and credit to the players and coaches we did it."

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The opponent and schedule won't be finalized until Monday's regional final between Alabama and Kennesaw State.