**JESUIT SHOCKS NATIONAL POWERHOUSE BISHOP KENNY 4-1 FOR 4A TITLE**

(PUBLISHED MAY 15, 2000 ON VARSITYONLINE.COM)

(PUBLISHED MAY 16, 2000 ON FOXSPORTS.COM)

**By DAVID BRACKMAN**

TAMPA, Fla. ― A team of no-names overcame a team of superstars in the Class 4A state championship game Thursday night at Legends Field when Tampa Jesuit, regarded by many as a non-factor this year due to its inexperience, outshined senior-laden Jacksonville Bishop Kenny, ranked No. 2 in two national polls, 4-1 in the state title game.

Josh Weis pitched four shutout innings of one-hit relief, Jesuit played another error-free game defensively and the Tigers scored three unearned runs with a few timely hits to send the third of Florida’s four national top 10 teams to a loss in the state tournament in a little over 24 hours.

Jesuit has a rich baseball tradition, but how unlikely was it for this year’s Tigers to capture a third state title since 1994?

The Tigers came into Thursday’s title game after having pulled from the grave a last-second 2-1 win over Royal Palm Beach in Wednesday’s semifinals. Jesuit scored twice in the bottom of the seventh after it had two outs and nobody on base when the bottom four spots in the batting order produced four straight hits, two of them with two strikes. Until then Jesuit was looking at its first season without 20 wins since 1987.

Speaking of records, Jesuit finished 21-13 after a 10-12 start, the most losses in any of coach John Crumbley’s 16 seasons. Bishop Kenny, which finished 34-12, had lost to a Florida team this year. (The Crusaders’ only other loss was April 8 to Greenbrier Christian of Virginia.) Bishop Kenny is ranked No. 2 in the nation by both Baseball America and FOXSports, while Jesuit was unranked in the latest Class 4A state poll.

Bishop Kenny had blasted national powerhouse Zephyrhills, which set a state record with 63 home runs and was ranked No. 8 by Baseball America and No. 11 by FOXSports, 9-0 in a 4A semifinal game Wednesday.

Speaking of offensive production, Bishop Kenny averaged 11 runs and 14 hits per game and boasted a batting average over .400 with its all-senior batting order. Jesuit, with four seniors on the team and two freshman starters, was batting .261. Bishop Kenny had more than three times as many home runs as Jesuit (42-13).

“I hate to say this, but at the beginning of the season, if someone asked me where I would be right now at this moment, I would have said at home,” Tigers sophomore David Ochotorena, who got into Thursday’s game as a pinch runner and scored Jesuit’s first run, said after the game. “When I saw all my friends celebrating, I just couldn’t get over it. It’s still sinking in.”

Jesuit scored solo runs in the second and third Thursday. Bishop Kenny closed the gap with a run in the fourth, but Jesuit added two runs in the seventh and Weis, who came on with runners on the corners and nobody out in the fourth after starter David Bartelt could not continue because of a blister on his thumb, retired the final seven Crusaders batters in order.

“We really thought we could do this. We just took a different path” than previous years, said Crumbley, who led Jesuit to 4A state titles in 1994 and 1997, when the Tigers were also named national champions by Baseball America. “Once you get on a roll. You can keep it going. In the last month, we’ve played some outstanding baseball.”

Bishop Kenny was left to ponder what went wrong at the end of an outstanding run.

“I really hurt for my 12 (seniors). You’d like to carry it out and walk away from the season with a win at the end,” said Bishop Kenny coach Bob West.

“The thing for us was we couldn’t get the leadoff hitter on. They got the leadoff hitter on more times and when that happens, it presents scoring opportunities. You’re able to bunt and do things to make things happen and get things going.”

Matt Marti, the starting and losing pitcher for the Crusaders, said Jesuit might have simply been a team of destiny. “They just had the magic tonight and it showed,” he said. “They fed off (Wednesday’s last minute comeback) all game long.”

Jesuit scored its only earned run in the second inning. Freshman catcher Eric Baumann drew a leadoff walk and Bartelt sacrificed him to second. Carl Smith, who put on a dazzling defensive display at three different infield positions in the two state tournament games, singled to center on an 0-2 pitch to drive in pinch runner Ochotorena with the run.

The Tigers added a second run in the third when Loren Prive reached on an infield error and scored on a triple into the right field corner by Danny Plasencia.

Bartelt, a junior righthander who had thrown a three-hit shutout in his last outing, retired nine of Bishop Kenny’s first 11 batters, but singles by Tony Ritchie and Marti to open the fourth brought Kenny to the mound.

“He (Bartelt) had a blister on his thumb and he gave us all he could but that was it,” said Crumbley, who inserted Weis. “He couldn’t throw his fastball (because) it was coming off his thumb. To be (unable) to throw his fastball and still hang in there into the fourth inning shows great fortitude.”

“He (Crumbley) told me all year long that if any of (the starting pitchers) get in trouble, I would get the ball,” said Weis (7-3), a senior righthander. “I knew the ball would be in my hand near the final outs. I’ve come in in situations like that the last two years and I knew we were playing defense well, so I had confidence.”

Weis struck out Jesse Stakes, but Marti stole second during the at bat. Grant Webber then lifted a fly to short center that freshman Shane Robinson snared with a diving catch. Ritchie scored on the sacrifice fly and Marti moved to third, but Marc Simon grounded out to third to end the inning. The Crusaders would have only one more baserunner ― Matt Rumble singled with two outs in the fifth ― and he never got past first.

The Tigers added two insurance runs in the seventh, both unearned. No. 9 batter Matt Lukevics led off with a single. Pat Rumble, who on Wednesday had pitched a one-hit shutout against Zephyrhills, came in to pitch and Robinson laid down a bunt that he beat out for a single. The bases were loaded after Prive bunted and Matt Rumble threw high to third on an attempted force for an error. A walk to Placensia brought in the third run and Robinson scored the fourth run on a wild pitch.

“Even going in to the bottom of the seventh, with the club we have we always feel like we have a chance tonight, even with three runs down,” West said. “But they made all the plays. Their pitcher got ground balls and pop flies. Then the team that executes wins.”

Jesuit played its third consecutive errorless game, sparked by rightfielder Plasencia, who flipped over a grandstand railing and landed in the bullpen to make a spectacular catch of Matt Rumble’s fly leading off the bottom of the first.

“It was the beginning of the game and I had complete focus. My eyes did not get off the ball and then that fence happened to run into me,” said Plasencia. “Momentum is a big key in this game and after I made that catch, we got some momentum.”

“Defensively, we may have played two of the most perfect games I ever coached,” said Crumbley, referring to Jesuit’s semifinal and title game defense.

Plasencia also credited Jesuit’s fans for the win. Although their travel time was less than any other team in the tournament ― Jesuit’s campus is less than a mile from Tampa’s Legends Field, spring training home of the New York Yankees ― “our fans, it’s the greatest feeling with these fans rooting us on, it picks you up,” Plasencia said.

Bishop Kenny is the third of four Florida teams ranked in the national top 10 by major polls to lose in the state playoffs. The Crusaders, who were ranked No. 2 by both Baseball America and FOXSports, dumped Zephyrhills (No. 8 Baseball America, No. 11 FOXSports) in a Class 4A semifinal game Wednesday and Miami Gulliver Prep (No. 10 Baseball America and No. 6 FOXSports) fell to Eustis in a Class 3A semifinal, also Wednesday. The only other Top 10 national team in Florida, Wellington, will play Friday (May 18) in a Class 6A semifinal. Wellington (30-1), the defending 6A champion, is ranked No. 1 in the country by Baseball America and No. 3 by Baseball America.