

Dixie Youth Majors: Headland wins its first state title

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Figure 1 DANNY TINDELL / DOTHAN EAGLE

Members of the Headland Dixie Youth Baseball team celebrate after winning the Alabama State Tournament in Headland Thursday.

HEADLAND – A little more ‘Bower Power’ mixed in with dominating pitching and slick fielding paved the way for Headland to win its first ever Dixie Youth Majors (ages 11-12) state baseball title on Thursday night at Douglas Park.

Headland, the host team of the 12-team tournament, defeated Bellingrath of Montgomery 6-0 in the championship game to finish undefeated in five games.

Headland advances to the Dixie Youth World Series in Laurel, Miss., next week and will begin play on Saturday, Aug. 3, against the Virginia state champion at 7:30 p.m.

The final out came when Chase Wilkerson recorded his seventh strikeout in the final three innings of work, sending the Headland players into a celebration on the field.

In the two previous years, Headland finished runner-up in the state tournament. Headland became the first host team to win a Dixie Youth Majors state tournament since Pelham did it in 1991.

“I’m kind of speechless,” coach Greg Wilkerson said. “Two years coming in second, so this has been a three-year process. That’s what I told them today. You’re playing for the last two teams that finished second.”

Josh Bower got the team rolling in the bottom of the second inning with a two-run homer that bounced off the glove of the centerfielder and over the fence. It was Bower’s fifth home run of the tournament.

“It means a lot because it helps the team so much, and I couldn’t have done it without my dad helping me so much,” Bower said of hitting the homers this week. “He’s been right there helping me the whole time. I also couldn’t have done it without these guys (teammates).”

Headland got its third run in the second inning when Cam Ingram walked with the bases loaded. In the fourth, Chase Wilkerson took a pitch the opposite way and stroked it over the left field fence for a 4-0 advantage.

Wilkerson, the son of the head coach, then came in to pitch the final three innings in relief of Ryan Rose, who was superb on the mound over the first three innings. Rose, mixing up his pitches well, allowed three hits – one each inning – while striking out three.

Once Wilkerson entered the game, his strong fastball was overpowering against the Bellingrath batters.

Lamont Mitchell did open the top of the fifth with a single, but then Wilkerson recorded a strikeout before Andre Marshall lined out to Ingram, who made a great stab of the ball at shortstop and then turned it into a double play by throwing out Mitchell as he tried to scamper back to first.

Headland got two insurance runs in the fifth. Jacob Milanowski led off with a walk and Ingram followed with a single. After Will Griffin flied out to center, Seth Goodson singled to load the bases with one out.

Max Roland's infield grounder was fielded and Goodson was forced at second, but two runs came into score when the throw to first base in an attempt at a double play got away.

Wilkerson then set Bellingrath down in order in the top of the sixth, striking out each batter to end the game. Wilkerson has been on the past three Headland teams.

“Felt amazing,” Chase Wilkerson said of getting the final out. “I don't even know what to say because it felt so good.”

Earlier in the day, Headland defeated Thomasville 8-2 to reach the championship game as the only unbeaten team left in the tournament.

In that game, Bower hit a grand slam in the third inning to put Headland on top 5-0. It marked the third grand slam for Headland this week, which set a new state tournament record.

Milanowski hit a home run in the fourth inning after Thomasville had plated a run to make it 6-1. After Thomasville scored a run in the bottom of the fourth, Headland got its final two runs when Rose singled in Wilkerson and Roland, both who had singled in the inning.

Coleman Wright pitched the first three innings before Matthew Sherrill finished up on the mound. Wright allowed one hit and struck out three, while Sherrill allowed one hit and struck out six.

“I want to praise God for helping us win the state championship,” Wright said. “It's just an amazing feeling.”

Bellingrath advanced to the title game by eliminating Munford earlier in the day, 5-4.

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