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Blue Valley wins Kansas 6A baseball title

By TEREZ A. PAYLOR
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TOPEKA | The plan was a simple one.

Blue Valley would start senior J.P. LaMunyon at pitcher in its Kansas 6A state championship game against Goddard on Sunday at Hummer Sports Park. And as soon as LaMunyon — who was making his first start at the position in almost four years — began to falter, they would go to their ace, senior Nate Kerkhoff.

Luckily for the Tigers, even the best-laid plans sometimes unravel. Kerkhoff made a huge impact in the game, but it wouldn't come from the pitcher's mound. LaMunyon pitched a one-hitter and led the Tigers to a 4-0 victory and their first state baseball title since 1992.

"I was just hoping he would get me through three or four innings, but he kept dealing, and I wasn't going to take him out," said Tigers coach Matt Ortman. "He just stepped up."

LaMunyon, who typically plays shortstop but appeared in 10 games as a reliever this season, said he knew he had his best stuff in his bullpen session before the game.

"I was throwing my curveball for strikes, and my fastball had good velocity," LaMunyon said.

However, LaMunyon would have plenty of help in taming the Lions. Blue Valley threatened to blow the game open in the first inning, when Goddard pitcher Jordan Jennings struggled with his control. Jennings hit a batter and walked three Tigers, including one with the bases loaded and two outs for the first run of the game.

However, Jennings pitched out of the jam and managed to keep the game close until the fifth inning, when he was knocked out of the game after he allowed the first two Tigers to reach base. Jeremiah Emrich came on in relief and surrendered a two-out, bases loaded hit to Kerkhoff that drove in two runs and made the score 3-0.

That was more than enough cushion for LaMunyon, who had a no-hitter going into the fifth inning. But Blue Valley sophomore Cory Segui added another run when he crushed a fastball more than 325 feet over the left-field fence in the sixth inning.

LaMunyon, whose no-hitter was broken up when a Goddard player singled in the fifth, overpowered the Lions in the final innings and clinched the title for the Tigers, who finished with a 19-6 record.

"We knew we had the talent, and we were finally able to go out the right way," Kerkhoff said. "You couldn't ask for a better ending."

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