

Martinez 'squeezes' Tigers into second round of playoffs

NATCHITOCHEs, La. - Senior Preston Martinez laid down a perfectly executed safety squeeze bunt to score Payne Williams in the bottom of the eighth inning to push across the game-winning run as the 14th-ranked St. Mary's Tigers' baseball team edged the 19th-ranked Ascension Catholic Bulldogs, 3-2, Thursday night at home in the first round of the Division IV select playoffs.

The Tigers (20-12) jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first inning as Ayden Warren and Martinez hit back-to-back RBI singles with two outs to put SMH out in front. However, the SMH offense stalled for the next six innings.

Williams kept the Tigers in the lead as he pitched five innings of shutout ball allowing just three hits, two walks and struck out one.

Sophomore pitcher Trey Scarborough came in relief and allowed two runs, two hits and struck out three in three innings as he picked up the win.

The Bulldogs (11-16) hung tough behind the arm of starting pitcher Jackson Landry as the game remained 2-0 going to the top of the sixth inning. Landry helped his own cause as he blasted the second pitch from Scarborough over the left-center field wall to tie the game at 2-2.

Scarborough held strong from there as he thwarted rallies in the seventh and eighth innings from the Bulldogs.

In the bottom of the eighth, Williams led the inning off and was hit by a pitch. Williams advanced to second on a groundout then to third on a wild pitch. The Bulldogs, then, elected to intentionally walk Warren which set up Martinez's heroics. The Tigers' centerfielder laid down a bunt that rolled perfectly down the first base line to score Williams easily for the game-winning run.

"He (Landry) had been pitching me backwards all game," said Martinez. "So, I figured I could execute the bunt. But it was a hard-fought game by all of us and I'm just glad to be playing another game with my brothers."

Martinez finished with two hits and two RBIs to lead the Tigers who had five hits against Landry.

Landry pitched seven 1/3 innings and allowed three earned runs, five hits, three walks and three strikeouts.

The Tigers advance to the quarterfinals to face the third-ranked Ouachita Christian Eagles (22-6) at date and time to be determined.