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'Win or go home' for Miners

West Virginia and Chillicothe tonight for Eastern title

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BECKLEY — Game 7 is here. The West Virginia Miners hope it comes twice on Wednesday, as well.

When the Miners take on Chillicothe tonight for the Prospect League's Eastern Division championship, the mentality will be simple.

"It's win or go home," first baseman Blake Roberts said. "We've got to bring everything we've got to Chillicothe for this game. We're in the playoffs, that's a big deal and anything can happen now. It (comes down to) whoever gets hot at the right time."

Nine days ago, after the Miners had lost their fifth straight game, manager Tim Epling likened the rest of the summer to the World Series. There were six games remaining in the regular season, and the playoffs would take on a seventh-game mood.

Well, West Virginia (26-30) goes into the playoffs having lost 10 of 11, including five straight.

Not exactly the kind of momentum a team looks for entering the postseason.

But the Miners are here, in their first year of existence, no less. Like Roberts said, anything can happen at this point.

"(Getting to the playoffs) was our No. 1 goal, regardless of how we got there," Epling said.

The Miners got here with a monumental assist from right-handed pitcher Dean Wolosiansky, who will get the nod for today's 7:05 p.m. start.

Wolosiansky (5-1) has constructed an award-caliber summer for the Miners. He leads the league in earned run average at 1.19, is tied for third in wins and tied for fourth in strikeouts (54) and opponents' batting average (.186).

The Ohio State product has not allowed a home run or thrown a wild pitch in 68 innings of work.

A win tonight would avenge Wolosiansky's only loss of the season. He allowed one earned run when he hit a batter with the bases loaded in a 2-0 loss July 14.

Wolosiansky has a 0.60 ERA in two starts against the Paints. He struck out 10 in an eight-inning,



The West Virginia Miners will take on the Chillicothe Paints at 7:05 p.m. today for the Prospect League's Eastern Division championship. The Miners made the playoffs in their first year of existence. Submitted photo

148-pitch no-decision on July 9.

"It will be different, because I have seen them a couple of times, but I am always up for a challenge," said Wolosiansky, who was able to spend Sunday night in the comfort of his Ohio home. "It goes both ways. They have seen me pitch, but I have seen their bats. They know my tendencies and I know theirs."

Chillicothe manager Brian Mannino is well aware of Wolosiansky's abilities. He indicated after last Thursday's 12-0 win over the Miners that Wolosiansky would make it difficult for the Paints in their quest for a league championship.

"We know they'd come with Wolo and that's what you want," Mannino said. "It makes it exciting. And tough, because he is the best pitcher in the league, in my opinion. But to be the best, you've got to beat the best."

"He's the best pitcher in the league," Epling asserted. "But the pressure is on him, too. I know that Chillicothe is going to say, to be the best, they've got to beat Dean. ... I think (Mannino) was sending a message to his guys, to focus in on Dean. So that's a challenge unto itself, and I understand that."

In Wolosiansky's two appearances against the Paints, Chillicothe star Jeff Holm was a combined 1 for 7 with one run batted in. That is amazing in itself, considering Holm missed the league's Triple Crown by .007 in the batting race.

Holm, a left-handed right fielder from Michigan State, has had a ridiculous year. He is the league's home run champion with 11 and RBI leader with 60, and finished second with a .359 batting average (Nashville's Kevin Smith won the batting title at .366).

He also leads the league with a .622 slugging percentage, 78 hits, 18 doubles and 38 stolen bases.

Holm isn't alone. Teammate Ian Nielsen, an infielder from Ball State, is second in homers (10) and RBIs (50). Greg Van Horn is hitting .317 and has driven in 33 runs, and outfielder Torsten Boss is at .306 with 31 RBIs.

Chillicothe, which has beaten the Miners seven times in eight meetings this season, is the league's top hitting team (.279) and is seventh in pitching (3.78).

The Miners will have to hit better today than they did last time out against the Paints (39-17). Chillicothe starter Matt Barnes allowed three hits over seven innings last Thursday.

Left-hander Blake Mascarello (7-1) is the league's wins leader and has a 2.86 ERA. Andrew Richardson is 5-2, 3.40, and closer Kyle Lindquist has 10 saves in 25 appearances.

West Virginia (.265) is fourth in the league in hitting, but 13th out of 15 teams in pitching with a 4.59 ERA.

Designated hitter Victor Gomez is batting .321 with three homers and 24 RBIs. Outfielder Jeremy Robinson and catcher Chris Kay are tied for the team lead with four home runs, while second baseman Travis Isaak leads with 30 RBIs.

Center fielder Joe Koch (.305) has done a magnificent job at the leadoff spot. He has a .428 on-base percentage and has walked 37 times while stealing 16 bases, all team-highs. The Kent State product also leads the Miners with 42 runs scored and is second with 57 hits.

Tonight's winner will play in Wednesday's championship round at Chillicothe's VA Memorial Stadium. The top seed will receive a bye, with the second and third seeds playing at 3:05 p.m.

The top seed will play the winner at 7:05 p.m. for the Prospect League championship.

Just getting a chance to play for a championship in the team's inaugural season is a success in itself.

"It's a huge accomplishment," said Roberts, who has raised his batting average to .267 with a recent surge. "A lot of these teams have been in this league for (many years) and know what to expect. For us coming in, a new team kind of meshing together, that is a compliment to the ownership and the management of the team to get us to mesh as a team.

"Hopefully, having Dean and (fellow all-star Chris) Marlowe ready, we can win three games and bring home a championship."

"They (the Paints) are good," said Wolosiansky, "but I think we are better. I think we can do it."

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