

# Boyertown rallies back, tops Souderton to keep state playoff hopes alive

**BOYERTOWN** >> He'd practiced for the moment for years.

Okay, so it was on a soccer field, smacking balls away from the nets. But Mason Kurtz took that skill set and made it pay off big for the Boyertown baseball team Tuesday.

Kurtz scored the winning run for the Bears in their District 1 Class 6A playback game with Souderton. His headfirst slide over home plate on a wild pitch, with two outs in a tie game, was the difference in a 7-6 affair at Bear Stadium.

"I saw the ball get away from the catcher," the sophomore, pinch-running for Mike Hohlfeld, said of the play. "I thought the coach (Todd Moyer) was saying 'no,' so I hesitated before I went. It turned out he was saying 'go.'"

Kurtz's heads-up play completed Boyertown's comeback from an initial 5-0 deficit against the Indians, who had taken a 6-5 lead in the top of the sixth after the Bears pulled even in the fourth. The 13th-seeded Big Red had struck for a four-spot in the second after scoring in their first at-bat, Conlan Wall putting the visitors back in front as he drew a walk and came around off Luke Shank's sacrifice bunt toward third, Luke Barnum's bouncer to first and Blaise Scalafani reaching base on an error.

Boyertown (18-6) is one win away for yet another spot in the state playoffs for its storied history. The eighth-seeded Bears will visit third-seeded Downingtown West Thursday, with the winner getting the spoils of the last berth from District 1 in the 6A field.

“It wasn’t too far out,” Souderton manager Mike Childs said of the game-winning play by Boyertown, coming after relief pitcher Jordan Morales had fanned two Bears. “Jordan came in and battled. It was just one ball slipping away.”

The stage for the game-ending dramatics was set by Mitchell Peers drawing a leadoff walk, then scoring from first off Mike Hohlfeld’s triple to center field – a hit the Souderton fielders appeared to lose in the shadows. Kurtz came on to pinch-run for Hohlfeld, and his moment of glory came on the first pitch to Mike Martin.

“I can’t recall a moment like this,” Kurtz said. “This was one of the most exciting endings ever.”

“This was one of my first varsity appearances. The coach asked me if I was ready, and I said I was.”

The Bears, coming off Friday’s one-run loss to Conestoga – like this game, they fought back in the later innings to make it close – pecked away at Souderton’s early advantage. They got two in the second, Martin (2-for-3) driving in one with a single, and another pair in the third with help from Austyn Levensgood’s bouncer to second and a wild pitch.

“We lost six games, five of them by one run,” Moyer recalled. “Now, we seem to have adopted the M.O. of starting slow and coming back to win.”

Colin Maloney, pinch-running for Martin (single) scored on another wild pitch in the fourth to knot the score at 5-5. That held in place until Wall (2-for-3) walked to start the Souderton sixth and came around for one last Big Red lead.

“Because this happened Friday – we went down early and came back – it wasn’t as uncomfortable today,” Mason said. “We got the momentum back.”

Noah Kurtz (5-1), coming on to pitch the sixth and seventh for

Boyertown, got the win yielding just one hit. Hohlfeld worked the first 4-1/3, touched for nine of Souderton's hits but striking out five.

Shank (2-for-2) drove in two of Souderton's runs in the second with a single. Wall (2-for-3) and Barnum (2-for-4) had other RBI as the Big Red collected 10 hits against a trio of Boyertown pitchers.

On the mound, Scalafani scattered six hits and yielded the Bears' first five runs through four innings, with four strikeouts to his credit. David Gulibon followed with two frames of relief before Morales came on in the seventh with none out and Boyertown sporting two baserunners.

"It was still an awesome season," Childs said. "Our seniors came up from the beginning. We had set a number of goals at the start of the season, and we met most of them.

"One was to make the state playoffs. We didn't make that, but making the playoffs ... they have a lot to be proud of."

**NOTES** >> Moyer was in a particularly jovial mood discussing the dramatic game-winning play. "We practice that all the time, except the head-first slide," he said jokingly. And in regard to Kurtz's form on the slide over home plate: "He's a goalie in soccer. He's paid to make head-first slides."