

ST3 – Playoff Thriller



Joey Bielek's two out hit in the ninth brought in the winning run

Firebirds
defeat Huskies
in extra inning
nail-biter

In a 3½ hour playoff matchup between regional rivals, **Chaparral** prevailed over **Horizon 12-11** in a nine inning thriller at Surprise Stadium Saturday night.

The game had something for every baseball fan – big hits, clutch pitching, tough defense, coaching strategy, small ball – and both teams battled to the end in a back-&-forth classic.

The see-saw struggle ended in the ninth when **Joey Bielek** came through with his biggest hit of the year on a two-out shot to the fence that brought in the winning run and emptied the dugout as the **Firebirds** swarmed home plate in celebration. **Bielek** continues to swing a hot bat with a 24 game hitting streak that warrants consideration for player of the year honors.

The victory marks the team's third straight tournament win, moving **Chaparral** into the 5A-II Pool Championship game on Thursday where they will play the winner of the Loser Bracket (**Horizon vs. Desert Mountain** – stay tuned!).

#6 Horizon wasted little time getting on the scoreboard when **Tanner Horn** hit a 2-run HR to take an early 2 – 0 lead. But **Chaparral** answered big-time with a seven-hit barrage that scored seven runs, chasing **Huskies** starting pitcher **Dean Jackson**. **Joey Bielek, Jordie Hein, Colby Targun, Nick DeRegis, Dillon Bigcrane, Kyle Toth, & Chance Adams** all had hits as the **Firebirds** brought ten batters to the plate to take a 7 – 2 lead after one inning.

The **Firebirds** threatened to run away with the game when they added three more runs in the second. **Jordie Hein** hit a lead-off single followed by a **Nick DeRegis** 2-run blast over the 400' marker in dead center for his team-leading 11th HR of the year, putting him in the school record books (tied for second behind **Paul Konerko's** '94 season record of 13). **Colby Targun** tripled, then scored when **AJ Schillinger** hit a sac fly to take a 10 – 2 lead.

But any thoughts of a one-sided landslide quickly disappeared as **Horizon** climbed back into the game with a third inning six-hit rally that produced five runs. **Johnny Rubino** got the **Huskies** started with a lead-off single - his first of three hits in the game – proving to be one of the

Firebird Flash



toughest outs of the season. In three games against the Firebirds, **Rubino** reached base in 11 of 13 PA & scored seven times. Also contributing to the rally were **Jordon Dunatov** with an rbi triple, **Michael McNamara**, **Luke Messer**, & **Tanner Horn** with hits that cut the lead to 10 – 7.

The rejuvenated **Huskies** shut down **Chaparral** 1-2-3 in the bottom of the third and suddenly it was a new ballgame. But after three innings of offensive firepower that produced 17 combined runs, defense and great pitching by both teams took over resulting in three straight shutout innings. **Horizon's Julian Carlos** held the **Firebirds** to three hits over 4 2/3 scoreless innings. **Peter Lenstrohm** came in to stop the **Huskies** third inning rally & pitched four+ solid innings.

Horizon threatened in the sixth when a runner tried to score from third on a short fly ball. But **Chaparral** came up with a huge defensive play to end the inning on **Nick Diamond's** catch & throw from the outfield and the runner was called out at home for interference.

With hits at a premium, the **Firebirds** tried to manufacture a run with a first-third delayed steal, but **Horizon** executed perfect defense to easily tag out the runner at home and end the sixth inning with the score remaining 10 – 7.

Trailing by three runs and down to their final out, **Horizon** never panicked. **Ryan Hand** hit a single that drove in a run to keep the **Huskies** alive. Representing the tying run, pinch-hitter **Nick Valenza** came to the plate, and on a two-strike count tattooed the ball into the left field bullpen and just like that the game was tied.

Leading off the seventh, **AJ Schillinger** reached on a throwing error and **Chaparral** played small ball strategy. Pinch-hitter **Eric Brossart** laid down a perfect bunt to advance the runner into scoring position, but **Valenza** struck out two batters to send the game into extra innings.

Rubino hit a leadoff single to start the eighth. **Nevin Wilson** entered in relief, got the first out then walked two batters to load the bases. A popup made out #2, but **Horizon** scored on a wild pitch/passed ball to take an 11 – 10 lead before **Wilson** ended the inning with a strikeout.

Having led almost the entire game, it was **Chaparral's** turn to show its muster. With two outs and runners at second & third, **AJ Schillinger** came through with a clutch hit up the middle, bringing in **Jordie Hein** from third to tie the game, but **Nick DeRegis** was called out at home on a perfect throw from CF **Tanner Horn** to extend the game another inning.

Valenza got a leadoff single for the **Huskies** in the ninth, but **Wilson** was on a mission and the hard-throwing lefty was overpowering with a strikeout & double-play to end the inning.

You know the rest - **Bielek's** walk-off in the ninth was the play of the game; however, **Nick Diamond's** ninth-inning lead-off single that turned out to be the winning run deserves mention as one of the best at bats of the season.

Our boys need two more wins – make sure to show your support!

Go Firebirds!