

# Legion Baseball Falls Church Eliminated in American Legion District Tourney

Vienna and Springfield Meet Tonight in the Championship Game



Falls Church Post 130 catcher Hardy Cox, pitcher Matt McDonald and manager Ray Zdanczewicz talk strategy during last night's game.  
(Photo by Dave Facinoli)

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by **DAVE FACINOLI**, Staff Writer | 0 comments

As has been the case for more than a couple of decades, Springfield Post 176 has again become one of the final two teams playing in the American Legion District 17 baseball tournament.

Springfield (21-10), the No. 2 seed and two-time defending champion, reached the final two last night at Waters Field in Vienna by rallying to defeat No. 5 seed Falls Church Post 130, 8-7, in the losers' bracket final.

Now, in order to earn its third straight crown, Springfield has to defeat top seed Vienna Post 180 (24-6) twice in the double elimination competition. Vienna has a 5-0 record against Springfield this summer, including an 8-0 victory July 24 in the winners' bracket final of the tournament.

Vienna and Springfield play tonight at 7 p.m. at Waters. If a second game is necessary, that will be at the same time and place on July 27.

The district champion advances to the state tournament in Stafford. Vienna last won the district in 2007. Springfield has won multiple district titles and finished second numerous times in the 23 seasons Al Vaxmonsky has managed the team.

In Springfield's win over Falls Church (17-15) last night, Post 176 trailed 7-3 in the bottom of the seventh inning. That's when Springfield's rally began, thanks to a two-out, three-run homer to left by Andrew Rector on a 3-2 pitch. The blast pulled his team within 7-6. All three runs were unearned as a result of a Falls Church error to start the inning.

Springfield added an unearned run in the bottom of the eighth to tie the score at 7. Then in the bottom of the ninth, Post 176 won in walk-off fashion when No. 5 hitter Daniel Allen, using a wooden bat as he did throughout the game, singled to right center with the bases loaded to drive home leadoff hitter Garret Shondelmyer with the winning run.

Falls Church manager Ray Zdancewicz said Rector's homer changed the game. "We didn't want to walk him to put the tying run at the plate, but we didn't want to give him anything good to hit either," Zdancewicz said. "We wanted to pitch around him, and we almost got him out. But we hung a slider there, and he hit it well. We were probably one pitch away from playing for the championship." Falls Church was hurt by three fielding errors, which led to five unearned runs. "A few fielding miscues hurt," Zdancewicz said. What also hurt Post 130 was stranding seven runs in the first three innings without scoring a run.

Falls Church, though, rallied to take a 4-2 lead in the fourth by scoring four runs on four hits. Caleb Beatty (2 for 4, four RBI) had a three-run double in that frame and Hardy Cox had a sacrifice fly. Springfield added an unearned run in the bottom of the fourth, then Falls Church scored three in the sixth to move in front 7-3 on an RBI double by Beatty and a two-run homer by Cox. Falls Church had 13 hits and Springfield had 11. Danny Zdancewicz was 2 for 5 with a double in his last game for Falls Church, leadoff hitter Phillip Morse was 3 for 5 with a triple and Jeremy Leopold had two hits. Frankie Hall, Hayden Hall and Nathan Goff had Post 130's other hits. For Springfield, Rector was 3 for 4 with a double and the homer, Donny Haeuptle had two hits, West Stonelake had an RBI triple and Connor Tagg singled and had a sacrifice fly.

Sidearmer Matt McDonald started and pitched seven innings for Falls Church, allowing two earned runs and striking out six with one walk. "Matt really pitched well for us after throwing three innings last night," Ray Zdancewicz said. Greg Zajic pitched three, one-hit shutout, innings of relief to get the win for Springfield.

"I'm disappointed we're not still playing but I'm proud of the guys for how they played in this tournament," Ray Zdancewicz said. "We were missing some guys and we still got this far." Falls Church was missing four starters, who were out of town, for all four tournament games. Post 130 finished 2-2 in the tournament, eliminating the No. 3 and 4 seeds and losing to the top two seeds.

NOTE: For Post 130, the 17 wins were a season best since the team entered the district under the Post 130 distinction in 2007. Post 130 also finished third in the district tournament in 2010 . . . In the last couple of weeks, Vaxmonsky won his 475 career game as Springfield's manager. He has been in that position for 23 years.