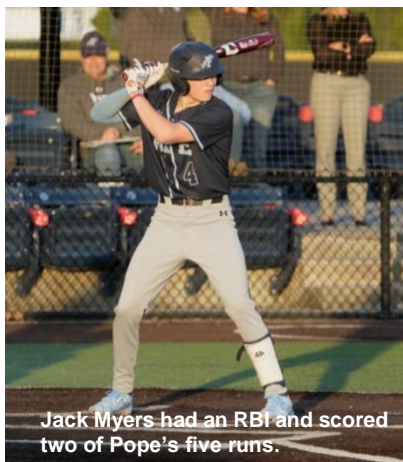


POPE BEATS NORTH COBB CHRISTIAN HIGHLY RANKED TEAMS SQUARE OFF IN EARLY SEASON DUEL

The standing room only crowd at LakePoint Sports Complex was all bundled up with wind chill temperatures in the low 30's and winds gusting up to 21 mph. All in attendance were treated to a display of high-level pitching and clutch hitting by the Pope Greyhounds, who defeated the pre-season third-ranked North Cobb Christian Eagles, 5-2, in the first game of the Georgia Dugout Club Baseball Tournament Friday night. Pope's overall record improves to 2-1 and region record remains at 0-0.

Sophomore right hander **Ethan Garrett** (1-0) hurled four consecutive shutout innings to pace Pope and earn his first varsity win in his first varsity start. Garrett used a mid 80's fastball and nasty change up to strike out eight batters, allow just two hits, give up one earned run, and walk two in five innings of work. Senior **Cooper Orr** pitched the sixth inning and allowed no runs and struck out one. Senior **Carson Kerce** closed the final inning and allowed no runs. Kerce gave up one single, but promptly picked off the runner at first base before he threw another pitch. Senior **Kent Schmidt** applied the tag at first base to end the game.

Pope's offense collected five hits off the Eagles high-level division-one signee pitchers, who consistently threw 85-90 mph. Kerce led Pope and reached base 2-of-3 times with a triple, one RBI, one walk, one run scored, and had one stolen base. Kerce's triple was his tenth career triple and set a Pope school record. Junior **Jack Myers** reached base 2-of-3 times with a single, one walk, one RBI, scored two runs, and stole two bases. Sophomore **Tanner Morneau** had a double and scored one run. Schmidt hit a single and had one RBI. Sophomore **John Stuetzer** had a single, scored one run, and stole two bases.



In the bottom of the first inning, Pope scored two runs on one hit to quickly erase a 2-0 deficit. Myers led off with a four-pitch walk and stole second base. With one out, Kerce cracked a two-strike, 89-mph fastball, for a triple in the right center field gap that two bounced off the fence at the 350-mark. Myers scored from second base. Schmidt followed with a ground out to second base that scored Kerce and tied the score.

In the bottom of the third inning, Pope scored one run on one hit to take the lead, 3-2. It was a lead they would not relinquish. With one out, Morneau slugged an 86-mph fastball into the left center gap to the fence for a stand-up double. With two outs and an 0-2 count, Schmidt hit a single over the pitcher and into center field

to score a head-first sliding Morneau from second base with what proved to be the game-winning run.

In the top of the fifth inning, the Hounds led 3-2. North Cobb Christian loaded the bases with two outs. After a mound visit by pitching coach **Matt Leidberg**, Garrett and the Hounds got refocused and back to work. Facing the Eagles number three hitter and the top junior prospect in the state of Georgia, Garrett threw a clutch (six-pitch) sequence. He threw a ball, a strike, and a one-hop ball that was blocked by catcher **Jesse Walter** to save a run. He followed with a strike on a change up, another one-hop ball that was blocked by Walter to save a run, and a final strike that was popped up to third base and caught by Myers for the third out to end the Eagles threat.

In the bottom of the fifth inning, Pope scored two final runs on two hits to gain a 5-2 lead. Stuetzer led off and hit a bad-hop single past the second baseman and into right field. Stuetzer then stole second base. Pinch hitter **Andrew Walters** hit into a fielder's choice and Stuetzer was out at second base. Walters advanced to second on a wild pitch. **Logan Castro** pinch ran for Walters. Myers hit an outside pitch just past the second baseman into right field and scored Castro from second. With two outs, Kerce walked and stole second base, but was not able to score.

In the top of the sixth inning, North Cobb Christian threatened again with runners on first and second base with no outs, but Orr was able to pitch out of the jam. On a 1-1 pitch, Orr enticed the Eagles hitter into a one-bounce grounder to Myers at third, who caught the ball and tagged the base for one out and threw across the diamond to Schmidt at first base. Schmidt made a nice one-hop pick to complete the double play. Orr struck out the next batter looking to end the inning.

The Hounds and Eagles both made two errors. Pitching for both teams combined to strike out 19 batters, Pope with nine and North Cobb Christian with 10.

Pope plays a doubleheader on Saturday to conclude the Georgia Dugout Club tournament. The Hounds play Effingham County at 12:30 and Norcross at 5:30.