

HOME > COLLEGE > COLLEGE BASEBALL

Michigan Beats Vanderbilt in Game 1 of the NCAA College World Series



PETER AIKEN/GETTY IMAGES

By **LAURIELAULETTA BOSHART** June 25, 2019

OMAHA, Neb. — After a 35-year drought, the Michigan Wolverine baseball program was back in Omaha last night seeking its first NCAA Men's College World Series baseball championship since 1962. Following a poor regular season record (50-20), the Wolverines rallied to win the Regionals over Creighton and the Los Angeles Super Regionals over powerhouse UCLA. They were undefeated in the first three CWS games, setting up a date with the Vanderbilt Commodores in the best-of-three championship series.

The pairing of these two teams was particularly poignant as Vanderbilt head coach Tim Corbin and Michigan head coach Erik Bakich, have a longstanding relationship. Corbin and Bakich worked together at Clemson in 2002 and the following year when Corbin took the head coaching job at Vanderbilt, he brought Bakich on as his assistant. Nine years ago, Bakich left for the top job at Michigan, but the two have remained friendly. "I have enormous respect for him and all he's taught me," said Bakich. "He is a consummate professional and a superb human being and has built a great program at Vanderbilt."

Corbin is equally complimentary. "There is no finer coach, no finer person than what you will find in Bakich," he says. "He is a great competitor and a good friend."

The two teams squared off last night with Tommy Henry (12-5) taking the mound for his second straight start. Coming off a three-hit shutout of Florida State on June 17, the sophomore struck out eight while pitching 8 1/3 innings of seven-hit ball. Jeff Criswell got the last two outs. Drake Fellows (13-2) got the start for Vanderbilt.

Fellows got into early trouble, yielding a leadoff walk to Jordan Nwogu. Big Ten player of the year Jordan Brewer doubled into the right-field corner for Michigan's first run and came home on Blake Nelson's base hit. Ako Thomas doubled in a run in the second, and Jesse Franklin's groundout brought in another. After 1-1/2 innings, the Wolverines were sitting on a comfortable 4-0 lead.

Vandy got on the scoreboard in the bottom of the second with singles from Philip Clarke, Harrison Ray and Ty Duvall. Duvall's single to left center scored Clarke and a passed ball plated Ray. The Commodores pulled to within two.

Fellows left with two on and two outs in the sixth, and left-hander Zach King worked out of the trouble to prevent the Wolverines from scoring more. Vanderbilt's JJ Bleday, the No. 4 overall draft pick by the Miami Marlins this month, hit his nation-leading 27th homer on Henry's first pitch in the bottom of the sixth, closing the score to 4-3.

After flying out and striking out twice, Jimmy Kerr's two-run shot into the right-field bleachers in the top of the Michigan seventh was followed by hugs all around for his family members. Among them were grandfather John Kerr, a member of the 1962 Wolverines championship team, and dad Derek Kerr, who played on the 1984 team, the last one to make it to the CWS before this year. Kerr, a senior who came to Michigan as a walk-on, has played a huge role in the team's improbable postseason run. He has hit seven of his 15 homers over 11 NCAA Tournament games and is batting .389 (7 for 18) in the CWS.

“Other than that (home run) at-bat today, I had four pretty rough at-bats, so it wasn’t my best day at the plate,” said Kerr, who went 1 for 5 with four strikeouts. “But when we have Tommy on the mound, you don’t really worry about only being up one run. Our team has so much trust in this pitching staff and how they’ve performed in the postseason that we don’t have a lot of pressure on ourselves because we know all we need is a few-run lead and they’re going to take care of the rest.”

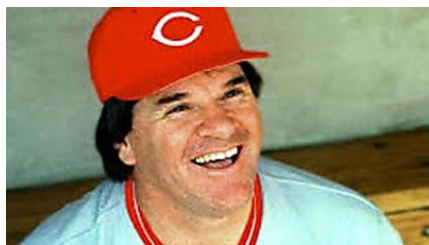
Joe Donovan’s homer leading off the eighth against reliever Patrick Raby put the Wolverines up 7-3. The Commodores scored one final run in the bottom of the ninth before Criswell closed out the game for a Michigan 7-4 win.

Game 2 is scheduled for Tuesday night, and Vanderbilt will send Kumar Rocker to the mound. The freshman threw a no-hitter in the super regionals and turned in a solid performance in his CWS start against Mississippi State on Wednesday.

Bakich is undecided on a starter but Criswell, who threw just nine pitches, is a possibility.

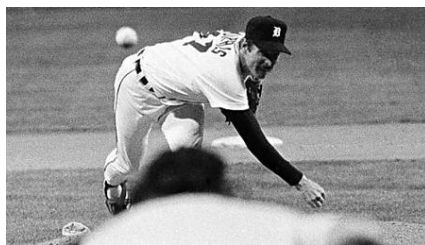
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