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Crean Lutheran held in check by Peninsula's group effort on the mound

By **OC VARSITY SPORTS STAFF** |

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By NICK INGRAM, Contributing writer

Things didn't look good early for the Peninsula baseball team in its CIF-Southern Section Division 3 second-round game against visiting Crean Lutheran on Tuesday afternoon.

Three batters into the game, Peninsula starting pitcher Matthew Meskin clutched the elbow on his throwing arm.

"As a coach, (what happened to Meskin) is the last thing you want to see," Peninsula coach Brian Bowles said. "You don't think about the game. You think about the kid. He's been a huge part of our success this year."

What transpired over the next 6 2/3 innings showed how the Panthers have picked each other up over the course of the season. Alex Bobb, Jake McKenna and AJ Hollis combined to scatter five hits while Ben Zuercher was responsible for the tying and winning runs as Peninsula defeated the Saints, 4-1.

Peninsula (23-6) will play at Righetti in the quarterfinals on Friday. Crean Lutheran, which won the Academy League title, finished the season with a 24-5 record.

"(Meskin going down) was kind of a gut-check for us," Bowles said. "We've preached a 'next man up' mentality, and Alex and Jake did a great job getting us back into the dugout."

After closing out the first inning with a strikeout, Bobb stranded a pair of runners in the second before running into trouble in the third. Bobb walked Hank Schineller with two outs before giving up an RBI double to Marc Lidd.

Peninsula's offense got to work after McKenna closed out the third. Michael Fuhrman singled with one out, took second on a wild pitch and scored on Zuercher's RBI double. After taking third on Ryan Daues grounder, Zuercher scored on a wild pitch.

"Anytime (Fuhrman) gets on, I know I have a chance to get an RBI," Zuercher said. "I was looking inside and (Crean Lutheran pitcher Louie Kim) threw me an elevated fastball inside that I turned on."

Zuercher (2 for 2, double) reached on an infield single in the fifth inning and took second when Daues walked. After Jake McKenna walked, Nick Frasso hit a chopper over the third-base bag to make it 4-1.

"We didn't have our best offensive day today, but Ben getting on four times was huge," Bowles said. "He put pressure on their guys and kept them under pressure."

Peninsula had a chance for a huge first inning. After Furhman and Zuercher walked, Daues was hit by a pitch. But Lidd snagged McKenna's liner to third before doubling Furhman off third.