

SPORTS



Randleman's Bryson Sweatt dives on top of the pile as the Tigers celebrate their 2-A state championship. PHOTOS BY MIKE DUPREZ/COURIER-TRIBUNE

DREAM COMES TRUE

White's no-hitter lifts Randleman to 2-A state championship

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USA TODAY NETWORK

BURLINGTON — Ryan White had a dream.

The Randleman ace left-hander dreamed the night before that he would throw a no-hitter on Saturday in the 2-A state championship series.

Sometimes dreams come true.

White, pitching the game of his life on the biggest stage possible in high school baseball, did indeed throw a no-hitter as the Tigers beat Rutherfordton-Spindale Central 4-0 in the third and deciding game of the 2-A state championship series at Burlington Athletic Stadium.

"The funny thing is I actually had a dream last night that I was going to throw a no-hitter," White said.

Seriously?

"Yes, sir," White said. "I did."

And then it happened for real.

White struck out 11, walked only two,

and received all the offense he needed on consecutive two-run doubles in the third inning by third baseman Hunter Atkins and catcher Brooks Brannon.

"I'm mumbling for words right now," White said. "It's just surreal..."

That was the view from behind the plate, too.

"I've seen it on TV all the time when the great pitchers throw no-hitters," Brannon said. "I never thought I'd be behind the plate to catch one. But to have that happen with him is amazing. I've never experienced anything like that."

"He works every day, super, super hard. And to see that happen puts a smile on my face, I'm telling you."

There were plenty of smiles all over the place.

"That's very special," said Randleman coach Jake Smith. "He's been Mr. Clutch all year with his outings. We kind of saved him for this moment. He competed."



Randleman's Ryan White pitches in Game 3 of the 2-A state championship series. White threw a no-hitter as the Tigers claimed the state championship.

See DREAM, Page 2B

Dream

Continued from Page 1B

It was the second NCHSAA state championship for Randleman, which has reached the fourth round or better in the playoffs every year since 2010. Randleman's other state title was in 2011.

Randleman (19-2) won Game 1 of the series 9-5 on Friday. But when R-S Central took a 2-1 win in Game 2 Saturday afternoon, Game 3 was on. The Tigers had to wait a long time because there was a 74-minute rain delay in Game 3 of the 4-A state championship series between Fuquay-Varina and Reagan.

The first pitch wasn't until 9:55 p.m. and it was a ball. White ended up walking leadoff hitter Kael Snethen on four pitches.

But it was on from there. The Hilltoppers (17-3) had just one more base runner the entire game. White threw his fastball by hitters and his curves and changeups befuddled the Hilltoppers all night. He struck out four in a row at one point and three straight in another stretch.

"He throws good," Atkins said. "He throws hard. His offspeed is consistent. It's in the zone. That's what you do."

There wasn't much the Hilltoppers could do.

"He was really good," said R-S Central coach Chadd Fowler. "He could throw his breaking stuff at any time. His fastball was good. Hats off to him. He was dealing. Unfortunately for us, it was in the third game of the state championship."

R-S Central starter Hayden Wheeler matched White by allowing no hits over the first two innings. And he was dealing, too, with four strikeouts in a row, including Andrew Cox leading off the third.

But then Kaden Ethier, the No. 9 hitter, dumped a double to center.

"His ball had a drop to it," Ethier said. "I was just trying to take it up the middle, right-center gap. That's all I was trying to do right there."

Owen Strickland drew a walk and then Trey Way singled to load the bases, setting the table for the middle of the lineup. Atkins turned on an 0-2 pitch and ripped a double down the right-field line, scoring two runs.

"In clutch situations, you've got to do your job," Atkins said. "I did my job."

And then Brannon copied that with his own two-run double for a 4-0 lead as



Randleman's Hunter Atkins smacks a two-run double in the third inning.

MIKE DUPREZ/COURIER-TRIBUNE

the No. 3 and No. 4 hitters delivered.

"Me and Hunter are two pieces of the puzzle as far as the team goes," Brannon said. "When everybody works together, we're really hard to beat and we showed that tonight."

That's music to Smith's ears. He expects it.

"They've been doing that all year," Smith said. "Hunter Atkins, player of the year in our conference, he does it. He came through."

Nobody talked about the no-hitter during the game even though the zeroes were quite visible on the scoreboard.

"We didn't want to jinx anything," Atkins said.

The biggest suspense later in the game was whether White was going to be able to finish the game because of NCHSAA pitch count limitations. When he recorded three straight one-pitch outs, it looked possible even as freshman Drake Purvis warmed up in the bullpen just in case.

White could throw 93 pitches and he was at 80 when the seventh inning started. He struck out Andrei Haynes on three pitches as the anticipation began to build among the Randleman fans. The next batter, Cameron Hill, grounded out to Way at shortstop on an 0-1 pitch. That meant White had enough pitches remaining to face Nate Ellenburg, who grounded out to Atkins at third.

Bedlam ensued as White raised his

arms in triumph. He was first greeted by Purvis and Atkins before a massive dogpile ensued.

A no-hitter in a state championship game.

"I know," Brannon said. "That's the crazy thing about it."

Several hours earlier, it was the Hilltoppers who had the momentum following their 2-1 victory as ace pitcher Trip Triplett outdueled Way. Ethier doubled and scored on Way's single in the second inning to tie the game but Snethen smashed a home run over the left-field fence in the bottom of the third.

With two runners on and two outs in the top of the seventh, Atkins hit a towering drive that Hill caught at the fence. The Hilltoppers celebrated.

"We had two choices," Brannon said. "We could curl up in a ball or come out and belt them in the mouth. That's exactly what we did. It was awesome."

White carries a football around pregame and likes to throw it to loosen up. That's what he did Saturday night. When the game started, the Hilltoppers might have felt like he was throwing darts.

"I've seen this greatness before," Brannon said. "He's an unbelievable pitcher. To put it all together in a state championship game is incredible."

The hugs and smiles abounded long after the game was over.

"It's just surreal," White said.