

Local players in high-profile All-Star game Rice's double, Huber's sac fly help North Orioles beat South Senators

by Marc Ethier
Staff Writer

It wasn't the nicest of August days. The heat was oppressive early on, the air like beads of water breaking on your cheeks as you entered brick-walled Shipley Field on the campus of the University of Maryland in College Park.

The mugginess eased up a bit halfway through Sunday's game, the third annual Mid-Atlantic High School Baseball Classic, with soft breezes serving as a vanguard to dark storm clouds that threatened but never delivered a deluge. The improvement was minor but coincided with an improvement in the North team's fortunes: The Orioles, including players from Frederick and Carroll counties, rallied for four runs in the final four innings to win, 9-7, over the South Senators.

In a roster filled with talent from Maryland and Pennsylvania, Steven Rice, a rising senior at Century High in Sykesville, started the game in left field and contributed a two-run double and a run scored. Carl Huber, soon to be a senior at Linganore, played four innings in left and hit a sacrifice fly in the fifth that sparked the game-winning rally. And C.J. Bliffin, Urbana's pitcher and another rising senior, threw an inning and struck out two batters. The three are teammates on the Mount Airy American Legion Post 191 team, and they were pleased to play with and against some of the best players in the region after making the team following an all-day tryout Friday.

They were also pleased to see all the college and pro scouts in attendance, most sitting behind home plate holding radar guns. "It was really great to see all the scouts," Bliffin said. "I enjoyed trying to throw my stuff and hit my spots against some of the best competition in the area."

Added Huber: “It was great to play at College Park. I’ve never played in a game like this, and it was a real learning experience as well as being a lot of fun.”

The Orioles weren’t having fun at first, though, after they found themselves behind early when the Senators scored three times in the first inning on a home run by Magruder High (Rockville) rising senior Matt Sweeney. But in the bottom of the first, Rice sent a 1-0 fastball deep into the left-center gap for a double that scored two runs. He scored to tie the game soon after when Devin Rivers of DeMatha punched a blooper to right.

“I was expecting a fastball and I took advantage of it and put it in the gap,” Rice said.

The Orioles took a brief lead in the second but in the top of the third the Senators roared back with three more runs to go up 6-4. Rice left the game after striking out in the bottom of the third and Huber took his place in left; Bliffin came on in the top of the fourth and struck out two batters but surrendered a run on a single by Cody Fleetwood of Easton (Md.) that made it 7-4.

“I was trying to throw a curveball by [Darron Lattomus of West Springfield, Va.],” Bliffin said. “My curve was breaking well and I was hitting my spots, but he tagged it just enough to get into right field. He moved to second on a passed ball and third on a steal, and then [Fleetwood] scored him.”

That’s about when the weather — and the North’s fortunes — began to change. As a light rain fell, Huber’s sacrifice fly to center field with one out and runners on second and third brought the Orioles within striking distance. They scored four more runs in the next four frames while shutting down the Senators’ batters, including L.J. Hoes of St. John’s (D.C.) and Sweeney, who was named the South’s top hitter and power hitter following Saturday’s skills competition.

The South would not rise again.

“That was the first all-star game I’ve ever played in, and it was a lot of fun,” said Rice, who tried out for the team Friday and was notified he’d passed muster Saturday. “We got to know some

different kids from different areas, and we got to see how we matched up with others from those other areas.

“I thought it was great when I was asked to play. I was pretty happy when I got the call Saturday morning.”

Huber’s season is over but both Rice and Bliffin plan to play fall baseball starting Aug. 25. Legion teammate and South Carroll pitcher Dan Gerjets will join them.