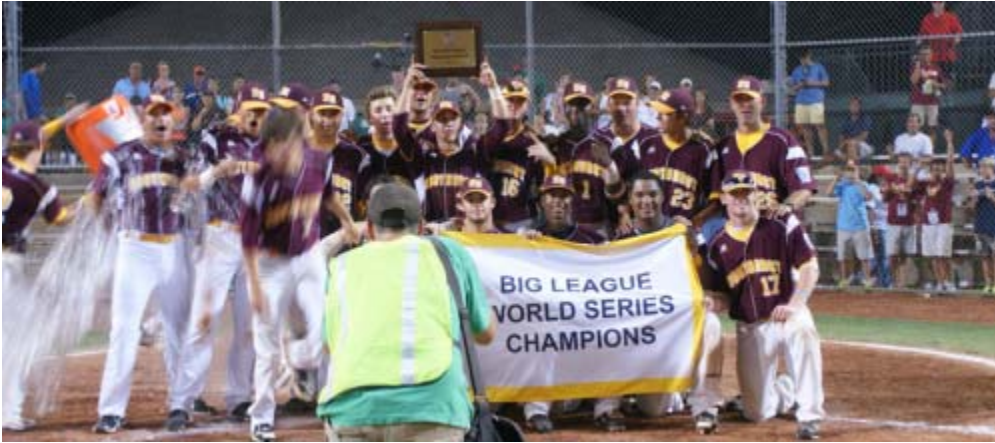


Greenville County captures Big League world title



8/3/2011

EASLEY — All of the evidence pointed to Puerto Rico to win the Big League Baseball World Series.

Someone forgot to tell Kyle Martin.

Martin was dominant on the mound and prodigious at the plate Wednesday night as Greenville County claimed the world title with a 9-7 victory over defending champion San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Martin, a University of South Carolina signee out of Wade Hampton High School, allowed just two hits through the first five innings and went 3-for-4 with the bat, driving in four runs.

It was the second world title for Greenville District 7, which wore its first world crown in 2008 – ironically with a victory over Puerto Rico.

The Latin America champion had been dominant in this year's BLBWS, going 5-0 in International pool play and winning its games by a combined 48-3 margin. San Juan entered the championship game with the tournament's best batting average (.394), lowest earned run average (0.64) and second-round Major League draft pick Jorge Lopez on the mound.

Greenville, on the other hand, barely qualified for the U.S. championship game with a 2-2 record after suffering consecutive one-run defeats on Saturday and

Monday. But the U.S. Southeast Region champs didn't flinch once they reached the title game.

"We talked about it and sort of came to the conclusion that the numbers made no difference," Martin said. "We were both 0-0 coming into the game."

Greenville took command from the outset, scoring three runs in the second inning and roughing Lopez up for six runs on six hits over the first 3 1/3 innings.

Greenville jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the second as Cory Thompson, a rising junior at Mauldin, had a two-run double and later scored when J.L. Mann product Brady Hegwood reached on an infield hit.

Greenville padded its lead to 5-0 in the third when Weston Jackson, a rising senior at Eastside, singled, took second on a balk and scored on a double by Martin. Greenville High's Glenn Batson then drove in pinch runner Ranz Bodison with a single to left.

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Martin came up big again in the fourth, ripping an RBI single up the middle with two outs to push District 7's advantage to 6-0. The lead swelled to 9-0 in the sixth as Martin blasted a two-run homer and Batson added a run-scoring single.

"Kyle was the man," Greenville coach Jeff Young said. "He was stellar on the mound and did a great job at the plate."

Martin had seven hits in his last 11 at-bats in the BLBWS, with six of the hits going for extra bases, including four home runs.

But he was far from the only hero. Every Greenville starter reached base safely at least once or scored at least one run, and the team showed great resilience at the plate – eight of Greenville's nine runs were scored with two outs.

"We don't give up," said Young, who also guided District 7 to its first world title in 2008. "We battle and go after it and make them throw pitches."

San Juan was playing in its sixth world championship game since the event moved to Easley in 2001. San Juan won the title in 2002 against U.S. East champion Maryland and again last year versus Thousand Oaks, Calif.

Puerto Rico lost in the finals in 2006, 2007 (against the S.C. District 1 host team) and again in 2008 when Greenville rallied for five runs in the bottom of the seventh for a 5-4 triumph.

Wednesday night Puerto Rico almost turned the tables, scoring three runs in the bottom of the sixth, then adding four more in the bottom of the seventh before relievers J.R. Black and Thompson were eventually able to close the door on the late rally and prompt a Greenville dogpile on the infield at the J.B. "Red" Owens Recreation Complex.

"They probably thought it would be another easy win," Martin said. "I don't know if they realized that we'd be coming to play."

Greenville finished with a 4-2 record and is 15-6 overall in four World Series appearances since 2007.

Courtesy of Greenville News.