Bench-Clearing Brawl Shortens Tech-WVU Game

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BLACKSBURG — The hitting at Tech Park Thursday wasn’t confined to the kind done with a baseball bat.

On what had to be one of the most unfortunate occasions in the long-time Virginia Tech-West Virginia athletic rivalry, the Hokies woos a doubleheader after the rightpitcher ended following a bench-clearing brawl in the first inning.

Tech won the opener, 5-1, behind the four-hit pitching of right-hander Jim Puglisi, and stretched its winning streak to 24 games after being awarded a 9-0 forfeit win in the second game. The contest ended with one out in the bottom of the first inning when the Mountaineers refused to return to the field after the fight.

WVU shortstop Jerry Mahoney, one of the principals in the wild melee, suffered a fractured jaw during the punching, shoving, elbowing and kicking that took place near second base. Mountaineers’ rightfielder Frank Pryor emerged with a bloody mouth. Ejected for fighting were Tech designated hitter Tony Roberts and first baseman Harold Williams. But the attempts to restore peace by umpire Yogi Roberts of Salem and Julian Fulcher of Roanoke went for naught when WVU Coach Dale Ramsburg told his team “to suck ’em (the bats) up” after the altercation.

The fight actually got its initial spark in the second inning of the opener. Mahoney, covering second on a force play, was taken out by Metts on an aggressive—but certainly clean—slide.

“That was the whole thing,” said Metts after the short doubleheader. “I was going into the base aggressively. That’s the way I play baseball, and I’m not gonna change.”

“But they (the Mountaineers) wanted to comment about it. They were making remarks about throwing at our batters and that kind of stuff. They had the chance when I came up if they wanted to do something about it.”

After Tech’s opening game win—fueled by a two-run, four-hit sixth inning—rain started to fall and it looked like the second game was in jeopardy. Unfortunately—considering the events to follow—the rain stopped and Tech began to toe off on WVU right-hander Doug Ogden.

With none out, three runs in and two men on in the first, Metts stepped to the plate and smacked an Ogden pitch to right-center. The Tech sophomore fell on route to first, but arose and turned for second. He slid at second, base umpire Fulcher calling Metts out as Mahoney made the tag.

“I said in and the guy tagged me,” said Metts. “I thought I was safe and said something about it to the ump. He (Fulcher) said, ‘No, you’re out.’ Then this guy (Mahoney) says, ‘Well, don’t cry about it.’

“I knew then I wasn’t gonna go back to the dugout. Yes, I showed him and that got it going. But I didn’t hit him. Just as I showed him, somebody came up behind me and really pelted him.”

“I’m sorry it happened,” said Metts, 5-11, 170-pounder. “I wasn’t looking for everyone to run on the field. I could have taken care of myself. I just don’t take a lot of bull from anyone.

“And I’m not gonna stop being aggressive. When you stop being aggressive, you start losing.”

Once the benches emptied, Roberts, Fulcher and the two coaches were powerless to stop the fracas. When the field was cleared, two WVU players told Roberts that he had lost control of the game. But the Salem pitcher and Fulcher were both positioning themselves for the next pitch after Metts’ hit drove in two runs that will never count. “I saw a guy (Mahoney) make the tag,” said Mountaineer Coach Dale Ramsburg of the brawl. “The umpire made the call. Then, I saw their guy come after our guy that made the tag.”

But why did the Mountaineers decide against finishing the game? “The reason is twofold,” said Ramsburg, whose team returned home with a 10-17 record. “I didn’t think we had a replacement for our shortstop. And... that’s enough for right now.

“Don’t know what was said out there or if anything was said. I have no idea what happened. If the guy runs off the field after he tagged out, nothing happens. But why attack the shortstop? He didn’t tag him hard or in the face or anything.”

Actually, WVU did have a spare infielder. Rick Angelone played second base for the Mountaineers in the opener, while John Shiple occupied that position in the nightcap. A Morgantown, W.Va., newspaper reporter said Angelone—who was on the bench in the nightcap—played shortstop a year ago.

“There’s a lowly way to end a game,” said Tech Coach Bob Humphreys. “I was standing out there (in the third base coaching box) and looking in the dugout. Next thing, I see these two guys out there and then hear something. Then everyone’s on the field.

“There’s no sense in that kind of thing going on. What really hurts is that this kind of thing gives you a bad reputation. And a bad reputation is easy to get, but hard to get rid of.”

The Mountaineers now are 27-7 in the bid to gain an NCAA Tournament berth, a situation which makes reputation even more important. Ironically, the first-game triumph was Humphreys’ 100th as the Tech coach. He would probably rather forget No. 10.

“The stuff started in the first game and went from there,” added Humphreys. “This isn’t the first time this sort of thing has happened in baseball. We certainly weren’t looking for a fight. I’ve told our guys to never run from anything, but never start anything either. I’m not running a boxing tournament.”

Humphreys said he would not make a decision on disciplinary action for Tech players involved in the fight until he talks with the principals. This is the second brawl the Hokies have been involved in this season, the first coming back on March 12 in a 4-3 loss at Maryland.

“It was the same thing at Maryland,” said Metts. “After that, we got a little coaching in what we should do if it happened again. I think it paid off today.”

“ Their catcher (Tom Gilbert) came running out there. When he did, that was an indication to our players that they (WVU) wanted to fight.”

Fulcher said Metts was kicked out for his part in starting the altercation, and Williams got the heave-ho for coming off the bench and hitting a West Virginia player.

“ It’s really terrible that something like that can happen in a baseball game,” said Tech centerfielder Sandy Hill, standing with Ramsburg after the game. “I’m sorry it happened.”

But happen, it did. Mahoney has a broken jaw to prove it.

Virginia Tech vs. West Virginia