Hokies Lose To CMU 2-1

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MINNEAPOLIS—Before Friday's opening game in the NCAA Mideast Regional baseball tournament, Bierman Field public address announcer Tom Greenhoe said, "All games will be nine innings in length."

Apparently, Virginia Tech didn't get the message.

The Gobbler's, hypnotized for six innings by righthander Kevin Flannery's no-hit pitching, fell into the losers' bracket of the tournament with a 2-1 loss to Central Michigan.

Tech takes a 34-8 record into today's 10 a.m. CDT opener against Southeastern Conference runnerup Florida. The Gators, 37-17, were bounced into the losers' bracket by Minnesota, 7-0. It was the Gophers' 24th home win without a loss this season.

This morning's loser goes home. Central (44-12) meets Minnesota (36-10) at 1 p.m. CDT in a winners' bracket game. Then at 4 p.m. CDT, the morning survivor faces the Central Michigan-Minnesota loser.

Gobbler's Coach Bob Humphreys said he will send either freshman lefty Mike Rhodes (5-1) or junior righthander Jim Puglisi (6-2) against Florida. The Gators are expected to go with righthander Bruce Baker (5-1) after Minnesota bombed UF ace lefty Ross Baumgarten Friday afternoon.

"I really can't explain it," said Humphreys after his team's 31-game winning streak became just a memory. "I told 'em (the team) after the game that it's beyond me why they can't get up when we're playing someone like this.

"We should be breathing fire. But instead, it is just like the second game for us last year."

Humphreys was referring to Tech's 5-4 loss to Furman in the Atlantic Regional at Columbia, S.C., a year ago. Friday's loss was the Gobbler's third straight one-run setback in NCAA play.

The Gobbler had chances to score in both the seventh and eighth innings, but didn't until Wayne Shelton's one-out home run in the bottom of the ninth. Shelton's blast over the rightfield fence was his 10th of the year, tying a school record for single season circuit shots. But it was of little consolation to the Gobbler.

Through the first six frames, sophomore Flannery baffled Tech with an assortment of off-speed pitches and an effective hard slider. When Tech's Dennis Duff was asked what Flannery was throwing, the Gobbler's leftfielder answered: "He didn't throw nothin."

Sandy Hill led off Tech's seventh with a 75-foot single that caromed off Flannery's glove. Trailling 2-0, Humphreys called for the hit and run with Shelton at the plate. But the Tech catcher struck out on a high pitch and Hill got a stumbling break off first and was thrown out stealing on the back end of the double play.

In the eighth, with Harold Williams on second and Danny Griel at first via a single and a walk, Rick Wade hit a hard ground ball past the mound. But just as the ball was leaving the infield dirt behind second, Central second baseman Dan Rohn made the play of the game—a diving stop and perfect throw to first to nip Wade for the third out.

"In the seventh, we have our 3-4-5 hitters up and get nothing," said Humphreys. "So, Hill stumbles and gets a bad break on the steal, and Wayne swings at a ball over his head.

"Flannery must have been throwing something because he had a damn no-hitter for a while. I didn't see too many bullets flying around. And the kid at second made a helluva play. If that ball goes through, it's a different ball game."

Righthander Duke Dickerson was victimized by lethargic play in the first inning. CMU leadoff hitter Mike Schervish singled on Dickerson's first pitch. Then Walt Gawkowski hit a topper up the third base line. Wade charged and fielded the ball, but threw it into rightfield, allowing Schervish to score.

It remained 1-0 into the sixth, when Schervish, a junior rightfielder, homered over the leftfield wall. Meanwhile, Tech hit only five balls out of the infield through seven innings.

The Tech players displayed confidence and a looseness unlike a year ago. But once the game started, Tech played as if it was back at the hotel sleeping.

"Those guys (Central Michigan) had a little mouth early and I thought that would loosen us up," said Humphreys. "And the last couple of days, we've been as loose as a goose."