

FREMONT TRIBUNE

First State captures state berth

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What a difference 24 hours can make.

One night after falling 18-0 to Elkhorn, the First State Bank Seniors avenged the loss with a 5-3 win Friday in the championship game of the Area A-6 American Legion Tournament at Moller Field.

First State now advances to the Class A state tournament, which begins Friday in Kearney. It will be Fremont's first appearance in the state tournament since it hosted the event in 1998.

"It's kind of a reward for their hard work this year," said First State coach Roger Ortmeier, whose team improved to 18-28-1 on the season. "We've lost so many one-run games this year and have not played bad baseball. It's a tribute to the kids to come out and play hard and believe in themselves."

First State scored first when Seth Mruz legged out an infield single in the second inning, allowing Andy Trent to come home.

After Elkhorn scored 14 first-inning runs in Thursday night's game, Ortmeier said it was important for First State to play well early on Friday.

"That's what we talked about was just coming out and getting the lead for Tyler (Leonard)," Ortmeier said. "We knew we'd have to score a couple to win it, but it was a load off our backs ... and it was like, 'OK, we got through the first inning, now let's get it done.'"

Leonard helped his own cause in the fourth with a solo homer off Craig Landholm.

"I knew he was going to throw me a fastball and I just wanted to make contact and get on base to maybe get another run in," Leonard said. "It ended up going out."

Leonard kept Elkhorn scoreless until the bottom of the fourth. Cory King squeezed home Craig Landholm and Zach Moore followed with an RBI double to tie the game.

First State answered in the top of the fifth on a two-out single by Trent that scored Sean Soderberg.

Leonard got a big out in the bottom of the inning when - with Matt Meyer on second base - he got Mike Zahm, Elkhorn's top hitter, to strike out swinging.

"I knew he hit the outside pitch well so the first few times I came inside," Leonard said. "The pitch I struck him out on I threw outside and he thought I must have been throwing off-speed or something."

Leonard then got Zach Garza to pop out to end the inning.

First State added a pair of insurance runs in the top of the seventh.

The first scored when Joe Gahan, who had walked, went all the way from first to third on a wild

pitch. The throw to get Gahan at third went into the outfield, allowing him to score.

Carson Cook then grounded to second later in the inning, and the throw home to get Soderberg was late, putting Fremont up 5-2.

After Leonard got the first out in the seventh, Meyer and Jeff Jensen hit back-to-back singles to bring up Zahm.

Leonard got Zahm to fly out to left field, and - after allowing an RBI single to Garza - struck out Landholm to end the game.

"I didn't want to walk anybody," Leonard said. "If they beat me hitting the ball, then they beat me. I just didn't want to give them any free bases."

Leonard ended up allowing seven hits and one walk while striking out three.

"That's why he's our ace," Ortmeier said. "He just steps up and does the job."

Soderberg reached base four times for First State. He had a single and drew four walks.

Landholm had a single and double, and Meyer and Kyle Becker each had a pair of singles for Elkhorn, which finished its season at 33-24.