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## Westwood surges into playoff picture

By **JEFF CASPERSEN**

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Just an inning after getting gunned down at the plate by Cedar Park center fielder Brandon Bingham, Westwood senior Craig Noel pumped a little life into the Warriors' playoff hopes, stroking a game-winning, two-out RBI single in the bottom of the seventh.

The clutch hit, a sharp grounder up the middle delivered on an 0-2 pitch, plated teammate Drew Trammell — a courtesy runner for Bill Mitchell — from third, lifting Westwood to a 1-0 varsity baseball win over the visiting Timberwolves.

"When I was going up there, I just knew he was going to throw me fastballs," Noel said of the decisive at-bat against Cedar Park pitcher Ryne Foster. "This is big for us. It keeps our playoff hopes alive."

Following Tuesday's contest, Cedar Park (7-6) and Westwood (15-13, 7-6) stood even in the race for District 14-5A's third and final playoff berth with one game remaining on the slate. The Warriors captured the season series between the two teams, 2-0. Therefore, if the squads wound up tied, Westwood would be entitled to the tournament appearance.

Also lingering in the mix is Georgetown, which, at 6-7, was in a position to force a three-way tie with a win and losses by both Westwood and Cedar Park. Georgetown faced the Timberwolves Friday, while the Warriors battled district champion Round Rock.

Just an inning before delivering the walk-off victory, Noel was involved in a controversial play at the plate. After knocking a lead-off single to start the home half of the sixth, Noel advanced to second on a Tyson Mire groundball two batters later. With two down, senior Rick Welch bounced a sharp grounder into center field. Bingham charged, fielded the base hit and fired plate-ward. Though a little high, the throw was on-line, affording Cedar Park catcher Tyler Pollard the chance to tag Noel out in the midst of a head-first slide.

Westwood charged right back in the seventh, loading the bases with one out on singles by Bill Mitchell and Chad Thielepape and a sacrifice bunt-turned-fielder's choice by Brian Taylor. Cedar Park pitcher Ryne Foster then struck out opposing hurler Matt Aubry, setting up Noel's heroics with two down.

Aubry and Foster were both stingy on the hill. Aubry limited the Timberwolves to just four hits and two walks in the complete-game effort. Cedar Park's most threatening rally came in the top of the seventh, when it advanced runners to second and third with just one out. Aubry wriggled free of the jam, striking out Wes Stewart swinging and Tyler Pollard looking.

"You've got to appreciate Aubry," said Westwood coach Bart Bratcher. "We haven't had many guys pitch like that this season."

Foster also pitched the distance, striking out four in 6 2/3 innings of work.

Junior right fielder Todd Gilfillan led Westwood with three hits in three trips to the plate. Craig Noel finished the night 2-for-3. Dayne Mitchell, Bill Mitchell, Mire and Aubry collected a hit apiece.

"This was just an awesome baseball game," praised Bratcher, whose squad has strung together a late postseason push, winning its last two games. "I really appreciate the way these kids have bounced back. They have really shown a lot of character."

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