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## One year after having to share crown, CG-Belgium emerges as undisputed king

Last year, the Cedar Grove-Belgium  Rockets stumbled down the stretch and had to share their first Central Lakeshore Conference baseball title in decades.

This season, the Rockets took the next step, roaring to an outright CLC crown by winning seven of their last eight games and finishing with a 13-5 record, two games ahead of runner-up Oostburg (11-7).

Cedar Grove-Belgium capped the regular season Monday with a 2-0 road victory over Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah, completing a game that was suspended last week.

The Rockets took the lead in the third inning when Kyle Kirst's RBI single scored Justin Keller.

In the seventh, Kirst doubled in Luke Kaat.

Kaat pitched the first four innings for the win, with Spencer Bares working the final three frames for a save. They combined to allow only four hits.

Josh Ruppel led the Rockets' offense by going 2-for-3, and Kirst, Keller and Zach Feind were each 2-for-4.

Taylor Kaboord had three hits for Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah, which finished 7-11 in CLC play.

The win didn't impact the title since Cedar Grove-Belgium had already clinched first place by sweeping a doubleheader against Ozaukee last week. However, the victory did punctuate the Rockets' impressive late-season run, which included three wins by the 10-run rule in their last four games.

Cedar Grove-Belgium took a 13-8 overall record in a WIAA regional semifinal game Tuesday against Ozaukee (see related story).

Rockets coach Mike Ruppel said sweeping Random Lake in a doubleheader June 25 was the key for his team.

"The turning point for our season was the Random games, where the players starting playing as a team and with some energy and heart," he said.

"Previous to that point, we were going through the motions at practice and games. We have had better, more focused practices which have helped us collectively as a team play better."

CG-Belgium 12-10, Ozaukee 2-0

The Rockets cruised in a home doubleheader in a doubleheader last Friday, avenging a 4-1 loss June 22 with a pair of six-inning wins.

"We came out to play with the purpose of winning the conference outright," coach Ruppel said.

Josh Ruppel went the distance on the mound in the first game, allowing two runs on two hits. He struck out nine, walked one and hit a batter.

The Rockets trailed, 2-1, early but scored four runs in the fourth inning and six runs in the sixth.

Ozaukee did all its scoring in the second when Hunter Hess drove in a run with a groundout and Jared Bares hit into a fielder's choice.

Cedar Grove-Belgium outhit the Warriors, 12-2, with Ruppel and Christian O'Donnell each going 2-for-3.

In the second game, Kaat tossed a six-inning shutout, scattering four hits and striking out eight.

The Warriors (9-9 in the CLC) never got a runner past second base. Their only extra-base hit was a double by Devon Linzenmeyer.

"Ozaukee was never allowed to get in the groove behind Kaat's strong performance and solid defense," coach Ruppel said.

The Rockets scored in each of the first four innings, including three-run outbursts in the third and fourth. Kirst, O'Donnell and Ruppel each went 2-for-3.

On July 3, the Rockets rolled to an 11-1 win over Sheboygan Lutheran/Kohler, the team they shared the 2011 conference title.

"Our hope is we can carry this momentum deep into the playoffs," coach Ruppel said Monday.

Image Information: CEDAR GROVE-BELGIUM'S T.J. Obbink stirred up a cloud of dust as he turned a double play during Friday's doubleheader against Ozaukee. Host Cedar Grove-Belgium won both games to clinch an outright Central Lakeshore Conference title. Photo by Sam Arendt