

KO by home run

Big blast from Stephens keys Oxford's win

BY CHRISTA TURNER

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ALEXANDRIA — Oxford's Jackson Stephens didn't think the ball had a chance.

The sophomore lofted a towering shot into right field that seemingly just kept going and going — until it landed beyond the fence for a two-run home run.

It was the first hit against White Plains senior Caed Turner, and it was the decisive blow in what had been a highly competitive game. The Yellow Jackets posted six runs in the bottom of the fifth inning en route to an 8-2 win against the Wildcats in the semi-finals of the Calhoun County baseball tournament on Monday night.

"To be honest, I thought it was just a pop-up," Stephens said of his home run.

"I heard my teammates saying, 'Go ball, go ball.' I was just praying for it to go over. That's a tough ball club. I wish them the best."

With the win, the Yellow Jackets advance to play Jacksonville in the finals tonight at 6 at Alexandria.

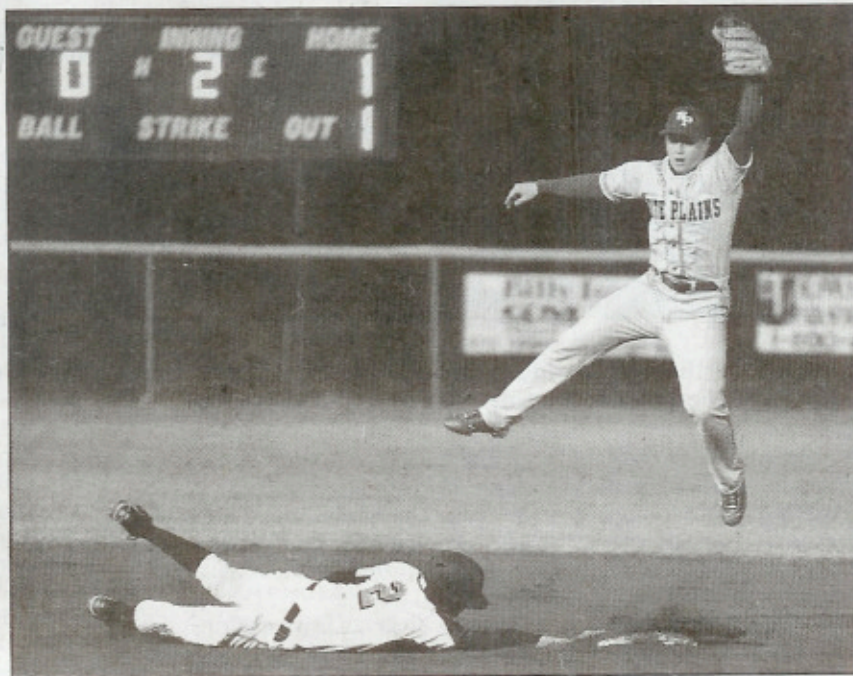
The Yellow Jackets (12-4) eked out a run in the first inning when Stephens walked, stole second, moved to third on an errant throw and scored on a wild pitch.

The Jackets had a similar threat going in the second inning, but T.R. Jones was thrown out at the plate trying to score on a wild pitch.

Errors hurt the Wildcats, who had an error in each of the first four innings, then three in the decisive fifth inning.

"You can not play the way we did defensively and beat a team like Oxford," White Plains coach Chad Hudson said.

"We can not play that kind of



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

White Plains' Brock Wright leaps to catch an errant throw from his catcher as Oxford's Conner Graham slides back safely into second base during the Yellow Jackets' 8-2 win in the Calhoun County baseball tourney.

defense. We were walking through land mines the first few innings.

"I feel pretty good about our pitching, but we've got to shore things up defensively. I told Caed I was proud he kept fighting and kept us in the game and gave us a chance to win."

The Wildcats (8-3) showed the same kind of scrappiness in tying the game in the top of the fifth. Justin Turner struck out, but advanced to first when Stephen's pitch skipped away. Two more wild pitches moved Turner over to third, and he scored on a sacrifice bunt from Tyler Jones. Jones also had a RBI double in the top of the seventh.

But things got away from the Wildcats in the bottom of the inning. Tanner Gardner walked and then scored on a double error. Adam Ballew reached first on a strikeout that got away. Stephen's home run made it 4-1. Tucker Simpson followed with a

double to right-center, ending Caed Turner's night.

The Jackets tacked on two more runs on a double from Will Davis. In the sixth, Ballew tripled and scored on Stephens' groundout.

Stephens pitched a complete game, striking out nine and giving up just two hits and two walks.

Caed Turner struck out six but walked six in 4 1/2 innings. Justin Turner relieved him, allowing three runs and striking out two in 1 1/2 innings.

"(Caed) was very, very impressive," Oxford coach Wes Brooks said. "I can't say enough about him. He shut us down for five innings.

"You'd think a 3A team facing a 6A team, he'd be nervous, but he wasn't. That's one of the best pitchers we've seen all year."

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