

Coffman tosses 'unreal' no-hitter

Story by Preston Wu

With the tying run just 90 feet away and two outs in the top of the final inning, the Mavericks were clinging to a 1-0 lead over Houston Christian. Junior starting pitcher Cole Coffman had not allowed a hit all day, but there was little margin for error if he wanted to get the win – and complete the no-hitter. On his 88th and final pitch, Coffman unleashed a fastball that froze the Mustang hitter. “After I threw the pitch, the umpire called it a strike, and I started screaming with excitement,” Coffman said. “All my teammates from the dugout started running out. It was an unreal experience.”

PREGAME

Heading into the game, Coffman knew the stakes were high because he would have to compensate for the team’s slumping offense. “Most of the season, our bats have been cold,” senior catcher Coltan Blossom said. “We’ve really struggled to put up runs consistently, so it puts a lot of pressure on our pitchers.” Regardless of the stakes, Coffman’s warmup routine was the same, consisting of a long stretching routine followed by throwing off flat ground. He always ends with a knuckleball – just for fun. In the Randall Field bullpen before the Mavs first SPC matchup on March 27, Blossom observed, “Cole’s changeup looked really nice, and he was confident in all his pitches. He looked really sharp.”

1ST INNING

Coffman recorded a pair of three-pitch strikeouts to open the game, followed by a first-pitch flyout to left fielder Andrew Christensen. “I was easing into the game and started trusting my pitches,” Coffman said. “I started feeling really good on the mound.”

2ND INNING

Coffman again displayed efficiency, needing only seven pitches to retire all three batters. “I felt like I could dominate anyone,” he said. “My confidence was sky high at that point.”

3RD INNING

After inducing weak contact to retire the first two hitters, Coffman struck out the nine-hole hitter looking. He had gone through the entire lineup once without allowing a baserunner, but because the Mavs had not scored, he knew he needed to stay dialed in. “I started to realize what was happening, but I had to focus on staying in control and taking everything one pitch at a time,” Coffman said.

4TH INNING

After a couple groundouts, Coffman struck out the three-hole hitter to end the inning. “I began to feel in total control,” Coffman said.



COLE-BLOODED Coffman's teammates rushed to celebrate after he threw a no-hitter against Houston Christian on March 29.

Photos courtesy of Jack Chavez

“My command felt sharp, and I was pinpointing my pitches exactly where I wanted them to go.” Behind the plate, Blossom made some adjustments the second time through the order. “At the beginning, we went with a fastball-heavy approach just to see if they could hit him at all,” Blossom said. “Then we mixed in a lot more curveballs and changeups.” In the bottom half of the inning, the Mavericks offense played small ball to get on the scoreboard against Houston Christian sophomore Tanner Ball, who was tossing a perfect game as well. Mavs center fielder Thomas Perich legged out an infield single to short – the first baserunner for either side. A balk and a groundout moved Perich over to third. He crossed the plate on a wild pitch, finally providing Coffman with some much-needed run support. “It felt really good to be there for my team,” Perich said. “Houston Christian also pitched a guy that was dealing, so it was important to get that run for Cole.”

5TH INNING

Coffman followed the same script as the previous innings: a strikeout looking, a routine groundout to second baseman Leyton Rhee and a swinging strikeout. “It was then that it really hit me that a no-hitter or even a perfect game was a real possibility,” Perich said. “Everything felt electric, and his stuff looked unhittable.”

6TH INNING

Coffman mowed through the bottom of the Mustang lineup, striking out the side and preserving the perfect game bid. But he nearly accomplished an even rarer feat in the process. It took Coffman only 10 pitches to whiff all three batters. If Coffman hadn’t thrown a ball on the first pitch to the third batter, he would have tossed what baseball insiders call “an immaculate inning.” In Major League Baseball history, there have been 326 no-hitters and just 121 immaculate innings since 1889. “It almost never happens, so it would have been crazy to see,” Blossom said. Coffman could finally see the light at the end

of the tunnel – he was just three outs away – although no one dared mention it to him.

7TH INNING

After forcing a groundout from the leadoff man for a quick first out, Coffman coaxed another grounder to shortstop Jake Irwin. This time, the ball was not fielded cleanly, and so the first baserunner of the game reached. The perfect game was no more. “There’s a lot of pressure at that point,” Blossom said. “It’s bound to happen, and we were able to joke about it in the end.” With a pinch runner now on first, the pressure shifted from Coffman chasing a perfect game to the team defending a one-run lead. After the runner stole second, the tying run was in scoring position with one out.

Outfielder Hudson Davenport fouled off four consecutive pitches before swinging over the ninth pitch of the at-bat for the second out. Coffman was just one out away from the no-hitter, but the lengthy at-bat left him dangerously close to exceeding the mandatory 95-pitch limit. On a 2-1 count to the cleanup hitter, the runner on second made the risky decision to steal third. Blossom’s throw was wide, but third baseman Jack Stanger prevented the ball from going into left field and letting in the tying run. “I threw the ball slightly off target, but luckily [Jack] made a great play to stop it and keep the runner from scoring,” Blossom said. “It could have been a disaster.” With the tying run just 90 feet away, Coffman prepared to finish what he started. “His face went red on the mound, which usually means he throws harder,” Blossom said. “He was an extra level of locked-in at the end.” Coffman fired a strike to get the count full. On his 3-2 delivery, while everyone on the field and in the stands held their breath, Coffman painted a fastball on the edge of the zone. “I caught the ball and heard the umpire’s strike-three call,” Blossom said. “I looked up, and Cole had the most emotion I’ve ever seen him have on the mound, and everyone came charging out.”

POSTGAME

As the dugout emptied, the reality of Coffman’s achievement began to set in for his teammates. “I honestly was so locked in on winning the game that it didn’t hit me that the no-hitter was actually happening until after the last pitch was thrown,” Perich said. “Everyone in the dugout rushed the field and dogpiled Cole.” For Coffman, the milestone was more than just a personal accomplishment. “I’m very grateful for my whole team because their energy was through the roof the entire game,” he said. “I couldn’t have asked for a better team to have accomplished this with.”

Additional reporting by Sophia Kim

PUTTING UP ZEROS After pitching a masterpiece, Coffman posed to commemorate the moment.

