

Bolton Brewers eliminate the Ivy Rangers to advance to NDBL Finals rematch with New Lowell

By Jim Stewart

The Bolton Brewers defeated the Ivy Rangers 8-4 to win their NDBL semifinal series 3-0-1 on Tuesday night.

The Brewers won Games 1 and 2 of the series by scores of 10-0 and 6-4, respectively.

The visiting Rangers rallied in Game 3 at North Hill Park to tie Bolton 6-6 and force a fourth playoff game back in Ivy.

With the series win, the Brewers advance to the League Championship for a rematch with the 2022 champs, the New Lowell Knights. New Lowell defeated Bolton four games to three in last year's hotly-contested NDBL championship.

In Tuesday night's decisive Game 4 road playoff victory, Brewers' Head Coach Mike Wallace credited his team's win to a series of factors: "I thought we caught a little magic against Ivy. Trent Barwick, our most veteran pitcher, threw four good innings for us and Aaron Dzib threw two innings to lock down the win."

Both Barwick and Dzib earned 3-0 records during the NDBL regular season during which the Brewers finished first in the loop with an .864 winning percentage.

Coach Wallace noted that superior pitching kept the game close versus the Rangers,

"It was 0-0 for three innings. Those innings were played in what felt like a half an hour. Off-speed pitches were working for both starters and the defense played well on both sides to support the pitchers. However, our lineup made adjustments to the off-speed pitches at the top of the fourth and some Ivy errors opened the door. We scored four runs and never looked back."

Wallace credited his hitters' determined nature as another key to winning the series versus the Rangers.

"We're a tough lineup to navigate through. I think Ivy has one of the best pitching staffs in the league and they had a couple of US College kids pitching for them this season. Overall, our hitting lineup was relentless, we worked counts and earned our walks to set up big hits. We also used our options off the bench and got our players into good spots where they could be productive offensively. It's a good feeling when we can sub in really good hitters who also happen to provide plus-defence at the latter stages of a ballgame."

With the Ivy Rangers in the rear-view mirror, the veteran Brewers' player-coach turned his focus towards the 2022 league champs.

"The key to beating New Lowell is we have to hit with runners in scoring position. Last year, we left a small village on the bases. We didn't have multiple run innings. In fact, we had 13 hits in Game 7 versus the Knights and only scored two runs. We also had key injuries to our shortstop, centerfielder, and second baseman. This year, we are far more healthy heading into the Finals."

The Brewers' skipper also noted the "advantages of a long break between the semis and the finals. It really helps set up our pitching rotation with Aaron and Victor scheduled to start Games 1 and 2 for us."

The Brewers (18-2-2) and the Knights (17-4-1) play Game 1 of their Best-of-7 NDBL Championship Series on Saturday, September 9 at North Hill Park at 1 p.m. Game 2 will be played in New Lowell on Sunday, September 10 with first pitch also at 1 p.m.