

Thunder continue their reign

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THE DAILY GLEANER

A little late thunder by Mitch Delaney allowed the Tecumseh Thunder to continue their reign.

After the defending Canadian senior men's baseball champions coughed up a 3-0 lead in the top of the sixth inning by giving up three runs, Delaney delivered a drop-the-bat, long-distance home run on Billy Martin's first pitch in the bottom of the inning to lift the Thunder to a 4-3 victory and their second straight national title before some 1,200 fans at Royals Field.

"It feels amazing, man," said Delaney, the six-foot-three, 220-pound first baseman who hammered Martin's inside fast-ball far into the night before the Thunder could dwell on the fact that the lead they had built had suddenly slipped through their hands — with three hits and three errors behind him.

"It's a game of inches ... they stuck around and they got some runs, but we stuck in there and battled," he said. "He

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Members of Tecumseh Thunder celebrate after edging Ontario-rival Strathroy Royals 4-3 to repeat as Canadian senior baseball champions on Sunday night at Royals Field. PHOTO: JEREMY TREVORS/MIRAMICHI LEADER

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BASEBALL → D1

tried to throw me that same first pitch fastball every time and that at bat, I knew I was swinging no matter what," said Delaney, who acknowledged the majesty of the blast.

"It was one of those 'off the bat I knew she was gone', so I just let the bat fly," said Delaney.

It made reliever Billy Hurley the winner. He had come on in relief of starter Joel Pierce, who was working on a two-hit shutout until the Royals pieced together a three-run rally in the top of the sixth on consecutive errors by normally sure-handed infielders Brandon Gignac and Matt Sykes.

Justin Cook singled to load the bases for all-star first baseman Ron Oneson, but he grounded into a double play – his second of the game and his fourth of the day, including two in their 1-0 semifinal win over the host Fredericton Peterbilt DQ Royals in the semifinal earlier. It appeared to score a run, but the umpires intervened for interference on the take-out slide at second base and the runner was sent back to third. But A J Reed followed with a two run double and Chris Mireault added another and we had a tie

game.

Temporarily.

"That happens ... you get a little tired," said Pierce, the rangy right-hander who won the opener for Ontario on Thursday. "Ideally, you don't go into a game wanting to do that. But when you win like that, you just go crazy. 'Everything's good after the fact.'"

Great, in fact.

Tecumseh looked to be in control when they scored a pair in the first on a two-run double by left fielder Paul Lamantia and then a homer to right by five-foot-eight leadoff man Curtis Lampkin.

Tecumseh won their way to the final with a 3-1 record in the round robin and, thanks to the mathematics of the tie-breaker, earned a bye to the semis. They edged the Charlottetown Islanders 1-0 in the semi and appeared destined for another shutout until the Royals roared back to make it tense. For a minute or two.

"I think everyone enjoyed it," Pierce said of the Delaney dinger. "It got pretty loud after that."

A second consecutive championship "is harder," said Pierce, who was the winning pitcher when the Thunder beat Quebec to win their first title on the Miramichi

last year. They had to work hard just to win the Ontario title, beating Strathroy twice on the final day to win the provincial title. And then, of course, had to do it again on a cool August night at Royals Field.

Pierce enjoyed the atmosphere.

"The park's small, but it gets loud," he said. "The fans were great. Both teams were getting chirped. But it was fun."

The top hitter for the tournament was Alberta veteran Drew Miller, who hit .500, belted three home runs and drove in 10 during round-robin play. Morgan MacLean of the Islanders was named top catcher and Shane Kraemer of the host Royals the top defensive player, based on his 3-0 shutout of British Columbia in the tournament opener Thursday night, in which he struck out 14 British Columbia batters.

Kraemer and MacLean were both named to the tournament all-star team with Oneson of Strathroy at first base, Dillon Doucette of Charlottetown at second, Kris Keating of Charlottetown at third, and an outfield including Jody Peterson of the host Royals, Jake Pelham of the Dartmouth Moosehead Dry and Miller. Mark Phillips of Charlottetown was the top DH.