

## JUNIOR LEAGUE BASEBALL DISTRICT 2 TOURNAMENT



Staff photo by Ric Dugan

Brunswick pitcher Matt Johnson winds up a pitch to a Frederick batter in Thursday's District 2 Junior Little League game against Frederick.

# HANDLING PRESSURE

Brunswick thwarts Frederick's comeback bid to win district title and advance to states

By **ALEXANDER DACY**

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KNOXVILLE - For the third time Thursday night, the Brunswick Railroaders Little League junior baseball team felt the pressure.

On the first two occasions, they responded to a run scored by Frederick Little League. On this occasion, BRLL had to hold on to a lead of its own.

FLL pulled within one run on a one-out balk in the top of the seventh, prompting Brunswick to turn to Jaden Purks on the mound. In just five pitches, that pressure was no more.

Purks locked down a two-out save that

sealed BRLL's 5-4 win at Othello Regional Park, giving the team the Maryland Junior League District 2 championship. Brunswick advanced to the state tournament, which begins July 5 in Hurllock.

"That's their character right there," BRLL manager Adam Kurtz said. "You can say all you want in [the dugout], but it doesn't matter. They have to do it out there. It's just a testament to their character and growth as young men to overcome and stay in the game the way they did."

It's the first time in the tournament Brunswick has overcome adversity, as its previous outing was a 10-0 romp of the same Frederick team.

Before Purks' effort, pitcher Matt John-

son supplied the heroics.

With two outs in the bottom of the fifth, he grounded a go-ahead RBI single up the middle that bounced off the lip of the outfield grass to ensure catcher Jacob Martinis would score. Two pitches earlier, Martinis evened the contest for the second time with an RBI single of his own.

"You just gotta trust in the guy behind you and know that he's gonna do a job," Johnson said.

But Johnson particularly stood out on the mound.

He frequently blew zippy fastballs by FLL's hitters, and his buckling curveball

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## Brunswick tops Frederick to win district title

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had several Frederick batters bending backwards in the box, only to watch it nestle in the zone for a strike. As he reached the 95-pitch limit in the sixth inning, Johnson dialed up one more heater that caught the outer half of the plate for his 12th and final strikeout.

"I just kept telling myself that I've been in this moment before," Johnson said. "And just gotta work in the offspeed more."

That became critical as it appeared runs would be at more of a premium Thursday.

Johnson earned the win, tossing 5 2-3 innings of two-hit ball. He struck out 12 and walked two while allowing a pair of unearned runs.

"I love Matt. He makes it easy for you," Kurtz said. "You give him the ball, and you're confident you're gonna get strikes, you're gonna get max effort and you're going to get quality pitching."

After Johnson departed the bump, BRLL added a pair of crucial insurance runs in the bottom of the sixth inning. First baseman Luke Stockman (2-for-2 with a double) scored on an error, and second baseman



Staff photo by Ric Dugan

**Brunswick first baseman Luke Stockman gloves the ball to make the out as Frederick's Gabriel Gutierrez lunges into the base in Thursday's District 2 Junior Little League game against Frederick.**

Chase Sofely came home on a wild pitch.

FLL left fielder Malakhi Howell sparked his team's seventh-inning comeback attempt with an RBI triple, his second hit of the evening. He then scored on the balk before Purks shut down the final two hitters to seal Brunswick's victory.

"We preach it all the time," Kurtz said. "For them to continue to stay in the game and continue to work and continue to grind, despite however their previous at-bats went, again, it's

all a testament to their character."

Brunswick's roster includes Martinis, Johnson, Purks, Stockman, Sofely, Timmy Gibson, Landry Kurtz, Braeden Kean, Grayson Huffer, Cam Galleher and Graham Reeder.

Frederick's roster includes Howell, Sam Rice, Gabriel Gutierrez, Joey Wolf, Avery Martin, Lucas Talkington, Levi Dobbs, Camren Snapp, Nate Murphy, Cade Bowie, Connor Radcliffe and Liam Macaulley.