

Cherry Hill East's Miller comes up big in a pinch

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HIGH SCHOOLS

Cherry Hill East senior Joe Miller will hardly ever stand out on the baseball field because of his catlike quickness.

Miller, a senior who stands 6-2 and weighs 200 pounds, lumbers around more than he prances.

But yesterday, with his team trailing in the bottom of the fourth, 3-2, Miller came off the bench to pinch-hit and pounced all over a first-pitch fastball with all the ferocity of a hungry lion on wounded prey. The result was a three-run homer to left-centerfield. It provided the winning runs as the Cougars held off Lenape, 6-5, in an Olympic American game.

"I was just trying to put it in play, really, just trying to hit it hard," he said after East improved to 5-2 with the win. "It looked fat to me, so I had to swing the bat."

That he did, and his blast could become a turning point for coach Erik Radbill's club. East had two devastating losses last week, allowing a run in each of the final two innings in a 4-3 loss to Washington Township, then got clubbed, 10-0, by Pitman on Saturday.

Yesterday, the Cougars found themselves down, 3-0, in the middle of the fourth and, it's pretty safe to say, heads were hanging.

"I'm feeling pretty good right now," said Radbill afterward. "It was a big question to see how we'd rebound from Saturday's [Pitman] game. We have a big week this week, and it could pretty much make or break our season. We lost a tough division game last week in the bottom of the seventh at Township. So now we're 1-1 in the division and the season is still in front of us right now. We have a bunch of games this week and most of our pitchers are ready now. We'd like to think we're in a pretty good spot."

They weren't yesterday, until the bats came alive in the fourth inning.

Sean Gold knocked in East's first run with a double, and scored on a sacrifice fly by Jeff Bohus. With two outs, Dante Casano and Brian Reynolds walked. Lenape coach Phil Fiore then brought in righty Joe Argow, who

gave up an RBI single to Chip Tagland. Then Radbill made the move of the game, sending up Miller to hit for No. 9 batter Joe Cona. All it took was one pitch for player to make coach look like a genius.

"Joe [Miller] has been working so hard in the cage and the coaches have been noticing and we keep telling him he's going to get his shot sooner than later," said Radbill. "He doesn't really have a position for us but he pitches a lot. He's our No. 2 starter. He might start getting a few at-bats when he pitches now. We're going to have to find a spot for him. You always look smart as a coach when it works out for you."

Lenape, which dropped to 6-5, scored a solo run in the third on a groundout by Ryan Fletcher. The Indians added two more the next inning when Brian Talbott and Ryan Phillips both worked walks off East reliever David Rothman. Both were knocked in on a single by Stefan Kancylarz. The sophomore knocked in two more the next inning on another single that plated James Peditto and Talbott. Kancylarz, a sweet-swinging lefty, finished 3-for-3 with a walk, two stolen bases and those four RBI.

Because of his team's inactivity due to rainouts, Radbill has plenty of innings left in his pitchers' arms. He told staff ace Ryan Martin that if this game was close near the end, the senior righthander would be toeing the mound.

So Radbill called his ace's number in the sixth, and Martin responded by retiring six of the seven batters he faced, including three strikeouts, to close out the important win.

"When Ryan goes into the game and we have a lead, we know it's lights out," said Miller. "Once the ball is in his hands, we have a lot of confidence that no one can come back on us. And he showed that again today."

Said Martin, who has committed to pitch at Iona: "I got in there since it was a close game, just like coach told me. I'm scheduled to pitch later this week [tomorrow, according to his coach], so it was good to get out there." ★