

# Rally against rival keyed Pine-Richland baseball's section title defense

Rv: [Jerin Steele](#)

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Christopher Horner | Tribune-Review

Pine-Richland's Owen Henne drives in a run against Seneca Valley on Thursday, April 20, 2023, in Pine.

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[Pine-Richland](#) baseball successfully defended its section crown by taking two out of three in a series with [North Allegheny](#).

How they won that series is a microcosm of what's made the Rams special the last couple of seasons.

They were down six runs early in Game 2 but clawed their way back to win 12-10 in a wild 11-inning game to secure the title.

Last year, the Rams surprised many on their way to a section title and they used a similar formula this season with an added element of more experience.

"These young men have grown and matured so much, not only as young men but as baseball players," [Pine-Richland](#) coach Kurt Wolfe said. "They got better as players, and they were through it last year. They understood how good the section is and the caliber of players they were going to see. That put them in a better position to have success."

Pine-Richland, [North Allegheny](#) and [Seneca Valley](#) all finished with an 8-4 record in Section 1-6A play, but the Rams took two of three from both the Tigers and the Raiders.

After a series of postponements due to poor weather early in the week, Pine-Richland took Game 1 from North Allegheny, 10-1, on May 5 behind a superb performance by starting pitcher Keegan Deihl.

Then, the next day in the second game, North Allegheny scored two in the first and five in the second to take a 7-1 lead.

“I told the players to just stay the course,” Wolfe said. “There was a lot of baseball to play, and we weren’t going to hit a six-run homer to take the lead. We had to slowly chip away.”

That’s exactly what the Rams did. They plated two in the fifth, three in the sixth and one in the seventh to tie the game.

Meanwhile, Sam Heckert pitched 5.2 innings of one-run ball in relief.

Pine-Richland scored three times in the top of the eighth to take a 10-7 lead, but North Allegheny didn’t go quietly. The Tigers rallied with three runs of their own to force a ninth inning.

Wolfe turned to Jacob McGuire, a senior and the typical starter in Game 3 of a series, the rest of the way. McGuire gave up a run, but kept the game tied in the bottom of the eighth and then pitched three scoreless innings.

“We had a conversation with (McGuire), and we told him if we had the lead, he was going in,” Wolfe said. “Did we know it was going to be a tie game in the ninth innings? No, but we had plans on using him to get the win whether it was Game 1 or Game 2. Obviously Diehl pitched great in Game 1, so we told Jacob to be ready and we would worry about Game 3 when it came. We were going to do whatever it took to win that Game 2.”

Anthony Mengine had an RBI single and Tanner Cunningham doubled him in for the two runs in the top of the 11th.

The Rams found out who they will play in the first round of the playoffs when the brackets were revealed May 12, which is past the deadline of this edition. If the playoffs are like last year, there will be a week off for Class 6A teams prior to playing the quarterfinals and semifinals on back-to-back days.

There’s a little unfinished business for the Rams when it comes to the postseason after falling to [Butler](#) in the quarterfinals last season.

Considering what the Rams did on their way to winning a section title, it’s safe to say they’ll be a tough out.

“We have some tough, hard-nosed kids that just refuse to lose,” Wolfe said. “When you have that grit and that type of mentality that you’re never going to back down and understand you’re always going to have an opportunity to win a ballgame, that’s a scary group.

“Right now, that’s where the boys are. They believe they can go in and win every game, and if things aren’t going their way, they know they can come back. They know they can continue to fight and ultimately win a close game in the end.”

*Jerin Steele is a freelance writer*

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