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Roaring Bears on target for Prentice Cup

Brampton team breezes past rivals

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SPORTS REPORTER

Some bears are winners and others just end up falling out of trees.

Crowds gathered yesterday a few blocks away from the Aurora Leisure Complex, site of the provincial high school baseball playoffs, but it was to watch a 200-pound black bear sitting in a tree get jabbed with a tranquilizer syringe and eventually get taken away after falling into a tarpaulin held by firefighters.

There were more busy Bears in the area, these ones playing baseball – working hard for a chance to win the coveted Prentice Cup next week at Rogers Centre.



RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR
Nathan Smith of the St. Edmund Campion Bears prepares to catch a fly ball while teammate Khadeem Escoffrey backs him up in the fifth inning of the Prentice Cup high school baseball playoffs in Aurora (June 3, 2009). The Bears beat St. Andrew's Saints 9-4.

The Bears from Brampton's St. Edmund Campion, Peel Region's champions, scored in their first five at-bats and went on to defeat the local St. Andrew's Saints, winners of the private school league, 9-4 in opening round action of the provincial East Region playoffs.

A few hours later, the Bears growled their way to a 12-6 win over the St. Joseph Jaguars of Ottawa.

To get to Rogers Centre for the final four, Campion needs to win today's game over the Notre Dame Fighting Irish of Burlington, who beat St. Joseph's of Cornwall 13-1 and Toronto's York Mills 6-2.

Former *Star* all-star Nate Smith led the way for the Bears with seven RBIs in the second game while Jimmy Britton pitched 2 2/3 innings in the opener and then tossed the entire seven-inning second game.

Smith and Britton's impressive efforts were no big surprise to Campion head coach Luciano Novia, who also had plenty of good words for 16-year old outfielder Khadeem Escoffery, now in his third year with the team.

"(Escoffery) has been a sparkplug in the playoffs," said Novia. "The kid is passionate about baseball, lots of potential and walks around school with his baseball batting gloves in his back pocket. He's struggled in the season, but really picked it up in big games like this."

Batting No. 2, Escoffery went 2-for-5 in the opener, scored the first run of the game, had a key RBI and stole a base. In the second game, another RBI, single and a pair of walks. He also made several good defensive plays.

Escoffery said the goal of winning a championship has also motivated him to be a better student.

"I don't like school but I know, to play baseball, I have to do well," Escoffery said. "I have to stay focused and not fall too much behind in my courses because I have four exams coming up. Right now, I want to help my team do something we have never done – bring home the Prentice Cup."

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