

## BASEBALL - CLASS 4A STATE THIRD-PLACE GAME: EDWARDSVILLE 6, YORK 1

## Noah Hughes, York savor a 'fun ride' to fourth in state

By JOSHUA WELGE  
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**JOLIET** - When Noah Hughes was called up to throw in one playoff game in relief for York two years ago as a skinny sophomore left-hander, little did he know the ride he was about to embark on.

In not just one sport, but two.

The ride for Hughes and York's eight other seniors ended June 8 with a 6-1 loss to Edwardsville in the Class 4A state third-place game at Joliet's Duly Health and Care Field.

But what a journey.

York (31-11), making its second consecutive state appearance for the first time in program history, finished fourth in Class 4A for the second straight season.

Hughes has collected quite a bit of state hardware the past two years. A right winger in hockey, he played on York's JV team that won the state championship as a junior. This season, Hughes and the York varsity team lost to New Trier in the state championship game.

"It's been ridiculous," Hughes said. "This year, the varsity [hockey] team took second place, last year reached the Final Four. It's just hard to believe the success that we've had. I can't imagine a better experience."

Hughes, although not possessing the notoriety of fellow senior pitcher Ryan Sloan, a potential first-round MLB Draft pick, has been a huge part of York's baseball success.

Hughes threw six shutout innings in York's sectional final win over St. Charles North and took the mound Saturday with an 8-1 record and 1.32 ERA on the season.

Starting the third-place game for the second consecutive year, Hughes threw three innings, allowing two runs on four hits with two strikeouts.



York's Drew Gami is tagged out at home plate during the Class 4A state third-place game against Edwardsville on June 8 at Duly Health and Care Field in Joliet.



Photos by Joe Leonard - jleonard@dailyherald.com  
York pitcher Noah Hughes throws against Edwardsville.

"It's awesome to be able to do it," Hughes said. "A little nerve-racking, but you have to be able to handle the nerves."

Hughes has shown he possesses nerves of steel in big spots. In last year's sectional final, he closed out a stunning 2-0 upset of top-seeded St. Charles East with an inning of relief in a game Sloan started. This year, he emerged as part of a big three with Sloan and Illinois State recruit Chris Danko on a York pitching staff that allowed only 12 runs over six playoff games leading up to Saturday.

"I definitely am throwing a lot harder than I was at that time, as a sophomore," Hughes said. "I throw four pitches now. I was a two-pitch pitcher sophomore year. My location is better. I'm just a better pitcher."

Hughes, who plans to attend the University of Iowa and study finance but won't play either sport, has enjoyed both very different athletic experiences. At 6-foot-1 and 160 pounds, he's a hockey player not afraid to lay a hit on people. In baseball, he prevents hits.

"They're very different, but I love

them both and had fun playing both," Hughes said. "Obviously hockey is much more fast-paced and baseball is much slower. It makes for an interesting switch."

York, which lost the June 7 state semifinal to Conant 1-0, had its best scoring chance Saturday in the fifth inning. The first three Dukes walked in the inning and Danko lined a single to right to score Hughes. But the next batter popped up and Josh Fleming lined into an inning-ending double play.

Two-time defending state champion Edwardsville, which beat York in last year's semifinal, padded its lead with three runs in the fifth and one in the sixth.

York managed only four hits, two by Danko.

"It wasn't our day yesterday, it wasn't our day today, but it was a fun ride for sure," Danko said. "I feel like we left our mark."

Indeed they have, as 15th-year York coach Dave Kalal echoed. Two years ago, the Dukes entered the playoffs as a 13-16 No. 10 seed and came a pitch away

from making state, losing an 11-inning heartbreaker to McHenry.

"That could have been three straight years. That game still sits in my craw. I'll never get over it," Kalal said. "But it's been just an unbelievable run. We went into the playoffs last year 20-15 as a sixth seed and made state."

"Some coaches go through their whole careers trying to do it one time. To do it in consecutive years, and to be in the Elite Eight three straight years, has been phenomenal."

Kalal said he's been blessed with talent and "blessed with dudes," especially on the mound.

Sloan, the biggest and baddest of those dudes, has the draft to look forward to next month, but on Saturday looked back fondly on his last high school season.

"We had a good group of guys and the chemistry came together at the end like it usually does," Sloan said. "I think at the beginning of the season we thought we could make it this far. The last two days weren't ours, but that's baseball."

## GIRLS FLAG FOOTBALL

## Willowbrook to host inaugural IHSA flag football state finals

By MICHAL DWOJAK  
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Willowbrook High School in Villa Park will host the inaugural girls flag football state finals this fall. The IHSA Board of Directors approved a three-year hosting contract at its meeting Monday.

The first state finals will take place Oct. 18 and 19. The move comes after the IHSA sanctioned flag football in February.

"The Willowbrook High School team, coaching staff and administration have been a model program in girls flag football in the state, so it seems fitting that they will serve as the host of the inaugural state finals," IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson said in a news release. "We appreciate their passion for the sport and are excited to work together to create lifelong memories for our participating schools."

Flag football is set to make its debut this fall with more than 100 teams committed for this season and 40 more teams interested for 2025. Willowbrook head coach Rachel Karos was excited to have her school host the inaugural event.

"We are proud to be part of growing girls flag football in Illinois, throughout the U.S. and internationally," Karos said. "Through the support of the IHSA and the Chicago Bears, girls flag football creates tre-

mendous opportunities for a diverse group of students, including engaging them with athletics, providing once-in-a-lifetime experiences and connecting them to scholarships. The inaugural IHSA state championship will be a historic event to continue to drive the sport forward and inspire the next generation. We are excited to provide an experience that promotes inclusion, access, diversity and equity for female athletes in Illinois."