

# OH SO CLOSE

*Bruins mount impressive comeback in Game 3 of South State, but lose emotional heartbreaker and championship by 1 run*



**Story by Charlie Lott, photo by Leah Murphy**

**B**ROOKHAVEN –Standing 60 feet and 6 inches away from the raggedy dirt mound, junior Trey Frierson was about to answer the prayers of many Bruin players and fans.

It was two outs at the top of the seventh inning. The Bruins, down 8-6, were at bat. The bases were loaded. Frierson faced a full count. All he needed was a single to tie the game and keep the Bruins' hopes alive.

“Last year, I was in the same position at Loyd Star,” Frierson said. “There was a runner on second base. And I had to get on base or drive in the runner to keep our season alive. And I struck out to end the game.”

Up to this point, the St. Joe Bruins had a commanding performance in the state baseball playoffs. After a 21-4 regular season record, the Bruins ripped through playoff games against North Forest, Enterprise and Taylorsville – running their overall season record to 27-4.

The Bruins entered the South State Championship series facing Loyd Star, a team that lost one game all season. After losing the first game in the best-of-three series, the Bruins won the second – setting up a do-or-die third game on the road at the Hornets' home field.

Despite a slow start, the Bruins found themselves

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in position to take the lead after an improbable top-of-the-seventh comeback.

Loyd Star threw the pitch. Frierson hit it, sending the ball in the gap between the third baseman and shortstop. When the left fielder misplayed the ball, Frierson turned a single into a triple – sliding head-first

into third and driving in the go-ahead run.

Bruin fans exploded in the stands and along the first-base fence line as St. Joe took a 1-run lead. When the next batter flew out, it was Loyd Star's turn at the plate.

At this point, the Bruins needed a quick three outs to win the game, the South State championship and a shot at the state championship the following week.

This next inning was a defining moment for the Bruins' extraordinary season. For such an immense moment, it's hard to believe that it all came down to one pitch.

Senior pitcher Michael Buck took the mound and snagged the first out – a ground out to Stephen Wolf at third base.

Next up, Loyd Star hit a ball to left field. When the ball bounced off Nick Louvier's glove, it turned a single into a triple – placing the tying run at third.

Now it was time for the Hornet Fans to celebrate in the stands and along the fence line.

When Loyd Star tied the game

at 9, Buck found himself in an impossible jam: The bases were loaded with one out and the winning run on third.

With the pressure building, in stepped Loyd Star's senior first basemen Bradyn Brister. With a full count, Buck's 80 mph pitch sailed high and to the right.

Ball four. The winning run walked into home plate.

The Bruins fell silent and slowly walked toward the right field corner in Loyd Star's Smith Field – the same spot where Bruin players and coaches met in last year's South State loss to the Hornets. Teammates and coaches wept.

“You can always learn something from failure. No matter what you do in life, failure can always teach you.” Coach McCall said.

Despite the loss, the Bruins showed great character in their comeback in the last inning.

This loss won't stop McCall along with the rest of his team. He vows the Bruins will be back next year, and out for blood.

