

DISTRICT 1 BASEBALL

Zupito fans 18 in UD's first district win since 1998

By Matt Smith

msmith@delcotimes.com

UPPER DARBY » Chris Zupito handled nervous energy prior to pitching in the biggest game of his life by reminding himself of his favorite pearl of wisdom.

"Pressure is a privilege," the Upper Darby senior said.

Zupito had trouble sleeping the night before and felt nauseous during the school day. He felt a bit of anxiety in the early innings of No. 9 Upper Darby's District 1 Class 6A tournament opener against No. 24 Council Rock North.

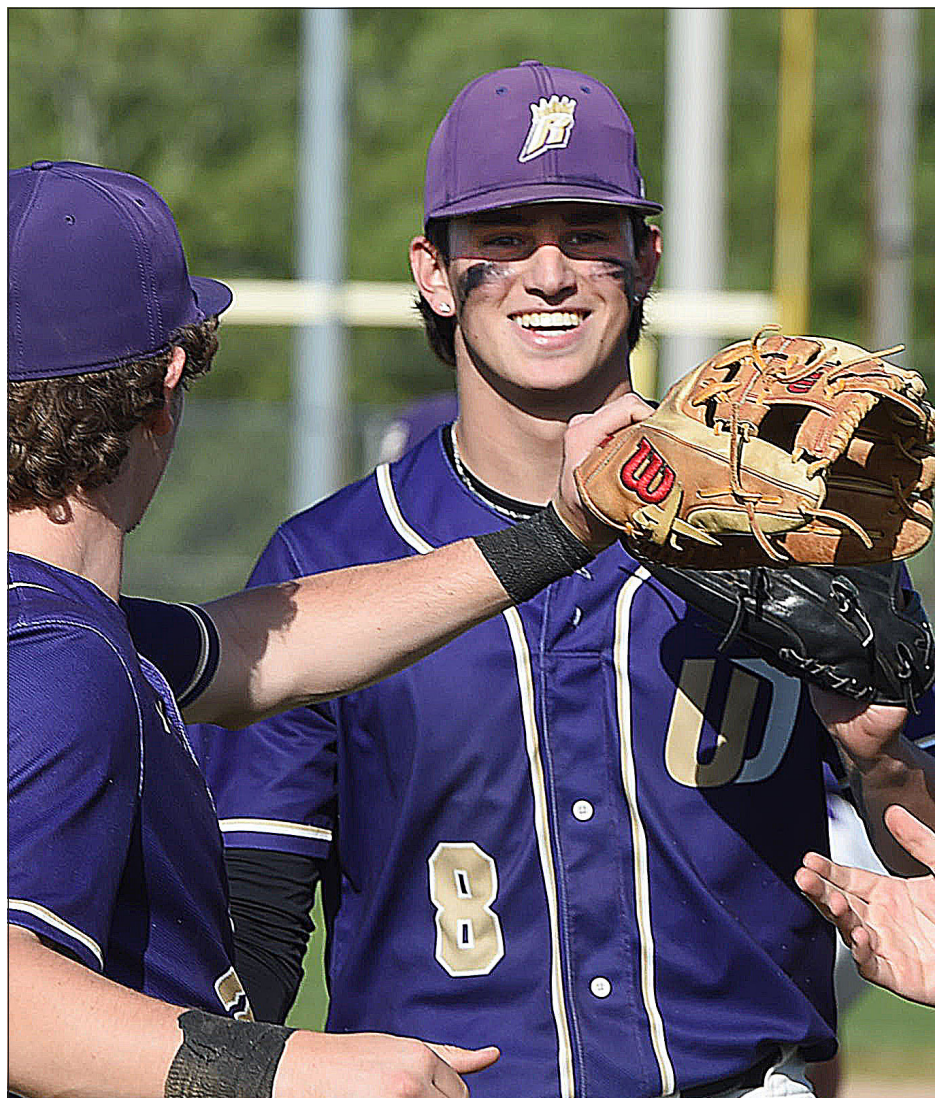
Maybe he felt the entire world was on his shoulders. The best pitcher in Delaware County did, after all, have the tall task of leading the Upper Darby baseball team back to the District 1 playoffs, where the Royals haven't been since 2010.

"The best/worst nerves I've ever had in my life," Zupito said. "It was insane all day. I think I was locked in since (Sunday) morning. But I felt sick most of the day. The second I stepped on the mound, most of the nerves went away and I went to work. I told myself that I had to give it my all and leave it all out there."

"It's probably the worst I've ever felt pitching, but that had to be one of my best performances"

You could say that again. The North Carolina State signee overpowered the Golden Hawks, who managed only two hits and one unearned run off the right-hander. Zupito recorded a career-high 18 strikeouts as Upper Darby defeated CR South, 3-1. It marked the Royals' first district playoff win since 1998.

Upper Darby travels to No. 8 Avon Grove for a second-round game Wednesday at 4.



PETE BANNAN — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Upper Darby pitchers Chris Zupito is all smiles after throwing a no-hitter earlier this month in a Central League win over Garnet Valley.

Zupito's 103rd pitch struck out nine-hole batter Joe Pirone to end the game. CR South had been silenced at the plate until the top of the seventh. Sam Serpiello had the only decent swing against Zupito all day, a one-out double to deep left field to score the Golden Hawks' only run, which was unearned. Zupito bounced back by registering his 17th and 18th punchouts.

At one point, Zupito retired 10 straight bat-

ters via strikeout. He was untouchable.

"My fastball set up all of my pitches," he said. "My main pitches were the slider and knuckle curve. But the fastball set the tone in every at bat."

And the Golden Hawks couldn't catch up to it or any of Zupito's other offerings.

"My curve was my best 0-2 pitch, to get a swing and a miss. My slider, I was comfortable throwing it in every count," he said. "I knew those hitters wanted

to hit fastballs. I kept giving them the slider and I was happy to keep striking them out."

CR South had runners on the corners with one out in the first inning. Zupito fielded a grounder back to the mound and threw to first. Billy O'Neill, the runner on third base, froze halfway down the line. That enabled first baseman Bryan Fitzpatrick to throw to catcher Colin Beelis and get O'Neill in a rundown. The

gift-wrapped double play saved some of Zupito's bullets: If he had to face another batter in the first, he might not have gotten the chance to finish the game under the 105-pitch limit.

"I thought I caught the ball back to me and then my glove came off, so the ball dropped. In my head I thought he was going home and I just had to get the out (at first base)," Zupito said.

Zupito was partially responsible for giving the Royals a 1-0 lead in the third off CR South starter Chase Ennis. With the bags loaded, he hit a grounder that was botched by the third baseman, enabling Drew Kessler to score from third.

In the fifth, Zupito smacked a single through the hole between first and second base, scoring Fitzpatrick from second. The Royals tacked on another insurance run in the sixth when Ben Beasley singled with two outs, stole second base and scored on Max Franzini's single.

"Winning this means the world to me because we are a group of nine seniors," said Fitzpatrick, who is bound for Cabrini. "We've been playing together since we were five (years old) and for it to finally come together after an unsuccessful season last year warms my heart. There is no better feeling right now."

With Zupito dealing, Fitzpatrick had a good feeling the Royals would celebrate a win that was more than two decades in the making, in front of a packed crowd of supporters.

"I know he is going to come out and pitch his best every single time," Fitzpatrick said. "On his bad days or on his good days, he is always going to compete against the other team no matter what. He

UPPER DARBY 3,
COUNCIL ROCK SOUTH 1

C.R. South 000 000 1 — 1 2 2
Upper Darby 001 011 0 — 3 8 1
WP: Zupito; LP: Ennis
2B: Serpiello (CRS).

emptied the tank and went the distance. I think that's his second complete game here and getting to watch it from first base was the best."