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If University baseball coach Ben Boka would have known Taylor Branisel was going to be so problematic on Wednesday afternoon, he would have met Benedictine's center fielder when he got off the bus in Hunting Valley, handed him 20 bucks and said, "Dinner is on me, and your reservations are at 4:30."

Branisel not only ran down and caught every gap shot Boka's team hit — five, to be exact — but he also delivered a mammoth RBI triple in the top of the seventh inning to lead the visiting Bengals to a 7-6 win over Boka's Preppers.

After pinch-runner Marco Orlando drew a pair of throws to first base from US pitcher Mike Arison, Branisel unloaded on the first pitch he received from Arison. And even though US right fielder Brian Hess was on his horse in full retreat at the crack of the bat, Branisel arrived at third base standing up, having driven in the go-ahead run.

"Taylor got a big hit," Benedictine coach Brian Sliwinski said. "That's what you expect out of a three-year starter. He is a very heady baseball player."

"I was just looking for a good pitch to drive," Branisel said. "I was thinking triple all the way. I saw the outfielder backing up, so I knew I hit it well."

Boka knew who hurt his team with a big hit — the same kid who hurt his team out in center field.

Five times did the Preppers launch deep drives to gaps — shots that could have been home runs in other facilities. But since University does not have a fence, Branisel took advantage of his speed to flag down the fly balls and squelch rallies.

Fittingly, the game ended when US' Michael Rossi lifted a shot toward Lake Erie that Branisel ran down for the final out.

"If you have a kid who runs well ..." Boka said, pausing, then acknowledging Branisel. "He certainly ran down a lot of our balls, balls that on other fields would have been gone. (Not having a fence) is one of our blessings and curses."

University (2-2) had multiple opportunities to get a win on Wednesday, holding leads of 2-0 in the first inning, 6-2 in the fourth and 6-4 in the sixth. But the Bengals (2-3) chased starter Chris Harris in the sixth, scoring their fifth run on a passed ball and the tying run on a wild pitch from Arison.

"We'll take 'em any way we can get 'em," Sliwinski said. "We've played a very good schedule to this point, so we'll take 'em whether they're by walk, wild pitch or passed ball."

Ryan Kovar walked to lead off the seventh for Benedictine, setting up Branisel's big hit.

Jordan Durham had two hits and scored twice for the Bengals, while Kovar singled in a pair in the fifth.

University's hit parade was led by Mike Ilacqua's two-run triple in the fourth and Rossi's two-hit performance, including a run-scoring double in the fourth.

"This totally changes the momentum of the team," Branisel said. "We've got good momentum going into the weekend now."

Thanks in no small part to him.

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