

Offensive Explosion, Smith's Dominance Earn Steam Doubleheader Split

Rose and Thomas combine to go 6-for-7 with seven RBI, five runs scored, and four doubles in game two as Steam bounce back from a 3-2 loss in the opener.

July 3, 2010

WESTERN HILLS, Ohio—

Game One (7 innings)

Guys don't bat over .400 often in baseball. Over .500 is something else entirely. So when John McCambridge (Xavier) entered Saturday's doubleheader with the Steam batting .507, the baseball fans of the world would think he's due for that unavoidable hitting slump. And it looked like that might start in the first game of the doubleheader, as McCambridge began the day 0-for-2, but the Licking County star was true to form, banging a pair of RBI singles in the late innings to bring Licking County back from a 2-0 deficit in a 3-2 Settlers victory. Brent Choban (Ohio) went the distance for Licking County to earn the win (3-0), giving up six hits and two earned runs before retiring the last 10 Steam batters he faced. The southpaw also picked off three Steam runners in the game, including two in the first inning.

The Steam took an early 1-0 lead in the second inning on a two-out Brad Gschwind (Miami) double and a Jake Proctor (Cincinnati) RBI single back through the box before Jon Edgington (Miami) homered down the left-field line in the third for Cincinnati's second home run of the year. The base knock for Proctor was his fourth in a span of 10 at bats (after beginning the season 1-for-14), while Edgington is hitting .333 (3-for-9) with a .571 on-base percentage since ending an 0-for-15 stretch on June 26.



1B Ben Thomas

Starter Brian Sand (Cincinnati) needed just 50 pitches to dance through the first four innings unscathed, working around an error in the first and three baserunners in the third. In the latter frame, the arm of J.R. Reynolds (Ohio) prevented what could have been a big inning, as Jordan Adams (Central Michigan) singled to lead things off but was tossed out at second by Reynolds while trying to advance on a pitch in the dirt. A walk and another single in the inning put runners on the corners with two men out, but Sand punched out Tyler Wynn (Cleveland State) looking on three pitches to end the inning.

Reynolds again threw out a runner in the fifth, but the Settlers still managed a pair of runs to knot the score at two. With runners on first and second and one out, both runners took off and McCambridge lined a ball just over a leaping Edgington at second for an RBI single. Licking County then sent both runners again, but Reynolds gunned down Wes Meadows (Otterbein) at third for the second out. Back-to-back full-count walks then loaded the bases for Daniel Gulbransen (Jacksonville), whose base hit drove home the tying run. The runs snapped a streak of 9.0 consecutive innings without allowing an earned run for Sand and a streak of 10.0 innings without an earned run for Steam starting pitchers. Sand threw 32 pitches in the inning.

Ryan Martin (Michigan State) came on to replace Sand in the sixth and got two quick outs before giving up a single and walking Meadows, the hitter preceding McCambridge. The base on balls—the first for Martin in 13.1 innings dating back to last season—indeed came back to haunt, as McCambridge delivered with a base hit to right to bring home the go-ahead and eventual winning run.

In the final inning, the Steam looked like they might crack Choban for the first time since the third inning, as he went to three-ball counts on both Gschwind and Proctor, but the lefty was up to the task, retiring both on ground outs to drop Cincinnati's record against left-handed starters this season to 2-7.

Game Two (9 innings)

In game two, Bryan Rose (Northern Kentucky) and Ben Thomas (Xavier), in the words of Licking County's broadcaster, "murdered" Settlers (14-7) pitching and Nathan Smith (Furman) was dealing all night long as the Steam trounced the Settlers 11-4.

Rose finished 3-for-3 with four RBI and played pepper with the right-field wall, hitting a monster round-tripper over it in the first inning before smashing two long drives off of said wall in the fourth and sixth innings. Rose is the first Steam (9-8) hitter to knock in four since Ryan Strausborger (Indiana State) had four RBI on July 27 of last season and is the first to notch three hits in a game without being retired since Edgington went 4-for-4 with five runs scored in last year's lid-lifter. Rose has now driven in six runs and drawn five walks over his last three appearances.

Not to be outdone was Thomas, who also doubled twice in going 3-for-4 with three RBI and three runs scored. Thomas' first double—to deep left-center—drove home the first two runs for the Steam in the opening inning, while his single brought home Gschwind in the third and his second double screamed over the center fielder's head in the fourth. Thomas, who has reached base safely in nine of his last 13 plate appearances (and 11 of his past 17), now has eight extra-base hits in his last 12 games—his 16 career extra-base knocks rank tied for sixth in Steam history with Nate Fields (Ball State), who was in attendance Friday night.

As much trouble as Licking County starter Christian Lockett (Kent State) had getting Cincinnati batters out—the righty yielded nine earned runs in 2.1 innings to take the loss (1-1)—Smith had that much success, allowing just three hits and an unearned run in 6.0 brilliant innings. Smith (2-1) walked just one and fanned six, including the side in the fifth inning on just 11 pitches. In fact, Smith threw just 72 pitches (49 strikes) in the game and never more than 14 in any inning.

Of course, Smith couldn't get McCambridge out—the center fielder went 2-for-2 with a walk against Smith and 3-for-4 in the game; after the doubleheader, his average stands at .519—but it was who Smith did get out (that is, everyone else) that mattered. Smith, sporting high socks and stirrups for the game, retired 16 consecutive batters not named McCambridge before Wynn's double in the sixth; McCambridge was on first base for that hit but was tossed out at home on a great relay from Rose to shortstop Michael Basil (Indiana) to catcher Ryan Bellamy (Xavier).

Smith himself has now gone 9.0 straight innings without allowing an earned run and has given up just one all season for a 0.53 ERA in 17.0 innings (four starts). His run is reminiscent of that of former Steam pitcher Ian Kadish (Marshall), who gave up just one run in a span of five starts (31.0 innings) last season. As a team, the Steam have now allowed three earned runs or less in eight straight contests; the team ERA over that stretch is 1.98, and on the season the number is 2.62, best in the league.

The Settlers' unearned run came in the first inning before the two-run double by Thomas and the two-run tater by Rose plated four runs for the Steam in the bottom half. The wheels then came off for Lockett in the third, as the Steam plated five runs to open up a 9-1 lead; the first nine batters of the inning all reached base. The last three batters for Lockett should sound quite familiar: hit batsman, walk, and walk, the last two of which forced in runs (Cincinnati has now driven in seven runs over the past two days without hitting the ball, on four walks and three hit batters).

The Steam would add runs in the fourth and sixth innings to go up 11-1 as Rose doubled home Thomas in the former and Gschwind in the latter.

A Cincinnati error led to three unearned runs in the seventh off of Mark Lincoln (Sonoma State), but Lincoln righted the ship for a scoreless eighth and Sam Dawes (Miami) continued his mastery with a 1-2-3 ninth to finish things off. Dawes has not allowed a run in 11.2 innings this summer; however, he lacks enough innings to qualify as the league leader in ERA. Smith is now second, though, after he and Dawes put on a clinic on Saturday.

The combined time of both of Saturday's games was just three hours and 56 minutes. Cincinnati plays again on Sunday, this time at Lake Erie for a 1:30 doubleheader. The Steam have won six of the past eight over the Monarchs, who are just 3-6 all-time at home versus Cincinnati.