

Twice is nice!

Steam take out Copperheads for back-to-back GLSCL titles

After two upset victories by the Southern Ohio Copperheads (over #2 Grand Lake) and the Licking County Settlers (over #1 Lima), the Steam found themselves matched up in the final with the fifth-seeded Copperheads. Cincinnati swept Southern Ohio during the regular season in two double-headers, but, as center fielder Ryan Strausborger put it, "Five in a row is tough." Both teams went 2-1 in their first three playoff games, with the only common opponent being the Grand Lake Mariners, whom both teams defeated.

After using left-hander Mike Jefferson (Louisiana Tech) to down the Xenia Scouts and secure a place in the title game, the Steam sent righty Matt Weber (Findlay) to the mound to face Southern Ohio. After the Copperheads stretched their pitching staff thin in their 3-2 win over Grand Lake, they sent Andy Onak (Ohio Dominican) to the hill to take on the Steam line-up that exploded for seven runs in one inning to defeat Xenia.

Weber allowed two runners in the first, one with a hit and one with a walk, but the Copperheads couldn't capitalize. After Jerod Yakubik (Ohio) flew out to left, Bellamy caught both baserunners attempting to steal second, and the Steam came to the plate for the first time in their attempt to repeat as GLSCL Champions.

The Steam threatened in their half of the first, putting a runner in scoring position after a Drew Schmidt (Xavier) base hit and a Jon Edgington (Miami) walk. They also failed to take advantage, though, as Ben Thomas (Xavier) grounded into a 6-4-3 double play and Andy Onak got out of the jam.

The Copperheads gave Weber some real trouble for the first time in the top of third, but Steam defense helped him escape it. After lead-off man Michael Fear (Morehead St.) reached on an error, the defense stepped up by retiring Trace Fowler (Sinclair CC) and Fear courtesy of a 4-6-3 double play. With two down, the Copperheads were in position to get the first lead after a Ryan Burnett (Bellevue CC) single and a walk to Jerod Yakubik brought shortstop Justin Marrero (Sinclair CC) to the plate. Marrero looked to knock in Burnett for the go-ahead run with a single up the middle, but Ryan Strausborger (Indiana St.) fielded the ball and fired it home, where Ryan Bellamy (Xavier) blocked the plate and made the tag to keep it scoreless going to the bottom of the third.

The Steam put Onak in a tight spot in the bottom half of the inning, loading the bases with one out after two base hits by Strausborger and Schmidt, followed by a walk to Edgington. After a strikeout by Ben Thomas (Xavier), Travis Shaw (Kent St.) fought off numerous two-strike pitches to earn a walk to get the Steam on the board, walking in Strausborger. That was all Onak allowed, though, as Brad Gschwind (Miami) ended the inning with a fly ball to center field, making it 1-0 in favor of the Steam.

Onak was finished after his rough third inning, as Nick Egan (Ohio) came to the mound for the Copperheads. His first two innings of work went well, as the bats remained relatively quiet on both sides. In the bottom of the sixth, Cincinnati finally got to the

right-hander with an inning of fundamental team baseball. Things began with a walk to Travis Shaw, followed by a well-executed hit and run on a Brad Gschwind single. TJ Jones (Cincinnati) followed with a sacrifice bunt to advance the runners to second and third, bringing the hero of the morning game, Bobby Freking, to the plate. Freking came through again, this time knocking a sacrifice fly to center field to score Shaw and double the Steam lead. Gschwind advanced to third on a balk, but was stranded there as Bellamy grounded out to end the inning with the Steam ahead 2-0.

The top of the seventh saw the end of the night for Matt Weber, as he gave up a lead-off double to Jeff May (North Carolina), struck a man out, and walked catcher Taylor Davis (Morehead St.). After 103 pitches and 6.1 innings of work, coach Joe Regruth visited the mound and sent Weber to the dugout, but not before he got a round of high fives from his teammates as well as an appreciative ovation from the Steam faithful. Regruth signaled to the bullpen and brought in Cody Elliot (Ball St.) to try and work out of the jam. Elliot did so in sparkling fashion, retiring the first two batters he faced on five pitches, stranding the two Southern Ohio runners and keeping the Steam lead at two runs.

Southern Ohio went to the bullpen again in the bottom of the seventh, this time calling on Brannon Belair (Kent St.) to try and keep the deficit at only two runs. Belair was also unsuccessful, pitching himself into a bases loaded, no outs jam. It started with a lead-off single by Strausborger, a walk to Drew Schmidt and an infield single by Jon Edgington. With the ducks on the pond, Ben Thomas brought Strausborger home with a sac fly to right field. Schmidt moved to third on the play, and the Steam had runners on the corners with one down. Travis Shaw came to the plate next and struck out, but not before Edgington stole second base to put two men in scoring position with two down for Brad Gschwind. The Copperheads once again went to the bullpen, using a lot of pitchers, as expected. This time it was Zach Botjer (Sinclair CC) who got the task of getting the Snakes out of the jam. He was successful, working a hard-fought at-bat against Gschwind and striking him out on the payoff pitch, ending the inning with the Steam lead at 3-0.

The Copperheads threatened again in the top of the eighth, courtesy of wayward pitching on the part of Cody Elliot. Elliot retired the first three batters he saw, including a strikeout to lead off the inning. After that, though, he couldn't quite hit his spots, missing narrowly a few times to walk Yakubik and Marrero to bring the tying run, Trent Moses (SE Missouri St.), to the plate. Coach Regruth chose to go with second team All-GLSCL reliever Michael Schum (Wright State). Moses took Schum's first pitch through the left side to load the bases and give Southern Ohio their best chance of the game with Jeff May coming to the plate. May just missed a Schum fast ball, but hit it well enough to bring in Yakubik on the sacrifice fly, putting his team on the board for the first time. Schum wouldn't allow anymore out of the Copperheads, striking out Jake Plata (U. of Akron) to keep it 3-1 in the middle of the eighth.

The Steam looked to get that one run back in the bottom of the eighth, and TJ Jones got their half of the inning off to a good start with a first-pitch single into left field. Bobby Freking then came to the plate and he and Jones executed a hit and run flawlessly, putting runners on the corners with none away. Ryan Bellamy then came through with his first

hit of the game, an RBI single to left field, scoring Jones. With no one out, Ryan Strausborger struck out, and Drew Schmidt hit a ball hard into left, but a diving catch by left fielder Jerod Yakubik led to an inning-ending double play. The Steam got their run back and went to the ninth ahead 4-1, only three outs away from a second consecutive GLSCL title.

Taylor Davis led things off for the Copperheads against Michael Schum. Davis reached on a throwing error at third base by Shaw, and the lead-off man was on. That was followed by another error, this time by Schum on a chopper back to the mound. With two men on, Trace Fowler came to the plate representing the tying run. Schum got Fowler to ground out to second, but Davis and Michael Fear both advanced into scoring position on the play, which, for all intents and purposes, should have ended the inning. No matter what should have been, Schum stepped back on the mound to face Zach Thoma (Western Michigan). Thoma grounded back to Schum, and he ran down Taylor Davis between third and home, allowing Fear to advance to third, but keeping the Steam lead at three runs. That brought the Copperheads' top offensive threat to the plate, Jerod Yakubik. He fell behind 0-2 to Schum, but fought off a tough pitch for a high chopper and an infield single, scoring Fear to bring Southern Ohio within two. Schum got ahead 0-2 again in the next at-bat, but this time, Justin Marrero ripped a ball down to third. Travis Shaw redeemed himself with a diving stop and strong throw to get Marrero by a step at first, making it back-to-back titles for the Steam, their second in only four years of play in the Great Lakes Summer Collegiate League.

In the end, the Steam overcame three errors to down the Copperheads behind timely play at the plate, on the mound and in the field. The Steam defeated the #5 seed to win the championship for the second consecutive year, as they defeated the fifth-seeded Columbus All-Americans for the victory last season. The Steam ended the playoffs with a 3-1 record, ending their season with a final record of 26-13.

COPPERHEADS (2-2) 000 000 011 2 7 0

STEAM (3-1) 001 001 11X 4 9 3

WP – Weber (1-0)

LP – Onak (0-1)

S – Schum (2)