

Stellar pitching continues as Steam shut down Mariners, 5-2

Uhl cruises after Rose, Thomas stake Cincinnati out to an early 3-0 lead.

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CELINA, Ohio—“Hang with ‘em” is about all one can say to a pitching staff which compiles a 3.12 ERA while the team loses five out of six games, including four by two runs or less. And hang tough the Steam hurlers did on Thursday night, standing tall once again and riding the big stick of Ben Thomas (Xavier) for a 5-2 victory over the Grand Lake Mariners in Celina, Ohio. The Cincinnati (7-7) staff has allowed five earned runs or fewer in eight straight games, 15 of the last 16, and 26 of the past 28.

Thomas drove home three runs on a pair of RBI singles to back a strong starting effort from lefty Paul Uhl (Thomas More), who completed 5.0 innings on just 60 pitches to pick up the win (2-0). Uhl allowed just a run on four hits and a walk while punching out four.

Perhaps the biggest moment of the game came with reliever Markus Kuykendoll (Xavier) on the mound in the sixth inning. Down 4-1 entering the inning, the Mariners (6-8) immediately notched three consecutive singles off of the Musketeer right-hander to plate a run and, with nobody out, had the tying runs in scoring position. But Kuykendoll turned things around just as quickly, getting Kevin Bower (Miami) to pop out before striking out Cory Klenke (Miami) and Jon Bonvillian (Hillsdale) swinging with the bases loaded to keep the Steam lead at two. Grand Lake would not seriously threaten for the remainder of the game.

Steve Matre (Mount St. Joseph) and Ryan Hopkins (Tennessee Tech) followed Kuykendoll’s 2.0 innings with a scoreless frame each, with Hopkins collecting his third save. The right arms of Matre and Hopkins are a big reason why the Steam bullpen has an ERA of 2.65 this season, including a 1.65 ERA in the sixth inning or later.

Cincinnati plated a rare first-inning run to grab an early lead in the contest, as Noah Zipko (Campbell) was hit by a Chase Rihtarchik (Michigan State) pitch to begin the game and advanced to third on a wild pitch and a groundout before Bryan Rose (Northern Kentucky) snapped an 0-for-22 slide with an RBI single up the middle. The first-inning score was just the second for the Steam all season, although opponents have only managed one.

Rihtarchik (0-2) would last just 3.0 innings, giving up three runs (two earned) to shoulder the defeat.

Uhl worked around a Jensen Painter leadoff double in the second—one of three hits for the right fielder on the night—and Cincinnati took advantage, extending the lead to 3-0 in the very next inning. Zipko singled with one out, and after Michael Morris (Tennessee Tech) reached on an error, Rose walked to load the bases for Thomas, whose base knock up the middle brought home a pair of runs. Since going 0-for-4 in the season opener, Thomas has recorded a hit or an RBI (or both) in all 12 starts.

A Corey Hough (Cincinnati) double led to sacrifice fly and a run for Grand Lake in the fourth, but the Steam got the run right back in the fifth to go up 4-1. A Morris base hit preceded another Rose walk and another Thomas RBI single, this time off of reliever Ross Gerdeman (Bowling Green). Thomas improved his average with runners in scoring position to .389 (7-for-18) in picking up his second three-RBI game of the season (and fifth of his Steam career).

After the Mariners’ run in the sixth, the Steam played little ball to go up by three once more in the eighth; Tim Issler (Ball State) singled to lead off the frame, advanced to second on a sacrifice by J.R. Reynolds (Ohio), and scored when Brennan Glass (Kent State) uncorked two wild pitches. The lead would be more than enough for Matre and Hopkins, who combined to retire six of seven Grand Lake batters to cap off Cincinnati’s sixth win in its past seven tries at Westview Park. The Steam have not surrendered more than five runs to the Mariners since 2007, and have



Ben Thomas

never allowed more than five runs to Grand Lake on the road—the Mariners have managed just 25 runs in 10 home games versus the Steam (eight of which were Cincinnati victories).

Morris scored twice and also notched a pair of hits to extend his hitting streak to seven games, while Issler finished 2-for-4 in the start at third base; Issler and Brad Gschwind (Miami) have combined to hit .424 (14-for-33) with a .512 on-base percentage and just one strikeout while playing third base this summer.

Friday night's game pits the Steam against Xenia, as Cincinnati will look to avenge its early-season loss to the Scouts. First pitch from the AIA Sports Complex in Xenia is set for 7:00 p.m.