

Road Warriors Win Wild One in Lexington

Steam improve to 8-4 away from home in 11-10 victory over Hustlers.

July 7, 2010

LEXINGTON, Ky.—Steam fans rest assured: Cincinnati's 3-5 record at Western Hills High School this season does not tell the whole story. With their 11-10 win over Lexington on Wednesday night, the Steam improved to 8-4 on the road, a winning percentage that would be the best in club history; entering the 2010 campaign, Cincinnati had won at an eye-popping .740 clip at home compared to .547 on opponents' home turf. Where the wins come is hardly a concern for the surging Steam, as Cincinnati has now won five of seven and sits in fourth place in the GLSCL at 11-9.

The Steam entered the contest with some impressive pitching streaks on the line, including nine consecutive games allowing four runs or less (the longest stretch in team history and the longest in the league since Grand Lake put together an 11-game streak from July 30, 2008 to June 23, 2009) and 10 consecutive tilts yielding three or fewer earned runs. Both of those streaks came to a halt in the seventh inning Wednesday night, but a continually improving offense and a bullpen that bent but didn't break ensured a Steam victory. The 10 runs are tied for the most Cincinnati has ever given up in a winning effort (the Steam also defeated Stark County 14-10 last season).

One equally impressive pitching streak did continue, however, as Paul Uhl (Thomas More) hurled 4.0 shutout innings in the start to make it 11 consecutive games in which Cincinnati's starter has allowed two or fewer earned runs. Steam starters have yielded a total of just eight earned runs over that period for an ERA of 1.45; Uhl (3-0) himself has lowered his ERA to 2.25 by giving up just one run over his last two outings, covering 9.0 innings. After Uhl's departure—Cincinnati was ahead 5-0 at the time—Lexington would get within a run on three separate occasions, but the bullpen, despite allowing 10 runners to cross the plate, fended off the Hustlers (6-15) to preserve the victory for Uhl, who is two wins shy of the Steam single-season record (held by Pat Berndsen and Joey O'Gara) after just four starts.

Michael Morris (Tennessee Tech) wasted no time in stretching his hitting streak to 12 games, singling in the first, but he was left stranded as neither team scored in the first two innings. Two hits in the game for Morris give him 11 (.458 average) over his last six games.

The Steam opened up a 1-0 lead in the third on a common sight of late: that is, Ben Thomas (Xavier) not even needing the lumber to pick up another RBI. Three walks—one by starter Josh Thigpen (Asbury) and two by his replacement, college teammate Garnder Adams—loaded the bases with one out for Thomas, who drew a five-pitch walk for his 10th RBI in his last seven games and his fifth this season via hit-by-pitch or walk. The base on balls also extended Thomas' on-base streak to 15 consecutive games. Cincinnati's two-through-four hitters in the lineup collected seven walks in the game without a strikeout; Bryan Rose (Northern Kentucky) worked three himself and scored twice in the game.

Thigpen (1-1) suffered the loss despite giving up just one of the 11 Cincinnati runs.

A Brad Gschwind (Miami) ground-ball double play ended the threat in the third, but the Steam would bounce back with a run in the fourth to go up 2-0. Michael Basil (Indiana) reached on an error with one out, swiped second, and came around to score on a base knock by Nick Priessman (Eastern Illinois), who had been 1-for-his-last-20 but went 2-for-4 with two RBI in the game. Then in the fifth, Cincinnati went to work quickly on new pitcher Koby Hearn (Union, Ky.). A Jordan Keur (Michigan State) double (his fourth of the year but first not coming in the eighth inning) and a Rose walk put two on for Gschwind. The runners pulled off a double steal before Gschwind doubled



SP Paul Uhl

both home for a 4-0 Steam cushion; Jake Proctor (Cincinnati) then continued his hot hitting with an RBI single to increase the Cincinnati lead to a handful.

The seemingly impenetrable Steam pitching staff was not so invincible on this night, as Nathan Mutsch (Xavier) had to be pulled after giving up four runs on four hits in the fifth. Ryan Martin (Michigan State) came on with the tying run on second and one out in the inning and kept the 5-4 Steam lead intact by inducing a pop out and a strikeout.

Cincinnati greeted another Lexington reliever—the sixth of eight Hustlers pitchers on the night—rudely in the seventh, as Todd Duff (Alice Lloyd) saw his 3-0 pitch to Thomas deposited into left field for a leadoff double, already Thomas' seventh two-bagger of the year. Gschwind moved the first baseman to third with a ground out before Proctor delivered again, this time with an RBI double to center field. The Steam would manufacture two more runs in the inning, making the score 8-4, thanks to a pair of Lexington errors (two of six on the night for the Hustlers, who have 57 errors and a .925 fielding percentage in their first 21 games).

The Hustlers finally got to Martin in the bottom of the inning, plating two on a two-out double by Shane Crain (Indiana State) before an error allowed a third run to cross, making the score 8-7. Opponents had been batting just .147 (4-for-27) with runners on base against Martin before Crain's RBI hit. Martin struck out Dain McNabb (Middle Tennessee State) to keep the Steam on top before Cincinnati got all three runs back in the top of the eighth. After two walks, Gschwind laid down an attempted sacrifice bunt, which pitcher Andy Heston (Northern Kentucky) threw away to allow a run to score. Proctor then made it five hits in a span of seven at bats with a two-RBI single up the middle to push the Steam lead back to four. Proctor finished with four RBI and became the seventh different Steam player notch three hits in a game this season.

The three-run eighth turned out to be crucial, as Steve Matre (Mount St. Joseph) worked a 1-2-3 eighth but Ryan Hopkins (Tennessee Tech) could only get one out in giving up three ninth-inning runs (this coming after the Steam had allowed just one earned run all season in the ninth inning). But with the tying run on first, Sam Dawes (Miami) entered and needed just four pitches to end the game, as he induced his 23rd and 24th ground ball outs of the season by virtue of a McNabb 5-4-3 double play. Dawes, who earned his first save, extended his scoreless stretch to 13.1 innings in the process. A hit for McNabb may have been a long shot, as batters are now just 1-for-17 with runners on base against the RedHawk southpaw this season, and no Steam pitcher has allowed an inherited runner to score this year (12 runners stranded).

At three hours and 28 minutes, the Steam's 11th win of 2010 took longer than any other game in Steam regular season history; the previous long game had been a three hour, 22 minute struggle with Xenia on June 27, 2007. Lexington hurlers needed 219 pitches to record 27 outs and fell just short of the century mark (98) in terms of pitches thrown out of the strike zone.

Cincinnati opens a three-game homestand on Thursday as the Steam tangle with the Hamilton Joes in a 7:05 game at Western Hills High School. The matchup features the two most accurate pitching staffs in the league, as Cincinnati and Hamilton rank one-two in the league in both fewest walks per nine innings (Cincinnati 3.107, Hamilton 3.113) and strikeout-to-walk ratio (Cincinnati 2.10, Hamilton 2.05).