

Steam Drop Pair of Heart-Stoppers to Lake Erie

Cincinnati makes noise in final inning of each game, but Monarchs pull off two one-run wins, 5-4 and 2-1.

July 16, 2010

WESTERN HILLS, Ohio—

Game One (7 innings)

A Lake Erie bullpen implosion and a Steam offense that refused to go down easy nearly combined for one of the most improbable comebacks in Steam history in game one, but Cincinnati left the bases loaded in the seventh as the Monarchs escaped with a 5-4 victory. The Steam entered the inning down 5-0, but a two-out throwing error by Bill Charvat (Illinois) extended the frame and preceded a single by Ryan Bellamy (Xavier) and three consecutive walks—two of which forced in runs—by Lake Erie relievers. Closer Dylan Vogt (Nebraska) entered the game and just beat Jordan Keur (Michigan State) to the bag on his ground ball to second to allow the Monarchs to barely squeak out the win.

When Tim Issler (Ball State) struck out in the seventh, the Steam had a runner on second with two out and were dangerously close to being shut out for the first time since the season opener. But an RBI single by Noah Zipko (Campbell) ended the clean sheet and Charvat threw low to first on Michael Basil's (Indiana) ground ball to give the Steam new life. Bellamy's RBI hit—his fifth in nine at bats this season with runners in scoring position and two out—made it 5-2 and brought up Michael Morris (Tennessee Tech), who worked a 10-pitch walk to load the bases. The Monarchs then replaced reliever Jeff Kelly (Pittsburgh) with Logan Brunkenhoefer (Oklahoma State), but the Cowboys hurler picked up right where Kelly left off in walking Jon Edgington (Miami), bringing the Steam within two at 5-3. Bryan Rose (Northern Kentucky) then nearly ended the game in dramatic fashion, but his hooking line drive into the left-field corner landed about five feet foul. Rose ended up walking to cut the lead to one, but in came Vogt, who induced Keur's ground ball to register his seventh save of the 2010 campaign.

Blake Bagshaw (Northern Kentucky) suffered the loss (0-1) but pitched better than his line; the freshman yielded five earned runs in 6.0 innings but was hurt by three long drives, including a pair of two-run jacks on two-out, two-strike pitches. Bagshaw punched out seven (tying for the most by a Steam pitcher this year), including the last three batters he faced, and walked just one in his 94-pitch effort. Steve Matre (Mount St. Joseph) followed Bagshaw by fanning the side in the seventh; Matre has now struck out eight of the last 10 batters he has faced over his past three outings and has not yielded a run in any of his last five appearances.

Still scoreless in the fourth, Ryan Ford (Middle Tennessee) led off with a single and swiped second, but Bagshaw quickly rebounded by sending Seth Willoughby (Xavier) back to the dugout on strikes and getting Reid Rooney (Central Michigan) to fly out to center. Bagshaw was a strike away from ending the inning but Jack Scanlon (Western Michigan) had other ideas, depositing a 2-2 pitch over the high right field wall for a two-run circuit clout.

Cincinnati had a golden opportunity to cut into the Lake Erie lead in the next half-inning, as a Rose walk—his 13th in his last nine games—loaded the bases with no outs after Morris and Edgington singled. But Keur fouled out to first and Jake Proctor (Cincinnati) ripped a ball right to the third baseman Charvat, who stepped on third for the rally-killing double play.

The Monarchs wasted no time making the Steam pay for the missed chance, as Alex Johnson (Cleveland State) put the Monarchs up 4-0 in the fifth when he launched an 0-2 pitch from Bagshaw over the left-center field wall.

When Willoughby tripled to deep left-center in the sixth and came home on a wild pitch, the run seemed insignificant, but it turned out to be the winning run as the Steam dropped their fifth one-run game of the season.

Zipko notched Cincinnati's lone multi-hit game, going 2-for-3 and snapping an 0-for-14 skid in the process.

Game Two (9 innings)

A hard-fought game on both sides ended with a bad taste in the mouth of the Cincinnati (12-12) faithful, as an overturned call in the Steam ninth inning prevented an opportunity to plate the tying run in a 2-1 Lake Erie (15-13-1) victory. An inning after Cincinnati loaded the bases with no outs and failed to score (the Steam are 1-for-their-last-17 with the bags full), Proctor smacked a double down the left-field line to lead off the ninth, bringing Edgington to the plate. Joe Regruth turned to the bunt once again, which had worked marvelously in the eighth—both Morris and Brad Gschwind (Miami) collected bunt hits in the inning—, and it looked like the tactic worked again when Edgington bunted to the left side and safe was base umpire Jim Merz's call at third when Willoughby—who picked up his first save—attempted to retire the lead runner. Manager Mike Montgomery came out to argue the call, and after Merz and home plate umpire Jon Milesky discussed the situation, the call was reversed, bringing Regruth out of the dugout to plead his case, but to no avail.

Edgington stole second—his 21st straight successful steal attempt in 2010 (including the spring season)—to give the Steam one last chance, but the pinch-hitter Issler struck out on three pitches and Nick Priessman (Eastern Illinois) grounded back to the mound to wrap things up. The doubleheader sweep was the first suffered by the Steam since Lima took a pair at Cincinnati on July 2 of last year.

Starter Mike Jefferson (Louisiana Tech) punched out the side in the first inning on 11 pitches but needed some help from his defense to keep the Monarchs off the scoreboard in the second. Sam Russell (Central Michigan) singled to begin the inning and advanced to second on an errant pickoff throw by Jefferson, but Proctor saved a run by making a diving stop on A.J. DeMarco's (Toledo) ground ball and flipping to Jefferson for the out. Jefferson would then catch Scanlon looking to end the threat.

Jefferson's three first-inning Ks meant that Steam pitchers had fanned nine consecutive Lake Erie batters (counting the end of game one).

Elliot Searer (Penn State) created a run in the third to put the Monarchs up 1-0, bunting his way to first before advancing to second on a sacrifice, stealing third, and scampering home on a wild pitch with two out. But Proctor punished an Eric Vaughan (Owens C.C.) pitch in the fifth for a no-doubt home run to tie the contest at one. The home run was the first surrendered by Vaughan (6-0) in his GLSCL career, spanning 44.2 innings; it was also just the fourth earned run allowed by Vaughan in his career (0.81 ERA).

Jefferson lasted 4.0 innings, allowing just one earned run, before giving way to Brent Wagner (Northern Kentucky) in the fifth. Jefferson punched out seven to retake the Steam career strikeout record (74) from Brian Sand (Cincinnati); the seven-strikeout game was the second for Jefferson this season and third in his Steam career. Jefferson has punched out five or more in eight of 10 career starts despite not pitching more than 5.0 innings in any of those starts (his career rate of 12.65 strikeouts per nine innings is far-and-away a Steam record).

The ERA for Jefferson over his last four starts stands at 1.72; he has punched out 23 in 15.2 innings over that stretch.

Wagner and Mike Peterson (DePauw) worked some magic to escape unharmed in the sixth and seventh innings, beginning when Wagner wiggled out of a two-on, one-out jam in the former inning. A double by Chris Savas (Central Michigan) put runners on second and third, but Wagner got Scanlon to fly out to shallow center and Keur made a diving grab in right to end the inning. Then in the seventh, Wagner got himself in trouble again, as Johnson walked before Ford feigned a bunt, pulled the bat back, and chopped a single through the drawn-in infielders to put runners on the corners. But Wagner was again up to the task, as after a sacrifice bunt put two in scoring position, Wagner induced a groundout (with the infield in) for the second out before being lifted in favor of Peterson. Peterson then said good morning, good afternoon, and good night to DeMarco, striking out the catcher on three pitches to leave the bases loaded (a Wagner walk preceded his exit).

Peterson (1-1) threw his first 10 pitches for strikes, but unfortunately for him two ended up in the outfield for base hits, leading to a Lake Erie run. Savas singled to lead off the eighth, moved to second on a sacrifice bunt, and scored on Johnson's sinking line drive up the middle that caught Priessman in-between. Priessman charged until the last moment and then pulled up, but the ball bounced over his head to allow the run to score the go-ahead run and Johnson to advance all the way to third.

Peterson got out of the inning with only one run crossing, leading the way for what looked like a promising Steam eighth. Priessman immediately started to make amends for his error by drawing a leadoff walk (which extended Cincinnati's streak of coaxing at least one walk to 34 consecutive games), and Morris reached with a bunt hit when third baseman Kurt Farmer (Nebraska) scooped up the ball on the chalk when it surely would have rolled foul. Gschwind's bunt found no-man's land to the left of the mound to load the bases, but the bases-loaded struggles for the Steam continued when Rose struck out and the new pitcher Willoughby got two outs on his first pitch when Russell gunned down Priessman at the plate on Keur's shallow fly to right.

A fifth-inning hit-by-pitch by Edgington allowed the three-year Steam player to tie his own Cincinnati single-season HBP record of eight (matched by Gschwind in 2008 as well) and extend his career HBP record to 21. A 2-for-6 day for the Miami product gives him an eight-game hit streak and nine hits in his last 18 at bats.

Cincinnati makes a quick turnaround to face the Delaware Cows in a 4:35 doubleheader on Saturday at Western Hills High School. The Steam are 5-1 all-time at home versus the Cows, who will be making their first trip to Cincinnati since July 9, 2008.