

Thomas puts on a show, but Steam fall to Xenia, 5-3

Scouts top Steam in Cincinnati for the first time despite a long ball and triple from the Cincinnati first sacker.

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WESTERN HILLS, Ohio—The wait is over. Steam first baseman Ben Thomas (Xavier) blasted his first home run as a member of the Steam Thursday night, a moon shot to right center off of Adam Westbrook (North Central Texas C.C.) in the second inning, but the Scouts (5-7) made up for it and more, notching a 5-3 victory over the Steam at Western Hills High School. Thomas also belted a long RBI triple to left-center in the fourth and eventually scored the tying run, but two Xenia runs in the fifth turned out to be the difference, as the Scouts picked up their first win in nine tries at Cincinnati. Xenia also scored more than four runs in a game at Western Hills High School for the first time ever.

Thomas, who is batting .438 (7-for-16) with six runs scored and five extra base hits over his last four games, homered in his 120th at bat in a Steam (5-4) uniform after belting 29 dingers—including a school-record 16 in 2009—in 427 at bats with the Xavier Musketeers. Yet the lack of home runs has not affected Thomas' run production whatsoever, as he drove in 23 runs last season (best on the team and fifth in Steam single-season history) and has seven RBI to date this year, tops on the squad once again.

Thomas' first drive of the night cleared the high fence in right-center field and drew gasps throughout the crowd, which saw a ball leave the yard for the first time this season at McCartney Stadium (the homer was also the first for the Steam in the 2010 campaign). The 1-0 Steam lead was quickly erased, however, as a two-out circuit clout from Eddie Young (UC Riverside)—which landed in nearly the exact same spot as Thomas' home run—put the Scouts up 2-1 in the third inning. The homer seemed to shake Cincinnati starter Paul Uhl (Thomas More) a bit, as Andrew Douglas (Fresno Pacific) followed with a triple over the head of Nick Priessman (Eastern Illinois) in center and Trey Rallis (Yale) walked to put runners on the corners. Andrew Spleth (Pasco-Hernando C.C.) then singled to left to plate Douglas and push the Xenia lead to 3-1.

In the fourth it was Thomas again getting the Steam rolling, as Cory Farris (Kentucky)—who has now scored a run in seven consecutive games—worked a walk to begin the inning and then took off on a hit-and-run on the first pitch to Thomas, who ripped it to deep left-center to score Farris easily and get the Steam within a run. It looked as if Westbrook might escape with the lead intact after he punched out Bryan Rose (Northern Kentucky) on a full-count pitch and got Jon Edgington (Miami) to line out to shortstop, but after a walk to Noah Zipko (Campbell), catcher Ryan Bellamy (Xavier) snapped an 0-for-14 slide with a line drive single down the left field line to tie the contest at three. With runners on second and third, Priessman nearly gave the Steam the lead against new pitcher Padriac Williams (Youngstown State), as his check swing grounder to third had base hit written all over it, but a nice barehanded play by Young kept the game tied. Williams (1-1) ended up taking home the victory in the game.

A walk and a hit batsman came back to hurt Steam hurler Tyler Hollstegge (UNC Greensboro) in the fifth, as both came around to score to put the Scouts up 5-3. Xenia caught a break with two outs in the inning, as the second run scored when Colby Braddock's (Cisco College) ground ball to third bounced over the head of the third baseman Zipko for an RBI single. With the bases full and two outs in the inning, Hollstegge (0-1) gave way to Sam Dawes (Miami), who threw 10 pitches to B.J. Willis (Wabash Valley) before getting him to ground out softly to Bellamy.

Dawes turned in a magnificent outing, needing just 37 pitches—of which only eight were balls—to record 3.1 scoreless innings. Dawes has now compiled 7.2 scoreless innings this season and is one of seven Steam pitchers who have yet to give up a run this year. Another of those pitchers is Steve Matre (Mount St. Joseph), who worked a scoreless ninth inning in the game. Matre's success with the Lions (a 1.19 ERA and 32 saves in 59 career appearances) has indeed carried over to the GLSCL, as he now has a 0.93 ERA and 11 strikeouts in 9.2 career innings with the Steam.

In the fifth inning, Farris tripled with two out and Thomas was intentionally walked, but Rose was retired when first baseman Tom Wertz (Houston) made a diving stop on his hard ground ball. Then in the sixth, Cincinnati nearly capitalized on a Xenia error, but a fluke play kept the Scouts in the lead. A walk, a hit batter, and an error by Young

loaded the bases with two men out for Brad Gschwind (Miami), who saw a Michael Johnson (Longwood) pitch hit the knob of his bat and trickle in front of the plate, where the catcher Braddock stepped on home plate for the force out to end the inning.

The Steam will play another game at home on Friday night, as they welcome the Lexington Hustlers to Western Hills High School for the first time. First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m., as the Steam look to make it two-for-two against the GLSCL's latest expansion team (Cincinnati won at Lexington, 3-2, on June 16 in the first-ever meeting between the teams).