

Late rally not enough as Hustlers top Steam, 8-5

Steam bring winning run to the plate in the ninth after falling behind 7-0.

June 25, 2010

WESTERN HILLS, Ohio—With an 8-1 cushion and a cruising Tanner Perkins (Western Kentucky) on the mound, the Lexington Hustlers seemed to be on well on their way to their third victory of this their inaugural season Friday night at Western Hills High School. But a run in the seventh inning and three in the eighth for the Steam cut the deficit to three before a two-out walk and a two-out hit batter put the tying runs on base for Cincinnati (5-5) in the ninth. However, Jordan Keur (Michigan State) could not come up with his fourth base knock of the night, bouncing into a fielder's choice to end the contest. Keur finished the game 3-for-6 in the losing effort, while catcher J.R. Reynolds (Ohio) drove in a career-high three runs.

The normally sure-handed Steam defense—which entered the game leading the league in fielding percentage at .980—was not so reliable on Friday night, as three Cincinnati errors led to five unearned runs in the first four innings of the game. Starter Mike Jefferson (Louisiana Tech) got himself in trouble early with walks and took the loss (0-2) for the second consecutive start. In the second, the Hustlers had a runner on first and two out after a walk before Michael Thomas (Kentucky) singled to put runners on first and second. Shane Crain (Indiana State) then took a ball to right field to bring home Taylor Russell (Northern Kentucky) for the first run of the game. Another walk filled the bases for Thomas Tolliver (Transylvania), who reached when Michael Basil (Indiana) bobbled his ground ball and threw late to first base. A third run crossed on an infield single by Travis Redmon (Morehead State) before a fly out finally ended the inning.

Jefferson was lifted after 2.2 innings of work and 78 pitches (41 strikes). The hard-throwing lefty punched out five for the second consecutive outing but walked four and yielded four hits. After his first start this season, opponents were hitting just .185 (22-for-119) against Jefferson in his Steam career, but batters have hit at a .429 (12-for-28) clip over his last two starts to up that mark to .231 (34-for-147). The five punchouts did move Jefferson (56 strikeouts) within one of Brian Sand's (Cincinnati) Steam career record for Ks. Jefferson also picked off his third runner of the season, tops in the GLSCL.

The 3-0 Lexington (3-8) lead increased to 7-0 in the fourth, as Mark Lincoln (Sonoma St.), who stranded a pair of runners in the third inning, struggled to find the zone in the next frame, walking three batters and giving up two hits in the inning, which led to four runs (three of which were unearned due to a Steam error on a routine pop fly). A strange play in the inning rightly ended with two outs for the Steam defense, as with the bags full and nobody out, Basil momentarily bobbled Dalton Henzman's (Middle Tennessee State) ground ball before stepping on second and firing to first for what looked like a double play. However, neither umpire appeared to have been watching the play at first, and the runner was initially ruled safe before the crew got together and corrected the call. Lincoln threw 42 pitches—including 25 balls—in his inning of work after Jefferson needed 43 pitches in the second inning.

Lincoln gave way to Mike Peterson (DePauw), who gave up just a run in 4.1 innings and would have kept the Hustlers off the board had he not wild-pitched a run home—one of four wild pitches on the night for Peterson and six for Cincinnati—one pitch before inducing an inning-ending ground out in the sixth.

Cincinnati got on the board in the fourth on an RBI fielder's choice by Reynolds before getting the bats going big time in the seventh inning. Unfortunately, it only led to one run, as baserunning mistake prevented what might have been a big inning. Michael Morris (Tennessee Tech) singled with one out, but when Keur's batted ball found the hole on the right side for a base hit, Morris rounded second too far and was gunned down by the right fielder Henzman. A hit batter and two singles—one of the RBI variety by Cory Farris (who did not score a run for the first time in eight games)—followed, but Tim Issler (Ball State) grounded out to end the threat with the Steam trailing 8-2. Issler turned in another solid day at the plate, going 2-for-5; Issler has hit safely in all five appearances this season and is batting .444 (8-for-18) on the campaign, including .500 (6-for-12) over his last three games.

Mark Saxman (Mt. Aloysius), who took the loss in the first matchup between the two teams, looked for a bit like he was headed toward another, as an error, a hit batter, and a wild pitch put runners on second and third with no outs for the Steam in the eighth. Reynolds rifled a double down the right field line to bring home both runners before

scoring himself on a two-bagger by Keur with one out. Keur trotted to third on a wild pitch, but the Steam squandered the chance to bring him the last quarter of the way around as Bryan Rose (Northern Kentucky) fanned and Ben Thomas (Xavier) grounded to second with new pitcher Wade Bush (Indiana State) on the mound. Bush worked the final 1.1 to save the win for Perkins (1-0), who yielded two earned runs in 6.2 innings. With the loss, the Steam drop to 1-5 on the season versus left-handed starters.

The Steam ninth began harmlessly enough, as Jake Proctor (Cincinnati) sat on first base with two out when Brad Gschwind (Miami) pinch-hit for Reynolds and drew a walk, his seventh since his last strikeout on June 16. Morris was then hit by a pitch (the fifth HBP by Lexington pitching on the evening) to load the bases for Keur, but dreams of a walk-off grand slam or even a game-tying double were not to become real on Friday.

Ryan Martin (Michigan State) notched his third consecutive scoreless outing with a perfect ninth and has not walked a batter in his last 10.2 innings, dating back to last season; Martin has 31 strikeouts to 10 walks in 27.0 career frames with the Steam.

The four-game homestand comes to a close on Saturday, as Cincinnati and Southern Ohio will face off in a doubleheader beginning at 4:35 p.m. The Steam have taken eight straight from the Copperheads, including a 4-2 win in the GLSCL championship game last year.