

Dragons Hand Sliders First Home Loss

After being shutout for the first time this season, the Dragons' bats came alive Monday night in Springfield as they handed the Sliders their first home loss of the season by a score of 9-3. The victory puts the Dragons at 6-4 on the season after completing a 2-2 road trip. The Sliders dropped to 6-2 for the season.

The Dragons scored early and often as they put up six runs over the first three innings. First baseman Dave Reynolds (Northern Illinois) got things started in the first with a double down the rightfield line, then advanced to third on a groundout by second baseman Kevin Tokarski (Illinois State). Third baseman Phil Wunderlich (Louisville) then reached base on an overthrow by the pitcher that allowed him to reach second and Reynolds to score. Catcher Matt Behren (Northern Illinois) followed that up with a double to right center, scoring Wunderlich and giving the Dragons a 2-0 lead after one. Text book baseball lead to the Dragons' third run. Rightfielder Pete Capetta (Illinois) walked to lead things off, then advanced on a Wilson sacrifice bunt. Leftfielder Nick Popescu (Bradley) followed up with a single to right center, scoring Capetta.

The third inning saw the Dragons take complete control of the game. Behren started things off with a solo homer over the rightfield wall, the Dragons first homerun of the year. After the next two hitters were retired, the Dragons started a two-out rally that began with a Pete Capetta triple down the rightfield line. Centerfielder Justin Wilson (Oakland) was hit by a pitch, Nick Popescu singled to score Capetta, followed by a Reynolds single that scored Wilson. The Dragons ended the inning with a 6-0 lead.

DuPage Starter Ryan Copeland (Illinois State) was great on the mound as well. Whereas Springfield starter Charlie Gordon ended his night after the third, Copeland was fantastic. Through the first five innings, Copeland held the Sliders to only three hits, escaping their only rally in the third. The Sliders were able to get runners on second and third after a couple of singles and a double steal with one out in the inning. But Copeland got the next two hitters on a pop out and a ground out to end the threat.

Springfield didn't plate their first run until the sixth. The Dragons scored on a Behren sacrifice fly in the top half of the inning. But in the bottom half, Vincente Cafaro singled with one out and stole second. After advancing to third on a groundout, Cafaro scored on a Dennis Vaughn single to right field. That was the only run they would score off Copeland, and the score was 7-1 after six.

The Dragons would score a run in each of the next two innings. Shortstop Jordan Tokarz (Eastern Illinois) tripled to start off the seventh, and scored on a Reynolds single to right. In the eighth, Behren and designated hitter Scott Sexton (Oakland) hit back-to-back singles with one out in the inning. Behren came in to score on a fielder's choice by Tokarz.

Although the Sliders would score a run each in the eighth and ninth, they couldn't muster up a big rally and Dragons took the game by a final score of 9-3. Copeland was splendid through his six innings, giving up only one run on six hits, walking one while striking out twelve. Eric Wyman (Illinois-Chicago) relieved him in the seventh and gave up a run on two hits in two innings, with Tom Zelasko pitching the ninth allowing a run and striking out two.

The Dragons now return for a nine-game homestand beginning Wednesday, June 18th, when they take on the Springfield Sliders at 7:05 pm at the Lisle Sports Complex at Benedictine University. Tickets start at \$6 with kids five and under admitted free. Group rates are available by calling the Dragons ticket office at 630-241-2255.