

Dragons Walk-Off With a Victory

After two days off, the DuPage Dragons decided to make the fun last a little longer Wednesday night. The Dragons sent the game into extra innings, where they earned a 6-5 victory over the Springfield Sliders via a walk-off homerun by Ryan Duffy (Mississippi State). The victory improved the Dragons to 8-6 on the season and ended the Sliders' six-game win streak.

The fun started in the first inning for the Dragons when they put a run across for an early lead. After starter Tony Manville (Iowa) retired the side in order in the top half of the inning, leftfielder Mark Noth (Belmont) lead off the Dragons' half of the inning by getting hit by the first pitch he saw. Designated hitter Ryan Duffy followed that up with a single to left-center that allowed Noth to advance to third. Rightfielder Justin Behm (Northern Illinois) hit a sacrifice fly to deep rightfield, scoring Noth and giving the Dragons a 1-0 lead. It was the first run Sliders starter Jonas Dufek had given up this year.

The Sliders got the run right back in the top of the second. With two outs, Chris Gacom hit a single up the middle. Colby Luttrell followed that up with a shot into the right-centerfield gap for a double, scoring Gacom from first and tying the contest at one.

The Sliders would add to their score in the fourth and fifth innings. Denny Vaughn lead off the fourth with a double to right-center, then advanced to third on a wild pitch by Manville. With one out, Colby Luttrell hit a sacrifice fly to rightfield, scoring Vaughn. Luttrell reached base on the play when the ball was dropped by the rightfielder, but Manville later escaped the inning on two fly ball outs. The Sliders lead off the top of the fifth by getting the first two hitters on base after a single and an error. The runners advanced on a sacrifice bunt, putting them on second and third with one out. Vaughn got his second hit in as many innings, knocking a single up the middle to score a run. A second run scored when Ryan Ashe hit a sacrifice fly to leftfield, and the Sliders had a 4-1 lead.

The Dragons started their comeback in the sixth inning. With two outs, catcher Matt Behren (Northern Illinois) stepped to the plate and ripped a pitch deep over the rightfield wall for his second homerun of the year. The homer cut the lead in half and the Dragons ended the sixth trailing by a score of 4-2.

DuPage was able to sweep their last homestand with the aid of three eighth inning rallies. The Dragons were at it again tonight, as they made their run in the bottom of the eighth. Justin Behm started the one-out rally with a walk, which was followed by consecutive singles by first baseman Phil Wunderlich (Louisville) and Matt Behren. With the bases loaded, the Sliders made their second pitching change of the inning, and it appeared to work out as Dan Marcacci struck out the first batter he faced. But with two outs in the inning, shortstop Jordan Tokarz (Eastern Illinois) smacked a screaming liner deep over the head of the leftfielder for a double. Behm and Wunderlich scored on the play, but Behren was cut down at the plate by a perfect relay throw from the shortstop. The two runs tied the game at 4-4.

After neither team scored a run in the ninth, the game went into extra innings. The Sliders again took the lead when they were able to score a run in the top of the tenth. After consecutive singles put runners on the corners with one out, Tyler Choate bounced into a fielder's choice that allowed a run to cross the plate. The run gave Springfield a 5-4 lead. But the Dragons got the run back in the bottom half of the inning. Matt Behren was at it again, knocking a double to give DuPage a runner in scoring position with one out. Scott Sexton immediately followed suit with a single that scored Behren to tie the game again at five.

Dragons reliever Andrew Estes (Oakland), in his third inning of work, gave up a two-out single before getting the next hitter to ground out to end the top of the eleventh inning. On the play, Ryan Ashe hit the ball hard right back up the middle, but Estes stabbed his mitt at the grounder, coming up with it and flipping the ball to first to finish the play. Then, with one out in the bottom of the inning, Ryan Duffy came up to the plate. Duffy smashed the second pitch he saw from Sliders reliever Jason Nantz deep over the scoreboard in right-center for a walk-off homerun and a Dragons victory. The mammoth blast was Duffy's second homerun of the year, tying him for the team lead with Matt Behren.

The DuPage Dragons next contest will be Friday night, June 27th, when they take on the Danville Dans 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.