

Sliders Take Early Lead, Drop Dragons

The DuPage Dragons began their four-game road trip on Wednesday night when they took on the Springfield Sliders. They hoped this road trip would begin their comeback effort in the Central Illinois Collegiate League standings. But after giving up four runs in the third, the Dragons couldn't claw their way back and the Sliders held on for a 4-3 win. The victory improved Springfield to an 18-4 record and an impressive seven-game lead over the second place Dragons. DuPage fell to 10-10.

DuPage starter Anthony Manville (Iowa) and Springfield starter Bryce Shafer escaped the first two innings without giving up a run. Manville ran into early trouble as he saw himself in a bases loaded situation in the first inning, but was able to escape by inducing a two-out groundball to retire the side. He had a much easier time in the second inning, getting a groundball for the first out, and then induced a double play ball after giving up a single. As for Shafer, he was able to cruise through the first two innings giving up only one hit.

The Dragons started the scoring in the third inning. After retiring the first two hitters in the inning, Shafer gave up a single to leftfielder Nick Popescu (Bradley). First baseman Ryan Duffy (Mississippi State) followed up with a double down the leftfield line, scoring Popescu and giving the Dragons the early 1-0 lead.

The Sliders bounced back with four runs in the bottom of the inning. Elliot Soto led things off with a single to left. He eventually stole second, and was able to advance to third on a throwing error. Ryan Ashe hit a sacrifice fly and after two batters in the inning, the game was tied at one. Vincente Cafaro then smacked a solo homer to leftfield to give the Sliders the lead. Andrew Quinnette hit a single to rightfield, but was able to advance all the way to third on a fielding error by the rightfielder, and Springfield was in business again. Quinnette scored on a single through the right side by Dennis Vaughn, the third hit in the row for the Sliders. Manville was able to get a fly ball for the second out of the inning, but after Vaughn stole second base, Ryan Mooney banged a single up the middle and Vaughn scored the fourth run of the inning. That spelled the end of the night for Manville, as Nick Kurash (Miami (Ohio)) came in to relieve him. Kurash got the next hitter to lineout to end the inning with Springfield leading 4-1.

The Dragons got a run back in the top of the fourth. Consecutive one-out singles by third baseman Phil Wunderlich (Louisville) and centerfielder Dave Reynolds (Northern Illinois) put runners on the corners for DuPage. Wunderlich scored on a double steal effort as Reynolds was thrown out at second, making the score 4-2. That would be the last run Shafer would give up, as he went six innings in his start.

The Dragons would push another run across in the seventh. Reliever Brent Kulavic gave up a single to leftfielder Mark Noth (Belmont), and he would advance to second on a wild pitch. Popescu would follow up with a single of his own, and the Dragons were in business with runners on the corners and no outs. Kulavic was replaced by Brandon Knowling, who would walk Duffy to load the bases. After getting a fly out, shortstop Jordan Tokarz (Eastern Illinois) hit a sacrifice fly to rightfield, scoring Noth to bring the score to 4-3. But that turned out to be the last run the Dragons would score on the night.

Knowling cruised through the rest of the game for the save. He gave up only one hit in his three innings of work, while Bryce Shafer picked up his fourth win of the season. Dragons relievers Nick Kurash and Tom Filip (Baylor) looked great in relief for DuPage. Kurash went three and 1/3 innings without giving up a hit, striking out four. Filip went two strong giving up a hit and striking out three.

The DuPage Dragons return home Monday night, July 7th, when they take on the Quincy Gems 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.