

Topsy-turvy J-Hawks split twinbill

Written by Tom Fruehling
Friday, 14 June 2013 23:51

His ballclub is battling for a division title in the Mississippi Valley Conference, but Dubuque Hempstead Coach Jeff Rapp complains about inconsistency.

“We’re like a Jekyll and Hyde team,” he said after the Mustangs (9-8, 8-4 MVC) split a doubleheader at Cedar Rapids Jefferson Friday night. “We’ve had some very good games. But we’ve also been ugly at times.”

He’s got nothing on first-year Jefferson Coach Kyle Rodenkirk. His young J-Hawks (5-13, 4-8) were embarrassed on their home field Wednesday night by Prairie, losing the opener 15-1 and the nightcap 7-4.

So what do they do but jump on Hempstead for three runs in the first inning of the first game Friday and cruise to a 6-2 win behind the solid pitching of sophomore Lucas Larson.

“We played a lot better than we did Wednesday,” Rodenkirk said. “We not only got 10 hits, but they were timely hits.

“We made some key defensive plays. And we got a real good pitching performance that kept us in the game.”

They got none of that in the second game Friday in a 10-1 loss. Jefferson managed just two hits, one of which didn’t get out of the infield.

A Mustang runner went from first to third on a sacrifice bunt because no one was covering the base. He then scored on a wild pitch.

Jefferson used four pitchers, and none were effective. Too many walks led to too many runs in the Hempstead blowout.

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"I'm OK with a split," said Rodenkirk, who is hosting a golf outing to raise funds for the baseball program Saturday afternoon at the Wildcat course in Shellsburg. "They're one of the top teams in the MVC.

"We have some young kids. And sometimes they play like it."

As one of those youngsters, Larson pitched like a veteran in front of dozens of Junior J-Hawk players who were recognized between games. He scattered four hits and went the entire seven innings.

"It was my best game of the year," he said. "We've had trouble giving up walks this year. So I was just trying to throw strikes and get 'em to hit grounders.

"I was hitting my spots tonight. My fastball was working, and so was my changeup at the end."

His cause was helped by the three-run cushion in the first inning. With the bases loaded and two outs, junior catcher Spencer Hunt laced a hard single into left that scored sophomore Cam Frazier and senior cleanup hitter Ky Kramer.

Another run by junior Layne Sullivan was tallied on a wild pitch.

"I was looking for a fastball," Hunt said. "When I got one, I just turned on it."

Larson appreciated the effort.

"You gotta love it when you've got some insurance," he said. "That set the tone for the game.

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And it helped me settle down.”

Dubuque Coach Rapp said his hitters were “behind the eight-ball” the whole game.

“We needed to be more aggressive early in the count,” he noted. “But their kid did a good job. His changeup really threw us off.”

In his first start of the season, Hempstead southpaw Jeremy Vaassen tossed a gem in the second game. The J-Hawks scored in their first at-bat when junior Ben Koering drilled a double into the gap in right center to bring home freshman Spencer VanScoyoc.

In a foretaste of things to come, though, Koering was thrown out trying to steal third. Jefferson never threatened after that while Vaassen continued to baffle J-Hawk batters.

“We got that one run early,” Rodenkirk said. “But then their pitcher really found his rhythm. He was pretty sneaky with his off-speed stuff. He fooled us.”

The Mustangs, meanwhile, scored three in the third and never looked back.

Vaassen took a seat for the seventh inning and fellow lefty Brett Bortscheller mopped up on a harmless ground ball and two strikeouts.

“These kids continue to play hard,” Rodenkirk said. “They don’t give up. We’re getting better.”

GAME 1

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HEMPSTEAD (2): Tomkins, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Till, lf, 3 1 1 0, Fitzgerald, 1b, 2 0 0 0, Oberbroeckling, dh, 3 0 1 1, Millius, p, 0 0 0 0, Crimmins, 2b, 2 1 0 0, Noonan, c, 3 0 2 0, Boleyn, ss, 3 0 0 0, Vaassen, rf, 3 0 0 1, Kutsch, cf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 26 2 5 2.

JEFFERSON (6): VanScoyoc, cf, 4 1 2 1, Frazier, rf, 4 2 2 0, Koering, 3b, 4 0 2 1, Kramer, ss, 2 1 0 0, Sullivan, lf, 3 1 1 0, Hunt, c, 3 0 1 2, Colbert, 1b, 2 1 1 0, Larson, p, 3 0 0 0, Johnson, 2b, 3 0 1 0. Totals 28 6 10 4.

Hempstead 011 000 0 - 2 5 1
Jefferson 311 001 x - 6 10 1

Millius and Noonan. Larson and Hunt. W-Larson. L-Millius. 2B-Tomkins, Colbert. SB-Frazier 3, Koering.

GAME 2

HEMPSTEAD (10): Tomkins, 3b, 4 2 1 0, Till, lf, 2 1 0 0, Fitzgerald, 1b, 4 0 2 3, Oberbroeckling, dh, 1 1 1 3, Breitbach, c, 0 0 0 0, Boleyn, ss, 3 0 0 0, Fitzgerald, rf, 4 1 1 0, Crimmins, 2b, 1 1 0 0, Breitbach, c, 3 0 0 0, Kutsch, cf, 3 3 1 1. Totals 25 10 6 7.

JEFFERSON (1): VanScoyoc, cf, 2 1 0 0, Frazier, rf, 2 0 0 0, Koering, 3b-p, 2 0 1 1, Scott, p, 0 0 0 0, Kramer, 1b-3b, 3 0 0 0, Sullivan, p-lf, 3 0 0 0, Hunt, c, 3 0 0 0, Larson, ss, 1 0 0 0, Colbert, dh-p, 3 0 0 0, Johnson, 2b, 3 0 0 0. Totals 22 1 1 1.

Hempstead 012 212 2 - 10 6 2
Jefferson 100 000 0 - 1 1 1

Vaassen, Bortscheller (7) and Breitbach. Sullivan, Scott (4), Koering (6), Colbert (7) and Hunt. W-Vaassen. L-Sullivan. 2B-Oberbroeckling, Koering. SB-Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, Crimmins, Kutsch.