

Solid pitching again fuels Saints sweep

Written by Tom Fruehling

Wednesday, 26 June 2013 22:18 -

As it has all season, Xavier got two stellar pitching performances Wednesday night at home to sweep a doubleheader from Iowa City High, 3-2 and 12-2. The second game was five innings.

What was different this time, though, was that the Saints eked out the first one not only on the strong arm of hurler Mitch Keller, but also his bat.

And fellow pitcher Zach Brown literally sacrificed his back to help pull off the come-from-behind win.

The Little Hawks (12-14, 9-9 MVC) had a 2-0 lead in the opener going into the bottom of the sixth inning.

Up to then, Xavier's only hit off Sam Mrstik was a single by lead-off batter Bryce Grimm in the first inning.

Adam Pick opened the sixth for the Saints with a walk.

For the second time in the game, Brown was awarded first after being hit by a pitch. The first one in the first inning, he said, barely grazed his helmet. The second, however, plunked him squarely in the back and put runners on first and second.

"I wasn't trying to get hit," Brown said. "But it didn't hurt."

Jordan Ratz moved them along with a sacrifice bunt.

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A ground-out to short by Luke Hammerberg plated Pick. And with two outs, back-to-back walks to Ryan Meaney and pinch hitter Jacob Harriott loaded the bases.

Despite holding on to a one-hitter, Mrstik was yanked for reliever Mitch Wieland to face Keller at the bat.

Keller didn't hit it hard, but he hit right between the first and second basemen. Jack Frakes managed to knock it down, but by the time he picked himself up Brown scored the tying run from third and Meaney raced home from second for the go-ahead score.

"I just sat back and tried to take the ball the other way," Keller said of his well-placed squibber. "It worked out, but it was the aggressive play by Adam (Meaney) that won the game for us, coming all the way from second."

Xavier Coach Dave Schemmel said it was just the kind of victory his surging Saints (17-9, 10-6 MVC) must have to make some noise in the postseason.

"We've got a decent little streak going (winning eight of their last nine games), and we need keep winning the close games," he said.

The team's pitching, he pointed out, has kept them in most games all year.

With a four-hitter under his belt, Keller raised his mark to 4-2 and didn't hurt his earned run average of 1.22.

As a staff, the Saints have an ERA of 2.22 and have held opponents to a measly .198 batting average.

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Brown (5-0 with an ERA of 1.13) worked the nightcap and held the Hawks to four hits and single runs in the first and third.

Saints' batters, meantime, battered five City High pitchers to take a 10-2 lead after three innings.

The game ended after five innings when Xavier parlayed two walks and consecutive sacrifice flies to go up by 10 runs.

"We got some key two-out hits," Schemmel said. "Our strong defense and pitching can keep us hanging in there in close games. That's what we need are some key hits."