

Eagles use 'small ball' in sweep

Written by Jim Ecker

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Todd Rima does not have a lot of big boppers on his ballclub this year, so the Kirkwood baseball coach has begun reaching into his bag of tricks to win games.

The "small ball" attack worked just fine Wednesday as the Eagles swept Muscatine, 6-4 and 8-6, in a non-conference twinbill on a windy day at Kirkwood.

Muscatine socked three home runs in the first game, but the Eagles countered with four sacrifice flies to stay in the game and ultimately win it.

Sulliam Rios Reyes hit a home run for the Eagles in the second game, but Kirkwood mounted a good portion of its attack with the hit-and-run and a suicide squeeze.

The Eagles have hit only four home runs in 24 games this season. Angel Merced has three of the homers and Rios Reyes has the other.

Rima implemented the "small ball" attack in the fourth game of a weekend series against Ellsworth this past Sunday.

"We haven't generated a lot of power in the middle of our lineup, so we thought we'd try to do some different things to generate runs," he explained. "Our guys have done a great job of executing. I think we're tough to defend when we play that way."

Not every "small ball" tactic worked Wednesday, but the Eagles operated at a high level.

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"When they execute it, it looks good," said Rima. "Sometimes when you don't, they can make you look silly. But our guys did a great job of executing it and moved the ball around. Some guys had great days today."

Rios Reyes, a slick-fielding shortstop, went 5-for-8 in the twinbill and hit for the cycle with two singles, a double, a triple and a home run for the afternoon. "He's been tremendous. He's been our leader lately," said Rima.

Merced, a catcher, first baseman and designated hitter, also has been working in relief this season and got the save in the second game. A switch-hitter, he belted a 420-foot home run on Sunday and has hit homers from both sides of the plate this year.

"He's been great the last week or two," said Rima. "Everything has clicked. He's a very, very talented young man."

Kirkwood raised its records to 15-9, but the Eagles are only 2-6 in the ICCAC conference heading into a four-game series at home against Iowa Central Saturday and Sunday.

"We're a work in progress, but we're getting there," said Rima. "I think we're making strides."

Jake Redlinger hit two home runs for Muscatine (11-17) in the first game.

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