

Stilts tosses 13 strikeouts in Alton Junior Legion's 5-2 win over Highland

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – **Adam Stilts** may well be on his way to becoming a pitcher to watch in Riverbender-area baseball.

Stilts tossed 13 strikeouts Thursday evening and gave up four hits - none through five innings – and threw 6.2 innings as Alton's junior American Legion baseball team defeated the Highland 2 side 5-2 in an Illinois District 22 game at SIU-Edwardsville's Roy E. Lee Field.

“He (Stilts) had a great game today,” said **Alton manager Dennis Sharp**. “I let his pitch count get (a bit high) today, he was probably about at 115-118 pitches; that's more than he's ever gone. We used the opportunity to kind of grow him a little bit and let him stay out there and battle. I'm really proud of him.

“Adam worked hard, and **Caden Akal**, our closer, this is a guy who, a few weeks ago, (had trouble hitting his targets), but we've been working hard in the bullpen. I'm training him to be the guy who can come in (with the) bases loaded, need that strikeout, need those two outs – throw that ground ball, and he's really bought into it – committed to it. He has a good split-finger (fastball) and good curve ball and he's really, really bought into it.”

Alton got on the board first in the bottom of the second when **Simon Nguyen** drew a two-out walk from Highland pitcher **Trent Hlafka** and stole second, then was singled home by **Parker Issacson** to get Alton ahead 1-0; another run came home in the fourth when Nguyen drew a leadoff walk and got to second on a fielder's choice that allowed Issacson to reach. Both advanced on a sacrifice from **Gage Booten**, then **Cole Akal** walked to load the bases; **Rylee Bernot** then lifted a sacrifice fly to center to bring in Nguyen to make it 2-0 in Alton's favor.

Stilts cruised most of the way in the game, at one point retiring 11 Highland batters in a row, striking out eight in that stretch, including striking out the side in the fourth. The only runner to reach base in the first five innings was Ross Spies on an error in the second; a leadoff single from Griffin Frahm in the sixth broke up the no-hit bid, but Stilts retired the next three Highland batters.

Alton scored twice more in the bottom of the fifth and did so without a hit, taking advantage of three walks, a hit batsman and two wild pitches that brought in Griffin Bionco and Brandon Droste, then got their final run in the sixth on Ryan Best one-out double to right, a wild pitch and a RBI grounder to second by Cullen McBride to score Best.

Highland finally got to Stilts in the top of the seventh when Hlafka singled with one out and went to second on a walk to Spies; Kolby Frey then singled the bases loaded, but one out after that, a Frahm single and Riley Field walk brought in two runs to cut the lead to 5-2. Sharp then summoned Caden Akal from the pen and Akal got Dylan Apken to strike out to end the game.

Alton went to 14-10 on the season with the win and will mark the Independence Day holiday weekend with a pair of doubleheaders, a 1 p.m. Saturday doubleheader at Lutheran North in St. Louis County and a 2 p.m. Sunday doubleheader at Alton High's Redbird Field against Jerseyville before traveling to Wheaton for a tournament the weekend of July 8-10; the District 22 junior playoffs get under way July 14.

