

# Redbirds' Steven Nguyen cracks key hit to pace Alton to baseball win over Jersey

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
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ALTON – A couple of plays can often decide how a baseball game can go.

Monday afternoon's contest between Jersey and Alton was just such a game, and both of the big plays involved the Redbirds' Steven Nguyen.

Both of them came in the third inning; in the top of the inning, the Panthers had the bases loaded on Nguyen and no one out with Logan Simpson at bat. Simpson hit a shot

towards the box where Nguyen was; Nguyen stabbed the hard-hit ball and threw home to Steven Patten to force Daniel Williams at the plate, with Patten then throwing to Brandon Droste to get Simpson at first to complete the double play.

Then, in the bottom of the inning with the Redbirds holding a 4-0 lead, Alton had the bases loaded when Nguyen came up to bat facing Jersey's Nate Robinson. Nguyen worked the count to 3-2 before getting hold of a Robinson offering and taking it to left for a bases-clearing double that scored Charlie Erler, Ben Mossman and Adam Stolts to break the game open, with the Redbirds going on to record an 8-4 win at Redbird Field to take their record to 4-0 on the year; the Panthers fell to 1-2.

“We came out aggressively on the basepaths,” said Redbird coach Todd Haug, “got some good pitching early, but there's definitely room for improvement and our dugout knows that. We've got to come back and play tomorrow, but there's definitely some things to work on and we'll address those.

“We always tell them the recipe for success in a ballgame is that a team's got to get the big hit, make the big play, get the big pitch; if you get some of those, or the majority of those, you like your chances. In that case, we made few big pitches and a few big plays and then Steven's hit down the left-field line was our big hit.”

Of the 4-0 start, Haug said “we're only as good as the next day's starters, so we're going to come back tomorrow – it's the old baseball cliché, it's one day at a time – but as far as we're concerned, we're 0-0 going into tomorrow.”

“Thew swung it well, made the plays when they needed to,” said Panther coach Darren Perdun, “and got some good clutch hits; they put more runs on the board today than we did. Unfortunately, we left too many runners on base, made a few mistakes here and there; it cost us.

“That was a momentum changer, for sure, anytime guys can turn a double play on you; unfortunately for us, it went their way instead of our way. (Nguyen's double) was a backbreaker; we had the guy before him get a close call on a 3-2 count at the plate. The pitch didn't go our way – that happens, that's baseball. The next guy comes up and make you pay.”

Despite the big plays, Perdun thought the Panthers' inability to get the key hit to score runners hurt them on the day. “It all comes down to our hitting with runners in scoring position for us today,” Perdun said. “We scored four runs, but left 14 guys on base. The old adage is you're supposed to score half as many baserunners as you get; you do the math. We should have had 10-11 runs somewhere in there, but that's the way it goes. That's baseball; Alton was the better team today, hats off to them.”

The Panthers got runners at second and third in the first two innings, but Nguyen managed to get key strikeouts or plays from his defense to keep Jersey at bay, but the Redbirds broke out on top in the first thanks to a two-RBI Robbie Taul single that brought in Mikey Hampton and Patten for the first two Redbird runs, Taul himself later scoring on a Charlie Erler triple to put the Redbirds up 3-0 before the big third inning. Alton scored once more in the fourth to go ahead 8-1; the Panthers scored three times in the sixth to get close, but Tyler Moxey shut them down in the seventh to preserve the win.

Steven Nguyen went 2-for-3 on the day with the three-RBI double; Erler himself was 3-for-4 with the triple, two RBIs and a run scored, Hampton went 2-for-4 with a triple and a run scored, Patten was 1-for-1 with a run scored, Taul 1-for-4 with two RBIs and two runs scored, Alex Gate had a RBI and Nathan Lemons and Ben Mossman each had runs scored.

Jacob Brady, Collen Carey, Kyle Kanturek, Williams and Blake Wittman each had hits on the day for the Panthers, with Brady, Simpson and Mitch Stockstill each recording RBIs.

Nguyen went 2.2 innings for the win, conceding an earned run on three hits while fanning one and walking five; Alex Gates also went 2.2 innings, giving up an earned run and striking out two and Moxey went the final 1.2 innings and only conceded a walk. Robinson took the loss, going three innings and conceding three earned runs on six hits while striking out three; John Fink went the other three innings, giving up an earned run on three hits and striking out two.

The Redbirds host the St. Louis Patriots, a home-school based team, at 4:30 p.m. today at Redbird Field, then travel to Piasa Southwestern for a 4:30 p.m. Thursday game; the Panthers are at Southwestern for a 4:30 p.m. game today, the host Belleville East in an 11 a.m. Saturday doubleheader.

