

Travis Heilman grand slam helps give Triad 5-1 win over Alton

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
May 15 2018 3:46 PM





TROY – One swing of the bat from Travis Heilman broke open a tight game in Troy Monday afternoon.

Heilman connected on a sixth-inning pitch that sent the ball over the fence in left-center field for a grand-slam homer that was the key blow in Triad's 5-1 win over Alton in a non-conference game; the Redbirds fell to 16-15 on the year while the Knights improved to 21-10.

Both Redbird pitcher Wesley Laaker and Knight pitcher Nick Beeler kept the game tight, the Knights holding on to a 1-0 lead before Laaker had to come out in the top of the fifth because of pitch-count rules. Laaker struck out three before coming out, while Beeler dismissed seven by strikeout in going the distance.

“We got a great effort from (Laaker),” said Redbird coach Todd Haug. “We were on a short pitch-count with him because we wanted to bring him back later in the week – 45 pitches in four-and-two-thirds innings. He did a tremendous job.

“We pitched well except for the one inning (the bottom of the sixth when the bases were loaded, leading to Heilman's grand slam), played pretty solid defense – they're a very, very senior-laden team, very experienced out there; they have seven seniors in their starting lineup and (Beeler) threw a very good game for them.”

“A real good game tonight; Beeler was strong again, he gave us what we needed,” said Knight coach Jesse Bugger. “Their guy (Laaker) was good – he mixed his pitches up well and we got a big hit early in the game that gave us a run, which felt pretty good for awhile but I thought if we could get to two, we'd be in good shape.

“Nick was throwing the ball pretty well tonight and I thought we were mixing his pitches pretty well – his breaking ball was good again. Those are his keys.”

Triad got their first run in the third when Hunter Smith led off with a single and was sacrificed to second by Drew Parres; a Josh Mesenbrink grounder to short sent Smith to third and Zach Kraabel singled in Smith to put the Knights up 1-0, Solid pitching by both Laaker and Beeler kept the score there until the bottom of the sixth.

Laaker came out of the game in the fifth after reaching his pitch count, replaced by Simon Ngyuen, who got Mesenbrink out to end the fifth and retired Kraabel to start the sixth before Beeler and Mack Langdon singled to put runners at first and third; Langdon moved to second on an error and Hunter Boyd drew a walk to load the bases to bring up Heilman, who sent a Ngyuen pitch over the fence in left-center for the grand slam that made it 5-0 in Triad's favor.

“We kind of just hung in there long enough that if we could get the big hit eventually, that was going to be tough to come back from,” Bugger said. “Our lineup is pretty deep when things are going well; if we can get guys like Heilman going a little bit here in the (IHSA Class 3A) postseason, that would definitely be big for us.”

Alton got a run back in the seventh Jackson Brooks doubled with one out and came home on a Riley Phillips RBI single, but Beeler got Adam Stilts to ground into a double play to end the game. Brooks was 2-for-3 with an RBI for the Redbirds, with Brooks 1-for-3 with a run scored and Laaker 1-for-1 on the day; the Knights were led by a 2-for-3 day from Langdon with a run scored, Beeler 1-for-3, Kraabel 1-for-3 with an RBI, Smith 1-for-3 with a run scored and Heilman 1-for-3 with the grand slam, four RBIs and a run scored.

Next up for Alton is a 4:30 p.m. Southwestern Conference game against Belleville West at Redbird Field today, while the Knights next meet up with Salem at 7 p.m. tonight at Busch Stadium in St. Louis.

