

Alton Post 126 American Legion Baseball Team Splits Doubleheaders To Start Short Spring Season

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ALTON - The Alton Post 126 American Legion baseball team got a head start on its 2021 season over the weekend by splitting a pair of doubleheaders against a pair of very good Illinois teams.

The Legionnaires split a doubleheader at Carmi on Saturday, losing the first game 6-4, but winning the second game 7-2. On Sunday at Lloyd Hopkins Field at Gordon Moore Park, Alton gave up seven runs in the top of the seventh inning in an 8-4 loss to Harrisburg, but bounced back to score the only run of the game in the home half of the sixth to win the nightcap 1-0.

All things considered, Post 126 manager Doug Booten felt his team played well in the opening four games.

"Pretty good," Booten said. "We haven't been outside, so it showed. But we haven't faced live pitching until now. We faced two very competitive programs, and we feel fortunate to split with them."

The idea of playing a spring season is to get players some experience going into the high school season, which has been pushed back into May and June by the Illinois High School Association because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"That's exactly what we're doing," Booten said. "As soon as the high school season ends, whenever that may be, we hope to get into the summer grind. The idea of the spring schedule is to get the same number of games that we'd normally do, and to get the kids some time on the field before the high school season starts."

The highlight of the weekend was Alton's usually strong defense, and its improvement on Sunday over the day before. In the opener against Carmi, the hosts got a run in the first, but the Legionnaires scored twice in their half of the third to take the lead. Carmi then scored four times in the bottom of the fourth to take a 5-2 lead, but Alton scored single runs in the fifth and sixth innings before Carmi pushed across an insurance run to take the 6-4 win.

Nick Rayfield and P. Kaylor had two hits each, while B. Smith and Caden Laslie also had base hits. Frank Goss had the Legionnaire's only RBI in the game. Smith pitched two innings and gave up a run on three hits while striking out two, then Laslie also pitched two innings, allowing four runs on one hit, walking two and fanning two. Ted Webb threw for an inning-and-a-third, giving up a run on one hit, and C. Hailstone pitched the last two-thirds of an inning, walking one and fanning one.

In the second game, the Legionnaires jumped out to a 6-0 lead, scoring a run in the first, two in the third and three in the fifth before Carmi countered with single runs in the fifth and sixth. Alton scored a single run in the seventh to gain the 7-2 win. Blaine Lancaster and Zach Cunningham each had two hits, while Rayfield, Webb and A. Callovini also had hits, with Rayfield, Hailstone and Webb all driving in a run each. Brady Salzman started and threw five innings, allowing a run on one hit while walking two and striking out five, and Smith pitched the final two innings, allowing a run on three hits, walked two and struck out two.

In the opener against Harrisburg, the visitors scored first with a run in the first, then Alton scored three in the fourth to take the lead, and another run in the sixth to go ahead 4-1. Harrisburg then scored seven times in the top of the seventh to take the first game win 8-4. P. Kaylor and Hailstone had two hits each, while Preston Schepers and Callovini also had hits, and Laslie had the team's only RBI. Hailstone got the start on the mound and threw three innings, allowing a run on two hits while walking four and striking out five, with Owen Macias pitching the next three innings, giving up three runs on three hits, walking five and fanning three, and C. Frensko pitched the final inning, giving up four runs on two hits, walking three.

In the second game, Alton scored the only run of the game in the bottom of the sixth inning to take the nightcap. Hailstone, Schepers and Macias all had two hits in the game, with Kaylor driving in the only run. Andrew Wieneke pitched four innings, conceding two hits while walking six and striking out five, and Webb threw the final three innings, not allowing a hit and fanning one.

The Legionnaires are 2-2 to start the spring season, and next play Mar. 21 at Harrisburg, then at Highland Mar. 27, and host Carmi Apr. 3 to finish the spring portion of the schedule. Booten is going to keep things simple for the spring portion of the season.

"We're just going to get some games in," Booten said, "pick up after the high school season ends, and just keep grinding."