

Cougars Get Walk-Off Win Against Tennessee Tech, Clinch OVC Tournament Spot

by Joe Pott
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EDWARDSVILLE – Brady Bunten's sacrifice fly with one out in the 11th inning vaulted SIUE baseball to a 4-3 win over Tennessee Tech Saturday at Simmons Baseball Complex.

"That was a really exciting baseball game and to come out on right the end of that makes this a big day," SIUE Head Coach Sean Lyons said.

Brett Johnson led off the inning for the Cougars and sent a ball off the right field fence for a double. Josh Ohl bunted him to third ahead of an intentional walk to Connor Kiffer. Buntin then lifted the ball into left field where it was caught by Jason Hinchman. Johnson tagged at third and scored with a head-first slide.

"Brett might have missed a home run by about 10 inches, and then Josh bunted him over so the execution was there," Lyons said. "We just needed to get a ball in the air. Brady was able to get a pitch he could elevate. Off the bat we felt it was deep enough to score Brett."

Ryan Guardino reached on an infield hit to start the top of the 11th and stole second base. He moved to third on a sacrifice bunt and was there with one out. SIUE reliever Jake Bockenstedt then proceeded to strike out the next two hitters to keep Tennessee Tech off the scoreboard and send the game to the bottom of the inning.

"To have the guy on the mound that can punch some guys out and get some swings and misses is so important," Lyons said. "That's what we've asked Bock to do a lot this year in those situations and he answered the bell today. Nic Roes blocked up some great pitches."

Bockenstedt (3-6) worked four scoreless innings allowing two hits. He struck out six. Saturday's outing came after he worked 1 1/3 innings of relief in Friday's game.

"Rebounding after yesterday and he gave us everything he had today," Lyons said of his reliever. "That gave us an opportunity to finally break through."

The Cougars improved to 8-9 in Ohio Valley Conference play and 21-21 overall. With the win, and a UT Martin loss Saturday, SIUE has guaranteed itself a spot in the OVC Tournament for the first time since 2015.

"We still have a lot of baseball to play," Lyons said. It's a great thing to know that monkey is off the back. Now everyone is fighting for seeding and to win series. We want to finish the year strong. That's what everybody in the league is trying to do. You're trying to climb the ladder to put yourself into the best situation come tournament time."

Guardino put the Golden Eagles on top with an RBI double in the first inning. The Cougars pulled off a double steal in the fourth, with Richie Well swiping home, to tie the score 1-1 in the fourth. Kiffer put the Cougars on top in the fifth to bring in Drew Mize to make it 2-1.

The Golden Eagles led 3-2 in the eighth when SIUE loaded the bases. Johnson tied the score with a sacrifice fly to right for his 50th RBI of the year.

Kaid Karnes allowed two runs in a six-inning start. He struck out three. Alec Kubik allowed an unearned run in the seventh inning.

"The guys on the mound did a phenomenal job," Lyons said. "Kaid gave us a great start and then Kubik coming out of the pen before 'Bock.'"

Kiffer finished with three hits. Bunten, Well and Mize each had two hits as SIUE outhit Tennessee Tech 13-10 in the game.

The rubber game of the three-game set is scheduled for 1 p.m. Sunday at Simmons Complex.

"This is an exciting day and a big win for us and now we get a chance to compete to take a series tomorrow," Lyons added. "Guys battled hard to get that win today and I think they will tomorrow."