

River Dragons Win First Ever Postseason Game, Take Prairie Land Division Championship Over Springfield

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – For the first time in their short two-year existence, the River Dragons hosted and won a postseason game. They hosted the Springfield Lucky Shoes in the Prairie Land Division Championship game Sunday evening at Lloyd Hopkins Field and won by a score of 4-1.

It comes off the back of a loss last night to the Shoes when Alton was defeated 6-5. The two teams split their eight regular season games, but the River Dragons won the one that mattered most and now they're into the Western Conference Championship.

In the Division Championship game, Alton got on the board first and early on.

With one out in the bottom of the first, Edwardsville's Blake Burris doubled to get things going. That brought up Eddie King Jr who tripled, scoring Burris, and making it a 1-0 ballgame.

Then came the big hit of the game. Marcus Heusohn came up and hit his first home run as a River Dragon over the wall in right-center. He scored King and made it 3-0.

"I thought Marcus might do what he did," head coach Darrell Handelsman said. "We gave him the green light on 3-0 and he did what you're supposed to."

"Normally I don't really swing 3-0," Heusohn said. "I've had some good swings the past couple of nights so I just trusted myself to put a good swing on it. He left a fastball over the plate and I didn't miss it."

Handelsman mentioned that the top part of his order, (Mike Hampton, Burris, King, and Heusohn), have been getting it done all summer.

At that point in the game, the nearly 1,200 people in attendance according to team general manager Dallas Martz, were all sorts of riled up.

Springfield did strike back quickly with their only run in the top of the second. A double scored the runner from first which hushed the large home crowd momentarily.

The Dragons' fourth run came in the fifth inning after Gunnar Doyle doubled scoring Ethan Kleinheider from second. That was enough to hold off the Shoes and earn a Division Championship.

Adam Stilts started on the mound for Alton and went deep into the game all the way through the eighth. He picked up six strikeouts and only allowed four hits.

"I mean, in two years, and I don't know, 20 something starts, that's the best I've ever seen him throw," Handelsman said about Stilts after the win.

"He's just as solid as it gets. He just goes out there and does his job. He doesn't get rattled. He was awesome tonight."

Colton Huntt came in as the closer and was throwing heat. He struck out his first two batters while throwing low to mid-90s. He fast-balled his way through the inning and got the ground out he needed to end the game.

It was mentioned earlier, but equally as important as the win was the number of fans in attendance. Dallas Martz said it was a great crowd.

"We felt this brewing. We knew if we put a winner on the field that people would get behind us. You know, our first playoff game ever, to have that many people here tonight is unbelievable," Martz said after the win.

"We get that Western Conference Championship, one game, winner take all and the guys are going to be locked in and ready to roll, I know it."

The River Dragons will play host to the Quincy Gems at 6:35 p.m. on Tuesday, August 9th in the Western Conference Championship game.