

Redbirds Continue Red-Hot Start - Beat Roxana 6-3

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
April 2 2024 9:41 AM



ROXANA – The Alton Redbirds are having their best start to a baseball season since 2017 when they rattled off eight straight wins to open the year.

While Alton has suffered a few defeats in 2024, it is still off to a 9-3 record.

“I think we were optimistic about being successful with things,” Alton head coach Scott Harper said. “We have the opportunity to compete offensively, and we’ve got plenty of pitching arms. We’re doing things we thought we would.”

After playing three games at the USA Stadium Complex in Millington, Tennessee (25 minutes north of Memphis), the Redbirds returned back to the Metro-East region to kick off another busy week where they’ll play six games in six days.

They began that run with a 6-3 win over the Roxana Shells on Monday afternoon.

The Redbirds used two pitchers to get the job done in what was a back-and-forth game.

Logan Hickmann started on the mound and threw the opening 3 and 2/3 innings. He allowed three runs on two hits while walking seven.

Elias Thies was on the bump for the Shells and he got out of the first after a couple of flyouts and a strikeout.

Hickmann followed up back-to-back Ks with allowing two straight walks to start his day. It allowed Mason Crump to deliver an RBI single, scoring Kael Hester to make it 1-0.

Alton got out of the inning thanks to a nice gun down from catcher Logan Bogard to throw out Caleb Wonders at second who was pinch running for Crump.

Then the Redbirds got the bats moving.

Thies went popout, flyout before the Redbirds went on a two-out rally.

Eli Lawrence and Hickmann hit back-to-back singles before Carsen Bristow was walked to load the bases. That brought things back to the top of Alton’s batting order as leadoff hitter Jack Puent stepped up to the plate.

He slapped a two-run single that scored Lawrence and pinch runner Roman Cross to take the lead at 2-1. It was Puent’s only hit on the day as he struck out his other three at bats.

Bogard hit an RBI single, scoring Austin Rathgeb to boost the lead to 3-1 in the third. But the Shells had a quick response.

Hickmann walked Kyle Campbell to start things off before Dalton Carriker doubled, sending Campbell to third. Hester singled, bringing in Campbell and then Aidan Briggs laid down a sacrifice bunt to bring in Carriker and tie the game up at 3-3.

Reid Murray hit an RBI double that scored Bristow to regain the lead before the Redbirds found themselves in a sticky situation in the bottom of the fourth.

After being behind in an 0-2 count, Zeb Katzmarek had a nice at bat, earning a leadoff walk. It was followed by Brady Jones being walked. After another nice defensive play from Bogard and another popout, it looked like Hickman was going to get out of the jam.

Instead, he walked Carriker to load the bases. That ended his day as Will Frasier was brought in to try and resolve the situation. He did just that when he struck out Hester to prevent any damage from being done.

Harper had mixed feelings about his team's pitching performance.

"We've got to get Logan Hickmann to throw some strikes a little more consistently. He's been struggling, working from behind there a little bit. He's got great stuff; I just keep trying to get him to trust it," Harper said.

"But Will Frasier; that's the MVP right there today. Coming into a big situation with the bases loaded, he just poured strikes. He shut them down."

Frasier would only allow two hits, putting up three scoreless innings while striking out four to give the Redbirds a chance to win.

Alton tacked on single runs in the sixth and seventh innings for good measure. Bogard had another RBI single in the sixth and Bristow had a sacrifice RBI after a long flyout in the final frame.

For the Shells, they aren't hanging their heads too low after competing with a quality team. They continue their mantra of getting better every day.

"In some sense, yeah," Roxana head coach Jerry Wheaton said when asked if his team got better after the loss to Alton.

"We got guys on the mound who needed innings. Thies, first time he's pitched in probably a week and a half, and it was a good outing from him. We held him to a 75-pitch count because we've got five more games this week and we'll need him."

“We did some things really well, manufactured runs. I do. I feel like we got better and competed hard against a 4A team that’s going to win a lot of baseball games this year,” Wheaton continued.

He said that Harper and the Redbirds are off to a red-hot start. A start they’ll look to continue this week as they host East St. Louis in a doubler-header on Tuesday before playing at Gillespie on Wednesday and then closing the week with another double-header against Freeburg on Saturday.

Roxana slips to 6-6 on the season. The Shells host backyard rival Wood River on Tuesday before hitting the road at Freeburg and Mater Dei on Thursday and Friday.

Once Frasier came into Monday’s game, Roxana’s bats just went cold.

“The kid they brought in there, he had a bit of a funky delivery and I think it threw our guys off for a couple of innings,” Wheaton said. “I think we aren’t aggressive enough sometimes at the plate. We walked seven times before the pitching change, and we’ve got to score more than three runs when you walk seven times.”

“We had chances and just didn’t get things done today.”