

Pitching, timely hits keep Cheyenne in first place

Friday night featured everything you'd expect from two teams battling for first place: solid pitching, timely hitting and competitive spirit.

Mike Lessig threw 7 2/3 of two-run baseball and the Grizzlies got the hits when they needed them to defeat the Fort Collins Foxes 4-2 at Pioneer Park. The win gives the Grizzlies a 1.5 game lead in the standings.

"It's nice to be able to win a close game, especially against the second place team," head coach Aaron Holley said.

Lessig was completely dominant, pitching into the eighth inning and allowing just four hits and two runs, striking out seven and walking just one batter.

"My guys played good defense behind me and we were able to score enough to get the win," Lessig said about his performance. "We just have to score one more than our opponent and we were able to do that (Friday night). As long as you're throwing strikes and getting ahead of guys you'll have success, and I was able to do that (Friday night)."

Lessig admitted that the close score allowed him to stay focused.

"You want to do well no matter the score, but when it's close like that it definitely does keep you focused," he said.

Closer Jack Winters finished the game, recording a four-out save.

Despite the offense being so strong most of the year, hits were hard to come by Friday night.

Like Lessig, Foxes' starter Kory Kiro was strong on the mound, allowing just four hits over six innings. While he allowed four runs, just two were earned.

"This is the kid that beat us the first time we faced them," Holley said. "He throws three different off-speed pitches, so he kept us off-balanced pretty well."

While hits were scarce, the Grizzlies were able to produce timely hits when needed.

In the fifth inning, leading 2-1, left fielder Kyle Dodge led off the inning with a single to left field. He stole second and was moved to third on a sacrifice bunt by Mike Wido before scoring on a throwing error by Fort Collins shortstop Eddie Allen.

"I had two strikes on me," Dodge said. "Batting leadoff that inning, I just wanted to get on. He threw it right down the middle and I was able to connect with it. When I saw he was slow to the plate I decided to take second."

Dodge provided a huge insurance run to widen the gap a little. Jauregui, who reached on the error, came around to score the team's fourth run later that inning.

“It’s good to know that even when we can’t put up the big numbers we can still win games, right fielder Andy Athans said. “We have the pitching to do it and the team to get it done. We have both pitching and hitting and can compete even when one isn’t on that night.”

Athans reached base in all four plate appearances, including a double, walk, hit by pitch and stole a pair of bases.

Cheyenne’s first two runs came early. Leadoff hitter Kevin Logan singled and advanced to second on a wild pitch. He then scored when Jauregui singled to right field. Jauregui scored two batters later to make it a 2-0 lead after one inning.

The Grizzlies have now scored first in 18 of their 21 games this season, and are 15-3 when taking the early lead.

“It works both ways,” Holley said. “Not only does it allow the pitcher to throw with the lead, but it also allows the offense to know that they can score runs, thinking, ‘Hey, we still have eight at-bats against this guy.’ When you’re scoring early, you’re going to win a lot of games.”

After picking up losses in their first two meetings against each other, Cheyenne now has Fort Collins’ number, taking the last four meetings.

“It’s nice to be able to get the wins right now and keep the lead,” Holley said. “The last two times we’ve been in first place we’ve dropped the next game. Finally we’re in first place and we’re holding our lead.”

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