

Foxes shut out Grizzlies

FORT COLLINS, Colo.—The Grizzlies' offense had a missing fuse Sunday afternoon. A team that has been so explosive all season was shut out on Independence Day, limited to just two hits in a 4-0 loss to the Fort Collins Foxes at The Fox Den.

Locked in a pitchers' duel, Cheyenne's Howard Heinrich and Fort Collins' TJ Fussell combined for just four total hits allowed through the first five innings.

Heinrich was dominant, facing the minimum number of batters possible through the first four innings, receiving help from a double play in the first inning and helping his own cause with two pickoffs.

"He's pitching great," head coach Aaron Holley said. "He's doing everything we're asking him to do as a pitcher—you know, getting into the sixth or seventh inning, keeping the runs down—he's doing a great job, we just can't get him any run support."

It wasn't until the bottom of the sixth that a run was put across for either team. A leadoff double by Foxes' Eric Doyle proved costly, as he moved around the bases and eventually scored on a fielder's choice. In the seventh, Heinrich recorded the first out of the inning, but an Anthony Guglielmi home run to deep center field, followed by two consecutive base hits and a walk ended Heinrich's day.

"I could tell from the beginning of the game it was going to be a pitcher's duel, and at the start I was able to get ahead with my fastball and drop the curveball and slider in for a strike when I was up in the count," Heinrich said. "A few times through the order, though, they saw the fastball and started jumping on it. A few dropped in and that's the way the game goes."

He ended up receiving the loss after allowing four earned runs over 6 1/3 innings, walking three and allowing seven hits. His stat line doesn't reflect how strong his performance was, however. The final two runs were scored when reliever Ryan Schwenn allowed two RBI singles before retiring the Foxes to end the eighth.

While Heinrich pitched impressively, Fussell was even better, throwing seven scoreless innings, allowing just two hits and striking out eight. He did walk five, but the Grizzlies were never able to string together base runners.

"It's uncharacteristic of our offense to not score runs," Holley said. "We had some good at-bats and we had some bad at-bats, but any time they gave us something like a walk or a hit by pitch, we couldn't seem to capitalize. It was a rough day."

Cheyenne had multiple base runners in an inning just twice and had a runner reach third base just once. Not once did the inning's leadoff hitter reach base.

"We had some ideas of certain approaches in order to scratch runs across, but it's hard to do stuff when you can't get your leadoff runner on," Holley said.

Unfortunately for Heinrich, Sunday was the second consecutive outing where the lefty has pitched strong but taken the loss. Cheyenne has provided little run support for Heinrich, scoring just two combined runs over his last two outings.

“For whatever reason, our offense dies on the days he’s throwing,” Holley said.

“It is a little frustrating, but there’s nothing I can do about it,” Heinrich said. “The guys go out and do their best every game. The game’s usually pretty good about evening things out. I’m sure in the future there will be a few games where I’ll get more than my share of run support.”

The loss marks only the second road loss of the season for the Grizzlies. Their only other road loss came May 30 in Fort Collins, their first road game of the season.

“When you have the bus rides, it gives you time to focus and become more mentally prepared, Holley said. “Usually you have a home-field advantage, but that hour ride lets them mentally prepare.”

With the loss, Cheyenne and Fort Collins are now tied for first place in the standings, both holding 17-6 records. Monday, the Grizzlies will be back in action with a 1 p.m. rematch against the Foxes, followed by the MCBL home run derby at 6:30 p.m., both at Pioneer Park.

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