

Grizzlies drop another heartbreaker to Foxes

Jefre Johnson came to the plate in the bottom of the ninth inning Thursday night with the chance to tie the game with one swing of the bat. He had, however, drove in and scored the only run of the game for the Grizzlies.

But Johnson, who had homered in his second at-bat of the game, was unable to provide the second spark, striking out to end the game as the Grizzlies (19-11) fell to the Fort Collins Foxes (24-7) 4-1 at Pioneer Park.

“I changed my approach at the plate that last at-bat,” Johnson said. “I was gonna go after a fastball, thinking they might have changed their approach to me. It didn’t happen; you chase a bad pitch and then you start pressing a little bit. You chase another and now you’re down two strikes and when it happens again, that’s the ballgame.”

With two outs, Jose Jauregui and K.C. Judge recorded back-to-back singles to pose a possible threat to Foxes’ closer Seth Blevins.

But the inability to score the runners was the story of the game, and the offense in general over the past week and a half.

Cheyenne isn’t having trouble hitting—they attacked Foxes’ pitchers with 10 hits Thursday, including three extra base hits—but instead finding timely hits to produce runs.

“It’s tough, but it’s really been the story of the last, probably 10 games for us,” head coach Aaron Holley said. “Just offensively we can’t get anything going. We still are getting hits, but it’s not about how you hit or if you hit but when you hit.”

In the first inning, Cheyenne loaded the bases but came away empty. In the second inning, it was much of the same, having runners on first and second with none out and second and third with one out, but again, not able to put a run on the board.

“We’re not getting those two-out hits like we did early in the season,” Holley said. “We’re not scoring runs early in the game like we did in the beginning of the season. We constantly have the pressure on us, because they are.”

The Grizzlies left a total of 12 runners on the bases Thursday.

Much like the past couple of games, the Grizzlies received a strong performance from their starting pitcher. This time it was Bryce Reid, who had been beaten just once this year prior to Thursday.

Besides the second inning, in which Reid struggled to find his location but still came away only allowing one run, and a wild pitch in the sixth that brought across two Foxes, Reid looked sharp as usual.

“I felt great the whole time,” Reid said, “but when I don’t make my pitches they score runs; it’s as simple as that.”

Still, though, Holley said he was very impressed with Reid's performance and that the loss was on the hitters, not him.

"We're pitching great," Holley said. "Our defense is making the plays. You can't expect to get more out of our pitching staff than what we're getting. We just can't give them run support or a lead to give them some breathing room. We can't play from behind every game."

Reid threw six innings, allowing three runs on five hits, striking out two and walking four. The big difference was a wild pitch in the fifth inning.

With the game tied at 1-1, Reid got the first two hitters of the inning to fly out, but a walk followed up by a double put two runners in scoring position and sent Holley out to the mound.

"Coach came out and talked to us and just said to get the last guy," Reid said. "I threw a curveball, I just let it float. I short-armed it and it bounced it 10 feet in front of the plate."

Johnson had trouble finding the ball, which had skidded back to the backstop, allowing not only Edder Morales to score from third, but also Eric Doyle to come around from second.

Fort Collins tacked on a fourth run in the eighth inning to put the game out of reach for Cheyenne.

"I think when we aren't hitting, the guys put a little bit more pressure on themselves to get it done," Holley said. "They just need to take the pressure of themselves and trust in their abilities. Someone needs to step up and be the hero."

"We just need to stick with it," Johnson added. "Baseball's a game of failure. Certain guys hit slumps and it just so happened that multiple guys hit slumps at the same time."

Other notes:

- Jefre Johnson had hits in his first two at-bats, the first a double down the third-base line and the second a home run over the left-field wall.

"I was looking for a pitch and he left it up enough where I could get in on it and it went out," Johnson recalled. "It was nice to have that hit. I would have liked for it to help us more or fire us up more, though."
- Judge, who was part of the potential ninth-inning rally, went 3-for-4 with a double, stolen base and walk.
- Reid made the catch of the year thus far when catcher Steven Keller hit a rocket comebacker straight at Reid. His reaction was perfect, though, putting his glove up just in time to make the play and end the inning. A hit would have most likely scored a run, as there were runners on first and second at the time.

"I actually caught that ball behind me; I don't know how I got it. I looked down and didn't realize I had it. It scared the crap out of me, but thankfully I caught it. I know if it were a couple more inches to the left or couple inches higher it would have hit me in a bad spot and I may not be talking right now."

- Ryan Schwenn came in to work the seventh and eighth innings. After pitching a 1-2-3 seventh, Schwenn let up three hits in the eighth before being relieved with two outs, two on and one run in. Chad Correa faced one hitter, pinch hitter Cody Bishop, striking him out. Taylor Fallon worked a scoreless ninth inning.
- With the loss, the Grizzlies have now lost six of their last eight games and are now a season-high 4.5 games back of first place in the MCBL standings. While there are still nearly two weeks left in the season, Cheyenne and Fort Collins face off head to head just two more times.

Nic Hallisey
Cheyenne Grizzlies Intern
nic.cheyennegrizzlies@gmail.com