

Pitching gem keeps Rockets on CLC roll

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
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Bares' one-hitter helps CG-Belgium sweep twin bill, stretch win streak to seven

It couldn't have gotten much better for pitcher Spencer Bares on Monday night.

Just a little bit, but not much.

With two outs in the seventh inning at Sheboygan Lutheran/Kohler, a grounder got through the Cedar Grove-Belgium infield, ruining Bares' shot at a no-hitter.

An infield error — the Rockets' only blemish of the game — then wiped out a shutout, but this was still Bares' night.

The Rockets won, 3-1, in the first game of a Central Lakeshore Conference doubleheader. In the second game, Justin Obbink allowed only two hits in leading Cedar Grove-Belgium to a 6-1 victory.

Rockets coach Mike Ruppel said he thought Bares could have gotten the no-hitter if the grounder had been fielded, but was still pleased with the one-hit performance of his ace. The junior struck out six, walked two and hit one batter.

"He pitched one heck of a game. I couldn't have been much happier with what he did," Ruppel said.

Offensively, the Rockets got a two-run triple from Brian Mueller in the second inning, and Bares was 1-for-3. That's all the offense Bares needed.

Obbink barely needed any offense in the second game, striking out eight, walking one and hitting one batter.

Jim Simmelink went 3-for-3 with a walk, and Bares was 2-for-3 with a double.

"We're getting some timely hitting and running bases well. We had a lot of first-and-third situations," Ruppel said.

Bares took advantage of the those situations by twice scoring from third on a double steal. As soon as he saw a throw to second base that was off line, he broke for home.

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“Spencer read them perfectly,” Ruppel said. “He just had a great day, just a good couple games.”

The Rockets’ top three hitters — Christian O’Donnell, Simmelink and Bares — had a hand in five of their six runs in the second game.

“That’s why they are where they are,” Ruppel said.

Although the Rockets committed three errors in the doubleheader, their defensive play is improving.

“We’re starting to play consistently,” Ruppel said.

Monday’s sweep gave Cedar Grove-Belgium a seven-game winning streak and improved its CLC record to 8-2.

Rockets drop Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah twice

Cedar Grove-Belgium pounded out a 9-4 road win over Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah last Friday, scoring its second victory over the same foe in four days.

Drew Emperley kept the host Resorters at bay for six innings in his first pitching appearance of the season. He allowed only four hits.

The game was tied at 1-1 until the fourth, when Cedar Grove-Belgium scored six runs. The Rockets added two runs in the sixth.

On June 11, Cedar Grove-Belgium thumped the Resorters, 14-3, behind Bares’ pitching and an offensive explosion that ended the game on a mercy rule after five innings.

Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah trailed, 5-1, before pulling within two runs in the fourth. However, the Rockets ended the suspense by scoring nine runs in the same inning.

All but one player in the Cedar Grove-Belgium lineup had at least one hit and all of them scored at least once.

O’Donnell went 3-for-3, and utility player Tyler Falk was 2-for-3.

In each of the two games, sophomore David Niebauer pitched one final, scoreless inning. Niebauer has also played shortstop and second base this season.

“He’s a young kid, works hard and understands the game,” Ruppel said. “He made a ton of great plays for us and really has been doing it all season.”

The rest of this week, Cedar Grove-Belgium was scheduled to play 5:30 p.m. games Wednesday at Oostburg and Friday at home against Ozaukee.

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The Rockets will then play a 5:30 p.m. game at Random Lake on June 24 and travel to Howards Grove on June 26 for a 5 p.m. doubleheader.

“As far as effort and overall team atmosphere, it’s the best team I’ve coached in three years,” Ruppel said. “We may not be as talented, but I completely enjoy the season. No personality problems — that’s a testament to the quality of these kids. They’re just great.

“Hopefully, they’ll continue to get better and stay competitive.”