

New, improving Rockets find a way

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
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Slow starts fail to keep CG-Belgium from zeroing in another CLC baseball crown

The Cedar Grove-Belgium baseball team won its 10th straight game Monday and sat alone atop the Central Lakeshore Conference standings.

But Rockets coach Mike Ruppel didn't want to talk about that.



Despite losing six of last year's players to graduation, most of them all-conference players, Cedar Grove-Belgium improved its record to 11-2 and remained in the driver's seat to win its third consecutive league title.

Ruppel didn't want to talk about that, either.

He's more worried about just getting better.

"We're a young team, so it's all about improvement," he said.

The Rockets' improvement plans stayed on course Monday when they rallied for a 12-7 road win over Random Lake.

After falling behind, 7-1, Cedar Grove-Belgium scored three runs in the sixth inning and six runs in the seventh to secure the victory.

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Shaky defense cost the Rockets, whose three errors in the first inning gave Random Lake five runs. But the Rockets' bats came alive as the game wore on.

Cameron Deppiesse and Brett Michaels each had two hits, and Christian O'Donnell added a double. Every Rocket got a hit except Justin Obbink, who walked twice.

James Simmelink started on the mound for Cedar Grove-Belgium but injured his finger on a bunt attempt. Sophomore David Niebauer, the Rockets' go-to bullpen guy, came in earlier than usual and pitched three innings of no-hit, no-walk ball while hitting one batter.

In the final inning, Niebauer struck out the Rams' 3-4-5 hitters.

"He threw 14 pitches, 10 for strikes," Ruppel said. "I can't say enough about David Niebauer."

Simmelink allowed eight hits and seven runs, but five errors hurt his cause.

Monday's win left the Rockets 2-1/2 games ahead of second-place Ozaukee (7-3) in the CLC standings.

CG-Belgium 7, Ozaukee 5

The Rockets prevailed in what began as a pitchers' duel between Justin Obbink and Ozaukee's Jeremy Wichmann.

Ozaukee held a 3-2 lead in the sixth inning, but Cedar Grove-Belgium surged ahead by scoring five times in its half of the frame.

The Warriors bounced back with two runs in the seventh, but Niebauer escaped further damage in an inning of relief that saved the win for Obbink.

In the Rockets' sixth, Brian Mueller led off with a single and scored on O'Donnell's triple. The rally also included RBI singles by Spencer Bares and Tyler Falk and a two-run double by Obbink.

Obbink pitched the first six innings, allowing three runs on two hits and five walks. He struck out six.

Bares led the Rockets' offense with two hits.

Wichmann allowed seven runs on seven hits in 5-2/3 innings. He struck out seven and walked one.

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Wichmann also sparked the Warriors at the plate, going 3-for-3 with two RBI and two runs scored.

Ozaukee's other two hits included a game-tying RBI triple by Joe Schauer in the sixth.

With the win, the Rockets avenged their last defeat, a 6-5 loss at Ozaukee on June 5.

CG-Belgium 22, Oostburg 3 (5 inn.)

The Rockets started celebrating the Fourth of July early with what Ruppel called "a hit parade" in a June 19 road win.

Oostburg held a 2-1 lead after one inning, thanks to two Cedar Grove-Belgium errors.

But the Rockets regrouped and surged ahead to stay with a seven-run fourth inning. They exploded for 14 runs in the fifth, turning the game into a rout.

Cedar Grove-Belgium finished with 16 hits and 12 walks, batting .624 in a contest called after five innings on the mercy rule.

O'Donnell was 3-for-3 with a single, double, triple and walk and scored four runs. Brandon O'Neil had two doubles.

Every player in the Cedar Grove-Belgium lineup had at least one hit or walk.

It all came against a team that beat the Rockets, 4-2, on June 3.

Simmelink pitched a complete game for the win.

"You score 22 runs, that's pretty relaxing as a pitcher. You can go out to the mound with some confidence," Ruppel said.

Despite some unexpected success with a roster that has only two seniors, Ruppel said he wants his team to improve in its final five games before the WIAA playoffs. Eliminating first-inning errors will be a big step, he noted.

"We start slow, which is just absolutely horrible to say as a coach. I guess we figure it out and

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make the adjustment somewhere along the line,” he said.

The Rockets were scheduled to travel to Howards Grove for a 5 p.m. doubleheader Wednesday, June 26, and will play 5:30 p.m. home games against Shebogyan Lutheran/Kohler on July 1 and Oostburg on July 3.

A RUNDOWN BETWEEN first and second bases had Ozaukee's Mitch McConnell scrambling to avoid an out against Cedar Grove-Belgium last Friday. The Rockets' Adam Gonwa (left) closed the gap while Brett Michaels (right) waited for a possible throw. Photo by Sam Arendt