

River Dragons Down Cross-River Rival O'Fallon Hoots 8-4

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ALTON - It was a toasty Wednesday evening in Alton at Lloyd Hopkins Field as the hometown Alton River Dragons hosted their biggest Prospect League rivals, the O' Fallon (Missouri) Hoots.

Before the game, both teams honored the life of Prospect Leaguer and former Lewis and Clark Community College catcher Ashton Smith. Smith tragically passed away Monday, before he was set to feature in that night's game for the Thrillville Thrillbillies of Marion against the River Dragons.

The Dragons and Hoots were joined on the field pregame by some of Ashton Smith's teammates at Lewis and Clark for a moment of silence in honor of Smith's life.

"We compete between these baselines," said River Dragons GM and acting manager Dallas Martz. "But we're one big Prospect League family off the field."

The Dragons and Hoots then lined up together as one group for the national anthem, further solidifying that message.

One would forgive Alton starter Alex Rodriguez if he needed a moment to compose himself on the mound following the emotional start to the night, but Rodriguez was sharp early. The Dragons hurler fanned two batters in the first and stranded a runner on third.

The first runs of the ballgame came by way of Civic Memorial product Bryer Arview, who smacked a two-run double in the second to open the scoring. Alex Rodriguez followed that up two quick zeros on the scoreboard.

In the bottom half of the fourth inning, the River Dragons would do all the damage they would need. Alton batted around, plating six runs in the inning.

The damage started with Evan Evola's solo homer down the right-field line but would not end there. A River Dragon then scored on a wild pitch, former Edwardsville Tiger and current Illini slugger Drake Westcott roped a single to drive in the fifth, and Erik Brockemeier sent a 3-run bomb over the left field foul pole to make it 8-0 early.

"Brockemeier's got that ability every time he comes to the plate," said Martz. "I told him that I wanted that pitcher that I recruited last year to go out there and swing the bat, and a few pitches later he hit that one out."

The Hoots would score their first three runs of the game in the fifth, chasing Dragon starter Alex Rodriguez, who may have had his best day in River Dragon pinstripes. Rodriguez went 4 1/3, gave up four hits and three runs, but fanned seven Hoots hitters in less than five innings of work.

"Alex (Rodriguez) has been battling all summer long," said Martz. "He arguably put up his best performance of the year today. I know he didn't get through the fifth, but for those first four innings, he looked really good."

The visitors would add a fourth run in the seventh, but were locked down by River Dragon reliever Tyson Greene, who worked quickly in the final innings, allowing just one baserunner, sealing the victory for the River Dragons.

The River Dragons, who've struggled mightily at times this season, are now winners of their last three, and building some momentum as the Prospect League season closes. They hit the road to Burlington for a two-game series before returning home Saturday to face the Danville Dans.

"The big difference is everybody's having fun," Martz said. "The biggest change we've made (since parting with Scotty Scott) is just putting people in positions to do their jobs,

whether it is coaches or players.”

