

Braves Blank Bombers

by Matt Tymann

07/17/08 HERNDON— As a general rule, it's tough for a baseball team to win when its batters strike out sixteen times in one game. Unless, of course, that team's starting pitcher turns in the best performance of the year in the same game.

That's exactly what Keith Hessler did for the Braves on Thursday night, and he got just enough offensive help to lead his team to a 2-0 win over the College Park Bombers. Hessler allowed just two baserunners in seven shutout innings of work, and faced just one more batter than the minimum over that time.

Hessler was perfect through three innings, and then gave up a leadoff single in the fourth inning to Ben Sobocinski. He then retired seven consecutive Bombers, before Clay Duncan singled in the sixth. A double play ended the inning, and then Hessler worked a 1-2-3 seventh to complete his superb outing.

The Braves (12-20) scored a run apiece in the third and fifth innings, which gave Hessler a much-deserved lead when he gave way to reliever Vinny Lally in the eighth. Lally and T.J. O'Grady each threw a scoreless inning to preserve Hessler's first win of the season.

John Lynch scored both of Herndon's runs, giving him four in the past two games. He doubled to lead off the third inning, and then was driven in by a Joe Charron single. In the fifth, Alex Ferrera knocked Lynch home, after Lynch had reached on a single.

Charron, Ferrera, and Michael Cheatham were the other Braves to reach base twice. Charron singled twice, while Ferrera and Cheatham each recorded a single and a walk.

The Braves did have six hits in the game, but could not avoid their highest strikeout total of the season. Every batter in their lineup struck out at least once, as Bombers' starter Jacob Lago racked up fourteen strikeouts in just seven innings. Reliever Colin Warner recorded the final two strikeouts, in the eighth inning. Notably, no Herndon batter struck out looking; each one of their strikeouts was of the swinging variety.

The game marked the second time this season that Hessler has thrown three perfect innings to start a game. The first was back on July 2, in a home game against Alexandria. In that game, he retired the first ten Aces' batters, before allowing six runs in the fourth. On Thursday, there was no such implosion.

With the win, Hessler improved to 1-3 on the season, and lowered his ERA almost a point and a half, from 6.30 to 4.95. Lago, despite his fourteen strikeouts, took the loss for College Park to drop to 2-3.

The Bombers are now 19-13 on the year, and solidly rooted into third place in the Cal Riken Sr. League. They are five and a half games behind Bethesda for second place, and six and a half games ahead of fourth-place Rockville. The Braves' win earned them a tie

with the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts for fifth place in the league, and are now just half a game behind Rockville for fourth.

Herndon will host those same Thunderbolts on Friday night, with the first pitch scheduled for 7 PM. Jaeson Hudnall (3-0, 2.88 ERA) is scheduled to get the start for the Braves.