

FEEL THE BUZZ!!



Monday June 22, 2009

The week that was



The Jacket's doubled their win total this week, put a bunch of miles on the odometer...and then they rested. After getting on a bus bound for Edmonton at 6am Saturday morning, the YJs split a double header against the Prospects, and trekked straight back to 'Toon town arriving at 5am — 6 hours before they were supposed to get back on the bus for a trip to Moose Jaw to play a make up game. Rain washed the game away before the bus left Cairns field. I heard Matt Lucchesi's knees sigh with relief from here.

The big news of the week is some new blood in the injury-plagued line up. GM Dave Riggs is thrilled with the addition of North Dakota product Zach Wentz, an old-fashioned middle-of-the-lineup slugger to a squad that — at long last — seems to be heating up at the plate. YJ nation will get their first look at Wentz Friday night at Cairns field when Regina comes to town.

Ironically, it has been the walking wounded — namely Chris Dobler and Scott Klassen who are both battling painful leg injuries — who are leading the offensive surge. Klassen has his average up to .444 and Dobler, a player who, when healthy, brings a lot of speed to the line up, has decided to deal with a bad hamstring by becoming an RBI machine.

Their contributions were on display in a huge home victory Wednesday night against the Lethbridge Bulls. Down 5-4 in the bottom of the 8th and absolutely desperate for a victory, Klassen got on base to begin the late rally. Andrew Buckham pinch ran and, when catcher Luchessi reached on an error, Dobler strode to the plate and stroked a double that earned him two huge RBIs (and four for the game).

It was also a good week for Thomas Robulak, who has overcome early frustrations at the plate to become a line-drive machine now operating out of the lead-off spot. Kudos to Andrew Buckham who, frustrated by a poor performance in his previous outing, took the mound on Sunday evening with a chip on his shoulder and tossed a gem to defeat Alex Kreis — the Prospects pitcher who was heard guaranteeing a win on Edmonton radio stations.

In a week with some great starting performances (everyone together now: "this team can flat-out pitch"), the one that I think deserves some attention wasn't pretty in any conventional sense. Baseball's critics often point to the individualistic, stat-obsessed nature of the game. It's a semi-valid critique along the lines of those who claim the relative lack of importance of a basket early in an NBA game or hockey's tendency to hire commissioners that seem to hate the sport. Baseball's absurd habit of combining two existing statistical categories into one every couple of years to get the stat-heads excited isn't helping with this perception (that's right, I'm talking about you WHIP and OPS).





Mike Frissina took to the mound on Thursday night in what was the Jackets 7th game in 8 days. It was an outing that he'd surely prefer be forgotten but one that his teammates and coaches surely will not. The bullpen was beaten up and coaches Riggs and Kjargaard knew they had a double header coming up on Saturday followed by another game on Sunday. Frisina surely understood what they needed him to do. It's my personal favourite example of the often-overlooked "team" play in baseball: a starter eating up some innings in a tough situation to save some tired arms. Blue Jays fans know that Roy Halladay has a number of these in his career: games where you don't have your best stuff, your fastball is straight, breaking pitches up, and you're getting knocked around. It's awful lonely up there taking a beating but instead of looking for an exit, you keep taking the ball inning after inning. It is in moments like this that the fundamental difference between a pitcher like Halladay and a pitcher like A.J. Burnett is located.

Frissina gave up a grand slam in the 1st and was down 8 runs after 4. He kept taking the ball. He kept taking it until the final out, refusing to give up another run and the YJ's almost got back in the game before falling short 8-5. It's the kind of start that doesn't often get noticed but every great pitcher has done it with an eye towards the two or three games it'll win you down the line.

The week that will be

The Yellow Jackets will try to gain some momentum on the road Tuesday and Wednesday June 23rd and 24th as they head out to Weyburn for a series with the Beavers.

Then they come home for a great weekend of baseball. It begins Friday June 26th against the Regina Red Sox. You want to be out for "Beat the Sox night." Fans will get a chance to take a sledge hammer to a Red Sox-decaled car throughout the game with donations going to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. The players will be sporting pink hats that will be auctioned off after the game and all cancer survivors, volunteers and their families receive half price admission.

The Okotoks Dawgs come to town for a two game series beginning at 7:05 Saturday the 27th and finishing Sunday afternoon at 2:35 pm.



Player of the week...Chris Dobler



Speed is a big part of his game so it can't be fun for erstwhile centerfielder Chris Dobler to be on the limp. That said, while his hamstring is failing him, his bat is not. Dobler has been on fire of late, a key factor in the YJ's two victories this week, notching 8 RBIs — a number of them clutch — while hitting .400 in his last 4 games. That said, when he gets pulled late in games for a pinch runner, he looks about as happy as Cito Gaston watching a Roy Halladay at bat in an inter-league game. On top of that, both Dobler and Klassen, having been pinch-run for multiple times by hurlers, have lost the time-honoured ability to mock pitchers for being lesser athletes.

Honourable mention — As was mentioned last week Klassen has struggled with a quad strain but his average is up to a scorching .444. Thomas Robulak and Brian Lourd (see below) are stringing together quality at bat after quality bat.

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Pitcher of the week...Dan Morari

Dan Morari gave up a single earned run in the first game of the double header on Saturday but was denied his first win when the Yellow Jackets gave up the lead in the bottom of the last inning. He leads the team with a gaudy 1.83 era and has 26 strikeouts in 19 innings but a lack of run support has left him with an 0-2 record. That's the way it's gone for Morari early this season but he is not the kind of competitor you'll hear complaining. A commanding presence on the mound, he brings an easy confidence mixed with humility off it. Morari, in what is fast becoming habit for YJ pitchers, also chipped in offensively this week with a big late-inning sacrifice fly in Wednesday night's victory over the Bulls.



Honourable Mention: We'll begin with the requisite tribute to Jordan Rawlyk's dominant season — he was the pitcher of record going 8 and giving up 4 runs in a big home win against Lethbridge Thursday night. Nate Coronado continues look good as he rounds into form after some early arm soreness. Andrew Buckham's bounce-back win on Saturday was big. If the YJs are able to put together a winning streak, he'll be integral.

Player Profiles...

Brian Loard



Position: 3rd ; 1st ; RF

#33

Long Beach City College

Home Town

You have to watch Brian Loard for a while before you truly appreciate his game. This Californian kid is a quiet presence who has played at 1st base; 3rd and in the outfield this season. He isn't flashy but watch closely and you'll see a tough competitor who is constantly looking for an edge and refuses to give in at the plate. He's among the team leaders in slugging, sports a nifty .426 OBP, leads the team in walks and is among the leaders in RBIs, Hits, Runs and Stolen Bases.

What does a California kid think of Saskatoon?

It's really beautiful. A lot more beautiful to look at than California. It's definitely some different scenery.

What do you miss about California?

I love it here but California is just home, you know?

Favourite thing about playing baseball?

Just competitiveness. It's a different sport. A lot of people don't understand it. When you understand it you realize how fun it is. There are edges all over the place.

Favourite major leaguer?

Ex-major leaguer Mike Piazza.

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Ok...definitely an answer from a So-Cal kid.

Brian, any advice/tips for an up-and-coming Junior Jacket who wants to play 3rd/1st base for the YJs one day? Your best tool is your fundamentals. Learn your fundamentals and you can advance so far in this game. At third just take your ground balls. Develop good footwork, get on top of the ball, throw it with topspin.

How about at the plate?

Same thing, It's all about solid fundamentals. Get your foot down early. See the ball, hit the ball. Eliminate any kind of loop to your swing.

Walk-up song?

Can't Get No Satisfaction: Rolling Stones.

Old School. Why?

I just love it. I'm not ever going to be satisfied.

Come out and see the Brian along with the rest of the Yellow Jackets as they're at home, at Cairns Field, for a critical three game home-stand beginning Friday, June 26th at 7:05pm against the Regina Red Sox. The Okotoks Dawgs come to town Saturday for a 7:05pm start followed by an afternoon tilt on Sunday at 2:35pm.

If you have any questions, suggestions or topics you'd like to see in up-coming editions of the buzz drop us a line at cmsincer@yahoo.ca or michael@in-play.ca

