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## Big Train saves best for last against Express

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by **Chay Rao**  
Staff Writer

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As the sun set behind the stands on Monday, lengthening the shadows on the field, the Bethesda Big Train could have let this game slip away into the approaching night. After all, Bethesda had already clinched the first seed in the upcoming Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League playoffs, and a 4-1 eighth-inning lead over the Rockville Express at Knights field at Montgomery College-Rockville had been turned into a 4-4 tie. Losing focus on the road would have been entirely conceivable.

"That's not what we do," Bethesda manager Sal Colangelo said. "Our character all year has been to fight back. That is why we have been successful."

Instead, the Big Train rallied with three runs in the top of the 10th inning to squelch any chances of an Express comeback and win 7-4. Bethesda (24-15) snapped Rockville's (19-20) five-game winning streak that moved it into third place in the league standings. Due to the fact that the Maryland Orioles are not participating in CRSBL playoffs, the Express will be the second seed.

"We played this like a playoff game," Express manager Tom Shaffer said. "We fought hard against the best team in the league and came back. I was happy with their effort."

For the first seven innings, the game looked as if it would not require a dramatic end. Big Train lefthander Derek Caldwell (who came into the game with a 4-1 record and a 1.26 earned-run average) kept Rockville's bats silent, at one point retiring eight batters in a row. Cruising along with a 4-1 lead, he looked to be in complete control.

"My plan was to just throw strikes," the Rider (N.J.) College sophomore said. "I wanted to keep



**Charlie Shoemaker/The Gazette**

**Nick Flahetka fires a pitch for the Rockville Express against the Bethesda Big Train Monday at Knights Field in Rockville. The Express came back late to tie the score only to lose in extra innings. Still, a recent winning spell has pushed the team into the second seed of the upcoming Cal Ripken Sr. League playoffs.**

the ball down, and then I got into a rhythm. [The coaches] want us to go 1-2-3 and get back in the dugout."

When runners did get on base, Bethesda's defense tightened behind Caldwell. The Big Train turned two inning ending double plays, including a nifty 4-6-3 number in the seventh that stopped a potential Rockville rally cold, stranding a runner. But in the eighth, Caldwell ran into trouble, walking leadoff hitter Aaron Meadows and then giving up a single to Justin Wilson. With runners on first and second, Colangelo came out to the mound to hand the ball to reliever Robbie Smithson.

"I put Robbie in a tough situation," Caldwell said. "He's done a great job for us, and he's a really great pitcher. That guy just laid down a good bunt."

The guy in question was second baseman Matt Eiden, a new addition to the Express. Bunting to move the runners over, he pushed the ball just past Smithson the load the bases before Mike Murphy drove in two runs with another single to left. Smithson exited and Brett Tidball entered, but Matt Edgecombe's single tied the score at four before the Big Train could end the inning.

"We started working the count better," Shaffer said. "We put pressure on their defense when we decided to bunt the ball, and then with the bases loaded all the pressure is on them. We did a good job of fighting back."

Yet the Express were not able to sustain that momentum as the game edged toward an extra frame. In the ninth, Wilson earned a walk, and then wreaked havoc with his speed. He moved to second on a botched pickoff play, and then stole third with two outs. Wilson stood 90 feet from home and victory, but watched as Tidball bore down and induced Murphy to fly out to left field to end the inning.

"We have guys that believe in our system," Colangelo said. "They come from good college programs, and they know how to win. Rockville is hot, and we battled. That sends a message."

That message might be that the Big Train will use any means to win. In the 10th, they used a single, a walk and a sacrifice bunt to move runners into scoring position before pouncing. When reliever Justin Segal uncorked a pitch that got past Rockville catcher R.J. Brown, Greg Lemon never hesitated, taking off from third to slide in under the tag for the go-ahead run. Bethesda tacked on the last two runs in anticlimactic but fundamentally sound fashion, scoring on a sacrifice fly and a beating another throw to the plate. It showed a potential playoff opponent that every player in the lineup understands his role. Tidball's (1-1) two-plus innings of relief earned him the victory, while Wyatt Stewart pitched a scoreless bottom of the 10th for his sixth save.

"We wanted to win the Montgomery Cup, and we've done that," Colangelo said. "We want to win the regular season, and we're almost there. If we can win the title, we'll meet all of our goals for the season."

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