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## Express enjoys Gross good fortune

Frederick grad excels at Shirley Povich Field

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

by John Y. Wehmueller  
 Staff Writer

When Billy Gross took the mound in the bottom of the first inning Sunday night at Shirley Povich Field, he had basically pitched three meaningful, competitive innings in the last 12 months.

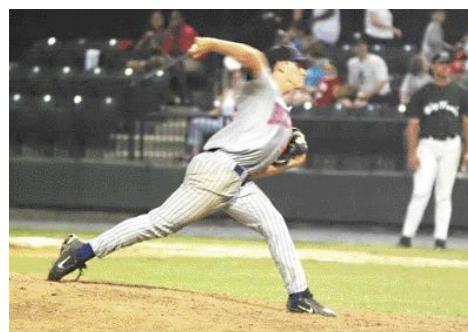
But when the Rockville Express right-hander walked off the mound at the end of the seventh inning, he had come within one seeing-eye single of his first no-hitter since Little League. As it was, Gross picked up the win in his first Cal Ripken, Sr. Collegiate Baseball League start, 2-0 over the host Bethesda Big Train.

“He had everything working, good command,” Express manager Tom Shaffer said. “He did what pitchers are supposed to do — get guys out.”

Big Train first baseman Preston Pehrson (University of Texas) broke up Gross’ no-hit bid in the seventh inning, but Gross finished off the inning. Lefty Nathan Perlitsch (Cuesta College of Calif.) worked out of a ninth-inning jam to save the win for Gross.

Gross, a Frederick native, picked up his first win in a relief appearance a week earlier against the Maryland Redbirds. Other than fall ball, and a two-inning preseason appearance for the Express (5-4), Gross hadn’t seen game action since graduating from Frederick High. He spent this spring as a redshirt freshman at West Virginia University.

“Well, I can’t say I have a dead arm,” Gross said. “I learned a lot. I can’t complain. ... When I got there [West Virginia], I didn’t have a changeup, really. Basically, that’s what I worked on the entire year, and that’s what I



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 Rockville Express pitcher Billy Gross fires a pitch Sunday night at Povich Field in Bethesda. Gross allowed one hit through seven innings in Rockville’s 2-0 win.

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was using tonight.”

Gross showed up at West Virginia with a fastball and a slider. He said he only threw the slider about 10 times Sunday night, instead mixing his fastball in with his changeup. That kept the potent Big Train lineup off balance. Bethesda (5-4) managed just four base runners against Gross.

Povich Field has been good to Gross this year. Coincidentally, it was there that he caught the eye of the Express. The team’s pitching coach, Tom Sizemore, was in town to catch a game between West Virginia and Georgetown, which plays its home games at Povich.

“It actually happened right here,” Gross said. “Coach [Greg] Van Zant, the coach at WVU, said, ‘Come in. They want to see you throw.’ So I threw a bullpen over here. They said they liked what they saw, and it kind of snowballed from there.”

“I think Billy was probably the last guy we signed,” Shaffer said.

Gross, a 2005 All-Gazette first-team selection in Frederick County, has already paid dividends. Through 10 innings pitched, he is 2-0 with a 2.70 earned-run average, seven strikeouts and four walks.

Gross once threw a perfect game in Little League, at the age of 10. An error and a walk in the second inning Sunday quickly ended that bid, but Gross kept the no-hit bid alive through six full innings, longer than he ever remembers carrying a no-hitter in high school. He said he started thinking about it in the fourth or fifth inning.

“It was probably when I heard the little kids start screaming about it,” Gross said. “I was surprised they knew about it, baseball-wise. And then I heard everyone over there going, ‘OK, time to break it up.’ But at the same time, I just kind of blocked it out.”

Despite losing the no-hitter, Gross helped lift the Express into a four-way tie atop the league standings through Sunday night’s play. Rockville, Bethesda and the Maryland Orioles are all 5-4. The College Park Bombers are 6-5.

Monday’s games were rained out, moved to Tuesday and finished too late to be included in this edition. Going into Tuesday, the pack was tightly bunched — not only was there a four-way tie for first, but the league’s other two teams were within two games.

Both Colangelo and Shaffer expect that parity to last all summer.

“Yeah, we’ve got a good team,” Colangelo said. “I think we’ll be up top, battling with Rockville and some other teams. But it would surprise me if the last-place team isn’t within four games at the end of the season.”

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**Cal Ripken, Sr. League Standings through Monday**

**Team W/L GB**

**Bombers 6-5 — Big**

**Train 5-4 — Express 5-**

**4 — Orioles 5-4 —**

**T’Bolts 4-5 1 Redbirds**

**3-6 2**

**Recent results Friday**

**Bombers 6, Express 4**

**Orioles 8, Big Train 6**

**Thunderbolts 13,**

**Redbirds 1**

**Saturday Orioles 2,**

**Express 0 Express 2,**

**Orioles 1 Redbirds 2,**

**Bombers 1 Bombers 3,**

**Redbirds 1 Big Train 3,**

**Thunderbolts 1**

**Sunday Thunderbolts 4,**

**Orioles 1 Express 2,**

**Big Train 0**

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