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## Rockville Express chugs into second place

Wednesday, June 28, 2006

by John Y. Wehmueller  
 Staff Writer

The red-hot Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts came to Knights Field in Rockville Saturday afternoon looking to extend their Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League winning streak to five games. Instead, they ran smack into Ryan Huston of the Rockville Express.

Huston, a pitcher at California Poly State University, allowed three hits and faced just five batters over the minimum, shutting down the Thunderbolts in a 5-0 Rockville win. Huston struck out six and walked none, lifting the Express (8-6) into sole possession of second place in the Ripken League, one game back of the Bethesda Big Train (9-5).

"We played well defensively and got great pitching," Express manager Tom Shaffer said. "Right now, I believe our pitching is the best in the league, by ERA. ... With the staff we have, they're going to keep us in ballgames."

The offense also did its job Saturday, led by Silver Spring native Ivor Hodgson (Mount St. Mary's) and second baseman Michael Gilmartin (UC-Irvine). Each went 3 for 4 on the night. Gilmartin hit an inside-the-park home run to get the Express on the board in the fourth inning, then led off the sixth with a single. That kicked off a three-run outburst, capped off by Hodgson's two-run single.

Hodgson added another RBI single in the eighth inning for another insurance run and also doubled in the game.

The win allowed Rockville to bounce back somewhat from two losses in its last three games, including a doubleheader split against the College Park Bombers Friday. The Express managed just five hits and committed three errors in losing the first game, 6-3, but rallied to take the second game, 5-3. Dylan Gaughen (Moorpark, Calif.) pitched 2 1/3 perfect innings of relief to pick up the win.

Still, Shaffer would like to see more consistent offense in support of the pitching staff. The bats were the main culprit in a 3-1 loss to the Bethesda Big Train last Thursday.

"We had three or four guys thrown out trying to steal a base," Shaffer said. "We weren't hitting, so we were just trying to make something happen on the bases. When that happens, we need to just start making contact."

Extra work in the batting cages hasn't really been an option lately, either. Saturday's game against the Thunderbolts was the last played in the league before severe thunderstorms hit the

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area Sunday.

The Express, scheduled for an off-day Sunday anyway, have only had one game washed out by the weather so far this week. But the schedule for July is already tight, and makeup games will only add to the load now that the season has nearly reached the midway point.

Still, Rockville is in much better shape now than it was after 14 games last year.

“We’ll be playing every day now,” Shaffer said. “At this point last year, we were 4-10, so we’re in a little bit better shape than last year. Hopefully, we can turn it on again like we did last year, win four or five games this week, and be sitting pretty.”

Weather permitting, Rockville gets back to action Thursday, hosting the Big Train at Knights Field at 5 p.m. After the battle for the league’s top spot, the Express visits the last-place Maryland Redbirds Friday night.

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