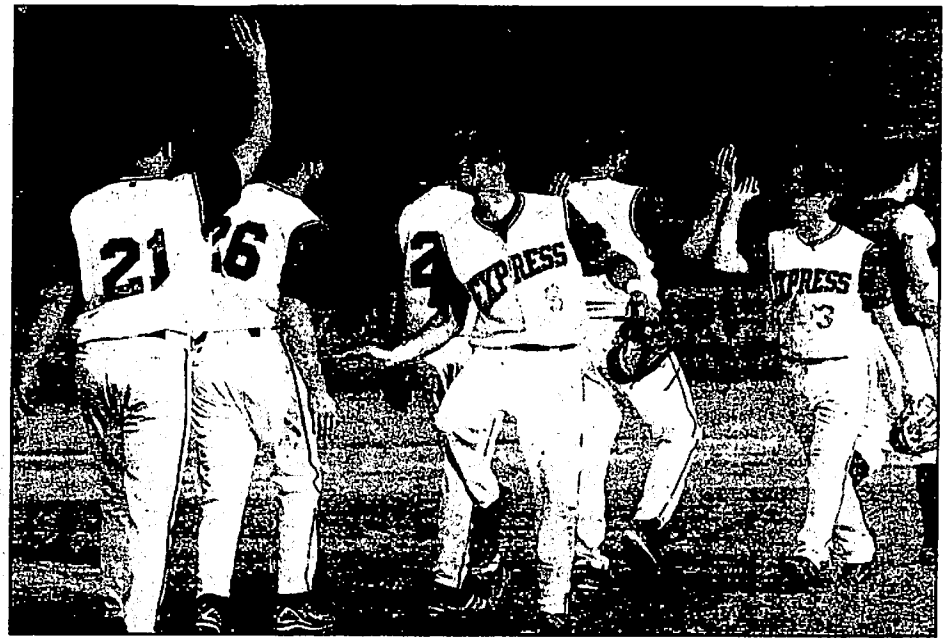


SPORTS



PHOTOS BY MARKETA EBERT

Eric Allen receives congratulations after his second run for the Express, left, while above, Express teammates congratulate each other after defeating the College Park Bombers.

Express topples Bombers 5-2

By Mike Brody
Special to the Sentinel

With a week and a half to go in the regular season, the Rockville Express is arguably playing its best baseball of the summer. The Express beat the College Park Bombers 5-2 at Knights Field Tuesday. The Express took control of the game early and the game was never really in doubt the rest of the way.

Already down 1-0, the Express jumped on Bombers starting pitcher Jack Amidei early, scoring three runs in the bottom of the first inning. Travis Babin got things started with a one-out triple and scored on Mike DeLeeuw's infield hit. Then Eric Allen picked up DeLeeuw with another triple. Allen later came in to score on a passed ball

to give the Express a 3-1 lead.

Mark Tracy padded the Express lead with an RBI single in the bottom of the third inning. But after that, starting pitcher Dan Francis was the story for the Express. Francis faced only 21 batters to record 18 outs between the second and the seventh innings. Francis picked up five strikeouts on the day. "Everything was working today," Francis said. "I was keeping the ball down and throwing strikes and just letting them get themselves out."

He began to show signs of fatigue in the eighth inning, when A.J. Casario's RBI triple made it 4-2. But Francis finished out the inning before giving way to Ryan Juran in the top of the ninth inning.

"That was the first time Dan

came out to pitch in about 10 days," Express head coach Tom Shaffer said. "He had shoulder problems, where it was a little stiff from the last time he started, but other than that he did a hell of a job today. He did a great job, and he kept them off balance with his curveball all day. He was throwing it for strikes. He was getting ahead of hitters. When you do that as a pitcher, it's pretty easy."

In the bottom of the eighth inning, the Express was able to grab an insurance run without the benefit of a base hit. Eric Allen led off with a walk, and Mark Tracy then laid down a sacrifice bunt to advance Allen to second. Allen alertly took third base as nobody on the Bombers was covering the bag. Later, with two outs, Allen was able to steal

home while Mike Zuanich was batting. The steal of home wasn't a conventional one. Rather, Allen sprinted home when the catcher threw back to the pitcher. "Late in the count, [Amidei] was down, the catcher really wasn't paying attention, lobbing it back to the pitcher. Down in the count, so we took the chance and we ended up scoring," Allen said.

Shaffer said he noticed what the Bombers were doing the third or fourth inning. "Eric in that situation, he's a very aggressive base runner, so a couple pitches before, we were talking about him going, and that was a big lead at third, so I wanted him to stay back a little bit and kind of rush to the plate quick, but he kept coming back when the catcher was throwing the ball back to the pitcher. So I just

told him, I said on the one play, you just stay out there. As soon as you see him throw, you take off. And it was great on his part to see that. He took off, and we got a run."

The win over the Bombers was the Express' third over them in as many days. The team has now won six of its last eight games. "We're starting to come around," Shaffer said. "We got our lineup that we have that gives us a best chance to win and to go on a run that we've talked about at the beginning of the year, and right now, with that lineup we're 4-1."

With the win, the Express improved to 18-14 on the season. The Express face the Bethesda Big Train at home on Thursday at 5 p.m. You can visit the team's Web site at www.rockvilleexpress.org.