

Bees win Opening Day marathon over Sea Unicorns after epic rally in 6th inning

This Wednesday, May 26 was opening day of the 2021 New Britain Bees season, and with fans back in New Britain Stadium at full capacity for the first time since 2019, the hive was buzzing all night; and the night was long. The Bees hosted the Norwich Sea Unicorns as one of the three new teams in the Futures Collegiate Baseball League of New England and, fortunately for the fans, the Bees overcame an early 5-run deficit to emerge victorious. They won by a final score of 11-6 to start the season with an important victory.

Much to the delight of the crowd, the Bees struck first offensively. In the second inning, Bees' designated hitter Andrew Cain reached base on a fielder's choice, then shortstop Jack Reardon stroked a double to right field off Norwich starter Gary Costello that sent Cain to third base. Luckily for New Britain, a throwing error and some heads-up baserunning allowed Cain to cross home plate and take the early 1-0 lead.

After retiring the first eight batters he faced, Bees' starter Dawson Logie let up a bloop single to third-baseman James Dolan with 2 outs in the third inning that would foreshadow the turning point of the evening for Logie. From there, Logie (and two fielding errors behind him) allowed the next seven Norwich players to reach base safely. By the end of the third inning, Logie had surrendered 5 hits, 2 walks and 6 total runs (4 earned), all with 2 outs. Bees' manager Donnie McKillop had seen enough and went to the bullpen, calling on the lefty reliever Steven Phillips to get the final out. Luckily, Phillips was able to get Unicorns' DH Thomas Keefe to popout and stop the bleeding while the game was still within reach at 6-1.

In the bottom of the third, the Bees added two runs of their own off the bat of center-fielder Sammy Smith that cut the deficit to 6-3 before the inning was over. Then a bases-loaded walk in the fifth inning trimmed the lead by another run.

The sixth inning is where the Bees really got to work though. After putting men on first and second base, Norwich brought in the lefty relief pitcher, Ryan Ahern. Ahern proceeded to get worked for a series of walks that gave the Bees their first lead since the second inning. Catcher Jimmy Sullivan punctuated the rally with a two-run double to right field. By the end of the frame, New Britain had faced three different pitchers, walked five times, been hit by two pitches and scored five runs. They entered the inning down two runs, and left it with a 9-6 lead they wouldn't give up.

Relief pitcher Ryan Doherty shut the door in the ninth and delivered New Britain the opening day victory. The game lasted over four hours, and the Bees won by a final score of 11-6. The team now sits at 1-0.

Jimmy Sullivan was at the center of the action all night long. The catcher from UMass Lowell reached base safely in five of his six plate appearances. He collected three walks, a double, a single and a stolen base while driving in four runs in the process. Coach McKillop called Sullivan's contributions "huge."

Sullivan wasn't the only productive bat for the Bees though; the entire offense seemed to be clicking for New Britain on Wednesday. As a team, the Bees produced over twenty base-runners, with an incredible 11 hits and 14 walks. They scored runs in five of the eight innings they were at the plate. They were dominant. "We have some really good bats," McKillop said. "I think we were working into a lot of really good hitter's counts, and then seeing the ball and driving it."

Aside from Logie's struggles in the third, the pitching staff fared very well too. After falling down 6-1 early, Steven Phillips, Jagger Duquette and Doherty combined for six straight scoreless innings to close out the marathon win. McKillop was particularly pleased with how the staff was able to bounce back, and noted that Logie did flash some excellent stuff early in the game. "It was awesome to see those guys eliminate some of the momentum they built," he said. "The pitching staff was awesome. [Tonight] was a great team victory and a long one."

The Bees now turn the page to their road game with the Pittsfield Suns on Thursday where the lefty Joe Nemchek will get the start on the mound. First pitch is at 6:35 p.m. Eastern.