

'Hoppers outlast 'Dads, 5-4 In Marathon

Written by Staff Reports

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The 1st-Half Northern Division Champion Hickory Crawdads took four one-run leads throughout the game, but the Greensboro Grasshoppers continuously battled back for the 5-4 win in 15 innings in Game 1 of the NDCS, before 2,816 fans at NewBridge Bank Park. The Grasshoppers hold a 1-0 series lead in the best-of-three set, which heads to Hickory on Friday.

Both starters -- Hickory RHP Cody Buckel and Greensboro RHP Rett Varner -- alternated scoreless innings throughout the first four frames, before Hickory (0-1) struck first in the top of the fifth. Jhonny Gomez ripped a double to lead off the inning, and Jurickson Profar quickly brought him home with an RBI single to make it 1-0.

Buckel kept the lead intact through the remainder of his six-inning stint, surrendering only two hits while striking out five. Roman Mendez navigated through a scoreless seventh, but the Grasshoppers (1-0) tied things up in the eighth. Ben Rowen, who came on for Mendez, retired the first two batters he faced, but Marcell Ozuna belted a game-tying solo home run that evented the score at 1-1.

Following a scoreless ninth inning, the Crawdads moved back in front in the top of the 10th with a solo shot by Tomas Telis. However, Ozuna struck again in the bottom of the inning to keep Greensboro alive. With Danny Black at third base and two outs, Ozuna placed a two-strike, broken-bat single to shallow right-center field, scoring Black to tie it, 2-2 extending the contest. Hickory took the lead again in the top of the 13th. Christian Villanueva sparked the stanza with a single and moved to second when Jake Skole walked. Jonathan Roof laid down a sacrifice bunt and Josh Richmond was walked intentionally loading the bases. Mike Ojala, who got the win in relief (1-0) took over on the mound for Greensboro and struck out Kellin Deglan, but Gomez came through with a two-out RBI single to give the 'Dads a 3-2 lead.

The Grasshoppers came charging back, however, in the bottom of the 13th. With one out against Ozuna reached on with a single, and he scored on an RBI double by Christian Yelich, tying the game at 3-3.

The game remained tied going into the 15th inning. Hickory moved back in front in the top of the 15th thanks to a two-out, two-run homer by Josh Richmond that gave Hickory a 4-3 lead. But it wasn't meant to be as Yelich belted a walk-off, two-run homer in the bottom of the 15th.

NOTES: Hickory will host Game 2 of the NDCS at L.P. Frans Stadium this Friday night at 7 p.m.! Don't miss all the exciting action of playoff baseball, followed by a fantastic fireworks show, presented by Vesco, Pepsi, Galaxy Foods Centers, Hickory Orthopaedic Center, Dale Earnhardt Chevrolet, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and JP Computer Consulting. Gates open on Friday at 6 p.m., seats are going fast.....If necessary the Crawdads will also host the Grasshoppers for third and final game of the series on Saturday at 7 p.m. Gates will open at 6 p.m.