

Robby Howell's gem tames the USF Bulls to kick off the UCFestival

UCF got the #UCFestival started right with a gem from the mound by Robby Howell. Howell entered the seventh inning with a no hitter as the Knights won 4-0.

By **Timothy Briggs** - April 16, 2016

With the festivities of the #UCFestival begging to be injected with a positive start, UCF (19-18 4-4 American) delivered with a 4-0 victory over the rival USF Bulls (17-18, 3-5 American) in front of 1,516 fans on Saturday afternoon to begin a day that represents a rejuvenation for UCF athletics.

With exciting events and fresh enthusiasm on the docket for an entire day in and around UCF, junior right-hander Robby Howell just did what he has always done on Saturdays this season—dominate.

Howell (7-0, 1.02 ERA) took a no-hitter into the seventh inning as he mowed down the Bulls all afternoon long, tossing seven scoreless innings and allowing just one hit while striking out seven.

"Robby was awesome," head coach Terry Rooney said. "He's been awesome all year now. He's just competing and he's doing all the things in baseball that you need. He's got a level of confidence about him and he's learning to split pitches, go one pitch at a time and that was a tremendous team win."

Howell's only hurdle came in the second inning when USF loaded the bases on an error and a pair of walks. His control was not as sharp early, but after striking out Bulls center fielder Garrett Zech, Howell stormed off the mound with a triumphant growl and a fist pump and he did not look back from there.

Howell retired 13 of the next 15 batters to end his outing as he took a no-hitter through 6 2/3 innings pitched before second baseman Jonah Garrison snapped it with a sharp single to left.

"I knew it, but to be honest, I was just worried about getting deeper into the game," Howell said. "We work hard every day to get better and we had to come in today and prove

something. This is a rivalry every year and we play with a lot of intensity when we play them.”

UCF’s offense was able to contribute with its usual suspects as Eli Putnam, the team’s leading hitter (.319), went 2-for-4 with a solo home run in the seventh inning and two runs scored. Second baseman and No. 3 hitter Ryan Crile also added an RBI double in the third.

Putnam’s home run was a big insurance run for UCF that allowed Rooney to place more trust in Howell as he attempted to make history. No UCF pitcher has thrown a no-hitter in 43 years since Pete MacLaughlin accomplished the feat against Columbia in 1973.

However, Howell’s pitch count increased rapidly as the game went along, eclipsing 100 pitches in the sixth inning and the question of if he was going to continue on was answered when he gave up the hit in the seventh.

“I’m not going to say he was coming out regardless, but the fourth run was a deciding factor.” Rooney said. “115 [pitches] is about that point where you start to think, but that fourth run was a factor. We have to embrace close games. This is one of the best leagues in the country, top three in the nation in RPI last year, and only the strong survive.”

With UCF establishing some consistency as conference play chugs along, the team is trying to get itself going and win series that it is capable of winning, and particularly on a day when lots of people were watching.

“We talked about it. What a great day for our athletic department,” Rooney said. “The weather is going to cooperate and there are people here today that might not have come on another day for the football and everything else that goes with it. We had a little something to us today. That’s been the hallmark of our team. We’re determined and focused.”

UCF will go for a series win tomorrow in a rubber match against USF at 1 p.m. Juan Pimentel will toe the mound trying for a third consecutive gem as UCF looks to get back to better than .500 in American conference play.

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