

By Tristan Hobbes

Santschi and Culligan Deliver in Clutch

Sean Santschi stood on the third base line and watched his throw roll down the right field line and the base runner stroll into second to start the seventh. That was the only motivation that Santschi needed to refocus and get the job done. He walked the next batter but left both runners stranded with a strikeout and two pop-outs, keeping the game scoreless.

“I just looked inside myself and told myself that I am not going to let Trent (Allianic) lose this game,” Santschi said.

He didn't.

Santschi

(pictured right)

came on for

Allianic in the

sixth with two on

and one out and



got a strikeout and a ground out to end that threat. He handed the ball to Tim Culligan to start the eighth and the right-hander from Nevada-Reno gave the Sweets the opportunity to win the game in the bottom of the ninth with two scoreless innings, including a called strike three to end the top of the ninth.

“Tim Culligan and Sean Santschi came into the game in positions where they could lose control of the situation and they controlled the game,” pitching coach Mark Michaud said. “That was the key difference; their ability to keep their head and keep control of the game.”

For Santschi, it was a mixture of well placed fastballs and a 12-6 breaking ball that had the Knights batters fooled. Culligan’s outing consisted of a good fastball and a exceptional breaking pitch.

“We know a little bit about them coming in and we don’t know a lot about them in the heat in the moment,” Michaud said. “[Tonight] We saw that we have a lot of gamers out there.”

Pitchers Shine on Opening Weekend

When your pitching staff allows only one earned run over a three-game series one of two things probably happened; your pitchers were dominant or your defense made a lot of errors. For the Sweets this weekend, it was the former. Eight pitchers combined to allow a total of three runs (one earned) over 27 innings and shutout the Corvallis Knights twice. In all, the Sweets staff allowed 18 hits, struck out 19 and walked only five in the three games.

Michaud was very pleased with the results and even more pleased with how his pitchers were getting them. He pointed to the amount of first pitch strikes his pitchers were getting throughout the weekend and how important it is to get that first pitch strike.

“You get strike one, then strike two and then you make a good pitch to get your strikeout,” Michaud said. “We get bad swings where we can get easy outs.”

On Friday, Ryan Richardson, Daniel Jewett and Drew Fittry combined on a five-hit shutout.

Saturday saw Brett Watson pitch very well despite giving up the only three runs of the weekend



and the Sweets finished the weekend with 12 scoreless innings thanks to Derek Peterson, Allianic, Santschi and Culligan.

Allianic (pictured left) redshirted this spring at Hawaii and Sunday was the first appearance for

him this season. The righty located all his pitches well and threw 81 pitches, 56 for strikes, in his first outing. Culligan was even better in relief, throwing 19 of his 24 pitches for strikes over the course of his two inning outing.

With two shutouts, Walla Walla has already topped their total of one from last year. With consistency comes success and if the Sweets pitching staff can continue to throw strikes and control the game, the success will most definitely come.

Sweets Struggling with Runners in Scoring Position

A walk-off victory can erase a lot of bad memories. When Kalani Brackenridge's liner to right landed in fair territory, most Sweets fans and players forgot about what had come before that.

What did come before that was not pretty. Up until that at-bat, Walla Walla was 0-7 with runners in scoring position on Sunday. The Sweets had a runner on third with one out in the fifth and produced a strikeout and ground out to strand him. They loaded the bases with one out in

the sixth and struck out looking twice in a row to leave them loaded and two more were left stranded in the seventh.

“A game like tonight it masks that a little bit,” manager J.C. Biagi said about the walk-off win.

“But the reality is it could have gone any way at any point.”

If it wasn't for Corvallis having similar problems, it would have. The Knights left a runner on third in the first and second, two on in the third, runners on the corners in the sixth and seventh and two more in the eighth.

The most disconcerting part is the strikeouts with runners on third and less than two outs. That was the case in the sixth when Corvallis reliever Kyle Hart struck out back-to-back Sweets looking. The pitches they did swing at weren't much better, however.

“The offspeed stuff,” Biagi said referring to the pitches that the Sweets were chasing out of the zone. “We have been exposed the last three days.”

There is no need to write off the Sweets has a team that will never produce. After all, the season is just three games old. Biagi is confident his players will come around with continued work and continued opportunities in situations like the ones faced tonight.

“Be able to come up in situations like that and pick a pitch and make it be the one you want and be on time,” Biagi said. “We are going to continue to work at that. I think we will be fine.”