

By Tristan Hobbes

Bullpen Answering the Call

Calls to the bullpen work sometimes and sometimes they don't. Every call the Walla Walla Sweets have made to the bullpen in four games this summer has worked. The bullpen has allowed just six hits over 15.1 innings of relief and has yet to yield a run.

Tuesday's call proved to be a great one. Geoff Soja entered in the fifth with a runner on third and one out and three runs already in. The righty gave up an RBI single to the first batter he faced but then went on to retire eight straight before giving up a one-out double in the eighth. He capped his outing with a game-ending strikeout that stranded the tying runs on first and second in the ninth.

"First of all, Geoff was itching, he was ready to go," pitching coach Mark Michaud said. "We're getting exactly what we want out of these guys [the relievers]. To go out there and compete and get us in positions where we can win games."

Soja did that. He kept the Sweets within striking distance and then finished the game off in the ninth. His performance matches those of Sean Santschi and Tim Culligan on Sunday and Derek Peterson on Saturday. Santschi and Culligan kept Corvallis off the board and allowed the Sweets to win it in the ninth and Peterson's three scoreless innings gave the Sweets a chance to win the game on Saturday.

The bullpen will continue to play an important role in these first few weeks. With many pitchers seeing regular action for the first time all year, arms are still getting used to all the work and

therefore, pitch counts will be lower. That means every night the bullpen will have to be ready to pitch in.

“Our bullpen needs to come in and be competitive,” Michaud said. “Throw strikes and have at least two pitches for strikes.”

Brackenridge does it again

It certainly wasn't as exciting as Sunday's but Kalani Brackenridge's (pictured below) RBI



single to center in the bottom of the eighth inning was still a game-winning single. The sharp single scored Nick Gentili from third and broke a 4-all tie, giving the

second baseman from Hawaii back-to-back games with the game-winning hit.

“The best way I can explain it is hes a tough kid and hes comfortable being in those situations,” manager J.C. Biagi said. “He doesn't get excited he just does what he does, stay with his plan, stays with his approach and executes.”

On Sunday it was a fastball on the outer third that he drove down the right field line and tonight it was another fastball out over the plate that he hit to center. There was a sense of purpose and immense concentration in each at-bat and the results showed it.

“That’s why I play this game for those big time moments and being able to execute is just a blessing,” Brackenridge said.

He almost didn’t make it to the eighth inning though. In the sixth, trailing by a run, Brackenridge tried to score on a Chance Kopacz single to left but he was thrown out at the plate. The throw just beat him to home and instead of sliding, Brackenridge collided with the Portland catcher and was tagged out for the final out of the inning. After the play, Brackenridge took the whole time between innings making sure he was OK to go back out.

“I thought I had it easy so I didn’t slide,” Brackenridge said and added with a laugh; “lesson learned, always get down.”

When he stepped to the plate in the eighth and delivered his second big hit of the season, you would be hard pressed to notice any sort of grimace on his face.

Comfortable is the Key for Stanford

It may have taken four games but Alex Stanford may have finally gotten used to Borleske Stadium’s infield. From day one, the shortstop has been in a constant battle with the infield. The infield had the upper hand through most of the weekend, popping up routine grounders at the last second, making Stanford work.

The result was four errors in the first three games and lots of frustration. The shortstop from Gonzaga is not letting it get to him though. Knowing he still has 28 games left to play at Borleske Stadium this year, Stanford is trying to get as comfortable as possible at short.

“Hes going to play great here he just needs to get comfortable to the surroundings,” assistant coach Cesar Lopez said.

Lopez has been working with Stanford before practices and games to get a better feel of the field; its hops, its

speed etc. The work

is already starting to

show. On Tuesday,

Stanford (pictured

right) was tested with

a variety of plays. He

made a charging play

on a slow chopper to

get the batter, went up the middle to stab another grounder and made two plays deep in the hole at short that showed off his range and his arm.

“I’m pretty comfortable going to my right and ranging it up,” Stanford said. “I got an average arm so I got to put my legs into too.”

“Started off rocky fielding the ball but I’m starting to figure out the field a little bit,” Stanford added. “We’ve been working a lot before practice and I’m getting back into the flow of things.”

