



Lester hits pitch-limit early and PawSox hit the skids

Charlie Zink comes on in relief and can't get his knuckleball to behave as the Bulls gore Pawtucket.

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DURHAM, N.C. -- It can't be a meeting of the big guns if one side doesn't bring enough ammunition to the fight.

Facing a 65-pitch limit, Jon Lester, the top pitching prospect in the Boston organization, had a 1-2-3 fourth inning, but didn't come out for the fifth at Durham Bulls Athletic Park last night.

His opposite number, Chris Seddon -- one of Tampa Bay's top prospects and also a lefthander, didn't have the same shackles, throwing 97 pitches over six innings to get his second win of the year.

While Lester, who left the game down, 2-1, pitched his best game of the young season, the PawSox relief corps couldn't match his pace. The bullpen cost the PawSox (7-8) any chance for a comeback as they fell 8-3 to the Bulls (10-5).

Charlie Zink replaced Lester in the fifth and gave up three wild-pitch-fueled runs. Delmon Young and Elijah Dukes, who struggled on Wednesday (1-for-7), came up with run-scoring hits in the inning.

Zink's replacement, Mike Bumatay, wasn't much better, allowing an inherited runner to score in the sixth and struggled in a groan-inducing seventh, giving up a run on two walks and three wild pitches, to make it 7-3. The Bulls scored another run in the eighth without a hit.

Designated hitter Jeff Bailey hit his second two-run homer in two days. Bailey's fifth of the year easily cleared the famous Durham Bull cutout above the 32-foot wall.

After giving up two runs in the third while facing the heart of the Durham lineup, Lester regained the form that made him dominant in the first and second.

He notched his fifth and sixth strikeouts against Kevin Witt and Shawn Riggans and cleanly fielded a grounder from Kevin Cash to end the inning and his outing.

Lester knows that Boston's plan is to limit his pitches in April.

"They just told me I'm on a pitch count and that's all I can do," said Lester. "There's no point in arguing because they've made up their mind."

Consequently, he's working on adjusting to the Triple-A level, 65 pitches at a time.

"I threw the ball well, commanded the ball well, had a plan and executed it," Lester said. "Finally, the game is starting to slow down. I'm getting comfortable on the mound."

With Lester's pitch restriction, Zink knew he would be in the game early. Unfortunately for the PawSox, his knuckleball wasn't behaving.

"I was having trouble throwing strikes with it. I was getting a ton of movement, but that's good and bad," he said after giving up four runs in just 1 1/3 innings. "I'm supposed to go four or five innings, so it's frustrating to me that we had to use another guy."

The PawSox, who have been straddling the .500 mark all season, have a chance to even their road-trip results with a win today before returning home to face Buffalo tomorrow.

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