

SLUG FEST!



By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Freshman Timothy Fitzgerald made a diving catch, created an intentional rundown between first and second to allow a runner to score and hit a walk-off single in the bottom of the 10th inning Monday to lead the Redskins to an 8-7 win over Garden City in the second game of a double header.

“He is the kid that wants to be at the plate,” Liberal coach Eric Olmstead said. “And he played a heck of center field. He kind of scuffled in the middle of the season, and now he is squaring things up. It looks good for the future.”

The Redskins needed Fitzgerald’s heroics in Game 2 after letting a 7-3 lead slip in the top of the seventh inning. Christian Hernandez pitched six solid innings for the Redskins before turning the ball over to Jared Fox in the seventh. A beaned batter, a walk and two Redskin errors in the field allowed Garden City to tie the game.

Alberto Aldaz came on in the eight, ninth and 10th and did not allow a Garden City run.

In the 10th inning, Collin Ware reached first on an attempted bunt that forced an out at second.

With two outs, Jared Hasik came to the plate and hit a high infield fly to third, but Garden City's fielder overran the ball, and it landed.

A wild pitch allowed the runners to advance to second and third, and Fitzgerald hit a solid shot to left center that allowed Ware to trot home for the game-winning run.

In Game 1, Hasik pitched a complete game win, holding the Buffaloes to only two runs in a 7-2 victory.

"WAC wins are big," Olmstead said. "It's good to get that off our back. I was very proud of the kids. We had multiple opportunities to give up runs and we shut the door late in the game. We rebounded from what we went through in the seventh. That shows a lot of character."

The game became personal after Hernandez made a wild pitch in the fourth inning with a 3-2 lead, and the Garden City runner attempted to score from third. Hernandez covered the plate and the catcher tossed the ball five steps ahead of the Garden City runner. Hernandez waited to apply the tag, and the Buffalo opted to apply an elbow to Hernandez' jaw and attempt to jar the ball out of his glove. The home plate umpire ejected the Buffalo from the game, and Garden City had to make a substitution at shortstop.

Later, a Liberal player was issued a warning for stepping into the baseline along first base in an apparent attempt to try to make contact, but missed.

The additional competitiveness may have come from a struggling Garden City team (3-14) and a resurgent Liberal team that had not won a WAC game in more than two years.

Liberal is currently 9-9, a marked improvement for the program.

“They love to play baseball,” Olmstead said. “They are having a lot of fun.”

Liberal had little chance to celebrate the sweep. The Redskins loaded a bus this morning to head to Hays for a 2 p.m. double header.

“Hays is a good ball club,” Olmstead said. “They played four over the weekend. It will take all we have, getting hydrated eat well, get on the bus and travel to Hays. We have 18 games in. Some are scrapping to get 12-14 games. Not getting down ourselves will be big because Hays has a good ball club.”