

Terry hits 3-run walkoff homer, McKinney perfect through 6 frames as Gastonia sweeps Lexington

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Curtis Terry came to the plate in the bottom of the ninth, facing Lexington closer Garrett Schilling.

It was a tie game, with the winning run on second.

Terry drilled the first pitch he saw deep beyond the 304-foot sign in left field, and when it landed the Gastonia Honey Hunters won 4-1 and swept the Lexington Counter Clocks.

Schilling threw a first-pitch curveball that hung up in the zone, and Terry took advantage of it to end the game.

“If [Schilling] threw anything over the plate, I was gonna swing,” Terry said about his approach to start the at-bat. “He threw a ball over the plate, it had some spin to it, and I saw it up a bit and swung.”

After Terry rounded the bases and was about to touch home, he channeled his inner Vince Carter and pretended to do a windmill slam dunk while being mobbed by all his teammates at the plate.

The slam dunk isn’t something Terry practiced or thought about before Sunday afternoon.

“Heat of the moment,” Terry said about his walkoff celebration. “And NBA finals [are] going on.”

If you’re wondering, Terry thinks the Nuggets are winning in five or six games.

Gastonia’s player/coach Ian McKinney was sensational on the mound against the Counter Clocks.

He threw seven innings of one-run ball, going six perfect innings to start things off.

That’s right – McKinney retired the first 18 Lexington batters he faced.

The southpaw struck out 11, which is the most any Gastonia pitcher has fanned in 2023. He broke his own game record for this year, striking out 10 on May 25.

McKinney used four different pitches for his 11 Ks: fastball (seven), slider (two), curveball (one) and changeup (one).

While some pitchers may try to be alone with their thoughts and separate themselves from teammates when throwing a perfect game, McKinney has the exact same routine no matter how his outing is going.

"I honestly try to just look at my little girl in the stands," McKinney said. "I love watching her smile, so every inning I pretty much go up there and make her smile."

McKinney became a father 10 months ago, and he loves interacting with his baby Eloise during Gastonia games.

"Priceless times," McKinney said. "And I'm glad that her and my wife are able to be here right now. It's definitely great."

Gastonia manager Goose Gozzo has certainly noticed how McKinney's changed since becoming a dad, and he loves the exchanges the father and daughter share during games.

"It's beautiful," Gozzo said. "I gotta be honest with you, it's beautiful. He's got a whole different perspective I'm sure... I could just tell you the difference between Ian last year and this year. He's just at ease with himself. His focus and concentration is way up there."

After retiring the first 18 batters of the game, McKinney allowed a solo home run to Ronnie Dawson to lead off the seventh.

At this point, Lexington starter Steven Colon was scoreless through six innings, so the homer gave the Counter Clocks a 1-0 lead.

McKinney went from being perfect to being in line for the loss.

But after Joey Steele came on in relief of Colon after the stretch, Scott Manea hit a game-tying solo shot into left.

The game remained 1-1 into the bottom of the ninth.

Zach Jarrett and Carlos Franco both worked walks, and that led to Lexington manager Barry Lyons deciding to bring in Schilling to face Terry.

One pitch later, Gastonia improved to 24-9 on the year while Lexington fell to 16-18.

Gastonia has a five-game winning streak after sweeping Lexington.

The Honey Hunters will now go on a six-game road trip, starting with the Charleston Dirty Birds on Tuesday at 6:35 p.m.

The Counter Clocks will travel to Lancaster to take on the Barnstormers for three games. The first game of the series is on Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.