

## **Miller Time: Gastonia walks off High Point; Dean Miller plays hero in 10th with 0-2 single**

**Noah Epstein**

Dean Miller's walk-off single in the bottom of the 10th powered Gastonia to a 7-6 win Tuesday night in its first game against the High Point Rockers in 2024.

The last time Gastonia matched up with its in-state rival was Game 5 of the 2023 South Division Championship Series, where Gastonia won and punched its ticket to the ALPB Championship.

The first of nine games played over the next three weeks between the squads did not disappoint, continuing the trend of intense and closely competitive contests between the top two teams in the league.

Miller became the last Gastonia hitter to reach base with his 10th-inning walk-off single, as the other eight hitters accomplished that feat by the third inning on Tuesday.

The designated hitter lined an 0-2 pitch from right-hander Garrett Schilling down the right-field line, plating Jake Hoover to end the game.

"I was trying to hit a fly ball to right field and it got to two strikes," Miller said. "[Schilling] was throwing some fastballs in and he did his job and threw the right pitches. With two strikes, I just wanted to put it in play and see what happens."

Miller fouled off both inside fastballs Schilling threw him before getting the better of the reliever.

Gastonia manager Mauro "Goose" Gozzo was happy with what he saw in Miller's fifth plate appearance of the evening.

"I loved his approach," Gozzo said. "On the two foul balls, it looked like he was trying to go to the right side a little bit. With the infield in, using the middle to the right side of the field is what you're supposed to do. Very, very proud of him."

Miller's heroics capped off a dramatic game in which Gastonia got out to a 5-1 lead before High Point scored five runs over the course of three frames.

Gastonia hit three home runs off High Point's starter, Jonah Scolaro, who came into the game with a 2.23 ERA in six outings.

Jack Reinheimer (5), Marc Flores (3) and Justin Wylie (12) teed off on Scolaro – all of them solo shots.

With the Club leading the Rockers 5-1 in the fifth inning, following the three home runs, Ben Aklinski hit a two-out, two-run single against Ryan Conroy to make it a two-run game.

Aklinski later hit a game-tying two-run homer in the seventh off Nate Peden, who had an 0.87 ERA in 20.2 innings entering the game. The High Point center fielder snuck a ball just inside the foul pole down the left-field line, making it 6-6.

After Peden's appearance, the Gastonia bullpen was nearly perfect.

Bryan Blanton pitched a 1-2-3 eighth inning, blowing 95 and 96 mile-per-hour heaters at the upper part of the strike zone past all three hitters during the at-bats. The right-hander struck out two and made easy work of the batters standing in his way.

Phoenix Sanders was next in line. The Gastonia closer came on to keep it 6-6 in the ninth, allowing one baserunner and doing the job.

Gabe Klobosits entered in the 10th, with a ghost runner starting at second. The runner was Aklinski, and he didn't end up going anywhere.

After walking Colin Moran, Klobosits retired three straight Rockers, punching out Connor Owings to set up his offense beautifully in the bottom of the 10th.

Jake Hoover started the frame as a pinch runner on second, and he immediately advanced to third on a sacrifice bunt by Justin Wylie.

Miller then got behind 0-2 before playing hero in Gaston County and giving his team a 7-6 victory.

Gastonia improved to 33-15 on the year, with High Point falling to 31-17.

There are 15 games remaining in the first half – eight of them feature the rivals playing each other in a battle for the first-half South Division champion.

The second of the eight games is on Wednesday at 7 p.m.