

Surging Slammers Sweep Y'all's with Dominant Doubleheader

By: Ryan Paris

JOLIET, IL - You know that scene in *Space Jam*? The one where the aliens steal all of the talent from the NBA players and become the Monstars? The Joliet Slammers were like those little aliens. Now, they're playing like baseball's Monstars.

Maybe it's the Jose Contreras effect. Maybe it's just a combination of players getting hot at the same time. Whatever it is, the Joliet Slammers look like a different team recently.

In both games of today's doubleheader between the Florence Y'all's (15-20) and Joliet Slammers (19-17), Joliet put up big totals in the second inning.

In Game 1, Joliet struck first with an Antonio Valdez RBI single and a Chris Davis RBI triple. They held onto the lead for the rest of the game, eventually winning 6-2.

In Game 2, down 3-0 after Aidan McEvoy struggled with command, Blake Berry rocked a two run blast to right center field. Then, Antonio Valdez stepped up to the plate.

There's something you have to understand about the Joliet Slammers. They don't hit home runs. They traded away their premier home run threat in the offseason. They have the lowest total in the Frontier League this season.

So after Blake Berry's long ball left the building, everyone was content with the allotted one home run for the evening. But then Antonio Valdez barrelled up the second pitch of the very next at-bat.

They say one time Negro Leagues star Josh Gibson hit a ball so far it didn't come back down. None of us in the suites saw where Valdez's blast landed. We were told it went 385 feet. We beg to differ.

In both games, the Slammers shut the door on Florence comeback bids.

Florence had a chance to get back in Game 1 in the fourth inning. Down 2-1 with a runner on second, Brendan Bobo sent a fly ball toward the left-center gap.

Liam McArthur was too far away. Chris Davis was not. He got the perfect read and flew across the turf, sliding on his backside to haul in the ball just before it hit the ground.

Late in Game 2, Ty Rybarczyk let up a leadoff home run and a single. With momentum brewing for Florence, he and Michael Quinones dueled at the plate. Looking for a ground ball, he got one. It was a sharp comebacker that only he could stop. Rybarczyk held out his glove, snagged the ball, and calmly turned a double play to end the chances for Florence. The Slammers went on to win 8-4.

And lastly, in both games, Jose Contreras stole the show.

In Game 1, Contreras crushed a jaw dropping fly ball in the fifth that died just short of the wall, but not before turning it into a run-scoring double.

In Game 2, he obliterated a ball down the left field line but foul. It easily had the distance to go. Later, he sent a ball the opposite way towards right-center field. This one cleared the fence with room to spare.

Two homers and two near homers in three games. It's safe to say that Jose Contreras is loving Joliet so far.

When we were walking out of the stadium after recording our postgame show, we overheard someone say Jose's name.

"The greatest player in the world?" Slammers catcher Drew Stengren asked, passing by.

Maybe that's a bit of a stretch. But then again, maybe not.

The Slammers begin a three game weekend series against the Evansville Otters tomorrow. First pitch is at 6:35 PM.