

Aurora Jays eyeing first place heading into final stretch



By Jeff Doner

With just six games left to play in the regular season, the Aurora Jays are still flying high.

The Blue Birds collected convincing wins over Clearview and Mansfield last week to inch their way closer to the top of the standings, currently sitting one point out of first behind Ivy and the Bolton Brewers, with games in hand.

"We're confident that we can beat both of those teams, we've just got to keep things rolling," pitcher Brad Crosby said. "I think we've just got to keep everyone positive and keep the spirits up, battle at the plate and throw strikes consistently because we have a pretty good defence too."

The game against Clearview was a close one, but the Jays were never in any real danger.

Jake Pinnigar got things off to a good start for the Jays, leading off with a single in the top of the first, which was followed up by another single from Ian Rettie.

With Pinnigar now on third and Rettie on second after a successful steal, Chris Fafalios cashed in both runners to give the Jays a 2 ? 0 lead.

Clearview's Jerry O'Hara followed that up by cracking a solo home run off Jays' pitcher Brent Owen in the bottom of the first to make it 2 ? 1.

Then in the third, Ted Beadle and Ryan Lewis crossed home plate to increase the Jays' lead to 4 ? 1. Clearview would add another run in the bottom of the third, but Owen and the defence shut things down for a 4 ? 2 final score.

"It was a tight game," manager Rob Wilson said after the game. "Brent Owen had a great start, as he always does, just keeping us in the game and giving us a chance to win. Ian Rettie did some damage at the plate and we got a win, which is what matters."

The Jays then had a couple of days off before returning home to Lambert Willson Park on Sunday afternoon for a matchup against the Mansfield Cubs.

In this one, the Jays went to work early and trounced the Cubs 13 ? 0.

The second inning was when the Jays did most of their damage, scoring eight runs to take advantage of the Cubs' pitching and spotty defence.

Leadoff hitter Chris Bloom was his usual self at the plate, coming around to score three times and earning a double and two walks.

Crosby, who has been a welcome addition to the Jays starting rotation this season, pitched a complete game shutout and ended it with two straight strikeouts.

Wilson said it was encouraging to see another full team effort so late in the season.

"It's nice to see the bats staying alive," he said. "We don't want to look past a team like Mansfield, but it was a game that we knew we should have won. They did play us tough last time though, so it was nice to get a solid victory over them. They might be a playoff team and they're battling for a spot."

The Jays have a huge week coming up as they face off against the two teams ahead of them in the standings.

This week they will host the Ivy Leafs and then head to Bolton to take on the Brewers on Thursday.

"With where our record is, I just want to see more of the same," Wilson said. "If our pitching can keep up where it is combined with some timely hitting and well-rounded defence, we'll be in good shape right through the playoffs."