Rockets Upset Toros 13-7 to Stay Unbeaten; Advance to “True Power” Tournament

When Jason Greene woke up on Wednesday morning the last two things he wanted to do were take a standardized test and check into a hospital. All he wanted to do was play some baseball and help his team prove they are worth respecting, and perhaps even fearing. Unfortunately the first two came to pass, and the latter was something that literally unfolded across the street from where Jason needed to be rushed after taking a hard chopper to the mouth in warm ups. He ended up needing stitches, and was so groggy that he didn’t even realize he hit the ground in the first place.

After the haze of the warmup started to clear, Jason willed himself to his feet, and his energy and passion unified the squad. Players huddled up, grabbed their autographed “perfect regular season” ball and collectively dedicated the game to Jason Greene. What unfolded on Lighthouse Field will forever clarify what happens when you play as one, no matter the odds.

Five batters into the first, the Rockets had a 2-0 lead off a standard Stephen Eager-White leadoff walk, a monster opposite field triple by freshman Ijustice Avery and an RBI single by sophomore Kevin “Tank” Williams.

The Toros of Nueva Esperanza, a standard heavy-hitting squad in the top A Division, came in as heavy favorites, but their lack of “fear” eventually cost them in the greatest ways possible as SLA kept proving their undefeated season wasn’t inflated. Yet, after some costly errors in the bottom of the 1st the Rockets found themselves down 3-2. They quickly responded though, and tied it up in the 2nd. After Nick Clark started it off with a single, Aaron Watson-Sharer turned the order over by slicing a single to right field. Stephen “Stax” Eager-White extended the inning when he was hit by a pitch and Kevin Courtney singled in the tying run to make it 3-3.

Esperanza took the lead right back in their half of the 4th, and the game was seemingly turning into a war of attrition where the last team to bat would pull out the single-elimination win. However, after a scoreless third for both sides, “The Rocket” changed everything. Stax ripped a hard single over the “hot corner”, pitcher Lukas Supovitz-Aznar was hit by a pitch and Kevin Courtney singled in another run. Then with two outs Kevin Williams, who reached base in every at bat and finished 4-4 with 2RBIs and a run scored, delivered a double into the right field corner scoring another. Seconds

later David Baker scorched a double of his own to almost the exact same spot in right, plating two more and making it 7-4.

Esperanza's defense was frustrated as Rocket hitters kept putting the ball exactly where they weren't, and very aggressive base running was forcing off-line throws allowing runners to advance into scoring position. The Toros got one back, the result of another Rocket defensive miscue, but only one, leaving them holding two and a 7-5 lead after 4.

The 5th was a black mirror of the 4th for the Toros as SLA plated 4 more runs in their half of the frame. Again, Stephen Eager-White, who reached base in all 5 at bats and went 3-3 on the day, got it started off with a rip single into left field. Lukas Supovitz-Aznar (2-4, 2RBIs, 2R) followed with a hanging triple in the right center gap. That was immediately followed by a Kevin Courtney double to center, and a laser beam down the left baseline that rolled for eternity, giving Ijustice Avery his first post-season home run and the 3rd of his freshman campaign. Avery would complete a monster day, 2-5 with the triple, home run, 3RBIs and 2 runs scored.

With the Rockets up 11-5 heading into the bottom of the frame, the energy in the park had officially shifted. It was as if Lighthouse Field was suddenly transformed into SLA's home field, and the respect and "fear" Jason Greene so desperately wanted for his squad was everywhere. Sophomore Lukas Supovitz-Aznar, who has been dominant all season, called the team into a huddle before they took the field.

"Look guys, we're better than them. A Division, C Division, It doesn't matter. We're better than them, so let's just keep proving it!"

After taking the field, Supovitz-Aznar settled back into his normal season routine of getting ahead in the count and allowing his dirty curve to make the best hitters seem foolish. He retired the bottom half of the order, preserving the 6-run lead, and set the stage for an unprecedented upset win.

SLA would add two more for insurance in the 6th with a very familiar plotline. The Toros would grab two quick outs, but couldn't for the life of them get the third before SLA would strike. This time it was 9-hitter Aaron Watson-Sharer who worked a hard-fought walk, then Stax singled him to 3rd. Supovitz-Aznar knocked him in and Stax raced to third. Kevin Courtney then plated his 4th consecutive RBI hit of the game, making it 13-5. Courtney would finish the game 4-5 with a double, 4 RBIs and 2 runs scored.

Holding 8 in the latter part of the game feels like a done deal, but stranger things have happened in Public League Baseball. And moments into the bottom half of the frame it seemed that it was heading in that direction. The Toros sent their top of the order to the plate, and Rosario smacked a hard liner to 2nd. Much like it did to Jason in the warm up, the ball hopped up at the last second and all that Stephen Eager-White could do was knock it down. Moments later another hard liner came right back to Stax, but he fielded it in enough time to get the lead runner at 2nd. Back-to-back walks loaded the bases, and it seemed that the tide could be turning. Esperanza's lefty 5-hitter- Burgos- came to bat having previously hit 3 balls hard at the gap between 1st and 2nd. Then another hot shot took a propitious hop to a ranging Stax who made a smooth turn to Ben Simon racing over to cover the bag from short. He quickly fired onto a fully outstretched Senior Raekwon Smith who scooped to complete a beauty of a 4-6-3 double play to get out of the jam without a single run crossing.

Still holding 8, Lukas Supovitz-Aznar took the mound to close it out. Facing the 6, 7 and 8 hitters in the lineup, Esperanza's plotline of struggling to get that 3rd out started to impact the Rockets as well. Supovitz-Aznar got two quick outs on a pop up to Stax at 2nd, and a great ranging play by Kevin Courtney in center. Then with Esperanza's season down to their last strike L.A. Ortiz ripped one high into the gap. Kevin Courtney gave chase and made a full-extension dive, which would have been the most dramatic way an 8-run win could have possibly ended. The ball just beat his glove and Ortiz made it to 2nd easily with the only extra-base hit of the game for the Toros. Two singles and a walk made it a 6-run cushion, but the Rocket ace kept his composure, inducing a game-ending grounder to Ben Simon at Short, easily throwing to Stax for the force.

As the Rocket bench jumped in excitement the reality started to settle in on both sides. For the Toros, a game they thought they had in the bag simply by being a much higher seed started becoming the stuff of bad offseason dreams. For the Rockets, simply believing they can do what no one expects is possible continued to pay dividends as "The Streak" continues to 14-0.

Game balls went all around, but the one that mattered the most belonged to the guy across the street waiting desperately for news like he was Mickey Mantle in '61 hoping Maris would clip the Babe's "unbreakable" home run record. Both Mantle and Greene got their wish. Maris set the new record in the final game of the season, and Jason simply knew his guys got it done. When the entire team raced across the street into the ER to deliver Jason his game ball the only thing bigger than his fat upper lip was the smile he painfully flashed as they embraced in victory.

Next up, The Rocket takes their still unbeaten 14-0 record up to tangle with A Division Champs Frankford on Fri, 5/15. First pitch 305pm.