

# Lions see solid relief pitching despite loss

By Paul Casella  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Despite hitting the leadoff batter in the sixth inning of a one-run game and walking the next three hitters, Calvin Grumley managed to avoid giving up any runs in his relief appearance Tuesday night at Medlar Field at Lubrano Park.

## BASEBALL

After picking off the runner whom he hit with a pitch, Grumley loaded the bases with three straight walks before inducing a line drive into a double play to end the inning.

While Penn State couldn't find the offense to overcome La Salle's one-run lead, the work of the

bullpen kept the Nittany Lions within striking distance until the final out.

Grumley and junior Mike Pierce combined to throw five scoreless innings in relief of freshman starter John Walter.

"Grumley pitched out of a couple jams there," coach Robbie Wine said, "but that's a part of it, just bend but don't break. I know he feels like he didn't pitch that well, but you look at the stats and he didn't give up the runs, so he did his job for us."

Grumley walked a total of four



Grumley

batters and hit two others, but he gave up just one hit over 2.1 innings before giving way to Pierce, who threw 2.2 scoreless innings to finish the game for Penn State.

Quality pitching out of the bullpen is something the team has come to expect, Wine said, as Penn State's bullpen has now pitched well in four of the last five games.

The relievers pitched three scoreless innings last Wednesday against Mount St. Mary's before allowing just one run in six innings of work in the first two games of this past weekend's series against Ohio State.

And despite allowing four runs in 3.2 innings in Sunday's game against the Buckeyes, the bullpen

bounced back Tuesday night.

"Our pitching has stepped up as of late," Grumley said.

"So hopefully we can keep that up and just give our team a chance to win the game every time we're out there."

The success of the bullpen hasn't been limited to one or two players, though, as the Lions have now used six relievers over the past week.

While Pierce said there is some competition among the pitchers to try and stay in the bullpen rotation, he added it's a relaxing feeling knowing other pitchers can come in and bail him out if he needs it.

"There's definitely some competition," he said, "but we're out there pitching for each other, also.

We give it everything we've got, and knowing the guy behind us has our back really helps."

But as the Lions look to regroup after the nonconference loss to La Salle, the team has at least reached a point in the season where the pitchers all have settled into their roles, which Wine said has been a big reason for the recent advancements.

"Everybody is improving out in the bullpen," he said of the bullpen.

"We've hit a spot where everyone is falling into their roles and, as always, confidence plays a big part in this game. When you start feeling it out there, you just have to keep rolling with it."

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## Depth

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long as the offensive line can block. The deep contingent can't be productive on talent alone. On the first 10 carries during the Blue-White game Saturday, the running backs averaged only 2.2 yards a carry — though Royster didn't play.

"It's going to challenge us if they're not blocking and making holes for us," Royster said, "but I think we're going to be confident in whoever's playing that they're going to be able to get the job done."

Beachum's return would provide diversity in styles behind the line. Beachum — who's recovering from an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear, medial collateral ligament (MCL) tear and cartilage damage in his right knee — is about five months removed from the injury and plans to return for preseason workouts.

Beachum sat out spring practice because he couldn't undergo full contact, but he said he is running full speed and ahead of schedule in the recovery process, which has been arduous.

"At 100 percent, I know I can help out the team," Beachum said. "I really feel I'll be able to this upcoming season."

If Beachum returns on schedule for the season opener Sept. 4 against Youngstown State, the already deep contingent would provide a more powerful punch to the 2010 season.

The possibility of five players getting carries next fall presents different styles, fresher legs and the possibility of catching defenses off guard.

"It's definitely been a blessing to have other running backs who can come in and make plays," Royster said.

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## Baseball

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It was good baserunning that helped the Explorers get three runs in the second inning.

With the bases loaded and one out, La Salle's Kevin Jones hit a deep fly ball to left that Deegan caught near the warning track. A run scored on the play, and both trailing

runners were able to advance into scoring position. That proved to be vital, as Mike Confarotta followed with a two-run single to give the Explorers a 3-0 lead.

That was all the offense La Salle would generate, as it managed just two hits the rest of the game.

The Lions struggled to get their offense going as well. Eramo hit a solo home run in the second inning, and Bobby Jacobs had an RBI single in the fourth to pull the Lions

within one run — but that's how the game ended.

Wine believes the Penn State hitters tried to do too much at the plate and on the bases, which led to the lack of offensive production.

"They lost a little focus today for some reason, and I don't know why," Wine said. "I think we feel like we can turn it on, and we didn't."

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## Strikeouts

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throws a sinking changeup, and the Lions not making the correct adjustments at the plate.

Caira struck out each Penn State batter who came to the plate at least once in the first game, and she added seven more strikeouts in the second game before giving way to Stacy Kuwik.

The Lions' 24 strikeouts in two games came just two days after finishing their sweep of Iowa on Sunday, when Penn State batters struck out just seven times combined in the two games against the Hawkeyes.

In the sixth inning of Tuesday's second game, though, Penn State still failed to capitalize, as strikeouts by Lauren Yao and Rossi stranded Griffith on base.

Yao, Akamine and Giordano led the team with four strikeouts apiece Tuesday, and first baseman Kailyn Johnson struck out three times.

"It was just a lot of mixture of things," said Griffith, who had only one strikeout in the doubleheader.

"It just comes back to when you see that first good strike, you gotta make something happen with that first good strike."

Catcher Danee Collett said the Penn State batters could have either moved up or back in the batter's box to help cut down on the strikeouts, as the changeups were dropping right under their bats.

"I think it was not making adjustments," she said of the struggles against the Orange pitcher.



Bryan Wade Heritage/Collegian

Senior pitcher Jackie Hill winds up in the first game of the Nittany Lions' doubleheader vs. Syracuse on Tuesday afternoon at Nittany Lion Field. Hill pitched six scoreless innings but gave up two runs in the seventh.

"I don't think it goes any deeper than that."

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## Sweep

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sense considering her dominance.

It was generally the same story for Caira in the later contest, as she stayed with her dropping changeup, which she called her out pitch. Plus, of the four combined hits in the doubleheader, two came from Griffith.

"We knew coming in that they were gonna be a great team," Caira said. "I had to be able to hit my spots well, and if I made a mistake, I knew they were going to jump on it."

The Lions scored their first run of the doubleheader in the seventh inning of Game 2, when pinch hitter Morgan Long reached on a single and got to third on a two-base error before eventually scoring on a wild pitch from Stacy Kuwik.

Kuwik entered the game in the sixth after Syracuse (27-20) got a pair of two-run home runs from Gibbs and Kuwik in the fifth inning against pitcher Lisa Akamine.

Akamine surrendered her most runs at home all season, as the first and fifth innings provided all six runs. In those two frames, Syracuse had five hits, walked three times and one batter got hit by a pitch.

With that handful of runs, Caira went back to her changeup.

"We weren't able to adjust to it and so she kept throwing it," Collett said. "We would have done the same to them."

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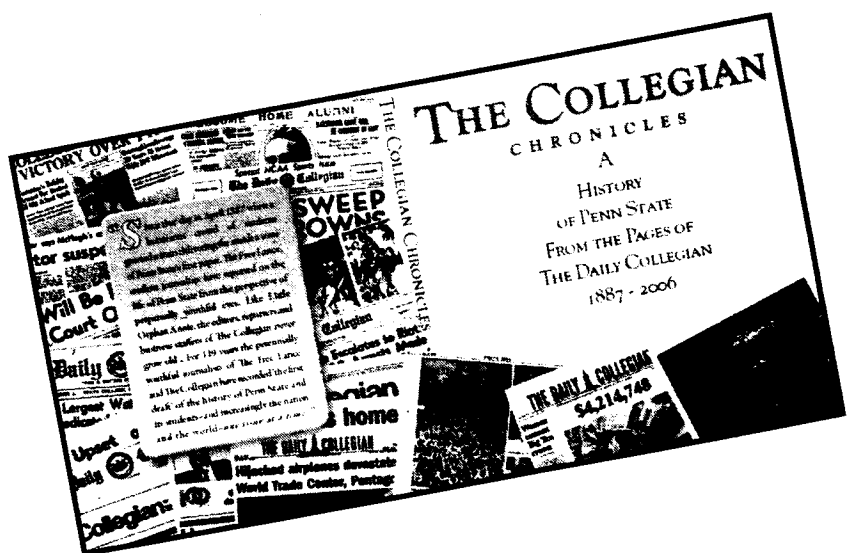


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