



Wellemeyer shines as Cards beat Bucs

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By Matthew Leach / MLB.com

PITTSBURGH -- As though he really needed them, Todd Wellemeyer received two separate illustrations of the value of controlling the strike zone on Friday night.

Wellemeyer pounded the zone for his six innings on the mound, allowing three hits, no walks and recording 18 outs on 70 pitches. Then, an inning after he was lifted for a pinch-hitter, his teammates scored four runs, despite earning a grand total of one total base by swinging the bats.

The end result was a 6-1 Cardinals win over the Pirates at PNC Park, and a very nice feeling for Wellemeyer to take into his first offseason as a Redbird. The right-hander, claimed off waivers from the Royals in May, turned in what may have been his most impressive performance in a St. Louis uniform in his last outing of the year.

"[I've been] just going right after them, not trying to put too much on the corners, just throwing everything I've got at 'em," Wellemeyer said. "[Manager] Tony [La Russa] and [pitching coach Dave Duncan] have been working with me a little bit on that, just doing the same thing every time."

It's worked beautifully. After issuing 28 free passes in his first 46 2/3 innings as a Cardinal, Wellemeyer was charged with one walk over his last two starts. Not coincidentally, he also was charged with exactly one earned run over those two games. When he throws strikes, he's a handful. On Friday, Wellemeyer threw nearly 70 percent strikes -- 48 out of 70 offerings.

"It's all in his delivery," La Russa said. "The longer that Dunc and he work together, the more consistent he'll be. He's got plus stuff. It's tough to sit up there and take strike one all the time, because it may be the last one you get."

Wellemeyer equaled his longest start as a Cardinal and the second longest outing of his Major League career. His five strikeouts were likewise his most with St. Louis and the second-best total of his career.

Unlike some of his mates in the St. Louis rotation, Wellemeyer has the ability to overpower hitters, and he showed it at times on Friday. He induced some ground balls and sometimes worked down in the strike zone, but he also pitched up and out of the hitting zone. Wellemeyer retired more than one hitter on high fastballs, pitches that had enough oomph and were high enough to make batters look bad.

"It adds a ton," he said. "If you're a pitcher that just throws on the corners, you've got to be there every time. Because every one of those hitters is going to be looking down at every pitch. If you can elevate a few times, they're looking up, and all of a sudden, they see something in the zone and it's got a little spin on it, and they're swinging."

Wellemeyer's opposition, Pirates starter Zach Duke, likewise threw strikes for the duration of his outing. Duke was pulled after seven innings, and when John Grabow entered a 1-1 game for Pittsburgh in the eighth, the first walk had yet to be issued.

By the time Grabow was done, he had handed out the first, second and third bases on balls -- not to mention a hit batsman, for good measure.

St. Louis crafted the winning rally with just one base hit, and that was a rare three-run single. David Eckstein drew a leadoff free pass, then stole second. Rick Ankiel bunted Eckstein to third, and the Pirates walked Albert Pujols intentionally.

Ryan Ludwick was hit by a pitch, loading the bases and bringing up So Taguchi. The outfielder fell behind in the count, 1-2, before drawing three straight balls to bring home the winning tally. When Steve Pearce misread Jim Edmonds' flyball to right field, the ball dropped in front of him for a single. All three Cardinals runners were motoring, and all three scored to make it 5-1. Pujols rapped an RBI double in the ninth for the final score.

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