

SPORTS

Orleans beast of east

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ORLEANS — They just win, baby.

The Orleans Cardinals grabbed the Eastern Division playoff series last night with a rollicking, 9-7 Game — victory over the Chatham A's on a warm, humid night before yet another large Eldredge Park gathering.

The Cards' 2-1 series win sets up a rematch of the 2003 finals with Bourne, which the Cardinals took in two games. Game — of the finals will be tonight at 7 in Orleans, but it is a question as to how much the Cardinals will have left.

Yes, it is the Cardinals who will carry the Eastern Division flag into the finals, less than 24 hours after playing five-plus innings in a broiling Chatham afternoon sun, then for more than three hours again last night at equally steamy Eldredge Park. All the while Bourne rested, having wrapped up a two-game sweep of Cotuit Wednesday in the Western playoffs.

"They've been like this all season," Orleans manager Kelly Nicholson said of his team. "This didn't surprise me. They've battled offensively defensively down to the last out all season. Our guys want to win this thing."

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Andy Graham (4-2) of UC-Santa Barbara gets the start for Orleans tonight against Bourne's Greg Reynolds (Stanford, 2-3).

Cardinals closer Steven Wright finally brought an end to last night's madness, retiring the last six hitters, two on strikeouts in the ninth. Wright, the righty from Hawaii, was named the league's top reliever before the playoffs and bounced back from an 11-inning loss to the A's in Game — Wednesday night.

Chatham outhit Orleans 14-7, and the Cardinals made three errors, but A's pitchers issued six walks and hit five batters.

Shortstop Steve Singleton of San Diego had three hits and three RBIs for the Cards and was 6-for-12 in the three games. Alex Presley of Mississippi was 4-for-6 for the A's and 8-for-14 in the series.

The A's walked away with most of the league's regular season awards and had the bigger names, but the Cardinals took advantage of every opening the A's gave them. They beat back an A's charge down the stretch of the regular season and they beat the A's in the playoffs.

Things almost got ugly in the last of the eighth, when A's closer Derrick Lutz threw a 3-0 pitch behind Brett Pill, who had already been hit twice. Pill walked slowly to first, the dugouts started emptying, but coaches and

umpires managed to control the heated situation.

More than anything, it was a by-product of a long, hot da a long, hot summer.

Orleans forced last night's game with a 5-2 win at Chatham in a game continued from Wednesday, when it was suspended because of fog.

Last night's contest was a back-and-forth game with four lead changes and three ties in the first four innings then the Cardinals broke it open with three runs in each of the fourth and fifth innings for a 9-4 lead, then had to hold on.

The A's scored a run in the sixth when league MVP Evan Longoria doubled home Presley (single). They added two more in the seventh to close within 9-7 on an RBI single by Adrian Ortiz. Presley singled in another run, but Cards left fielder Chris Pettit gunned down Ortiz at the plate on the pla reliever Daniel Albritton managed to escape further damage. It was the second outfield assist for the Cardinals in the game, with center fielder Colin Curtis gunning down Baron Frost at the plate in the first inning, an inning when the A's scored twice and could have had more. It was a precursor of the excitement to come.

Chatham led 4-3 after four innings before Orleans stormed back.

The A's must have been confident with Jared Hughes (7-0, 1.62), the league's winningest pitcher, getting the Game — start. But even a first-inning 2-0 lead wasn't enough for the Long Beach State right-hander against the refuse-to-die Cardinals. This wasn't the same Hughes who dominated all season. The pitcher, who displayed excellent control with only 11 walks in 50 innings during the summer, lasted just two batters into the fifth, walking three and hitting three and striking out only three after fanning 54 this season.

Orleans starter Lee Hyde lasted only 3

164 innings on the hitters' night.

The A's Todd Frazier, 0-for-9 in the series and also struggling in the field, tied it 3-3 in the fourth with a solo homer. The A's scored an unearned run later in the inning for a 4-3 lead, but back came Orleans.

Manny Burriss lined a hit-and-run double into left-center that scored a running Steve Singleton to pull the Cards into a 4-4 tie in the bottom of the fourth. Burriss moved up on a Hughes wild pitch and came home on Dave Uribes' soft single to left just over the drawn in infield.

Uribes would get the next two bases on a passed ball and a wild pitch, scoring for a 6-4 home team advantage.

The Cardinals put up another three-spot in the fifth. Hughes began the inning with a walk and hit a batter. Singleton's two-run double against reliever Brooks Brown put Orleans up 8-4 and Jason Jacobs singled to score Singleton. The nine runs would be enough, if barely.

Frost, Chris Coghlan, Frazier and Ortiz all had two hits for the A's.

Burriss and Curtis had two hits each for the Cardinals.

Cardinals force third game

The pesky Cardinals came back in the continuation of Wednesday night's suspended game for a 5-2 victory before about 1,500 sun-worshiping baseball fans at Chatham's Veterans Field.

UCLA's Brant Rustich pitched one-hit, shutout ball after taking over for starter Everett Teaford when yesterday's action began with Chatham batting and two outs in the bottom of the fourth. Rustich, a 6-6, 220-pound right-hander, struck out six and walked two.

Chris Pettit sliced a pinch-hit, two-run double down the right field line in the seventh off David Huff to give the Cards a 3-2 lead. Huff, a southpaw headed to UCLA in the fall, came into the game in the top of the fifth in place of Wednesday starter Robert Woodard.

Orleans added an unearned run in the eighth and Jason Jacobs singled home a run in the ninth.

Chatham had a runner on third in both the fifth and sixth innings against Rustich but couldn't score.

Chatham had taken a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the fourth Wednesday night when the game was suspended because of fog immediately after Garrett Bussiere two-run homer for the A's.

Dave Uribes had two hits for the Cardinals.

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