

## 2021 VBL All-star Day Recap

By: Eric Fenstermaker

HARRISONBURG, Va. – The Valley Baseball League’s finest took to the turf in Harrisonburg for the 2021 VBL All-star Game on Sunday.

Eagle Field at Veterans Memorial Park is usually the home of the Harrisonburg Turks; however, Sunday, it was the home of the best and brightest upcoming athletes that the VBL has to offer.

Fans from Covington to Purcellville traveled to James Madison University to watch the next generation of athletes play ball.

Sunday’s all-star festivities featured quality family fun for all ages. Young fans had the opportunity to meet their favorite players prior to the action for autographs, as they looked to become the next great sluggers and aces in the VBL.

The competitions began with the 60-yard dash and home run derby.

Over twenty different athletes competed in the 60-yard dash looking to etch themselves into the VBL record books as some of the fastest to ever compete.

In a tough fought competition, Edrick Felix (Woodstock River Bandits) took home the title with a time of 6.43 seconds.

Following the dash was the derby featuring some of the league’s most talented hitters.

The home run derby featured 11 of the best batters in the VBL, who – going into the derby – had a combined 68 homeruns.

The Strasburg Express and Woodstock River Bandits looked to dominate the derby, as both sides brought three batters each to the slug fest. The North was well represented in the home run derby, as nine of the 11 batters came from northern squads.

The only two batters from the South (Zach Levenson and Kyle Murphy) both came from Waynesboro.

After round one, Woodstock and Strasburg both put a player into the second round with Jaylon Lee (eight home runs) representing the River Bandits and Brayton Brown (six home runs) representing the Express. Levenson rounded out the top three batters with five homers.

However, even though Levenson had the lowest home runs in the first round of those that moved on, the second round belonged to the Waynesboro outfielder.

Levenson exploded for 16 second- round homers. This would be more than Brown (two home runs) and Lee (three homers) would have combined in the second round.

In the end, Brown's total of nine would narrowly edge out Lee's eight homers to put him in the finals against Levenson.

Brown would hit first driving in two deep balls. Levenson came to the plate needing just three homers to win, and he did just that. Levenson knocked in three home runs – while registering just one out in the last round – to take the home run derby crown.

After enjoying the dazzling display of deeply hit balls, fans sat back and watched as the best of the best took to the diamond around 7:30 p.m.

The North and South rosters consisted of 26 players each representing all 11 teams around the league. Coach Mike Bocoek from Woodstock led the charge for the North, while Coach Kory Koehler from the Charlottesville Tom Sox managed the South.

The North took the field dressed in teal, while the South donned orange jerseys for the All-star Game.

Coach Bocoek's team batted first and took the first lead of the night in the top of the first inning. The North drove in three runs on four hits to establish themselves early on in the contest.

The South threatened in the third as Michael Rosario (Harrisonburg Turks) hit a deep fly ball into center field that would surely have given the South their first runs of the night; however, Jaylon Lee (River Bandits) robbed Rosario at the wall to end the inning.

After robbing the South of a homer, the North responded by putting one over the right field wall, courtesy of Christopher De Guzman (Winchester Royals) to make the lead 4-0 for the North.

The North made substitutions in the bottom of the fifth bringing in eight different players in the field, and the South did the same in the sixth. Both teams put a different pitcher on the mound each inning throughout the night.

Both teams went back and forth retiring batters, and hits were hard to come by, especially for the South.

In the top of the eighth, Wade Cuda (Cardinals) scored on a wild pitch pushing the score to 5-0 in favor of the North.

That was all the action the fans were able to see as issues with the mound forced an end to the game in the eighth. The VBL All-star Game has not gone a full nine innings since 2018.

The MVP for the South was Victor Castillo (Lumberjacks), and the MVP for the North was Jaylon Lee.

Every team except for the Tom Sox will be back in action tonight.