

## Huskers Hammer Illini

Lincoln - The Nebraska baseball team (17-9, 2-1 Big Ten) put together one of its best games of the season on Sunday afternoon at Hawks Field in front of 5,266 fans, as starter Zach Hirsch improved to 3-1 on the year with a career-high tying 7.0 innings on the mound, while Chad Christensen drove in a game-high and career-high tying four RBI's to power the Huskers to a 13-3 win over the Illinois Fighting Illini and a 2-1 series win in NU's first ever Big Ten series. After dropping Friday's series opener 11-3 to the defending league and tournament champions, the Huskers outscored Illinois by a combined score of 31-8 in the final two games of the series to open conference play with a series win for the first time since 2008 when they swept Kansas State in Manhattan. Husker fans topped the 5,000 mark in all three games of the series, with a combined 15,697 fans coming out to see the Huskers open conference play.

Along with Christensen's four RBI's, Kash Kalkowski and Richard Stock each plated three runs on the day and Kale Kiser hit his fourth home run of the season. NU out-hit the Illini 14-5 and improved to 12-0 on the year when outhitting its opponent, while the Illini's five hits were a season low.

On the mound, Hirsch held the Illini in check and gave up just one run on three hits and two walks. A native of St. Charles, Ill., Hirsch faced no more than five batters in any inning and faced just three hitters in four different innings, while also notching two pickoffs on the afternoon. Tyler King and Travis Huber combined to pitch the final two innings of the game, with each giving up one run on one hit.

Illini started the game by scoring in the top of the first for the third straight game, but unlike Friday and Saturday, when the Huskers went down in order in the bottom of the first, NU evened the score with a run of their own. Michael Pritchard drew a leadoff walk and moved to third on a double by Rich Sanguinetti. Christensen then took a pitch on the outer half of the plate the other way and grounded out, but it was enough to score Pritchard from third to tie the game.

Pritchard got the Huskers going again in the bottom of the third with another leadoff walk.

Sanguinetti then laid down a sacrifice bunt and Illini starter Josh Ferry tried to get Pritchard at second, but failed, giving NU runners at first and second with no out. Christensen loaded the bases with his seventh and the team's 20th bunt single of the season, which set the table for Stock and Kalkowski to drive in three runs with back-to-back singles. After Pat Kelly flew out and Kalkowski was thrown out trying to steal second, Cory Burleson drove in Stock for the Huskers' fourth run of the inning.

Kiser put the Huskers up 6-1 in the fourth with a leadoff home run, his fourth of the season. The senior from Plano, Texas, has nearly matched his combined home run total from his first three seasons at Nebraska, as he hit two each as a freshman, sophomore and junior.

NU solidified its lead in the bottom of the sixth with four runs on five hits, as Pritchard, Christensen, Stock, Kelly and Burleson all roped singles. Pritchard's single came on a bunt to improve the Huskers' season total to 21, after NU produced just 16 bunt singles in 55 games a year ago.

Christensen added his third and fourth RBI's of the game with a one-out double in the seventh that scored Kiser and Sanguinetti. The Husker shortstop later scored his third run of the game and sixth of the series on a RBI single from Kalkowski.

The Husker now turn their attention to Tuesday night, when they wrap up their 17-game home stand with Kansas State at 6:35 p.m. NU opened the home stand with a 9-6 win over the Wildcats, who are 13-10 on the year after dropping 2-of-3 to Texas at home over the weekend. Nebraska will hand the ball to sophomore Brandon Pierce for his first start of the season, while the Wildcats' starter is yet to announced.

