

FSL North Championship Preview

The Daytona Cubs will take on the Dunedin Blue Jays in a best-of-three series beginning on Tuesday, September 3rd at Jackie Robinson Ballpark.

By Robbie Aaron / Daytona Cubs

Daytona Beach, FL -The Daytona Cubs (75-51) are set to take on the Dunedin Blue Jays (63-68) in the FSL North Championship - a rematch of the 2011 first round, won by the Cubs in three games.

Dunedin, which finished two games better than Daytona in the first half with a 37-29 record, stumbled throughout the second half to finish a league-worst 26-39. The Cubs won 11 of their final 12 games to finish 40-20 in the second half, eight games better than the Lakeland Flying Tigers.



The Cubs won 11 of their final 12 games heading into the postseason. (Aldrin Capulong)

Daytona won the season series 10-4 over the Jays, and has taken seven of the last eight meetings between the two teams, including back-to-back doubleheader sweeps on 8/27 and 8/28 at Jackie Robinson Ballpark.

Both of Daytona's no-hitters this season came at the expense of the Blue Jays. RHP Matt Loosen tossed a complete game nine inning no-hitter on 7/8 at Florida Auto Exchange Stadium, and RHP Ben Wells, LHP Kyler Burke and RHP Zach Cates combined to throw a seven inning no-hitter on 8/21 and 8/28, a game that began in Dunedin but was finished in Daytona due to weather.

The Cubs finished within the top three in the league in many offensive categories (first in stolen bases (159), third in average (.261), second in home runs (81), third in runs (599)) while, conversely, pitching, has been a staple for Dunedin throughout the season. The Cubs steadily climbed through the ranks in the league in pitching as the season progressed, moving from last in the league in early July, to as high as third in team ERA in August, and finishing sixth. Daytona's pitching staff surrendered the least amount of hits of any team in the league with 1,029.

The recent doubleheader sweeps appeared to have rattled the Blue Jays, resulting in the club looking for answers from above - and not necessarily in a spiritual manner either. The Jays recalled two top pitchers from AA-New Hampshire to bolster their arsenal, both of whom had tremendous success at the higher level.

RHP Austin Bibens-Dirkx, a former AAA-Iowa Cubs pitcher, has pitched at the Triple-A level for four different organizations in his career. Bibens-Dirks went 9-5 with a 2.85

ERA in 17 appearances (13 starts) for Dunedin this season. He walked only 26 opponents and struck out 98 over 101 innings. Since his promotion to AA-New Hampshire on 8/14, the Salem, OR native allowed only two earned runs over 20 innings (0.90 ERA). Bibens-Dirkx is scheduled to start game one for Dunedin on Tuesday in Daytona.

The Blue Jays also recalled RHP Casey Lawrence from AA-New Hampshire. Lawrence had a 2.70 ERA in two starts in Double-A, and actually started the season in AAA-Buffalo.

The Jays will turn to their top prospect (according to MiLB.com) RHP Aaron Sanchez in game two of the series on Wednesday in Dunedin. Sanchez is 4-5 with a 3.34 ERA over 22 appearances (20 starts) this season for Dunedin. The Barstow, CA native is coming off shutouts in four of his last five appearances, and has only allowed one run in 9.2 innings over two outings against the Cubs this season.

Daytona will give the ball to newly-acquired RHP Corey Black to start the series-opener. Black has had consistent success since being traded from the New York Yankees for OF Alfonso Soriano. The San Diego, CA native is 4-0 with Daytona with a 2.88 ERA. Black has struck out 28 opponents over 25 innings with the Cubs and leads the FSL with 116 strikeouts on the season. The 22-year-old has not faced Dunedin as a part of the Cubs organization, but did pitch against them five times with the Tampa Yankees over a span of 14 starts. In those five outings, Black went 0-1 with a 4.33 ERA (10 runs in 20.1 innings).

RHP C.J. Edwards, who came over from the Texas Rangers as a part of the Matt Garza trade, is scheduled to start game two for the Cubs to counter Sanchez. Edwards dazzled in his Cubs organizational debut on 7/28 in Palm Beach, striking out the first seven batters he faced and finished his outing with five one-hit shutout innings. The Prosperity, SC native is 0-0 with a 1.96 ERA for the Cubs in six starts. He has struck out 33 opponents and walked only seven in 23 innings.

Cubs pitching as a unit has held Dunedin to a .219 team batting average in the 14 games the two teams have played against each other. In those games, the Jays on-base percentage is .277. The Cubs have hit .236 off Blue Jays pitching with a .315 on-base percentage.

OF Pin-Chieh Chen is hitting .360 (9-for-25) against Dunedin this season with a team-best .484 on-base percentage.

INF Dustin Geiger hit .306 off Blue Jays pitching with two home runs and 11 runs batted in.

RHP Zach Cates only surrendered one run over nine innings of work in three appearances against Dunedin this season.

The winner of the FSL North Championship will take on the winner of the FSL South Championship being played between first half champion Fort Myers Miracle and second half champion Charlotte Stone Crabs. The FSL Championship is a best-of-five series with the North team home for the first two games and the South team home for the final three.

Daytona Cubs playoff tickets are available online at daytonacubs.com, by calling (386) 257-3172, or by stopping by the Jackie Robinson Ballpark ticket office at 110 E. Orange Avenue across from the ballpark. The Cubs ticket offices will be open on Labor Day, Monday, September 2 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The office will re-open at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday.

Every Daytona Cubs playoff game can be heard live on AM1230 and AM1490 in Volusia County, online at myam1230.com, or on your smart phone by typing in "WSBB" in TuneIn radio.

FSL North Championship Series Schedule

Game 1 - Tuesday, September 3, 7:05 p.m. - Jackie Robinson Ballpark

Game 2 - Wednesday, September 4, 6:30 p.m. - Florida Auto Exchange Stadium

Game 3 - Thursday, September 5, 6:30 p.m. - Florida Auto Exchange Stadium (If Necessary)

This story was not subject to the approval of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues or its clubs.