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Battaglia walks off Bandits behind gem from Jarvis

By Alexis Brudnicki / Brisbane Bandits

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Jason Jarvis allowed one earned run over seven innings on Friday night. (SMP Images)

BRISBANE, Qld. - The Brisbane Bandits, proudly presented by WellDog, just keep bringing the excitement to AFA Stadium at Holloway Field.

After clinching a first-place berth and home-field advantage for the Australian Baseball League Championship Series on Thursday night, the Bandits walked off the Alcohol Think Again Perth Heat on Friday, taking down their visitors 3-2 in 10 innings.

"That was fun," Brisbane manager David Nilsson said. "That was definitely great, especially after last night to come out and back it up with this crowd, and for the boys to continue having fun. I don't know where that win ranks for us but right now that was just awesome."

Ryan Battaglia launched the big blow for the home squad, the 23-year-old catcher sending his fourth ball out of the park this season with one out in the bottom of the 10th frame, ending a 2-2 deadlock in a battle of arms throughout the contest.

"This team just continues to amaze," Nilsson said. "You don't know who it's going to be, and that's such a big hit for him. Everyone is so happy for him. He's been doing a lot of extra early work, his attitude is fantastic, and at no stage this year has he been down at all. He's been a really positive influence around the boys and the whole group's just happy it was him."

Being a part of every Bandits team Brisbane has seen in the six years of the revamped ABL, Battaglia's role has varied throughout his tenure. Moving around the diamond this season, the Brisbane native has spent additional time working with first-base coach Shayne Watson - also in his sixth year on the staff - to help him behind the dish and the squad is enjoying the advantages.

"In a nutshell, he's made big improvements," Watson said. "We're really working on his footwork, having quick feet, light feet, and having soft hands with his receiving, and a little bit of game-calling as well but mostly more technique behind the plate, with being strong and firm behind the plate and having softer hands, quicker feet, and doing things right."

Added Battaglia: "Personally I feel like I have improved a lot this season. I've been working hard off the field, getting back into catching after I didn't catch for a while, but I'm really enjoying baseball and it helps."

"You've seen a difference," Nilsson said. "He's doing a lot of early work and working hard with Shayne Watson and you're seeing the benefits. He's throwing really well, he threw two balls [to second base] great tonight, and the pitchers are really enjoying throwing to him and having a lot of success with him back there."

Jason Jarvis was Battaglia's battery mate on Friday and in his final start of the regular season, he threw eight stellar innings, allowing two runs (just one earned) on five hits with one walk and eight strikeouts. Looking for sole possession of the league lead with his ninth win of the year, the 28-year-old right hander took a no-decision and will remain



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the final win of the year, his 20-year-old right-hander took the decision and his team tied with Queenslander Steven Chambers at eight.

"He was spectacular," Brisbane's skipper said. "It was disappointing obviously because we were hoping that he could get that extra win, but he's going to have to finish up being tied for first in the league. That was an awesome effort, and I really wrestled with taking him out, but in the bigger picture it was the right thing to do."

Catching Jarvis in their third outing together, Battaglia and the Arizona native have shared a mutual trust in each other and enjoyment in watching each other work.

"Jarvis was really good," the backstop said. "He always pounds the zone and that helps. He gets ahead of the hitters a lot. He always goes out there and gives it his all, and he showed that tonight, going eight innings. I love catching him. It's fun."

Added the righty: "I love [Battaglia]. He's a good mate of mine and we work well together. He really cares and he pays attention well and I can tell that he takes it really seriously this year."

Heat hurler Edwin Carl matched Jarvis for seven frames and left after allowing two runs (just one earned) on four hits, walking none and striking out seven, using just 90 pitches to get through his outing.

"Edwin's been great all year," Nilsson said. "He's had our number all year and for us to get two runs off him, that's a lot more than we normally get, put it that way. He was dominant. He's a great pitcher. Hopefully he gets a chance to play professionally somewhere, because no doubt about it, he can play professional baseball."

The five Bandits players who have been with the squad since the inaugural season made significant contributions in the second matchup of the four-game series. Along with Battaglia, Andrew Campbell and Mitch Nilsson each added multi-hit efforts, Nilsson driving in his team-leading 38th run of the season.

First baseman David Sutherland held down the defence, including a spectacular sliding catch into the home dugout to end the sixth inning, and closer Ryan Searle finished the final two innings for the Bandits, the 26-year-old right-hander allowing just one hit and striking out three to earn his fifth victory of the season in the walkoff.

"It's a really good feeling," Battaglia said. "I mean, we've already clinched, but we don't want to go out there and lose. We're going to battle every day, and we'll do the same for the last two games of the regular season, and that was really nice."

Brisbane and Perth square off for the third game of the series on Saturday, first pitch set for 6:30 PM local time with big leaguer Travis Blackley on the mound for the home squad.

This story was not subject to the approval of the Australian Baseball League or its clubs.