

High Point Rockers vs. Southern Maryland Blue Crabs

The Rockers and Blue Crabs will begin a three-game set on Friday at Truist Point. This is the first matchup between the two clubs since May 9, which concluded a stretch of six straight games between the two sides that saw each team take two of three at its home ballpark. Southern Maryland may not be used to seeing new opponents. Over the Blue Crabs last 21 games, they have only faced four opponents. Southern Maryland went 11-10 over that stretch, which makes perfect sense considering they have played .500 ball nearly the whole season. Meanwhile, High Point's eight-game winning streak and run of winning or splitting its past 11 series came to a screeching halt against Gastonia. The Rockers were swept for the first time this season and have fallen to four games back of The Baseball Club. If the Rockers want any chance of making a late first-half comeback they have to take care of the Blue Crabs.

About the Rockers:

The Rockers come into this game at 31-19, four games behind Gastonia for first in the South Division. They have lost three in a row, but are still five games better than the Charleston Dirty Birds, in essence making it a two horse battle for the division. The Rockers lost their first series since they dropped a three-game set to the Blue Crabs on May 6th. At the time that was the third straight series High Point was defeated. However, it had since found its footing prior to this past series against Gastonia. The Baseball Club has won five in a row and eight of their past ten games ensuring that the Rockers must play flawless baseball down the stretch to have any shot of chasing them down. Despite missing out on an opportunity at Caromont Health Park this past week, they'll get their chance to tackle Gastonia with six of their remaining 13 games coming against The Baseball Club. High Point's heartbreaking trip to Gastonia put a damper on what had been an outstanding roadtrip. The Rockers won the first six games against the Staten Island FerryHawks and Lancaster Stormers prior to being walked-off in all three games at Caromont Health Park. The first two games went to the 10th inning, but the Rockers failed to score in their half of the 10th allowing Gastonia to push in the "ghost runner," who starts the inning at second base, to come away with a win. In the finale Gastonia did it in nine innings, rallying with two-outs off Rocker closer Jameson McGrane. The Rockers must have a short memory and battle against a pesky Southern Maryland team to ensure what was a brutal three games doesn't become a brutal week.

Key Players:

Ryan Grotjohn:

Grotjohn started the season in a slump that saw him putting together quality at-bats and hitting the ball hard across the field, but not getting results. It felt as though every ball he hit hard was right at a fielder. However, through it all he remained confident, knowing if he continued to make good contact, those balls would fall. It took a couple weeks, but he was right. Over Grotjohn's past ten games he is hitting .450 with three homers. His hot stretch has seen his batting average on the season go from .230 on June 2 to a team best .312 average about three weeks later. Grotjohn's role becomes even larger as after Martin Figueroa's injury. The Rocker shortstop gets slotted into the leadoff spot and they'll need torrid June to continue in order to stomp the Blue Crabs.

Colin Moran:

Colin Moran has been a rock in the middle of the High Point order. He has slugged six homers and routinely puts together major league at-bats, walking as many times as he's struck out. However, Moran's bat had cooled off and saw him enter a mini slump that was highlighted by a struggle to hit left-handed pitching. Moran may have had a breakthrough though on Wednesday as he lined pitches the other way off Gastonia southpaw Nick Wells. Through six games Moran has hit .400 with a homer against Southern Maryland this year so this could be the team that allows Moran's bat to come alive.

Keys Trends:**HR ball:**

The Rockers have the second most homers in the Atlantic league with 70 and have won all but one game this season that they hit more homers than their opponent. More than 47% of their offensive production comes via the home-run, demonstrating how vital it is to the Rockers success. High Point and Gastonia are the only two teams that have more homers than doubles, proving that the hits that result in runs matter the most. The Rockers are 20-1 when they out-homer their opponent and 27-4 when they have as many or more homers than their opponent, compared to just 4-15 when they do not.

Gold Glovers:

The Rockers defense has gone through stretches this year when they've been outstanding as well as times when they've been sloppy, but overall they have committed the third fewest errors with just 35. They have guys like Ben Aklinski, DJ Burt and Ryan Grotjohn who routinely make diving catches that save runs. However, over the Rockers past ten games, they have taken this to another level. The Rockers have made just one error in their past ten and just two over their past 13. The Rockers committed only one error over their eight game winning streak and they'll have to continue to make plays in the field to get back to their winning ways.

Dominance on the mound:

In 2023 High Point had the best strikeout to walk ratio in the Atlantic League. They had the second most strikeouts and fewest walks, with 69 fewer than the next closest club. This season the Rockers are demonstrating a similar dominance. They have the best ERA at 3.47 and have a strikeout to walk ratio of 3.39. Rockers pitchers have plenty of strikeout stuff, striking out more than 10.6 batters per nine innings and have 47 more strikeouts than the next closest club. The Rockers prevent runners from getting on base because they don't walk a soul. They have walked just 150 guys all year, which can explain in part why they have stranded more runners than their opponent in 25 of their past 29 games.

About the Blue Crabs:

Southern Maryland comes into this three-game set at 24-26, seven games behind the Rockers and 11 games back of division leading Gastonia. The Blue Crabs are 5-5 over their past 10 games and not surprisingly, are 3-3 against High Point.

Keys Players:**Anthony Brocato:**

The St. Johns alum has burned Frank Viola's Rockers in 2024. In six games he has bashed three homers vs High Point, but he's done damage against the entire league. For the season Brocato is hitting .259, but his 12 homers and 36 RBIs make him one of the more dangerous Atlantic League bats.

Josh Broughton:

Every team has a hitter that is the gritty bat that it feels as though the Rockers can never retire. For Southern Maryland, that is Josh Broughton. His 2024 season started against High Point when the two clubs first played earlier this season and hit .455 over those six games. Broughton has hit everywhere he's been and carries an independent ball career batting average of .393. However, over his past 10 games Broughton has a .220 average, so the Rockers may be catching him at the right time.

Key Trends:**You can't win if you don't score:**

Southern Maryland has struggled to score runs. Only Hagerstown has scored less and no team has recorded fewer base hits or has a lower batting average than the Blue Crabs. They have the least doubles and don't hit for power either. They have the fourth fewest homers with 54 and are not an aggressive baserunning team. The recipe for success for the Blue Crabs is leaning heavily on their pitching. The Rockers pitching staff has been by far the best in the league, so if they hold down the Blue Crabs they may only need to scratch across a few runs to win.

Lookout!:

We just documented Southern Maryland's challenges offensively, so what is a strategy to rectify that: getting on base by whatever means necessary, even if that is wearing a pitch to the back. Southern Maryland has been hit the most times in the Atlantic League, and that has been the case each of the past three seasons. The Blue Crabs hitters are not afraid to crowd the plate in efforts to eliminate inside pitches and get a few more men on base. The Rockers pitching staff knows how to pitch inside, but if they happen to miss a little too far inside, we may see our fair share of hit batters this series.

Pitching Matchup:

Fri: S.M. - Ian Kahaloa vs HP - Cam Bedrosian

Kahaloa: 50.0 IP (10GS) / 6.12 ERA / 31BB:52Ks / 9 HR allowed

Bedrosian: 14 IP (3GS) / 2 ER (1.29 ERA) / 5BB / 15Ks

Sat: S.M. - Shawn Semple vs HP - Taylor Guerrieri

Semple: 55 IP (10GS) / 5.72 ERA / 11BB:40Ks / 7 HR allowed

Guerrieri: 30IP (8G-6GS) / (4.20 ERA) / 26Ks / 10BB / 8HR allowed

Sun: S.M. - Garrett Martin vs HP - TBD

Martin: 52 IP (10G-9GS) / (4.15 ERA) / 17BB / 41Ks / 6HR allowed

TBD:

Starting Pitching Keys:

Southern Maryland's strength is its pitching. It has the fourth best ERA at 4.71 and it walks the second fewest in the league. They do not feature a lot of swing and miss, but they will make you earn your runs. However, one pitcher that does issue the free pass is Ian Kahaloa. The Blue Crab righty has the second most walks in the Atlantic League and has had a game this season where he walked nine. The Rockers have to have a patient approach at the plate against him. Saturday the Rockers will see Semple, who the Rockers tagged in his first appearance against them. They knocked him around for eight runs over three innings on May 8, so this game will be about whether Semple can make an adjustment. Martin will throw the finale. He's another arm that refuses to walk hitters, but has been susceptible to the homerun ball. When pitchers have struggled with keeping the ball in the yard, the Rocker's hitters have typically exploited it.

The Rockers pitching staff has been the heartbeat of the team. The Rockers starters have allowed 11 earned runs over their past 42 innings, which translates to a 2.35 ERA. Bedrosian has been magnificent this season, holding opponents scoreless over his past two starts. For the season he has a 1.29 ERA, and has gotten a lot of swing and miss with his fastball, curveball, change-up combo. Guerrieri has had an up and down season. He has a 4.20 ERA over 30 innings, but was scoreless in his last start. However, that start was limited to just three innings. Guerrieri's first start came against the Blue Crabs and was not pretty. He allowed seven runs over two innings and gave up three homers. The homers have been what has given Guerrieri nightmares. The eight longballs he has surrendered have been the primary cause for his poor outings. If he keeps the ball in the yard he should be in good shape against the Blue Crabs this time around.

Milestone Watch:

Rockers manager, Jaime Keefe, has the third best active winning percentage in the Atlantic League and got wins 300 and 301 when the Rockers swept their doubleheader Sunday against the Dirty Birds on May 19. Blue Crab manager Stan Cliburn is 14 wins away from 2,000 career wins as a minor league manager, which would make him just the 12th ever to hit that mark.

How Can I Tune In?

Friday and Saturday our coverage will start at 6:30 p.m. EDT with a first pitch of 6:45 p.m. EDT. Sunday our coverage will begin at 3:50 p.m. EDT with a first pitch time of 4:05 p.m. Tune into the game on MixLR or watch the game on FloSports.