

Hill a bright spot for struggling Nationals

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Staff Writer

Despite stringing together six quality starts for the Washington Nationals, Georgetown's Shawn Hill hasn't exactly been rewarded in the win column pitching for Major League Baseball's last-place club.

The 26-year-old righthander has posted a 2-3 won-lost record for the 9-23 Nats with an earned-run average of 3.00, emerging as one of the few reliable arms on a young Washington pitching staff that was expected to have growing pains. Number-one starter John Patterson went on the disabled list this week and Hill has had to manage through some soreness as well, although not in the reconstructed right elbow that caused him to miss much of the last two seasons.

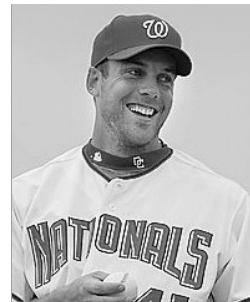
Hill has lasted until at least the sixth inning in all of his last half-dozen starts and has been most effective with his ground ball-inducing sinkerball, walking just 14 batters, striking out 28 and allowing 37 hits through 45 total innings.

Hill's start on Sunday at the famed Wrigley Field in Chicago against the Cubs typified how his season has gone so far. He was masterful at times with his pitch control but again received little offensive support and the Cubs took a 2-1 lead in the fifth inning after Hill plunked

Chicago's Jacque Jones in the leg with the bases loaded.

Hill recovered to finish the sixth inning and was pulled after surpassing the 100-pitch mark. The Nationals actually rallied to take a 3-2 lead, only to lose in 10 innings 4-3 to increase their losing streak to five.

Afterward, Hill said that a painful left shoulder suffered when sliding back into third base during a game on April 20 was the reason for giving up three walks and hitting two batters on Sunday.



SHAWN HILL

He has also experienced tightness in his right forearm that hasn't allowed for full extension in his delivery.

"I felt real good out of the gate, but I've started to fly open, mechanically," the six-foot, 185-pounder said on the Nationals' website. "It just fell apart a bit."

Hill's next start comes up Friday at home against Florida, the third time he'll face the Marlins this year. The Nationals will visit Toronto to take on the Blue Jays on the weekend of June 15-17.

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