San Francisco scored 18 and still couldn’t shake Phoenix

Ernie Bewell | 1981-08-20 | Games through 1981-08-19

On July 26 the San Francisco Warriors could have lost a series and still had room to spare. They were six games ahead of Phoenix. On August 19 they scored 18 runs and couldn’t shake the Firebirds. Both clubs finished the night 64–57. Now Phoenix comes to San Francisco for four games, and the winner of Thursday’s opener will have first place to itself.

San Francisco’s lead disappeared during an eight-game losing streak. The first came August 9, when Minneapolis beat San Francisco 6–5. By August 16, three straight losses to Dallas and three more to Atlanta had left the Warriors even with Phoenix. The next night San Francisco took a 1–0 lead into the seventh against Tampa Bay and lost 2–1. Phoenix beat Dallas 3–2 that night and went in front.

The Warriors took their share of first place back on Tuesday with a 6–1 win while Phoenix lost. On Wednesday they put six runs across in the first inning against Tampa Bay. Luke Margalit homered and drove in five in the 18–2 win. San Francisco scored 24 runs in its two wins over the Storm. It had scored 15 in the eight straight losses. The bats have given the Warriors a chance to defend first place at home. The standings gave them no head start.

The game that kept it even

In Phoenix, Stephen Grimes carried a shutout into the ninth against Dallas. By the time he came out with one down, he had allowed three hits and struck out seven. Omar Espinoza got the last two outs. The Firebirds did all their scoring in the fourth, when Alex Monge, acquired from Houston on July 28, homered. Three runs were plenty.

Phoenix has won nine of the clubs’ 15 meetings, but the four played in San Francisco ended two apiece. Los Angeles is two games behind both leaders. When the Firebirds and Warriors meet August 20, one team can finally put a win on its own side of the standings and a loss on the other’s. See who leaves the opener 65–57. For at least one night, the West will belong to that club alone.