

# ESPN Baseball



Saturday, May 10

## Bus dies in rural Alabama, players sleep on pavement

Associated Press

When their bus broke down after dark in rural Alabama, the Jacksonville Suns knew they were in for a long night.

By noon Saturday, having spent 12 sticky hours snacking on candy and sleeping on sheets spread out over the pavement of a gas station parking lot, the Double-A affiliate of the Los Angeles Dodgers knew just how bad it was.

"A lot of guys are sort of dazed right now," Suns radio announcer Joe Block said from a replacement bus on the outskirts of Atlanta.

Fortunately for the worn-out Suns, their game Saturday night at home against Orlando was postponed because of the transportation problem. It will be made up as part of a doubleheader Sunday.

Players often call the minors the bus leagues because of the long hauls. For good reason, as the Southern League Suns found out.

The whole ordeal began Friday night when Jacksonville lost its sixth straight game, 3-2 to the Birmingham Barons. The Suns packed up and left the ballpark in Hoover, Ala., around 10:30 p.m. CDT and settled in for what they expected to be a 12-hour ride.

But about 35 miles east of Birmingham, the bus had trouble going up a hill and pulled over near Pell City. A repairman was summoned, and he began working on the bus with the driver shortly before midnight.

"We kept thinking we were going to leave soon," Block said. "But we never did."

Trouble was found in a fuel connection and the Suns were told they were stuck. And there wasn't much relief in sight on a humid, sticky night.

The Suns tried without luck to find another bus in Birmingham or Atlanta.

"We called a couple of companies, but they said it was prom night and all of them were rented," Block said.

Eventually, another bus was located -- but it was about 430 miles away, back in Jacksonville.

With no flights available, either, there was nothing to do but wait. Too bad for them, no

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hotels were close by.

"Some guys tried to sleep on the bus, but it was hard because there was no air conditioning. It was about 90, 95 degrees in there," Block said.

That's when several of the Suns tried falling asleep on the concrete. For the hungry guys, there weren't many options.

"We ate everything the gas station had, they were real nice to us. I had Reese's Pieces, fruit juice and a lot of water," Block said.

Around noon Saturday, the substitute bus pulled up and the players climbed aboard.

There were movies for the Suns to watch, but the air conditioning wasn't working very well. Most of the players' cell phones had gone dead, too, and there wasn't much meal money to go around.

By late afternoon, the bus was circling around Atlanta traffic with another five hours to go. The Los Angeles organization did its best to help, paying for a full lunch at a restaurant.

"Right now, most of the guys are just waiting for the sun to go down so it might cool off," Block said.

Block mostly was looking forward to a nice shower and a comfortable bed.

"I've seen a lot of stuff happen in the minors over the years," he said. "This is one of those things that once I get a good night's sleep, I'll be able to laugh about it."