

Navarreto is big catch for Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 15 June 2015 15:48 - Last Updated Monday, 15 June 2015 16:17



One of the top Major League prospects on the Cedar Rapids Kernels is hitting just .180 for the season, but Brian Navarreto has superior skills for a young catcher.

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer predicted Monday that Navarreto will play for the Minnesota Twins some day.

"He'll catch in the big leagues," Mauer said without hesitation. "His bat will determine how long he's going to be there."

Navarreto went 1-for-2 with two walks Monday afternoon in an 8-2 loss to Lansing before 2,980 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium, giving him a six-game hitting streak and raising his average all the way from .119 to .180.

He's gone 8-for-16 in the last six games and is starting to spray line drives around the ballpark.

"Yeah, I'm comfortable right now. Right now I feel pretty good," said Navarreto. "I just trust

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myself and try to keep my swing and my mind right. I just keep it the same way."

Navarreto, 20, is from Puerto Rico and has been a catcher since he was 14. The Twins selected him in the sixth round of the 2013 draft and gave him \$262,500 to sign.

He hit .226 for the GCL Twins in 2013 and hit .194 at Elizabethton last year, so he's still learning how to swing the bat. He's been hot for the Kernels the last week as they try to put the finishing touches on a playoff spot for the first half of the Midwest League campaign.

"He's still young for this league," said Mauer. "Hopefully you're starting to see him take off with his bat."

Mauer said Navarreto is swinging at good pitches, taking his walks, hitting the ball the other way and turning on a fastball, all the ingredients of a batter who's starting to mature. He's had only 345 official at-bats in the minor leagues, which is less than one full season.

Mauer hopes Navarreto's hitting will continue to improve, but thinks Navarreto's defense is already extremely good. He called Navarreto one of the top-two defensive catchers in the Twins minor league system and perhaps the best.

"Top to bottom defensively, he's the best guy that I've had here, for sure, without a doubt. In three years," said Mauer.

Navarreto has nabbed 19 of 34 runners trying to steal bases against the Kernels for a success rate of 55.9 percent, which is way above average. He nailed 2-of-3 Lugnuts on Monday.

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"If you're at 35 percent, you're pretty good," said Mauer. "Yup, he's doing pretty good. When the pitcher gives him a chance, he puts it right there."

Navarreto has a powerful right arm along with good balance and foot work. Those are the keys for stopping runners from stealing a base.

"Always work hard, hard. Just focus on catching the ball, get a good transfer and throw the ball to a base. And somebody has to get there to catch it," Navarreto said, smiling. "I just throw to the base."

Mauer said every good team needs a quality catcher. "If your catcher isn't very good, it's going to be a long season for you," he said.



Navarreto has committed only one error this season and has allowed only two passed balls, which along with excellent throwing has helped the Kernels pitchers immensely.

"He takes pride in it, No. 1," said Mauer. "You've got to take pride in it. And you've got to be able to separate what you're doing offensively, because really the pitcher and the team depend on you."

Navarreto likes wearing the gear and catching a game. "I enjoy that job," he said with a smile. "I'm feeling great, a better feeling that I have now."

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Jared Wilson, one of the Kernels' top pitchers all season, had a rough outing Monday and was touched for seven hits and five earned runs in four innings.

Alex Real continued his good hitting for Cedar Rapids. He went 2-for-3 and socked his first home run.

The Kernels (38-26) host Burlington at 6:35 p.m. Tuesday to start a three-game series.

LANSING (8): Alford, cf, 4 0 0 0, Urena, ss, 5 1 1 0, Tellez, 1b, 5 2 2 0, McBroom, dh, 3 2 1 1, Leblebajian, 3b, 5 3 3 2, Almonte, rf, 5 0 2 2, De La Cruz, c, 4 0 0 1, Carlson, lf, 2 0 1 0, Locastro, 2b, 4 0 2 0. Totals 37 8 12 6.

KERNELS (2): Corcino, rf, 4 0 0 0, Gordon, ss, 3 0 0 0, Larson, lf, 4 0 0 0, Real, dh, 3 1 2 1, Doe, 1b, 4 0 1 0, White, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Valera, 2b, 4 0 0 0, Navarroto, c, 2 1 1 0, English, cf, 3 0 1 0. Totals 30 2 6 1.

Lansing 023 000 300 - 8 12 0

Kernels 000 010 010 - 2 6 3

Greene, Mayza (7), Biggs (8) and De La Cruz. Wilson, Velez (5), Nordgren (7) and Navarroto. W - Greene (6-2). L - Wilson (5-2). 2B - Leblebajian (2). HR - Leblebajian (3), Real (1). SB - Carlson (6). E - Doe (3), Valera (2). T - 2:45. A - 2,980.