

Pitching leads Kernels to sweep

Written by S.D. Buhr

Tuesday, 16 April 2013 22:41 - Last Updated Tuesday, 16 April 2013 22:47



What a difference 24 hours can make.

One night after his pitching staff gave up 14 runs to the visiting Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, Cedar Rapids Kernels pitching coach Gary Lucas saw his staff hold the same team to a single run over 14 innings in Tuesday night's doubleheader at Veterans Memorial Stadium. The Kernels took the first game, 3-0, and then jumped on Wisconsin starting pitcher Jorge Lopez for eight runs in the first inning of the nightcap en route to a 9-1 win and a sweep of the twinbill.

Not bad, considering neither of the starting pitchers the Kernels sent to the mound on Tuesday had started a game yet this season.

Brett Lee (2-0), who had been tapped by Lucas and Manager Jake Mauer as the Kernels' sixth starting pitcher in their six-man rotation to start the season, had yet to get his first start because of the four straight games the Kernels had postponed on last week's road trip. After two relief appearances of just one inning each, Lee finally got his first start in a Cedar Rapids uniform.

Was it tough waiting for that opportunity?

"I thought I was never going to start," Lee answered, with a laugh.

All he did was throw six shutout innings while giving up six hits and striking out three Rattler hitters without giving up a walk. Lee said his two-seam fastball was working well for him.

"Throwing (the fastball) away from hitters because I saw what happened last night," he said. "I knew if you go in, they hit it, so I just kept it away. Also had my changeup working really well tonight."

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Tyler Jones faced just four hitters, striking out one, in a scoreless seventh inning to record his second save of the year.

Not to be outdone by Lee, Steven Gruver, who only found out earlier in the day that he'd be getting the starting assignment for the second game, threw four shutout innings. Gruver had thrown a total of 5 1/3 innings in two prior appearances, both in relief. Gruver, who knew he'd be limited to about 60 pitches, had a simple goal for the evening.

"Help the bullpen out tonight. After the last couple days with everyone pitching, we wanted to use as few men as possible," Gruver said.

Lucas had plenty of praise for both efforts, complimenting the way both pitchers challenged the Wisconsin hitters.

"Brett Lee did more than we could hope for," Lucas said. "He hadn't been in there for a while. Had a couple of appearances to keep himself sharp but cancellations just kinda bumped him in the rotation. He stayed real patient and when he got out there he made a lot of (good) pitches right away."

And as for Gruver, Lucas added, "That is a bonus. He fed off Lee's confidence and Gruver did the same thing."

Lucas summed up the difference between Monday's game and the twinbill Tuesday as, "better quality pitches in better locations."

Tim Atherton (1-0) came on in relief of Gruver and was credited with the win. He held the Rattlers to a single run on just two hits over three innings of work, while striking out a pair of hitters.

Jorge Polanco provided much of the necessary offense in the first game, with two singles in

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three at-bats and an RBI. Romy Jimenez also drove in a Kernels run with an infield hit in the Kernels' sixth inning.

Kernel hitters wasted no time getting heated up in the nightcap. They put eight runs on the board in the first inning off of Lopez, who gave up all eight runs while recording just one out before being pulled by Wisconsin Manager Matt Erickson.

Byron Buxton, who sat out the first game of the night after taking a pitch to his forearm on Monday night, started the second game with an infield single and added a two-RBI double in his second at-bat of the first inning. Buxton finished the game with three hits, increasing his batting average to .474.

Polanco also added two more hits in the nightcap, including a double that drove in Buxton and DH Tyler Grimes in the Kernels eight-run first inning. Third baseman Travis Harrison hit his second home run of the season, also during the first inning.

Manager Jake Mauer, while certainly appreciative of the efforts of the four Kernels pitchers, was quick to add that the team's defense was also much improved over the night before.

"It made a big difference, you know, you catch the ball the way you're supposed to," he said.

The doubleheader sweep pushed the Kernels i to first place in the Midwest League Western Division, a half-game ahead of Quad Cities, which split a doubleheader with Clinton Tuesday night.

The Kernels close out the series against Wisconsin with a single game Wednesday night at 6:35.

GAME 1

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WISCONSIN (0): Taylor, cf, 4 0 0 0, Arcia, ss, 3 0 0 0, Haniger, rf, 3 0 1 0, Berberet, 1b, 3 0 1 0, Coulter, c, 3 0 1 0, Sermo, dh, 3 0 1 0, Garza, 3b, 3 0 1 0, McFarland, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Reed, lf, 3 0 1 0, Suter, p, 0 0 0 0, Blaski, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 28 0 7 0.

KERNELS (3): Williams, cf, 4 1 1 0, Pimentel, dh, 4 0 0 0, Polanco, 2b, 3 0 2 1, Hicks, 1b, 2 1 0 0, Walker, rf, 1 0 0 0, Harrison, 3b, 2 0 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 2 1 1 0, Jimenez, lf, 3 0 1 1, Grimes, c, 3 0 0 0, Lee, p, 0 0 0 0, Jones, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 24 3 6 2.

Wisconsin 000 000 0 - 0 7 2

Kernels 001 002 x - 3 6 1

Suter, Blaski (5) and Coulter. Lee, Jones (7) and Grimes. W - Lee (2-0). L - Suter (0-1). Sv - Jones (2). 2B - Haniger (4), Garza (2). SB - Sermo (3). CS - Harrison (1). E - Haniger (1), McFarland (2), Grimes (2). T - 1:40.

GAME 2

WISCONSIN (1): Taylor, cf, 3 0 0 0, Reed, lf, 3 1 1 0, Haniger, rf, 3 0 0 1, Berberet, c, 3 0 0 0, Sermo, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Garza, 1b, 2 0 0 0, Rodriguez, 2b, 2 0 2 0, McFarland, dh, 2 0 0 0, Arcia, ss, 2 0 0 0, Lopez, p, 0 0 0 0, Gibbard, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 23 1 4 1.

KERNELS (9): Buxton, cf, 4 1 3 2, Grimes, dh, 2 1 1 1, Polanco, 2b, 4 1 2 2, Hicks, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Walker, rf, 3 2 1 1, Harrison, 3b, 3 1 1 2, Goodrum, ss, 1 1 0 0, Arias, c, 2 1 0 1, Jimenez, lf, 2 1 0 0, Gruver, p, 0 0 0 0, Atherton, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 25 9 9 9.

Wisconsin 000 000 1 - 1 4 2

Kernels 800 010 x - 9 9 0

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Lopez, Gibbard (1) and Berberet. Gruver, Atherton (5) and Arias. W - Atherton (1-0). L - Lopez (0-2). 2B - Polanco (3), Buxton (2). 3B - Reed (2). HR - Harrison (2). SF - Grimes. CS - Sermo (1). E - Sermo 2 (3). T - 1:51. A - 611.