

Berrios gets win in Kernels debut

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 22 April 2013 21:22 - Last Updated Monday, 22 April 2013 21:26



BURLINGTON - A lot of 18-year-old guys are trying to find a date for the senior prom these days or worrying about how to pay for college next year.

Not Jose Berrios.

He's already got \$1.55 million from the Minnesota Twins and he's pitching in the Class A Midwest League for the Cedar Rapids Kernels. And he can probably get all the dates he wants.

Berrios pitched five innings in his debut for the Kernels Monday night and got the victory in an 8-4 triumph over the Burlington Bees before 727 fans at Community Field.

Berrios, a supplemental first-round pick in 2012 from Puerto Rico, had a little bit of a rocky start in the first two innings when he allowed two runs and five hits, but he found the groove after that and got stronger as the game went along.

"Very good, first time throwing," he said, searching for the right words in English. "The first two innings, a little bit up. Got down some after that."

Cedar Rapids Manager Jake Mauer saw it the same way.

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"I think he was a little excited, early. The ball was up," said Mauer. "He's a command guy, and his command wasn't the best. He was up a little bit, but I thought he settled in pretty good."

Berrios allowed seven hits, struck out five batters and walked two. Both of the runs against him were earned. He retired for the night after throwing 77 pitches as he works to strengthen his arm.

Berrios pitched for Puerto Rico in the World Baseball Classic, where he famously struck out New York Yankees star Robinson Cano, but he did not get to pitch a lot in the WBC and spent extra time in extended spring training before joining the Kernels last week.

Mauer liked what he saw of Berrios, who won't turn 19 until May 27 and is at least two years younger than all the other pitchers on the team.

"A young guy, 18 years old," said Mauer. "He kind of gathered himself a little bit and the fourth/fifth innings were pretty good."

Mauer liked the way Berrios battled and showed maturity on the mound.

"Without a doubt," he said. "He's a pitcher. He didn't have his best stuff. But he competed, got through five innings and got himself a win. Pretty good."

Berrios flashed a 93 mph fastball to the scouts who gathered behind home plate. He also showed a knee-buckling curveball that got two Bees looking helplessly at strike three.

"He's got a good curveball. He punched a few guys out with it," Mauer noted. "That's his game. He's got 'plus' velocity and he's got a big-time curveball."

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Berrios had his own cheering section Monday night at Community Field with members of the Southeastern Community College baseball team in the box seats next to the Kernels dugout.

"Yes, my friends from Puerto Rico," he said. "We know each other. It was great."

The Kernels (12-5) collected six extra-base hits and took an 8-3 lead into the bottom of the ninth inning. The Bees scored a run against Kernels reliever Chris Mazza and loaded the bases with nobody out, but Tim Atherton came in from the bullpen and struck out three straight batters to preserve the victory.

J.D. Williams went 3-for-3 with two doubles and a two-run homer for Cedar Rapids in the ninth spot in the batting order. Adam Walker went 2-for-4 with a triple and long solo homer in the ninth inning in the No.5 spot.

"Walker and Williams had a pretty good night. That's nice to see," said Mauer. "When you extend the lineup you've got a chance to win some ballgames."

The Kernels will be aiming for their fourth straight victory when they face Burlington Tuesday at 11:30 a.m. in the final game of the three-game series.

KERNELS (8): Buxton, cf, 4 1 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 5 0 1 0, Polanco, 2b, 4 0 0 0, Leachman, 1b, 4 1 0 0, Walker, rf, 4 2 2 2, Harrison, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Pimentel, dh, 4 0 0 0, Rodriguez, c, 3 2 1 0, Williams, lf, 3 2 3 3. Totals 35 8 8 5.

BURLINGTON (4): K.Johnson, rf, 3 2 2 0, Toribio, 2b, 5 0 3 1, S.Johnson, dh, 2 0 0 1, Hinkle, 1b, 5 0 2 1, Bemboom, c, 4 0 0 0, Clarke, cf, 5 1 1 0, Bolaski, 3b, 5 0 2 0, Gowens, lf, 2 1 1 1, Soto, ss, 4 0 1 0. Totals 35 4 12 4.

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Kernels 101 200 202 - 8 8 0

Burlington 110 000 011 - 4 12 2

Berrios, Soliman (6), Mazza (8), Atherton (9) and Rodriguez. Scoggins, Boyd (4), Efferson (8), Santos (9) and Bemboom. W - Berrios (1-0). L - Boyd (0-2). S - Atherton (1). 2B - Goodrum (5), Williams 2 (3), Rodriguez (2), Hinkle (4). 3B - Walker (1). HR - Williams (2), Walker (2). SB - Buxton (7), Williams (6), K.Johnson (2 (12). E - Toribio (2), Bolaski (4). T - 2:42. A - 727.