

Kernels have appetites for victory

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 30 June 2013 00:05 - Last Updated Sunday, 30 June 2013 00:32



The Cedar Rapids Kernels are hungry for another victory.

In fact, they can taste it.

The Kernels notched their ninth straight win Saturday night, 2-1, when Adam Brett Walker raced home with the winning run on a wild pitch in the bottom of the 10th inning against Peoria.

If the Kernels defeat the Chiefs again Sunday afternoon, the entire team will be treated to a grand feast at the Ox Yoke restaurant in the Amanas in honor of the team's 10th win a row.

That's the standing offer from management: Win 10 straight and chow down.

The Kernels can taste that sumptuous food now. And make no mistake, they know what's at stake (or is it steak?).

"They all do in there," said Kernels skipper Jake Mauer. "The first four guys came in and said, 'One more.' I said, 'I have nothing to do with it.' I try to stay out of their way."

Tim Atherton, the Cedar Rapids pitcher from Australia, will get the ball Sunday with the free meal hanging in the balance. "I guess the boys are pretty hungry," he said with a smile.

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The Kernels were treated to a big meal at the Ox Yoke when they arrived in Cedar Rapids in early April. Many of those guys are still on the club and want to go back.

"It was really good," said Atherton. "It will be good to go out there again. I'm looking forward to it."



Brett Lee pitched a brilliant game Saturday but ended up with a no-decision. He took a 1-0 lead into the eighth inning, but a double-play grounder squirted through the legs of shortstop Jorge Polanco to let Peoria tie the game. Lee squirted out of trouble before calling it a night.

"You just have to get the next one. It's damage control," he said, shrugging off the ill-timed error. "Noone else scored."

Nobody blamed Polanco, who has been a main cog in the Kernels' machine this season. Cedar Rapids has the best overall record in the Midwest League at 49-28, with Polanco playing a starring role.

"He's helped out a lot," said Lee. "You just have to pick him up, have the other players on the team pick him up and keep going."

Polanco's error cost Lee a potential victory, but the 6-foot-4 lefty from Florida didn't seem too worried about it. "It's OK," he said. "We got a win. It's no big deal."

Lee scattered four hits in eight innings. He struck out nine batters and did not walk anyone in

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his best outing of the year. Lee and catcher Michael Quesada were on the same page all night with his fastball, slider and changeup.



"It felt really good," said Lee. "I had faith in 'Q'. He helped me get the job done. My fastball was really great tonight."

Walker led off the bottom of the 10th with a single to left, then stole second base to put himself in scoring position with nobody out. Walker is a big man at 6-foot-4 and 230 pounds, but he can move. It was his seventh stolen base and one of the biggest of the year.

Max Kepler walked to put runners on first and second with nobody out. Tyler Grimes bunted them to second and third, even though Mauer had removed the bunt sign when he saw the Chiefs had their infielders moving all over the place.

"He bunted a bullet, too," said Mauer. "Thank god nobody caught it. That might have been a triple play."

Quesada came up with runners at second and third and one out. The Chiefs brought their infield in for a play at the plate, putting the pressure on Quesada. He worked the count to 2-and-2 when Peoria relief pitcher Zach Russell threw a fastball that eluded catcher Gerwuins Velazco.

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Walker raced for the plate and beat Velazco's throw to Russell, who was covering home. Walker did not think it would be a close play, but it was.

"It kind of bounced off the ball and it came back," he said. "I'm glad I got in there."

Walker has won games for the Kernels this season with his big bat. This time he won a game with his strong legs.

"I think I can run a little bit," he said. "I'm just trying to make plays and help the team win."

A crowd of 3,533 fans enjoyed the victory on fireworks night at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Caleb Brewer (1-1) pitched two scoreless innings for the victory. He struck out three batters, giving the Kernels pitchers 12 strikeouts and no walks in 10 innings.

Cedar Rapids and Peoria (42-34) meet Sunday at 2:05 p.m. with the trip to the Ox Yoke on the line. The Kernels won nine straight games in April and are hungry for No.10 this time.

PEORIA (1): Valera, ss, 5 0 1 0, Vargas, dh, 5 0 0 0, Wilson, 2b, 4 0 0 0, Walton, lf, 4 0 0 0, Wisdom, 3b, 4 0 3 0, Schaffer, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Tilson, cf, 4 0 0 0, Martini, rf, 4 1 1 0, Velazco, c, 4 0 1 0. Totals 38 1 7 0.

KERNELS (2): Williams, lf, 0 0 0 0, Pineda, pr/lf, 4 0 1 0, Polanco, ss, 5 0 1 0, Harrison, 3b, 5 0 1 0, Hicks, 1b, 5 0 0 0, Walker, rf, 3 2 2 0, Kepler, cf, 4 0 1 1, Grimes, dh, 3 0 0 0, Quesada, c, 4 0 1 0, Licon, 2b, 4 0 1 0. Totals 37 2 8 1.

Peoria 000 000 010 0 - 1 7 3

Kernels 000 100 000 1 - 2 8 3

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Hernandez, Lee (9), Russell (10) and Velazco. Lee, Brewer (9) and Quesada. W - Brewer (1-1). L - Lee (2-1). 2B - Walker (17), Kepler (5). SB - Walker (7). T - 3:05. A - 3,533.