

Kepler in right spot for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Saturday, 27 July 2013 21:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 28 July 2013 10:44



Max Kepler spends most of his time patrolling the outfield for the Cedar Rapids Kernels, but Saturday night he took a turn at first base.

Regardless of the position, Kepler brought his “A” game and led the Kernels to a come-from-behind 5-2 win over the Clinton LumberKings in front of a packed house of 5,161 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Kepler made a diving stop in each of the first two innings to preserve a scoreless game and hit a solo home run to move the Kernels to within a 2-1 score in the fifth inning. He added another run-saving, diving snag in the seventh frame and topped off his night with an RBI single in the Kernels’ eighth.

“All I was trying to do was knock it down at first,” Kepler said after the game. “I like to go for it. Things work out for you sometimes.”

Second baseman Jorge Polanco and shortstop Niko Goodrum turned an acrobatic double play to end the Clinton sixth inning, as well, to end a LumberKing scoring threat.

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer expressed his appreciation for the defensive performance of his infielders after the game.

“Polanco and Goodrum turned a big double play and Kepler was flying all over the place. Sometimes you need that,” he said.

The LumberKings did capitalize on one Kernels defensive lapse to score a run in the third inning and plated another run on a sacrifice fly in the fourth to take a 2-0 lead before Kepler's bomb in the fifth.

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While Kepler's fifth inning home run was the Kernels' first hit of the game, the bats woke up after that.

Two hits in the sixth inning failed to result in any runs, but the home team broke through for two runs in the seventh inning to take a 3-2 lead and added two more insurance runs in the eighth.

Tyler Grimes had the big hit in the seventh with a double to left field, driving in Kepler to tie the game. Grimes then scored on a single by Jeremias Pineda.

Mike Gonzales got things going in the eighth inning with a single and scored on an Adam Brett Walker double off the left-field wall. Walker, in turn, scored on Kepler's RBI single to center field to give the Kernels their final margin of victory.

Kernels starting pitcher Tim Atherton breezed through two perfect innings to start the game, striking out four Clinton batters and benefiting from Kepler's defense at first base. The Cedar Rapids righthander worked six innings, surrendering just those two early runs, while striking out eight Clinton batters.

"(Atherton) worked in and out of trouble, he didn't blow up," Mauer said afterward. "Timmy deserved to win that game."

Hudson Boyd, who contributed two hitless innings of relief, earned credit for the win and Brian Gilbert worked a perfect ninth inning for his first save as a Kernel.

The Kernels host Clinton again on Sunday afternoon at Perfect Game Field. Game time is 2:05.

CLINTON (2): Marte, ss, 4 0 1 0, McGruder, dh, 2 0 0 0, Pizzano, lf, 4 0 1 0, Peterson, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Littlewood, c, 3 1 1 0, Morales, rf, 4 0 1 0, Ard, 1b, 2 1 1 1, Lopes, 2b, 3 0 0 0, Zorrilla, cf, 4

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0 1 0. Totals 30 2 6 1.

KERNELS (5): Murphy, cf, 4 0 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 4 0 0 0, Polanco, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Gonzales, dh, 4 1 1 0, Walker, rf, 4 1 1 1, Kepler, 1b, 3 2 2 2, Harrison, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Grimes, c, 4 1 1 1, Pineda, lf, 3 0 1 1. Totals 32 5 8 5.

Clinton 001 100 000 - 2 6 2

Kernels 000 010 22x - 5 8 1

Kaalekahi, Holovach (7) and Littlewood. Atherton, Boyd (7), Gilbert (9) and Grimes. W-Boyd (3-4). L-Kaalekahi (4-3). Sv-Gilbert (1). 2B-Morales (2), Grimes (7), Walker (23). HR-Kepler (5). SB-McGruder (1), Goodrum (12), Pineda (12). S-Lopes. SF-Ard. E-Marte (18), Kepler (5). T-2:32. A-5,161.