

Kernels unbeaten when Mauer tossed

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 04 August 2013 18:44 - Last Updated Sunday, 04 August 2013 19:18



Jake Mauer has done an excellent job as the manager of the Cedar Rapids Kernels this season, but maybe he should get ejected from games more often.

The Kernels have a 3-and-0 record when he gets tossed.

Mauer was ejected in the fourth inning Sunday for disputing a call by the home-plate umpire and was listening to the game on the radio when it had a happy ending.

Joel Licon hit a game-winning single down the third-base line as the Kernels rallied for two runs in the bottom of the ninth inning and trimmed Quad Cities, 3-2, before 2,447 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The victory kept the Kernels (27-15) ahead of the River Bandits (25-16) in first place the West Division standings for the second half of the Midwest League campaign.

Mauer was ejected after Travis Harrison was called out for interfering with Quad Cities catcher Roberto Pena on a stolen-base attempt by Adam Brett Walker. It was the third out and ended the inning, but Mauer maintained that home-plate umpire Malachi Moore made an incorrect ruling on the play.

Moore claimed Harrison hit Pena with his bat on the back-swing and called Harrison out for interference. According to Mauer, the correct ruling in that situation is to call a strike on the batter, rule a "dead ball" and send the runner back to his base, with nobody called out on the play (unless it was strike 3, which it wasn't).

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"He doesn't know the rule, but what are you going to do?," said Mauer. "The other guy (base umpire Jason Starkovich) didn't know the rule either. It's not interference. Nobody is out. That's not how you call that play."



Mauer talked to Moore about his ruling and eventually got tossed from the game.

"I didn't swear once," said Mauer. "It doesn't come up a lot, but if you're going to call that rule, you better understand what you're calling. I told him I wasn't going to leave until you give me an explanation. Call it the right way."

Mauer finally left and handed the lineup cards to hitting coach Tommy Watkins, who ran the club in Mauer's absence.

Watkins wanted to play the game under protest, based on an incorrect ruling, but was turned down after several conversations with the umpires, who told him he could not protest a judgment call. Watkins said he was protesting an incorrect ruling, not a judgment call, but lost the argument.

"They said we couldn't protest, and I didn't understand why," said Watkins.

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It looked like it was going to be a long, sad day for the Kernels as they continued to have problems on offense. The Kernels had only two hits and trailed, 2-1, heading into the bottom of the ninth inning.

A loss would have lifted Quad Cities ahead of Cedar Rapids into first place in the West Division, so there was a lot at stake.

Niko Goodrum led off the bottom of the ninth with a hard ground ball, but was thrown out for the first out. Jorge Polanco singled to right and the Sunday matinee crowd began to stir. Walker, who leads the Midwest League in home runs and RBIs, lined a single to center field and that's when the Kernels got the break they needed. The ball squirted past Quad Cities center fielder Teoscar Hernandez for a two-base error, allowing Polanco to score the tying run and letting Walker reach third base.

The River Bandits gave Max Kepler an intentional walk, putting runners at first and third with one out, setting up a possible double play to escape the inning. Harrison struck out, leaving the game in the hands of Licon, who had been robbed earlier in the game by Hernandez on a long blast to left-center.



Licon pulled an 0-1 pitch down the third-base line. It took one hop in front of the bag, then bounced over the base and into foul territory. The only question would be "fair" or "foul," and Moore called it fair.

Quad Cities third baseman Brian Blasik strongly disagreed and so did River Bandits Manager Omar Lopez, to no avail. A similar call went against the Kernels earlier in the game, so it

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balanced out, except this was the game-winner.

"I didn't look," said Licon. "I was just looking back at the umpire to see what he was going to call. I was kind of yelling out, 'Fair ball!'"

Still planted in his office, Mauer knew something good had happened before Kernels broadcaster Morgan Hawk could describe the action on KMRY. "I could hear the crowd get excited before Morgan said anything," Mauer said with a smile.

Licon posed for pictures on the field after his first game-winning hit of the season. "My host family was here today, so it was a good way to end the game and celebrate with them," he said. "It was awesome. Very cool."

Mauer, a mild-mannered skipper who rarely raises his voice, was ejected from games at West Michigan May 3 and at Kane County June 3. The Kernels won both of those games with Watkins serving as the interim boss both times, so the hitting coach is now 3-and-0.

"Tommy should be Manager of the Year," joked Minnesota Twins General Manager Terry Ryan, in town for the series against Quad Cities.

"I won't take credit for the first one," Watkins responded, "because it was the ninth inning with two outs."

Cedar Rapids and Quad Cities will meet again Monday night and Tuesday night, with both games at 6:35.

Mark Appel, the No.1 overall pick in the June 2013 draft, is scheduled to pitch for the River Bandits on Tuesday.

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QUAD CITIES (2): Hernandez, cf, 4 1 1 0, Vasquez, lf, 5 1 2 0, Correa, ss, 5 0 3 1, Gulbransen, dh, 2 0 0 0, Borchering, 1b, 2 0 0 1, Pena, c, 4 0 0 0, Scott, rf, 4 0 1 0, Blasik, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Elkins, 2b, 3 0 1 0. Totals 33 2 9 2.

KERNELS (3): Murphy, cf, 4 1 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 3 0 0 0, Polanco, 2b, 4 1 1 0, Walker, rf, 3 1 1 1, Kepler, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Harrison, dh, 3 0 0 0, Licon, 3b, 4 0 1 1, Altobelli, c, 3 0 1 0, Pineda, lf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 30 3 5 2.

Quad Cities 100 000 001 - 2 9 2

Kernels 100 000 002 - 3 5 1

Holmes, Minor (7), Minaya (9) and Pena. Berrios, Bixler (7), Boer (8) and Altobelli. W - Boer (1-0). L - Minaya (1-5). 2B - Scott (12), Hernandez (19). 3B - Murphy (1). SB - Scott (24), Elkins (16). E - Blasik, Hernandez, Berrios. T - 2:35. A - 2,447.