

Kernels enjoy laughter (except Kepler)

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 25 August 2013 19:06 - Last Updated Sunday, 25 August 2013 19:22



A thoughtful emergency room doctor at St. Luke's Hospital may have saved Max Kepler's season for the Cedar Rapids Kernels Sunday afternoon.

Kepler suffered a severe gash on the middle finger of his right hand in a freak accident before the Kernels' 9-1 victory against Peoria and was taken to St. Luke's for treatment. A teammate was taking swings in the indoor batting cage when the bat slipped out of his hands and struck Kepler, who was standing outside the net.

The doctor originally planned to close the gash with five stitches, but decided to use 11 tightly spaced stitches instead when he learned Kepler is a professional baseball player. The extra stitches could make it easier for Kepler to play again this season, because they are less likely to pop loose during physical activity.

The stitches will not be removed by a doctor for 10 to 14 days, but the Midwest League playoffs begin Sept. 4 and Kepler is determined to play again. He's listed as day-to-day and would like to play Monday night when the Kernels host Peoria.

"We'll see tomorrow," said Kepler. "I'll move it around and see if I can function with it. I hate being out."

The net on the indoor batting cage protects people on the outside from being hit by batted balls and other objects. Somehow, the flying bat poked through the net and struck Kepler.

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