

## Kernels roll into playoffs with 88th win

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 02 September 2013 23:16 -

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CLINTON - The Cedar Rapids Kernels don't get too wrapped up in statistics and numbers, but something caught their eye Monday.

The Kernels belted Clinton, 15-6, to finish the regular season in the Midwest League with 88 victories and only 50 losses.

The special number is 88, which ties for the second-most in club history and is the most victories since the 1990 Cedar Rapids Reds went 88-46.

The Cedar Rapids Bunnies set the franchise record in 1922 when they posted a 92-37 mark and won the Mississippi Valley title. These Kernels are next in line with 88 wins, a full 91 years later.

"Wow. That's tremendous," pitcher Brett Lee said. "Too bad we didn't catch them."

The Kernels open the Midwest League playoffs Wednesday at Quad Cities, but playoff victories don't count in the season total. But even so, the 88 victories are the most in 23 years and equals the most wins since Cedar Rapids joined the Midwest League in 1962.

"That's pretty cool," said Adam Brett Walker, who hit his first home run in three weeks and drove in three runs. "We have a good ballclub. Guys coming in and leaving, but overall we had a pretty good ballclub. It's been a lot of fun."

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Cedar Rapids compiled the best record in the Midwest League this season with its 88-50 mark. Bowling Green finished six games back in the overall standings at 82-56. Quad Cities was another game back at 81-57.

The Kernels went 40-28 for the first half of the Midwest League campaign, then went 48-22 in the second half despite seeing league MVP Byron Buxton and other top players promoted. The Kernels used 48 players this season, nearly two full teams.

"Just because a guy went up, it doesn't mean the team is going to be worse," said Lee, who will pitch Game 1 in the playoffs. "Someone has to fill that spot, step up and take charge.

"We all play pretty well together. When someone is hot, everyone is hot. It's good chemistry," said Lee. "We all love to help each other out. We push each other."

The Kernels were certainly hot Monday. They scored their most runs since June 1 and collected 14 hits in their final tuneup before the playoffs.

Walker hit a 425-foot rocket to center field for a solo homer in the second inning to give the Kernels a 1-0 lead. He finished the regular season with 27 homers and 109 RBIs, the best in the league in both departments by wide margins.

Jonathan Murphy hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning and finished with four RBIs. Murphy, Jorge Polanco, Mike Gonzales, Walker, Tyler Grimes and Michael Quesada all had two hits as the Kernels pounded the baseball.

Polanco, an all-star second baseman, made a brilliant defensive play in the fifth inning when he roamed far behind second base for a ground ball, spun and got his man at first base with a strong one-hop throw from short center field.

The very next batter hit a scorcher to right-center, but Walker - an all-star right fielder - raced

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over and made a diving grab for two highlight plays in a row.

"It was a fun win today," said Mauer.

Mauer was not happy with his club Sunday in a sluggish 3-1 loss to Clinton, but that changed 24 hours later following a heart-to-heart talk in the clubhouse.

"I was happy with the way that we came out today," he said. "We had a little different feel. We had pretty good energy."

Mauer thinks his club is ready for the playoffs. Everybody is healthy again, the pitching has been strong during the second half of the season and the hitting came alive Monday.

"You never want to peak too soon," he said. "You want to be full bore going into the playoffs. We got healthy - as healthy as we could be, I guess. We'll see what happens."

Mauer is proud of what the Kernels have accomplished this season.

"We've had a nice year. We've done very well," he said. "We're looking forward to going over to Quad Cities and playing a good game and see what happens."

"We've had an excellent regular season, without a doubt. We out-slugged teams the first half, and really pitched well and played good defense the second half. Those guys in there have done an outstanding job."

The Quad Cities River Bandits won the season series from the Kernels, 10-6, and should be a formidable opponent in the best-of-3 playoffs. The second and third games (if necessary) will be played in Cedar Rapids on Thursday and Friday.

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"I feel like we're strong enough to win it. The whole thing," said Lee.

Eight teams made the Midwest League playoffs. The semifinals in the Western Division feature Cedar Rapids (88-50) against Quad Cities (81-57) and Beloit (77-62) against Clinton (67-72). The semifinals in the Eastern Division feature South Bend (81-58) against Great Lakes (67-72) and Fort Wayne (72-67) against Bowling Green (82-56).

The divisional finals are scheduled for Sept. 7-8-9 (best-of-3) and the league championship is scheduled for Sept. 11-12-14-15-16 (best-of-5).

The Kernels' game at Davenport Wednesday is scheduled for 7 p.m. The games in Cedar Rapids are set for 6:35 Thursday and Friday.

KERNELS (15): Murphy, cf, 5 2 2 4, Goodrum, ss, 5 1 1 0, Polanco, 2b, 5 1 2 1, Kepler, lf, 5 1 1 1, Gonzales, 1b, 4 2 2 1, Walker, rf, 4 2 2 3, Harrison, 3b, 4 1 0 0, Grimes, dh, 4 3 2 1, Quesada, c, 2 2 2 2. Totals 38 15 14 13.

CLINTON (6): Hebert, 2b, 3 0 0 0, McGruder, 2b, 2 0 2 0, Littlewood, dh, 5 0 0 0, Zorilla, cf, 5 1 2 0, Ard, 1b, 3 2 2 0, Guerrero, rf, 4 2 2 4, Shank, 3b, 2 1 1 2, Morales, lf, 3 0 0 0, Peguero, ss, 3 0 0 0, Caballero, ss, 1 0 0 0, Torres, c, 4 0 2 0. Totals 35 6 11 6.

Kernels 010 270 041 - 15 14 0  
Clinton 000 200 040 - 6 11 3

Sulbaran, Boyd (6), Montanez (7), Gallant (7), Bixler (8), Gilbert (9) and Quesada. Ewing, Ogando (5), Vargas (8), Mieses (9) and Torres. W - Sulbaran (9-4). L - Ewing (1-2). 2B - Goodrum (22), Polanco (32), Grimes (11), Quesada (13). 3B - Guerrero (3). HR - Walker (27), Murphy (2), Guerrero (4), Shank (1). SB - Shank (1). E - Shank (2), Zorilla (6). T - 2:54. A - 1,030.