

## Kernels drop opener, must win Thursday

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 04 September 2013 21:55 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 September 2013 22:41

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DAVENPORT — The Cedar Rapids Kernels compiled the best record in the Midwest League this year, but if they don't win Thursday night their season will be over.

The Kernels lost to the Quad Cities River Bandits, 2-1, Wednesday night before 2,417 fans at Modern Woodmen Park in Davenport in the opening round of the playoffs.

This is a best-of-3 series, so the Kernels will face a "must-win" predicament when they meet the River Bandits on Thursday at 6:35 p.m. at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids.

"We're going home. We'll have a packed house, I'm sure," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer. "The crowd will be fired up. And hopefully these boys will be fired up. We'll see what we get."

Cedar Rapids has to win Thursday night and again Friday night at home to reach the semifinals of the MWL playoffs.

"I definitely feel like we can go home and win two," said Kernels right fielder Adam Brett Walker, the league's home run and RBI king. "We're still a good ballclub. Just go back home, get some life, get some energy and just try to convert on the opportunities we're given."

The Kernels collected only four hits and went through an 0-for-20 stretch at one point Wednesday. They left the bases loaded after scoring their only run in the second inning and

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wasted a chance in the fifth inning when they had two runners on base with one out, but nobody delivered a clutch hit.

The game was tied, 1-1, heading into the bottom of the eighth inning. Teoscar Hernandez began the frame with a single to left field for the River Bandits and all-star shortstop Carlos Correa lined a hit-and-run single to right field to put runners at first and third with nobody out against Kernels relief pitcher Madison Boer.

Mauer elected to play his middle infielders at double-play depth instead of playing the infield in to choke off the runner at the plate. The Kernels got their double play on a high chopper by Danry Vasquez to shortstop Niko Goodrum, but Hernandez scored to give Quad Cities a 2-1 lead.



"Play it in? Yeah, we thought about that. One hundred percent," said Mauer. "Thinking back on it, I think we probably should have walked him (Vasquez). Unfortunately, a double play ground ball didn't help us much, but if we're going to score one run we're not going to win anyway.

"If we play the infield in, I think that ball goes through to the outfield and it's first-and-third again. Niko made a nice play to get it."

The Kernels did not have a prayer against Quad Cities closer Andrew Walter in the top of the ninth inning. Walter struck out Mike Gonzales, Travis Harrison and Michael Quesada to end the game.

The River Bandits have been a nemesis for Cedar Rapids all season and hold an 11-6 edge in the series. Now the Kernels have to turn things around and beat the Bandits in two straight

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games.

"There's definitely pressure to win tomorrow," said Walker. "Personally we all want to win the championship, but you have to get past the first series. We wanted to come here and get a good start, but now we know we have to go home and win two.

"It's definitely a little more pressure, but we just have to make sure we play our game," he said. "When we play our game we're pretty successful."

Correa, the No.1 overall pick in the 2012 draft, went 3-for-4 for the Bandits and accounted for half of their six hits.

"I hope Correa misses the bus tomorrow," joked Mauer. "I hope he doesn't get on the bus, to be honest with you. We might have a chance.

"He's killed us. We know it, they know it. We just can't solve him, for whatever reason. He's a great player, no doubt about it."

There won't be any big speeches before Thursday's game, Mauer said.

"No. They just have to go play," he remarked. "We had a lot of guys that were tight today. We didn't perform the way that we can, whether it's the playoffs or butterflies. We have to rebound and come back see what we get."

Cedar Rapids scored its run in the second inning on an infield single by Walker and an RBI double to left-center by Gonzales. Brett Lee allowed one run in five innings and Alex Muren pitched two scoreless innings for the Kernels. Boer allowed the go-ahead run in the eighth and was the losing pitcher.

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Tim Shibuya (4-0, 0.96 ERA) is scheduled to pitch for Cedar Rapids on Thursday night against Joe Bircher (3-3, 4.15). Shibuya pitched a complete-game shutout in his last appearance and was named the Midwest League Pitcher of the Week.

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

QUAD CITIES (2): Kemp, 2b, 3 0 0 0, Hernandez, cf, 4 1 1 0, Correa, ss, 4 1 3 0, Vasquez, lf, 3 0 0 0, Borchering, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Ruiz, 3b, 2 0 2 1, Pena, c, 3 0 0 0, Scott, rf, 3 0 0 0, Blasik, dh, 2 0 0 0. Totals 28 2 6 1.

Kernels      010 000 000 - 1 4 1

Quad Cities    000 100 01x - 2 6 1

Lee, Muren (6), Boer (8) and Quesada. Devenski, Lambson (6), Walter (8) and Pena. W - Walter (1-0). L - Boer (0-1). 2B - Gonzales. SB - Murphy (1). E - Quesada (1), Ruiz (1). T - 2:26. A - 2,417.