

Kernels have 3 catchers on the job

Written by S.D. Buhr

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Bo Altobelli, Michael Quesada and Mitch Garver have several things in common. They are similar in age and each played some college baseball before starting their professional careers with the Minnesota Twins organization.

In addition, each of the three hails from areas of the country that you would assume allows baseball to be played in more moderate weather than what welcomed them to Cedar Rapids last week. Altobelli is from Texas, Quesada went to school in California and Garver is from New Mexico.

They were asked Sunday if they had any prior experience playing ball in conditions comparable to what they faced in their first week of Midwest League play this season.

ALTOBELLI: It's a little different, especially coming from Florida (for spring training) up here, so that's the major change. But it does get cold in Texas. We have played games in sleet and snow before, so I'm a little bit used to it. Of course, you prefer the Florida weather, which hopefully will come here soon.

QUESADA: Being from California, this is as cold as I've had to play in, but it's a learning experience. You go up and down the (organizational) ladder, there's cold places. Minnesota, for example. You're not going to complain when you're up there, are you? You might as well get used to it
now.

We're not the only ones who are cold, everyone else is cold, too. So it's something you've got to work through it and experiment with ways to stay warm.

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GARVER: It's very similar (in New Mexico). We get a lot of wind. We don't get a lot of moisture. There's no snow and sleet and rain, but when it does rain, there's always going to be wind to accompany it. So the cold is familiar, but you can never really get used to it. You're always going to be playing in cold, so the first few months of the season, there's an adjustment.

METRO SPORTS REPORT: A year ago, Garver was finishing up his college career at New Mexico. He was asked what differences he's noticed as he enters his first year of full season professional baseball.

GARVER: It's just different doing this every day. You have to learn how to maintain your body and how you prepare each day is based off how you feel. If you're feeling a little down one day, you might have to do something a little bit extra to get going.

It's different from college because really baseball is the only thing you have to worry about. You have to worry about keeping your body in shape, showing up to the field on time, doing what you've got to do to prepare.

Whereas in college, you had to take care of your social life, your emotional life, your school work and other factors that go into it. It's a more independent way of living and the competition obviously is better.

METRO SPORTS REPORT: So does that mean you have no social life or anything like that when you're playing professional baseball?

GARVER: You've really got to balance things. In pro baseball, your social life is within the team. It's kind of who you hang out with 24/7.

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METRO SPORTS REPORT: Both Quesada and Altobelli spent time in Cedar Rapids a season ago. They were asked whether they were adjusting their approaches this year as they return to open the season with the Kernels, but clearly hope to be getting considered for possible promotions to the next level.



QUESADA: My adjustment is not worrying about it. I think I worried too much last year, putting pressure on myself with what to do. It's a marathon, like Mitch said, it's every day. I think I played pitch by pitch every day like it was my last pitch and I think you have to pace yourself a little bit.

That's the adjustment I'm making this year is pacing myself throughout the year. I understand it's 140-some odd games, plus spring training. I'm treating my body a little differently, adjusting that way. That's really the difference that I feel. After my first full season, I caught a lot last year and this year I'm trying to treat it as a marathon and not a sprint.

ALTOBELLI: Similar to what they said, you can't worry about it because the moment you think you've got it figured out, you'll find out you've got no idea what's going on as far as what they think you're going to do and what you think yourself you're going to do.

So you can't think about it. You've just got to go out there and play. Play how you want to play and the rest will take care of itself. If the team wins, everyone's going to be happy and, more likely, people will move up if you win. So just focus on winning and the rest will take care of itself.

METRO SPORTS REPORT: The Kernels' roster includes 13 pitchers, leaving room for just 12 position players. Three of those spots are held by these catchers. That means Kernels Manager Jake Mauer has to ration out innings behind the plate among the three backstops. They were asked how it works out, splitting time among the three of them.

ALTOBELLI: Every year of pro ball, we've had three catchers where I'm at, so it's nothing new to me. But being here, we know Jake's going to help us out the best that he can, DH-ing us,

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maybe getting time at first base, who knows.

You've got to try and stay focused, take some extra BP if you need it. At least we're catching bullpens if we're not playing, so the ball's still coming at us. So we're still getting that feel down. It's definitely difficult, but Jake does a good job of getting us in there and trying to keep us in a routine, so credit to him for keeping us up to date with what's going on.

QUESADA: All of that's out of our control. It's up to Jake and the organization. It's not anything we have any power over. All we can do is go out and play the best we can. If they're going to play us more, then they do. Jake, as Bo said, does a really good job of finding ways to get us in there somehow. He's not going to shortchange us.

METRO SPORTS REPORT: Garver, on the other hand, was catching almost every game during his college season a year ago.

GARVER: Yeah, that's right. It's a long season. It's longer than most people might think. It's my first full season, so I guess I probably don't have a feel for it like these guys do, but 140 games is a long time and if you're really only using one or two catchers, it's going to break down toward the end of the year.

I think having three guys is going to be helpful. You can stay fresh. You can get some days off, get some at-bats at some different positions where you don't normally play. It teaches you how to be a good baseball player. If you're only playing one position, you're not going to be as baseball savvy as you are if you can play multiple positions. They like to see how you can do at different positions and I think that's a cool thing.