

Kernels rally for 6th win in row

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 14 April 2014 21:53 - Last Updated Monday, 14 April 2014 22:07



Mitch Garver was the designated hitter for the Cedar Rapids Kernels on Monday night, so he got to stay a little warmer than his teammates who had to play in the field on a frigid evening at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Garver did everyone a favor in the bottom of the ninth, however, when his squib single with the bases loaded gave the Kernels their sixth straight victory with a 5-4 verdict over South Bend.

Nobody wanted to see extra innings with the temperature in the low 30s and the wind whipping from left to right. Thanks to Garver, the Kernels got out of the cold and into the heated clubhouse for a hearty meal.

It was nasty-cold on the field and for the announced crowd of 2,021, many of whom took advantage of special \$1 tickets.

"That's a new low for me. That's the coldest it's been," said Garver. "I've seen a lot in Albuquerque (his hometown) and places I've played, but that's a new low."

The game last 3 hours and 7 minutes, but thanks to Garver and his teammates it did not last a minute longer.

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The Kernels trailed 4-2 heading into the bottom of the ninth inning, but South Bend closer Daniel Gibson had trouble throwing strikes and the home team took advantage.

Joel Licon led off with a walk and pinch-hitter Logan Wade lined a single to right-center. Jeremias Pineda twice failed to put down a sacrifice bunt and then lined to center field for the first out.



Jason Kanzler, the leadoff batter in the lineup, drove in Licon with a single to right field, making it 4-3. Tanner Vavra singled to right to load the bases with one out.

Gibson walked Zack Larson to force in Wade with the tying run and the sacks remained loaded. Gibson went to a 3-2 count on Garver, who hit a chopper back toward the mound. Gibson got his glove on it and deflected the ball away from the rest of the infielders as Kanzler raced home with the winning run.

It was a squib single, but it counted.

The Kernels were not billed as a big-hitting ballclub coming into the season, but they ranked fifth out of 16 teams in the Midwest League in hitting when the game began and they collected 11 more safeties Monday night. They've had several come-from-behind victories and have the best record in the league at 8-3.

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"I think everyone is kind of finding their role and we're doing things right," said Garver, who went 3-for-4 with a triple and raised his batting average to .324. "Our pitchers are throwing a lot of strikes. We're just doing what we need to do."

Garver thinks there's a good attitude on the club.

"If you put too much pressure on yourself, things are not going to turn out," he said. "We've got a really loose mentality when we're in the dugout. It's not over until we're cleaning off our shoes."

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer liked the way his club kept battling, despite the bad weather and early 3-0 deficit.

"We kept battling, we kept battling. A little chilly," he said with a grin. "We're proud of the boys. They really don't give up. It could have been pretty easy just to roll over. We kept scratching."

Aaron Slegers gave up four runs (three earned) in five innings as the Kernels' starting pitcher. Brandon Bixler pitched two strong innings in relief, then Hudson Boyd (2-0) pitched two more strong innings in the eighth and ninth and got the win.

South Bend collected only four hits in the game, all against Slegers.

The Kernels and South Bend (4-7) meet again Tuesday night at 6:35.

SOUTH BEND (4): Parr, ss/lf, 4 0 0 0, Westbrook, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Trahan, lf/rf, 4 0 0 0, Palka, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Munoz, 3b, 3 2 1 0, Perez, c, 3 1 0 0, Bray, rf, 0 0 0 0, Velazquez, ph/ss, 2 1 1 1, Esquerria, dh, 3 0 2, Almadova, cf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 30 4 4 3.

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KERNELS (5): Kanzler, cf, 5 1 1 1, Vavra, 2b, 5 1 2 0, Larson, rf, 4 0 0 1, Garver, dh, 4 1 3 1, Haar, 1b, 3 0 3 1, Quesada, c, 4 0 1 1, Licon, 3b, 3 1 0 0, Vielma, ss, 1 0 0 0, Wade, ph, 1 1 1 0, Pineda, lf, 4 0 0 0.

Totals 34 5 11 5.

South Bend 030 100 000 - 4 4 1

Kernels 010 001 003 - 5 11 1

Blair, Schepel (6), Bradley (8), Gibson (9) and Perez. Slegers, Bixler (6), Boyd (8) and Quesada. W - Boyd (2-0). L - Gibson (0-2). 2B - Esquerra (1), Munoz (1), Vavra 93), Haar (2). 3B - Garver (1). SB - Velazquez (2). E - Velazquez (2), Vavra (2). A - 2,021.