

## Mauer says Christensen ready for promotion

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 11 June 2014 21:39 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 June 2014 22:47

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It was a nice human-interest story when Chad Christensen returned home to Cedar Rapids to play for the Kernels this year, but it's turning into much more than that.

Christensen has performed very well for the Kernels and Manager Jake Mauer would not be surprised if he gets promoted to the Fort Myers Miracle in the Florida State League soon.

Christensen belted a key two-run triple and drove in three runs Wednesday night as the Kernels clipped the Quad Cities River Bandits, 5-4, in a Midwest League game before 2,581 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Christensen, 23, is hitting .295 with five homers, 34 RBIs and 17 stolen bases for Cedar Rapids and he's excelled in the field at first base, left field, right field and center field.

"He just always seems to be the right guy in the right spot," said Mauer. "When the situation comes up and we need something, he always delivers."

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The struggling Kernels were clinging to a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the eighth inning when Christensen walloped a two-run triple to deep center field. He then scored on a wild pitch to give Cedar Rapids a 5-1 lead.

Those three runs proved critical when the River Bandits rallied for three runs in the top of the ninth inning.

"Christensen was huge," said Mauer.

There are only four games left in the first half of the Midwest League campaign, with the All-Star break next week. If Christensen duplicates his numbers in the second half of the season, he'd hit nearly .300 with 10 homers, 70 RBIs and 35 stolen bases.

"It's quite possible he won't be here. That would be my guess," Mauer responded. "I'd like to keep him the whole year, but you're starting to get at that point where promotions are going to happen.

"As far as I'm concerned, he's one of only a few guys that I can think can be at that next level now."

Christensen was flattered to hear what Mauer had to say.

"That's very nice," he remarked. "It's not up to me. I'm just playing baseball. But that's very nice to hear.

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"Again, I try not to worry about that too much. The guys with the Twins, they know what they're doing."



Mauer said nothing is imminent with Christensen, but that could change quickly.

"I hope he stays the whole year, selfishly," the skipper said. "He's an older guy. He's doing what we've asked of him here. If he keeps putting up numbers like that and they call and need somebody, he's the first guy I'd say. Absolutely.

"I wouldn't be surprised (by a promotion). Not at all," said Mauer. "He's good in the outfield. He's really good in left and right. And he can play center. He's good at first. That's a valuable guy to have."

Mauer likes the way Christensen has handled playing pro ball in his home town.

"I think he thrives on it a little bit," he said. "He feeds off it. He gets a nice ovation every time he comes up to the plate, as he should."

The Twins took Christensen in the 25th round of the 2013 draft following his all-Big Ten career at the University of Nebraska. He said he enjoys playing in Cedar Rapids with his family at the ballpark on a regular basis.

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"I try not to take it for granted," he said. "It's kind of a rare opportunity that I've been excited about since the day I got drafted by the Twins.

"I'm just trying to have fun with it and take advantage of it as long as I can."

Christensen expected to have a good season with the Kernels.

"I came in here expecting to hit, expecting to play well," he said. "I have confidence in my abilities, as everyone in the clubhouse does. I didn't plan on hitting .240."

The Kernels had lost 25 of their last 35 games heading into Wednesday's contest, but they got four quality innings from 19-year-old Dominican pitcher Fernando Romero and three excellent innings from Brandon Bixler and led 2-1 after seven.

Hudson Boyd pitched a 1-2-3 eighth inning and things looked good for the Kernels when they scored three times in the bottom of the eighth, but Boyd ran into problems in the ninth inning and Todd Van Steensel had to come in to get the final out with the score 5-4 and two runners on base.

Jason Kanzler hit a solo home run for Cedar Rapids in the second inning.

The Kernels (29-37) and River Bandits (34-31) meet again Thursday night at 6:35 at Perfect Game Field.

QUAD CITIES (4): Phillips, cf, 5 0 1 1, Moon, 2b/ss, 5 0 1 0, Holberton, dh, 3 0 0 0, McDonald, 1b, 4 2 2 0, Mitchell, rf, 3 1 1 0, White, 3b, 3 1 1 1, Kemmer, lf, 3 0 1 0, Booth, c, 4 0 0 0, Lindauer, ss, 2 0 0 0. Totals 34 4 8 4.

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KERNELS (5): Vielma, ss, 4 2 2 0, Vavra, 2b, 4 1 2 0, Christensen, lf, 4 1 1 3, Garver, dh, 4 0 3 0, Haar, 3b, 4 0 2 0, Kanzler, cf, 4 1 1 1, Quesada, c, 4 0 0 0, Altobelli, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Murphy, rf, 3 0 2 0. Totals 34 5 13 4.

Quad Cities 010 000 003 - 4 8 1

Kernels 110 000 03x - 5 13 0

Grills, Frias (6) and Booth. Romero, Bixler (5), Boyd (8), Van Steensel (9) and Quesada. W - Bixler (4-3). L - Grills (2-2). S - Van Steensel (6).

2B - Moon (7), Murphy (2). 3B - Christensen (3). HR - Kanzler (6). SB - Vielma (7). E - Kemmer (1). T - 2:36. A - 2,581.