

Kernels limp to 31-39 for first half

Written by Ryan Suchomel

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The Cedar Rapids Kernels ended the first half of their Midwest League season with an all too typical 13-3 loss to Burlington Sunday afternoon before 2,999 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

"I would say so," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said. "Our starter doesn't get through the fourth (inning), we battled back to make it a game, and unfortunately, our bullpen has had a tough go.

"That's how it's been. Our starters' ERA has been pretty high."

The Kernels went 31-39 in their first 70 games, placing sixth in the Western Division of the Midwest League, 14 games behind Kane County.

Pitching has been the problem, and Sunday the Bees blasted 19 hits and plated 13 runs.

"We need our pitching and defense," catcher Michael Quesada said. "We're scrappy on offense. But it's not like last year, when we could rely on a three-run home run.

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"Our pitching needs to be better, for sure, in the second half. That was supposed to be our strong point, and we need to be a whole lot better."

Following the MWL All-Star game Tuesday, Cedar Rapids returns to action Thursday with a four-game set at Kane County, followed by a three-game series at Peoria. The next home game is June 27 versus Clinton.

"We can't get into the playoffs being second-to-last in pitching," Mauer said. "The way we're built, we're going to score 3, 4, 5 runs."

"We're not going to get into slugging matches like today. We've got to pitch way better to have a chance."

Starter Ethan Mildren came into Sunday having won his last two games, but he was hit in the arm by a line drive off the bat of Burlington shortstop Erick Salcedo in the fourth inning and had to come out.

"It just missed my glove," Mildren said. "I'm lucky it got me in the meaty part of the forearm, and not the elbow."

"I took a couple steps for the ball, then it just shot up my arm in pain. That's what happens sometimes in this job."

Mildren (2-4) was scuffling in the fourth inning when he had to leave the game. The Bees ended up putting six runs on the board to go ahead 7-0.

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“When you run the bullpen out in the fourth innings, it's not going to work out very good,” Mauer said.

The Kernels finally got to Burlington starter Victor Alcantara in the sixth inning. Tanner Vavra and Chad Christensen hit singles to open the inning. Bryan Haar had a sacrifice fly and Ryan Walker hit a two-run double to make it 7-3.

“Rarely do we not show any life,” Mauer said. “If we can keep the games closer, it gives us a chance to put something together.”

In the seventh inning the Kernels had two on with two outs when Mitch Garver hit a grounder deep in the hole. Salcedo got him out at first on a bang-bang play, but the replay in the press box showed Garver was safe.



“We had Haar coming up, and he’s been pretty hot,” Mauer said. “It could’ve been a whole different story. But that’s how baseball goes.”

The Bees added four runs in the eighth inning and then capped their big day at the plate with a two-run homer off the right field foul pole by leadoff hitter Kody Eaves.

“We were chipping away,” Quesada said. “But then they had a couple big hits to put it out of reach.”

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Garver finished 2-for-4 to pace the Kernels, who had seven hits offensively.

"I'd like to have seen what would've happened if I had caught the ball or made a play," Mildren said. "But I fell behind today, and that resulted in some hits."

Mauer said all the pitchers were getting behind in the count against the Bees.

"We were not very aggressive in the zone today," he said. "It seemed like we were behind a lot. It is a lot easier to hit when you are 2-0 or 2-1."

Eaves went 4-for-6 for the Bees, including a double, home run and four RBIs. No.9 hitter Salcedo was 4-for-5 with a triple.

Mauer said the team is ready to start the second half of the MWL season at 0-0 on Thursday. He didn't think the roster would change much in the short-term.

"I assume this is what we are going to roll with," he said. "Hopefully, we don't have a dozen injuries like in the first half. I'm looking forward to turning the page."