

## DiMaggio's cousin gives Kernels a boost

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 29 July 2014 21:56 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 July 2014 05:10

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You don't find too many New York Yankees fans out in California, but Kernels relief pitcher Chris Mazza had a good reason for cheering for the Bronx Bombers when he was growing up.

The famous DiMaggio brothers - Joe, Dom and Vince - are his third cousins and he actually met Joe DiMaggio when he was a little kid.

"My great grandmother is a DiMaggio," Mazza related Tuesday night after helping the Kernels trim Burlington, 6-2. "I kind of grew up a Yankees fan my whole life."

Mazza, from Clayton, Calif., tossed 1.1 scoreless innings for Cedar Rapids Tuesday before 2,440 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Joe DiMaggio, the Hall of Famer with the famous 56-game hitting streak, was also from California, and Mazza is proud of his baseball heritage.

"I found out when I was like 7 years old," he said. "Me and my older brother were watching TV and they were doing a special on Joe, and my brother looks at me and goes, 'You know that's our cousin, don't you?' I go, 'WHAT!?'"

"I think I met him one time when I was really little, right before he passed. He was standing over there at a family reunion.

"We have some memorabilia at the house," he said. "We have a lot of stuff. Stuff gets passed down through generations."

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For the record, Mazza does not claim to be related to Marilyn Monroe, who was married to Joe DiMaggio at one time.

"I guess by marriage," he said, "but they were divorced before I was born, so I'm guessing no (on being related to Monroe). I'd have to say no to that one."

Mazza, 24, was primarily a shortstop in high school and Menlo College, a Division III school in California, but he had a strong arm and was used as a closer his senior in college. He was only 5-foot-6 as a senior in high school, but he's grown to 6-foot-4.

"The next thing I know college happened and I was able to throw 94," he said.



The Kernels bullpen has done excellent work during the second half of the Midwest League campaign, helping the Kernels contend for a playoff berth with a 17-9 record in July.

Mazza, Dallas Gallant, Jake Reed, Brandon Bixler, Hudson Boyd, Nick Burdi and Jared Wilson have all been pitching well in the bullpen.

Reed, Gallant and Burdi can top 95 mph with their fastballs. Mazza and Wilson can touch 95, which gives Cedar Rapids a flock of live arms.

"We've got five guys that can go out there and force the action and strike somebody out," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer noted. "It gives you options."

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Reed pitched two scoreless innings in the eighth and ninth Tuesday for his third save, lowering his ERA to a sparkling 0.82. Lewis Thorpe (2-2) struck out 10 batters in 5.2 innings for the victory, with Mazza and Reed taking the ball from there.

Mazza lowered his ERA to 2.54, with 28 strikeouts in 28.1 innings.

The Kernels had a 31-39 record during the first half of the Midwest League campaign, but they are 21-16 for the second half and headed in the right direction.

"Ever since the first half, we've just meshed and started really playing as a team," said Mazza.

The starting pitchers have improved and the relief pitchers have been doing a good job.

"We just have a mindset, basically, we're going to get in the game and we're going to shut the door," said Mazza. "We've just been on a roll so far."

Michael Quesada had a clutch two-run single for the Kernels early in the game. Mitch Garver, Bryan Haar and Alex Swim had two hits.

The Kernels returned home from Dayton, Ohio, at 5 a.m. Tuesday after an eight-hour bus ride, making Tuesday night's victory a little sweeter.

"That's pretty good, getting off the bus like that," said Mauer. "We didn't look too good early on, but we got the cobwebs off just in time. That was good."

Cedar Rapids (52-55) and Burlington (57-49) meet again Wednesday night at 6:35 at the stadium.

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BURLINGTON (2): Eaves, 2b, 4 0 0 0, Rosa, 3b, 3 2 1 1, Fish, cf, 4 0 2 1, Aguilera, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Dalton, dh, 4 0 0 0, Palmer, lf, 4 0 0 0, Mendoza, rf, 3 0 1 0, Moye, c, 3 0 0 0, Salcedo, ss, 3 0 1 0. Totals 31 2 5 2.

KERNELS (6): Walker, ss, 4 1 1 1, M.Murphy, cf, 4 0 0 0, Christensen, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Garver, dh, 4 1 2 0, Haar, 3b, 4 2 2 1, Swim, rf, 3 2 2 0, Williams, lf, 4 0 0 0, Quesada, c, 2 0 1 2, Vavra, 2b, 3 0 1 1. Totals 32 6 9 5.

Burlington 100 001 000 - 2 5 3

Kernels 000 220 02x - 6 9 2

Hurtado, Mahle (5), Muck (8) and Moye. Thorpe, Mazza (6), Reed (8) and Quesada. W - Thorpe (2-2). L - Hurtado (1-1). S - Reed (1). 2B - Fish (22), Swim (6), Haar (18). HR - Rosa (7). SB - Garver (6), Walker (7). E - Moye (3), Mendoza (5), Palmer (1), Thorpe (2), Vavra (9). T - 2:49. A - 2,440.