

Kernels tie for top with clutch win

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 07 August 2014 22:18 - Last Updated Thursday, 07 August 2014 22:31



If you like a good pennant race, look no further than the Western Division of the Midwest League.

It doesn't get any tighter than this.

The Cedar Rapids Kernels moved into a three-way tie for first place in the Western Division Thursday night when they rallied for a 4-3 victory in 11 innings over Kane County before 3,347 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Mitch Garver led off the bottom of the 11th by ripping a double to left-center field, then Bryan Haar followed with a double off the left-field wall to drive in pinch-runner Jon Murphy with the winning run.

The victory left Cedar Rapids, Kane County and Wisconsin tied for first place in the second-half standings with identical 27-19 records with 24 games left in the regular season.

Kane County was the first-half champ and has already clinched a playoff spot. If the season ended right now, Cedar Rapids and Wisconsin would make the playoffs as well.

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The Kernels trailed, 3-1, and appeared headed for their fourth loss in their last five games, but they scored twice in the bottom of the eighth and prevailed in extra innings, thanks in great part to more strong work by the bullpen.

"That's a big win against a really good team," said Garver. "That's a tough team to beat."

Kane County has the best overall record in the Midwest League at 72-44.

"Hopefully it's one of those wins that keeps us rolling and we can rattle off a bunch in a row," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer.

Garver tied the game, 3-3, with a clutch two-out single in the bottom of the eighth and got things started with his double in the 11th.

Haar belted a hanging slider off the wall, but Jon Murphy (the pinch-runner) hesitated at second base to see if the ball would be caught in case he needed to tag up. It turned out to be a fairly close play at the plate, but Murphy got across safely.

The night had an unhappy ending for Murphy, who was called into Mauer's office after the game and informed he has been released by the Minnesota Twins organization. Murphy, an outfielder, was hitting .207.

Mauer said outfielder Zach Granite will come off the disabled list Friday and replace Murphy on the roster.

Matt Batts pitched the first six innings for the Kernels. He struck out eight batters and did not

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walk anyone, but he was touched for three runs (two earned) on five hits.

The Cedar Rapids bullpen sparkled again with Jared Wilson, Jake Reed and Dallas Gallant combining for five shutout innings while allowing only one hit. Reed struck out four batters in two innings and has not allowed an earned run in his last 12.2 innings.

"If it's a bullpen battle, I'm putting money on us, because we have guys back there who are lights out," said Garver, one of the catchers.

Garver ranks in the top 10 in the Midwest League in RBIs, home runs and batting average and is a strong candidate to become the Kernels' Most Valuable Player, but Haar, Chad Christensen and slick-fielding shortstop Engelb Vielma deserve consideration as well. Christensen ranks in the top-5 in the league in runs scored.

"When one of us struggles, the other guys pick us up," said Haar. "When we all click, it's going to be real nice."

Mauer is not ready to cast a vote for MVP. "You can put them all in the mix, really," he said about Garver, Haar, Christensen, Vielma and others.

"It would be tough just to single one guy out, without a doubt," said Mauer. "I think that's what makes us dangerous, because we don't rely on one guy."

Haar made a brilliant play at third base on a grounder behind the bag Thursday. He dove for the ball into foul territory, leaped to his feet and gunned the ball to Christensen for the out at first base.

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Garver and Vielma both went 3-for-4 for the Kernels.

Minnesota Twins star Joe Mauer, on loan to the Kernels during an injury rehab assignment this week, is scheduled to play for Cedar Rapids this Friday, Saturday and Sunday against Kane County, according to Jake Mauer.

The game times are 6:35 p.m. Friday, 5:05 p.m. Saturday and 2:05 p.m. Sunday.

Joe Mauer did not play Thursday. It was a planned off-day for Mauer.

KANE COUNTY (3): Dunston, lf, 5 2 1 0, Young, 2b, 5 1 2 1, Carhart, 1b, 5 0 0 0, Caratini, c, 4 0 1 2, Brockmeyer, dh, 4 0 1 0, Candelario, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Baez, rf, 4 0 1 0, Penalver, ss, 4 0 0 0, Martin, cf, 4 0 0 0. Totals 39 3 6 3.

KERNELS (4): Walker, 2b, 5 1 1 0, Christensen, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Garver, c, 4 0 3 1, J.Murphy, pr, 0 1 0 0, Haar, 3b, 5 0 1 1, Swim, rf, 4 1 1 0, M.Murphy, cf, 4 0 1 1, Williams, lf, 4 0 0 0, Vielma, ss, 4 1 3 0, Vavra, dh, 4 0 0 1. Totals 38 4 10 4.

Kane County 000 201 000 00 - 3 6 1
Kernels 010 000 020 01 - 4 10 1

Underwood, Garner (7), Rakkar (8), Carrillo (11) and Caratini. Batts, Wilson (7), Reed (9), Gallant (11) and Garver. W - Gallant (2-1). L - Carrillo (0-1). 2B - Young (3), M.Murphy (2), Vielma (12), Garver (21), Haar (20). 3B - Dunston (6), Caratini (1). E - Garner (1), Batts (1). T - 3:09. A - 3,347.