

Kernels tumble in 15 without Mauer

Written by S.D. Buhr

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Minnesota Twins star Joe Mauer left for the Twin Cities before the Cedar Rapids Kernels took the field Sunday, but Minnesota pitcher Ricky Nolasco still had some unfinished rehab business of his own this weekend.

Chances are, even Nolasco, who left the game with two outs in the sixth inning, was nearing home by the time the Kane County Cougars finished off the Kernels, 7-4, in the 15th inning in a game that lasted an even five hours.

Nolasco surrendered three runs to the Cougars on seven hits.

After throwing two shutout innings in the 13th and 14th innings, Chris Mazza (3-3) took the loss when he gave up three runs in the 15th.

The Kernels could muster just two hits in 13 opportunities with runners in scoring position, something Manager Jake Mauer was disappointed with after the game.

“I feel bad for those pitchers,” the manager said. “They competed their tails off.”

Another good crowd of 3,060 fans paid the admission price to watch Nolasco make his second rehabilitation start for the Kernels in less than a week.

Nowhere near that many bodies were still filling seats at Veterans Memorial Stadium by the time the teams walked off the field at the end.

Nolasco, currently in his eighth year of Major League ball, is attempting to work his way back to

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the Twins after straining his pitching elbow in early July.

The plan was for Nolasco to throw 75 pitches and he left the game with two outs in the sixth inning after reaching that level. He struck out seven batters without issuing a walk.

Nolasco indicated he'd be returning to Minneapolis and resuming his regular workout routine as he prepares to rejoin the Twins rotation. Exactly when that might occur was something the pitcher was unwilling to reveal.

"They (the Twins) can announce that stuff," he said. "I'm ready to go. Whenever that day is, I'll be ready."

Having the two big leaguers in town for six games in the past week was a boon for their Class A affiliate in Cedar Rapids.

According to Kernels General Manager Doug Nelson, the club would typically have expected attendance in the neighborhood of 19,000 fans for the homestand. Thanks to Mauer and to a lesser extent Nolasco, close to 26,000 fans came through the turnstiles over the past week.

"To be perfectly honest, we had no idea what to expect," said Nelson. "We have never had a rehabilitation assignment of this magnitude."

Accommodating the additional fan interest that comes with a veteran All-Star appearance by Mauer took extra effort on the part of just about every member of the Kernels' staff, according to Nelson.

They not only opened the ticket office for extended hours last weekend to deal with ticket

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demands, but it was necessary for the Kernels staff to cancel planned days off for their entire contingent of ushers, concession workers and other game-day staff.

One aspect of the increased fan interest caught the Kernels a little off-guard, according to the GM.

“We didn’t appreciate how aggressive the autograph seekers could be,” said Nelson, who added the club had to get a little creative to get Mauer out of the ballpark at times without being stopped by large groups of autograph seekers waiting outside the ballpark.

Nelson added, however, that, “Joe was great about the structured autograph sessions” that were scheduled during the week by the team.

The Kernels tallied two runs in the third inning on an RBI single by Bryan Haar that drove in Ryan Walker and Chad Christensen, then scraped together two more runs in the seventh to pull ahead of the Cougars, 4-3. Kane County notched the game, 4-4, in the eighth inning.

That score stood into the 15th inning.

Kane County’s Ben Carhart, a catcher by trade who was the Cougars’ designated hitter to begin the game, earned the win on the mound by pitching the final two scoreless innings in relief.

The loss dropped the Kernels into a tie for second place in the MWL Western Division with Wisconsin, which also lost Sunday. The two teams trail Kane County by one game in the standings with 21 games remaining in the regular season schedule.

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The Kernels have their last scheduled off-day Monday, then travel to Beloit for a three-game series starting Tuesday night.

Mauer confirmed that infielder Jonatan Hinojosa is scheduled to rejoin the Kernels from Elizabethton on Monday, in time for the trip to Beloit.

Hinojosa appeared in one game for the Kernels earlier in the season before serving a suspension.

The addition will bring the Kernels back up to their 25-player roster limit.

KANE COUNTY (5): Dunston, lf, 7 2 3 1, Lockhart, 2b, 6 2 3 0, Carhart, dh/p, 6 1 2 0, Rogers, 1b, 7 1 2 2, Brockmeyer, c, 7 1 3 2, Candelario, 3b, 7 0 1 1, Brown, rf, 7 0 1 0, Penalver, ss, 6 0 0 0, Martin, cf, 6 0 1 0. Totals 59 7 16 6.

KERNELS (4): Walker, 2b, 7 2 2 0, Christensen, 1b, 6 1 1 0, Garver, dh, 4 0 1 0, Vavra, ph/dh, 1 0 0 0, Haar, 3b, 6 0 1 2, Swim, rf, 6 0 2 1, Murphy, cf, 6 0 0 0, Wade, lf, 6 0 1 0, Quesada, c, 6 0 1 0, Vielma, ss, 5 1 1 0. Totals 53 4 10 3.

Kane County 101 100 010 000 003 - 7 16 2
Kernels 002 000 200 000 000 - 4 10 2

Wells, Hermans (6), Heesch (7), Carillo (8), Rakkar (11), Carhart (14) and Brockmeyer. Nolasco, Bixler (6), Reed (8), Wilson (10), Mazza (13), Boyd (15) and Quesada. W - Carhart (1-0). L - Mazza (3-3). 2B - Candelario (15), Martin (14), Rogers (23), Brockmeyer (11), Quesada (11), Swim (9), Garver (23). 3B - Rogers (2). HR - Dunston (2). SBH - Lockhart (10). E - Penalver (20), Hermans (2), Swim (3), Walker (8). T - 5:00. A - 3,060.