

There's magic in the air for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr
Sunday, 17 August 2014 18:57 -



It's the time of year when baseball teams in the playoff hunt start talking of "magic numbers" – the number of combined wins for your team and losses by your closest competitor that a team needs to clinch a postseason berth.

Before the game on Sunday, the Kernels' magic number was 11.

After the Kernels generated a bit of ninth-inning magic Sunday, that number is now in single digits at nine with 15 games remaining in the regular season.

The Kernels completed their sweep of the Peoria Chiefs with a walk-off 5-4 win in front of 4,050 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium that featured the winning run scoring on a wild pitch during an attempted intentional walk.

With Logan Wade on third base and Chad Christensen at first, the Chiefs decided to intentionally walk Cedar Rapids cleanup hitter Mitch Garver with the score tied at 4-4.

The first pitch to Garver was intentionally wide and very unintentionally low. It got past Peoria catcher Steve Bean, allowing Wade to score the winning run.

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Wade had reached base with a two-out double and advanced to third base on a wild pitch. Christensen then worked a walk to set up the game-ending dramatics.

Wade was 3-for-5 on the day with a home run. Both his first-inning single and ninth-inning double came despite catcher's interference as his bat made contact with the catcher's mitt in both instances.

"He had enough sense to keep running," Manager Jake Mauer observed. "That showed some instincts right there. He kept going and knew they were playing no-doubles and worst case scenario, he can go back to first base."



Wade was also responsible for the Kernels being in a position to pull off the win. His three-run home run in the fifth inning turned a 3-1 deficit into a 4-3 Kernels lead.

Jonatan Hinojosa and Garver continued to swing hot bats with two hits apiece.

Starting pitcher Ryan Eades was responsible for all four Peoria runs, but worked through six innings before turning the game over to his bullpen with the game tied.

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Hudson Boyd worked two perfect innings and, according to his manager, "He wanted to go back out there for a third inning."

Instead, Mauer gave the ball to Brian Gilbert (1-0), who added a perfect ninth inning for his first victory since joining the Kernels from Fort Myers last week.

Cedar Rapids and Wisconsin are in the drivers' seats to earn the two second-half playoff spots in the Midwest League's Western Division. Peoria would be next in line, but the Kernels hold a seven-game lead over the Chiefs with 15 games to play, and those are the numbers that matter in terms of clinching a coveted spot in the Midwest League playoffs.

"From where we were in April and May where it seemed like anything and everything was going wrong," said Mauer, "maybe it's starting to even out now."

The Kernels' current six-game winning streak matches their best of the season. They also won six straight from April 9-14.

One more thing going the Kernels' way as they head into the new week is the re-arrival of outfielder Zack Larson, who arrived in the Kernels' clubhouse after the game. He was hitting .292 through 32 games with the Kernels earlier in the season before going on the Disabled List with a hamstring injury.

Larson will likely take the roster spot of pitcher Josue Montanez, who appears headed to the DL with a shoulder issue.

The Kernels begin a three-game series Monday night at 6:35 against Quad Cities at the stadium.