

Hu-Dini works his magic for Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 23 August 2014 21:16 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 August 2014 21:28



BURLINGTON - Chih-Wei Hu is playfully called Hu-Dini by the Cedar Rapids Kernels because he's a great illusionist and escape artist, just like the real Harry Houdini who entertained legions of admirers a century ago.

This Hu-Dini makes batters and potential jams disappear with his artistry on a pitching mound.

Hu did it again Saturday night when he tossed a four-hit shutout for six innings as the surging Kernels blanked Burlington, 3-0, before 2,764 fans on Fireworks Night at Community Field.

Hu made the Bees batters disappear with relative ease. He also took another notch off the Kernels' magic number as the visitors moved onto the verge of clinching a spot in the Midwest League playoffs.

Hu did not join the Kernels until July 7, but he's compiled a 7-1 record and 1.94 ERA in just nine games since then.

Kernels catcher Michael Quesada enjoys working behind the plate when Hu, a 20-year-old marvel from Taiwan, is on the mound.

"It's a privilege," said Quesada, who caught Saturday's game. "He lets me throw whatever I want to throw. He throws all the pitches for strikes with good location."

"He has a really advanced feel for the game of baseball and pitching for such a young age. It's a lot of fun."

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The Kernels won for the 33rd time in their last 43 games, raising their overall record to 70-61 and their second-half mark to 39-22 with nine games left in the regular season. This is the first time all season that Cedar Rapids has been nine games above the .500 mark.

Hu has allowed only 36 hits and 11 earned runs in 51 innings, with 43 strikeouts and just 10 walks. Batters are hitting less than .200 against him and rarely make good contact.

"He pitches in and out of trouble," said Manager Jake Mauer. "A couple of hits, no big deal. Ground ball double-play and inning over. He's been able to do that several times."

"That's learning how to pitch and being a pitcher," said Mauer. "Get the ground ball when you need the ground ball. He's been lights-out for us the whole time he's been here."



Hu appears unflappable on the mound, with tremendous poise and composure.

"He's pitched some big games before. You can just tell," said Mauer. "I know he's going to pitch for their national team in Taiwan this fall. So he's on the map with them. They know about him."

Burlington put runners on first and second with one out in the sixth inning, sending Kernels pitching coach Ivan Arteaga to the mound to counsel Hu. The Bees played the famous Abbott & Costello routine of "Who's On First" on the P.A. system during the visit, but in this case Hu was on the mound.

"I wonder how many fans picked up on it?" Mauer said with a smile.

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The Kernels did not mount much of an attack themselves Saturday, but it was enough. They scored two of their runs on double-play grounders as Bees pitchers wiggled out of damage. Alex Swim went 2-for-4 with an RBI.

Brian Gilbert pitched two scoreless innings in relief and Jake Reed pitched the ninth inning for his fourth save. Reed has not allowed an earned run in 19.2 consecutive innings.

Jonatan Hinojosa went 1-for-4, extending his hitting streak to 11 straight games.

The Kernels swept the three-game series from Burlington (64-66). The two teams are likely to meet again in the first round of the Midwest League playoffs, beginning Sept. 3 in Cedar Rapids.

The Kernels open a three-game series in Davenport against the Quad Cities River Bandits Sunday afternoon.

KERNELS (3): Hinojosa, 3b, 4 1 1 0, Vielma, ss, 4 1 1 0, Christensen, 1b, 3 1 1 0, Swim, rf, 4 0 2 1, Murphy, cf, 4 0 0 0, Wade, dh, 4 0 0 0, Williams, lf, 2 0 0 0, Quesada, c, 3 0 0 0, Walker, 2b, 3 0 0 0. Totals 31 3 5 1.

BURLINGTON (0): Way, cf, 4 0 1 0, Eaves, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Houchins, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Aguilera, dh, 4 0 1 0, Bayardi, rf, 4 0 0 0, McGee, c, 3 0 1 0, Gretzky, lf, 3 0 1 0, Dalton, 1b, 3 0 2 0, Salcedo, ss, 3 0 0 0. Totals 31 0 7 0.

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Kernels 101 001 000 - 3 5 1

Burlington 000 000 000 - 0 7 4

Hu, Gilbert (7), Reed (9) and Quesada. Etsell, Loconsole (6), Busenitz (8) and McGee. W - Hu (7-1). L - Etsell (5-4). S - Reed (4). 2B - Eaves (36). E - Hinojosa (5), Etsell (2), Eaves 2 (30), McGee (9). T - 2:25. A - 2,764.