

Garver hurt as Kernels drop opener

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 03 September 2014 21:57 -



The Midwest League playoffs have just started, but the Cedar Rapids Kernels are already in deep trouble in their best-of-3 series after the Burlington Bees after losing 2-0 at Veterans Memorial Stadium Wednesday night.

Chih-Wei Hu, their best pitcher, tossed five scoreless innings Wednesday but it wasn't good enough.

The Kernels bullpen, nearly flawless the past two months, gave up two runs and took a rare loss.

Mitch Garver, their MVP and Midwest League all-star, took two nasty foul tips off his mask and could be done for the playoffs with concussion-like symptoms for the second time this summer.

The Kernels will have to defeat the Bees in Burlington Thursday night and Friday night to reach the second round of the playoffs. Right now it does not look good.

Garver sat in front of his locker after the game, his head down and aching. He left the game in the bottom of the sixth inning after being hit for the second time in the top of the inning.

"I have a little headache right now," he said softly. "I'm kind of upset. I think it's going to be a

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seven-day deal."

All Minor League players have to rest for seven days when they are diagnosed with concussion-like symptoms.

"Head trauma," said Garver. "I've been through it before this year. It's kind of a similar case. It's too bad it happened."

Garver was on the Disabled from June 25 to July 4 with his first bout with head trauma. If he has to sit another seven days, the season could be over before he can play again.

"He'll go see the doctor tomorrow, but it's not looking too good," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer. "Not feeling good. Headaches. He's got all the signs of a concussion. It's a shame.

"He was trying like heck to stay in that game," said Mauer, who made the decision to lift him. "His symptoms were just too much."

Garver hit .298 during the regular season and led the Kernels with 16 home runs and 79 RBIs as the No.4 batter in the lineup.

"It seems like every time I go out and catch now, I get a foul ball off my mask," he said. "They may be small, but they add up. It makes you feel not right, and that's what they're worried about."

Minnesota Twins star Joe Mauer moved from catcher to first base this season after suffering a concussion last year. Mauer spent a week with the Kernels last month while recovering from a strained muscle and spoke to Garver about head injuries.

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"We had about a 30-minute talk," said Garver. "He's been through the same deal. His symptoms were pretty bad, too. He said health is important."

Michael Quesada, who has shared the catcher's job with Garver this year, replaced Garver in the lineup Wednesday. Alex Swim, the other catcher on the team, is the Kernels' starting right fielder, so there would not be any catchers on the bench if both of them are in the lineup Thursday night in Burlington.

Hu pitched out of trouble and had seven strikeouts during his five shutout innings, but his pitch count reached 90 and Mauer went to the bullpen for Chris Mazza in the top of the sixth. Burlington designated hitter Eric Aguilera belted Mazza's first pitch for a solo home run to left-center.

Burlington scored again in the seventh against Mazza for a 2-0 lead and the Kernels were never able to retaliate. Cedar Rapids had seven hits in the game, but they were all singles.

The Kernels did not get two hits in the same inning until the ninth, but they were foiled anyway in the final inning when J.D. Williams lined into a double play.

"We missed a lot of fastballs," said Mauer. "That was the most frustrating thing."

Mauer might have liked to see Hu pitch six or seven innings before going to the bullpen, but Mazza has pitched well this season and helped the Kernels reach the playoffs.

"We didn't score a frickin' run, so unfortunately it didn't make much difference," said Mauer.

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The Kernels entered the playoffs with a six-game winning streak against Burlington, including a three-game in Burlington Aug. 21-23. Now they'll have to sweep a two-game series in Burlington to stay alive.

Mauer is not sure if the Kernels could get a replacement player here in time if Garver has to go on the Disabled List.

"Obviously Garver is a big part of the team and you'd like to have him in there, but that's the thing with baseball," said Mauer. "When a guy goes down or something happens, it gives another guy an opportunity. You have to make the most of it.

"We'll go with the boys we have here," he said.

BURLINGTON (2): Way, cf, 3 0 0 0, Eaves, 2b, 3 1 1 0, Bayardi, rf, 4 0 1 1, Aguilera, dh, 4 1 2 1, Houchins, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Dalton, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Gretzky, lf, 4 0 1 0, McGee, c, 4 0 0 0, Salcedo, ss, 4 0 1 0. Totals 33 2 8 2.

KERNELS (0): Hinojosa, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Vielma, ss, 4 0 0 0, Christensen, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Garver, c, 2 0 0 0, Quesada, ph/c, 1 0 0 0, Swim, rf, 4 0 2 0, Williams, dh, 4 0 1 0, Murphy, cf, 4 0 2 0, Wade, lf, 4 0 0 0, Walker, 2b, 3 0 1 0. Totals 33 0 7 0.

Burlington 000 001 100 - 2 8 1

Kernels 000 000 000 - 0 7 0

Alcantara, Loconsole (7), Busenitz (9) and McGee. Hu, Mazza (6), Gallant (7) and Garver, Quesada (7). W - Alcantara. L - Mazza. S - Busenitz. HR - Aguilera. E - Dalton. T - 2:53. A - 1,602.