

Kernels raise record to perfect 6-0

Written by S.D. Buhr
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The Cedar Rapids Kernels stretched their perfect record to 6-0 to start the 2015 season, topping Beloit 8-4 in front of a Tuesday night crowd of 876 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Even with the perfect record, Kernels Manager Jake Mauer did not feel his team's performance was exactly perfect, however.

The Kernels were outhit 10-7 by the Snappers and the Cedar Rapids bullpen allowed for some drama at times.

"It wasn't our best (game), no doubt about it," the skipper conceded afterward. "That being said, we were able to make pitches when we needed to. They're not all going to be pretty and a win's still a win."

In six games this season, Mauer has yet to turn in two lineup cards that look alike. According to the manager, that's not likely to change anytime soon.

"We've had six different lineups and we're still going to mix and match," he promised. "We're pretty deep."

"Every guy, down to our 12th guy can play, so they're all going to get a chance. I don't believe in guys just sitting there and when you do need them, they get rusty."

One name Mauer has consistently penciled into his lineup is Nick Gordon, the parent Minnesota Twins' first round draft pick a year ago and fifth pick overall. He is the only player on the roster who's been in the

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starting lineup for all six contests.

That's a fact that hasn't escaped the young prospect, but he's certainly not complaining.

"Every day the lineup comes up and I've been blessed to be in it," Gordon said with a smile after the game. "He (Mauer) knows what he's doing. I mean, we're 6-0 so it has to be working."

It's easy to understand why a manager would write Gordon's name down every night when the 19-year-old shortstop is already sitting at, or near, the top of the Midwest League in multiple offensive categories.

His .429 batting average was second in the league going into Tuesday night's contest and he owned or shared the league lead in hits (9) and triples (2). He also was in the league's top 10 in at least four other offensive categories.

On Tuesday, Gordon drove in a pair of runs with a two-out single in the second inning and scored his sixth run in as many games for the Kernels in the sixth.

As they've done in every game so far in the young season, the Kernels jumped ahead on the scoreboard, plating five runs in the first two innings while Cedar Rapids starting pitcher Jared Wilson (1-0) was retiring the first seven Snappers batters he faced.

Beloit got on the board with a run in the third inning and tallied another in the fifth. The Snappers sent eight batters to the plate in the seventh inning, but managed to add just two more runs.

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The Kernels immediately got those two runs back in their half of the seventh on a bases-loaded, two-out, two-RBI line drive single to left field by catcher J.J. Fernandez. His manager was impressed with that effort.

“Those two runs Fernandez drove in in the seventh were huge,” Mauer said.

Wilson gave up just two runs, both earned, in his five innings on six hits and a walk. He struck out three Snappers.

Randy LeBlanc and C.K. Irby shared relief duties for the following three innings, each with mixed results, but neither pitcher relinquished the Kernels’ lead.

Cam Booser worked around a two-out single in the ninth inning to notch his first save of the season.

Tanner English, with a pair of singles, was the only Kernels hitter with multiple hits. Trey Vavra hit a home run in the first inning.

The Kernels open a three-game series with Peoria Wednesday night. The Chiefs will bring a 4-2 record to Cedar Rapids. Game time at Perfect Game Field is 6:35.