

Kernels survive Peoria's trick defense

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 13 May 2015 21:45 -



Kernels Manager Jake Mauer was a little surprised when the Peoria Chiefs used five infielders in the bottom of the 10th inning Wednesday, but he's seen tricks like that before.

His own family did it.

"My dad used to do that a lot," he said, relaxing in his office at Veterans Memorial Stadium. "But my dad used to put six infielders and play one outfielder. If you hit the ball to the outfield, you beat us."

The gambit almost worked Wednesday, but the Peoria first baseman committed a throwing error on a play at the plate and the Kernels collected a 6-5 victory over the Chiefs in 10 innings before a season-high crowd of 3,073 fans that included a lot of school kids.

The Kernels had runners at second and third with one out in the bottom of the 10th with Nick Gordon striding to the plate in a 5-5 game. Peoria skipper Joe Kruzel pulled right fielder Nick Thompson into the infield and put him on the right side between the first baseman and the second baseman, creating less space for Gordon hit a single through the infield.

"He really guessed right," said Mauer. "Nick pulled the ball, which he usually doesn't do. I thought he'd put the fifth infielder on the other side."

Gordon pulled the ball right at first baseman Justin Ringo, but Ringo made a bad throw to the

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plate and the ball skipped past his catcher for an error as Zack Larson scored the winning run.

"Thank goodness that Larson was moving," said Mauer. "He was going on contact, so there was no hesitation. If he (the first baseman) steps and throws, he's out."



Tyler Kuresa led off the bottom of the 10th with a single and the speedy Larson entered the game as a pinch-runner. Blake Schmit, who joined the Kernels this week, put down a good sacrifice bunt and reached first base on an error. Tyler English bunted the runners to second and third, bringing Gordon to the plate in a game-winning situation.

Kruzel visited the mound, ostensibly to talk about walking Gordon to set up a double-play, but instead he signaled for Thompson to hustle in from right field. Gordon was surprised by the maneuver.

"A little bit. Yeah, I little bit," he said. "That's the first time I've ever seen that."

Gordon was looking for a ball he could drive to the outfield, but Peoria relief pitcher Robby Rowland jammed him with an inside fastball on a 2-2 count after Gordon had fouled off two pitches.

"They didn't give me a ball I could drive up the middle," said Gordon. "I'm just thankful we scored a run."

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Mauer said his father pulled tricks like that when he coached Jake and his two brothers, Joe and Billy.

"It worked more than you would think, believe it or not," he said. "Guys get so 'big' trying to hit the ball, they either strike out or ground out."

The Kernels fell behind early 4-0, but battled back and tied the game 5-5 in the eighth.

"The boys didn't stop," said Mauer. "They hung in there and hung in there. That was good. A good team win."

Six Kernels had multi-hit games in a 14-hit attack. Trey Vavra had three hits. English, Gordon, T.J. White, Kuresa and Schmit had two hits. Vavra and Kuresa drove in two runs.

Peoria beat the Kernels in extra innings Tuesday night, then the Kernels returned the favor Wednesday afternoon. The Kernels returned to the ballpark at 9 a.m. Wednesday after a late night.

"I went to bed last night and got something good to eat and got some sleep," said Gordon.

Zack Tillery had a strong outing for the Kernels in relief Wednesday. He tossed four shutout innings, with six strikeouts and only one hit. Mauer said he's thinking about giving Tillery a starting assignment. "You can see why," the skipper said.

The Kernels (21-12) host the Chiefs (17-16) again Thursday night at 6:35.

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Thompson belted two home runs for Peoria Wednesday.

PEORIA (5): Sierra, cf, 5 1 2 0, Mercado, ss, 3 0 0 0 Ringo, 1b, 4 1 1 0, Thompson, rf, 4 2 2 3, Bean, c, 5 0 2 0, Sohn, 2b, 5 0 0 0, De Leon, dh, 5 0 0 0, Diekroeger, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Drake, lf, 4 1 1 1. Totals 39 5 8 4.

KERNELS (6): English, cf, 5 2 2 0, Gordon, ss, 6 1 2 1, Vavra, dh, 4 0 3 2, Murphy, lf, 4 1 1 0, Fernandez, rf, 5 0 0 0, White, 3b, 4 1 2 0, Doe, c, 4 0 0 0, Kuresa, 1b, 5 0 2 2, Larson, pr, 0 1 0 0, Schmit, 2b, 4 0 2 0.

Totals 41 6 14 5.

Peoria 004 010 000 0 - 5 8 4

Kernels 001 120 010 1 - 6 14 2

Poncedeleon, McKnight (5), Alexander (7), Rowland (8) and Bean. Curtiss, Tillery (6), LeBlanc (10) and Doe. W - LeBlanc (2-0). L - Rowland (1-1).

2B - Bean (3), Kuresa (4), English (5). HR - Drake (4), Thompson 2 (4). SB - Sohn (7), Drake (4), Gordon (5), English (10). E - Bean (6), Ringo 2 (4), Rowland (1), Fernandez (3), White 95). T - 3:33. A - 3,073.