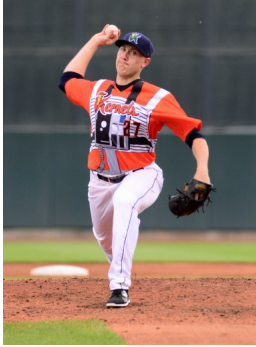


Keaton is man of 'Steele' for Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 29 May 2015 21:39 - Last Updated Friday, 29 May 2015 21:53



Some players lead their team in home runs, wins and saves when they are in Little League or high school, but Keaton Steele accomplished the rare trifecta when he was a junior at the University of Missouri in 2013.

In fact, he was the only Division I college baseball player in the country that year to perform that particular triple crown.

"I was fortunate to be able to hit and pitch in college," he said Friday night.

Steele is strictly a pitcher these days and he showed Friday why the Minnesota Twins plucked him in the eighth round of the draft last year.

Steele tossed seven strong innings to help the Kernels top Clinton, 6-1, in a Midwest League game before 2,749 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

"I feel good," he said. "The last time I was out there for that long I was in college. It feels really good to know I can still go out there and do something like that."

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Steele, from St. Joseph, Mo., hit .430 at Iowa Western Community College in 2012 and was named the MVP of the junior college national tournament when his team won the title. He led the University of Missouri in home runs, wins and saves the next year, but the pro scouts ultimately told him his future would be on the mound.

"I said that's OK," he remarked. "My dream is to get to the next level, it doesn't matter where it's at."

The first three batters for Clinton Friday night collected a single, single and double. That made it 1-0 with runners on second and third with nobody out, but Steele wriggled out of trouble and cruised from there.

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer visited the mound with two outs in the seventh inning and a runner on second base, but left Steele in the game. The pitcher is normally done when Mauer makes his stroll to the middle of the infield, but not this time.

Steele got the final out in the seventh inning with a strikeout before calling it a night.

"I was really happy with what he did, especially that last out in the seventh," said Mauer. "He wanted to get that last out, and he didn't want to come out of that game."

"I gave him a chance and he did pretty good."

Steele (2-0) allowed one run on five hits and three walks. He lowered his ERA to 2.70 in three outings since joining the Kernels May 18 from Extended Spring Training.

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The Kernels struggled for five innings against Clinton starter Luiz Gohara, but the Lumber Kings changed pitchers in the sixth and the Kernels went to work against Jarrett Brown and scored four runs in the frame for a 4-1 lead.

Pat Kelly tied the game, 1-1, with a triple and Zack Larson followed with an RBI double for a 2-1 lead. Larson scored on a wild pitch and Max Murphy later scored on an RBI single by Brett Doe.

Brown uncorked four wild pitches in the sixth inning to make life easier for Cedar Rapids.

Doe collected an RBI double in the eighth inning when the Kernels added a pair of insurance runs. He finished 3-for-4 with a double and two RBIs. Kelly was 3-for-4 with a triple and RBI.

Randy LeBlanc pitched two scoreless innings in relief and got his first save.

Cedar Rapids (31-18) and Clinton (23-26) meet again at 6:35 p.m. Saturday.

CLINTON (1): Fields, cf, 4 1 1 0, Ascanio, ss, 3 0 1 0, Ward, 2b, 4 0 2 1, Brito, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Morales, rf, 4 0 0 0, DeCarlo, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Mack, lf, 4 0 2 0, Mariscal, dh, 3 0 0 0, Taylor, c, 3 0 0 0. Totals 32 1 7 1.

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KERNELS (6): Schmit, ss, 4 1 1 0, Kelly, 2b, 4 1 3 1, Larson, lf, 3 1 1 1, Murphy, cf, 3 1 0 0, White, 3b, 3 1 0 0, Fernandez, rf, 4 1 1 0, Doe, dh, 4 0 3 2, Navarreto, c, 4 0 1 0, Kuresa, 1b, 3 0 0 0. Totals 32 6 10 4.

Clinton 100 000 000 - 1 7 1

Kernels 000 004 02x - 6 10 1

Gohara, Brown (6), Miller (7) and Taylor. Steele, LeBlanc (8) and Navaretto. W - Steele (2-0). L - Brown (1-3). S - LeBlanc (1). 2B - Ward 2 (7), Larson (9), Doe (5). 3B - Kelly (3). SB - Fields (8). E - Ascanio (1), LeBlanc (1). T - 2:20. A - 2,749.