

Ex-Kernel returns and beats former team

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 28 June 2015 17:14 - Last Updated Sunday, 28 June 2015 20:03



Christian Powell remembers the date like it was yesterday, even though it happened more than a year ago during the 2014 season in Cedar Rapids.

"May 11th. A rainout with Peoria," he said Sunday.

That was the day Kernels Manager Jake Mauer told Powell that the Minnesota Twins had decided to give him his unconditional release from baseball. In other words, he was fired.

"To be honest with you, I kind of felt it coming the whole year," he said. "I just felt off. I just wasn't pitching very well.

"I expected it to happen, which is kind of a bad thing and probably didn't help the way I was performing. It got into my head too much."

Powell signed with the Houston Astros as a free agent this March and was assigned to the Quad Cities River Bandits, putting him back in the Class A Midwest League with the Kernels.

More than a year after being released by the Twins, Powell took the mound at Veterans Memorial Stadium Sunday afternoon and pitched five strong innings in a 6-1 victory over the Kernels before 2,115 fans.

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Powell allowed one run on four hits, with three strikeouts and one walk. It was his first victory for the River Bandits in six games and lowered his ERA to 2.21.

Powell had two tours of duty with the Kernels, and neither was effective. He went 3-5 with a 5.81 ERA in 14 games in 2013 and was 0-1 with a 7.56 ERA in 10 games last year.

The Twins selected him in the eighth round of the 2012 draft, but decided early last season he wasn't going to make it.

Powell claimed it was just another game Sunday, with no special vindication, but admitted he naturally thought about what transpired here a year ago. "It's kind of in the back of your mind," he said.

Powell got his first victory with the River Bandits by allowing only four hits and one run. He struck out three batters, walked one and lowered his ERA to 2.21 in 20 1/3 innings.

"When I got released by the Kernels, I went back to school and graduated," he said. "I was like, 'I'm just going to call it a day.' I didn't touch a baseball until November.

"Over time the urge came back. I felt like if I didn't give it another chance I'd regret it the rest of my life."

Powell had a tryout with the New York Mets on March 3. Two days later he had a tryout with the Astros and signed as a free agent.

He said he's a different pitcher now, stronger and with a better attitude after struggling with the Kernels. He said he lost about 50 pounds prior to the 2014 season and was too weak to play well for the Kernels.

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"I just crumbled and couldn't perform," he said.

Powell said he'll never forget the day he was released, but said there are no hard feelings.

"I was sitting there on the bike," he said. "I was working out and getting ready for the next day and Jake said, 'Can you come in my office?' That was it.

"I got home (to South Carolina) and it kind of hit me: Dang, am I ever going to play again? It kind of hits you pretty hard."

Powell said he feels good about his career again.

"I am not the same person I was when I was with them," he said. "It was a very humbling experience. It kind of puts you back in reality. You can be replaced."

The Kernels (42-32) got only five hits against Quad Cities Sunday and lost the series, 3-1. The Kernels begin a new series at Wisconsin Monday night.

Alex Real hit a solo home run for Cedar Rapids.

QUAD CITIES (6): Ritchie, C, 5 0 3 1, Bregman, ss, 5 2 1 1, Tanielu, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Martin, lf, 4 2 3 1, Bottger, rf, 4 0 1 0, Laureano, cf, 5 1 2 1, Hernandez, 2b, 4 1 1 1, Boyd, dh, 3 0 2 0, Reynoso, 3b, 3 0 0 0. Totals: 37 6 13 5.

KERNELS (1): English, cf, 4 0 1 0, Gordon, ss, 4 0 1 0, Corcino, rf, 4 0 1 0, Real, dh, 4 1 1 1, Murphy, lf, 3 0 0 0, Valera, 3b, 2 0 0 0, Fernandez, 1b, 3 0 1 0, Navarreto, C, 3 0 0 0, Kelly, 2b,

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3 0 0 0. Totals 30 1 5 1.

Quad Cities ☐ ☐ 011 110 002 - 6 13 1

Kernels ☐ ☐ ☐ 000 010 000 - 1 5 0

Powell, Martes (6) and Ritchie. Tillery, Theofanopoulos (5), Bixler (8) and Navarreto. W - Powell (1-0). L - Tillery (4-3). Sv - Martes (2). 2B - Martin (5). 3B - Laureano (4), Martin (3). HR - Bregman (1), Real (2). SB - Martin (7). E - Fernandez (7). T - 2:33. A - 2,115.