

Slumping Kernels drop 4th in row

Written by S.D. Buhr

Tuesday, 18 August 2015 20:49 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 August 2015 21:32



The Cedar Rapids Kernels and Kane County Cougars will be making postseason appearances in the Midwest League playoffs in September, but don't suggest to Kernels Manager Jake Mauer that his team's current four-game losing streak might be because his team is tired and there's nothing really on the line as the season winds down.

"They're playing for jobs next year, a lot of them," Mauer said after his charges fell 1-0 to the Cougars before 1,638 fans Tuesday night at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Mauer is not interested in excuses.

"It's the same for everybody, especially this time of year," he said. "Use whatever one you want to: Too tired, too sunny, too hot, too cloudy, too wet. Insert excuse here. Put whatever you want, but (the opponent is) going through the same thing, the same as 15 other clubs in this league.

"It's a test, there's no doubt," he said. "But it's the same everywhere. It's a matter of finding a way to get it done. You're going to be tired. You should be, by this time. If you're not tired, there's something wrong."

The Kernels wasted another excellent pitching performance, failing to provide any run support at all for starting pitcher Keaton Steele.

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Steele hit Chuck Taylor, the first batter he faced in the first inning, with a pitch and Taylor came around to score on a fielder's choice, putting Kane County up 1-0 before the home team had a chance to come to the plate.

Steele then retired the next 14 batters he faced and 20 of the final 22. Both runners that reached base off Steele after the first inning were erased by double plays. He gave up just three hits in eight innings and struck out four batters.

But the Kernels managed only six hits and were just 1-of-5 with runners in scoring position. The only real Cedar Rapids scoring threat was wasted in the sixth inning.

Rafael Valera singled and moved to second base on an errant pick-off attempt by Kane County pitcher Josh Taylor. Nick Gordon then singled, putting runners at the corners with nobody out. But Valera was tagged out at home as he tried to score on a Taylor wild pitch that bounced away from catcher Michael Perez and the next two Kernels failed to drive in Gordon, ending the threat.

With three weeks left before the Kernels face Quad Cities in the opening round of the MWL playoffs, Mauer is getting enough pitching that he feels he has plenty of postseason pitching options, but piecing together a lineup from the roster of position players is another matter.

"We've got some holes we're trying to fill and giving guys chances, trying to figure out who our best nine's going to be," the skipper said. "We've got several spots that aren't filled. There are different guys out there, it seems like, every night. We've got to have somebody step up."

One guy Mauer does not think he's likely to have at his disposal is outfielder Tanner English,

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who injured his thumb on a fielding play Friday at Lake County during the Kernels' recent road trip. English had an MRI on Tuesday, but even without knowing the result, Mauer is not optimistic.

"He's done (for the season). I'd say so. He can't even move it," Mauer said. "It's not broken, but he's probably done, more than likely."

English had been hitting leadoff for Mauer, batting .307 in the season's second half and .410 in his last 10 games while providing stellar defense in center field.

Kane County and the Kernels will play the second game of their three-game series at 6:35 p.m. Wednesday at Perfect Game Field.

KANE COUNTY (1): Taylor, lf, 3 1 0 0, Vargas, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Regis, dh, 3 0 0 0, Herum, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Bray, cf, 3 0 0 0, Lugo, ss, 3 0 1 0, Perez, c, 3 0 0 0, Munoz, 3b 3 0 0 0, Castillo, 3b, 0 0 0 0, Reyes, rf, 3 0 1 0. Totals 27 1 3 1.

COUGARS (0): Valera, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Gordon, ss, 4 0 1 0, Corcino, cf, 4 0 2 0, White, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Doe, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Paul, dh, 4 0 0 0, Larson, lf, 3 0 2 0, Navarro, c, 3 0 0 0, Diemer, rf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 31 0 6 0.

Kane County ▯ 100 000 000 - 1 3 1

Kernels ▯ ▯ ▯ ▯ ▯ 000 000 000 - 0 6 0

Taylor, Solis (7), Burr (8), Ramirez (9) and Perez. Steele, Theofanopoulos (9) and Navaretto. W - Taylor (3-2). L - Steele (4-4). S - Ramirez (7). 2B - Larson (18). E - Taylor (1). T - 2:12. A - 1,638.