

Kernels enjoy 23-3 romp over Peoria

Written by S.D. Buhr

Monday, 24 August 2015 21:12 - Last Updated Monday, 24 August 2015 22:23



Every minor leaguer's goal entering the season is to develop his game to the point where he earns a promotion to the next level in the system.

Sometimes, that call comes when a player has dominated play within his current league. Other times, circumstances align to create an opportunity for a player to move up the organizational ladder, at least temporarily.

Such circumstances allowed Cedar Rapids Kernels third baseman T.J. White to get a promotion to Fort Myers July 10, despite carrying just a .230 batting average at the time. But as the Miracle began to rack up injuries among their early-season regulars at the corner infield positions, White and catcher/first baseman Brett Doe both got the call to move up. By Aug. 4, White was back in a Kernels uniform for Manager Jake Mauer.

"Yeah, Jake pretty much let us know," White recalled. "He said it could be four to five days, it could be two weeks or it could be the whole season. So we were looking to just go play and have fun with it."

White is still having fun and has turned his season around. Through the weekend, he was carrying a .317 batting average since his return to the Kernels and had reached base in 20 straight games.

On Monday night, the fun continued and White shared the joy with his teammates.

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The game between the Cedar Rapids Kernels and Peoria Chiefs may have had the earmarks of a classic pitchers duel going in, with Kernels starter Keaton Steele facing the Cardinals' 2014 first round draft choice Jack Flaherty, but what the 2,021 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium got instead was an old-fashioned beat-down administered by the Kernels, who obliterated the visitors 23-3.



White was one of three Kernels batters to notch at least four hits and one of three who finished just one hit short of hitting for the cycle. Four more Kernels tallied three hits apiece.

White had two singles, a double and a triple and Max Murphy had a single, a double and a triple. Edgar Corcino added a single, a double and a home run.

"We were joking yesterday, hitting's contagious, and it really is," a smiling White said after the game. "Everyone started swinging it early and it was a fun game."

Austin Diemer contributed two singles and a pair of doubles, but leadoff hitter Sean Miller led the Kernels' offensive attack with five hits, all singles. He also walked once.

Cedar Rapids struck early and often.

The first six Kernels batters of the game hit safely in the first inning and the first five came around to score off Flaherty. He would face just eight batters before being lifted by Chiefs Manager Joe Kruzal with just one out in the initial stanza.

Six straight hits were a season record for the Kernels. It was a record that lasted exactly three

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innings.

In Cedar Rapids' half of the fourth inning, which lasted 38 minutes, Cedar Rapids sent 16 batters to the plate and eight straight batters hit safely during the inning.

Kruzel threw in the towel early for the Chiefs. With his team trailing 16-2 through 5 ½ innings, the Peoria skipper brought in Alex DeLeon, a first baseman by trade, off the bench to pitch for the Chiefs to start the sixth inning. He was greeted rudely by Edgar Corcino, who launched DeLeon's first pitch beyond the right field wall.

Before the night was over, Peoria would also bring their designated hitter, Luis Cruz, and their first baseman, Jake Gronsby, to the mound in relief.

The Kernels would total 27 hits off Peoria pitchers, which was a season high and far more than enough support for Steele, who gave up two runs on six hits in six innings, and relievers Zach Tillery and Nick Anderson.

The offensive outburst was rare for a Kernels team that has struggled at times to score runs. Jake Mauer is counting on White, among others, to keep the runs crossing the plate going forward.

"He put in a lot of work down there in Fort Myers with (Fort Myers hitting coach) Jim Dwyer. The guy's got 18 years' big league experience. When he (White) came back, he had a different amount of confidence about him. He seems to be on just about everything.

"We're trying to find guys in the middle of the lineup," Mauer added, also mentioning improvements he's seeing from Max Murphy, Alex Real and others. "We'll mix and match and figure out our best nine, but T.J.'s going to be in there just about every night."

The experience at the higher level has not been lost on White, though he doesn't feel it's a

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totally different game at that level.

“Not much difference. It’s still baseball,” he said.

Still, there was an adjustment for him in Fort Myers.

“Guys (at Class High-A) can locate their off-speed (pitches) so much more, which makes it so much more dangerous,” White said. “You might not see a fastball again after that first pitch, because they can control it so much better. Here, you’ll probably most likely get another fastball or two before the end of the at-bat.”

While White would obviously prefer to have finished out his 2015 season in Fort Myers, returning to Cedar Rapids does bring with it one benefit. While the Kernels are preparing for postseason play, the Miracle are on the verge of elimination from playoff contention.

So, while those on the Miracle roster will likely be playing their final game of the season on Sept. 6, White will be with the Kernels as they begin their quest for MWL championship rings on Sept. 8.

PEORIA (3): Seferina, 2b, 5 0 1 1, Mercado, ss, 4 0 0 0, DeJong, 3b, 4 0 2 0, O'Keefe, c, 4 1 1 0, Bader, cf, 3 1 1 2, Gibson, lf, 1 0 0 0, Thompson, rf, 4 0 0 0, Cruz, dh/p/1b, 3 0 0 0, Gronsky, 1b/p, 4 1 4 0, Peoples-Walls, lf/cf, 4 0 1 0. Totals 36 3 10 3.

KERNELS (23): Miller, 2b, 6 4 5 1, Gordon, ss, 6 4 3 2, Corcino, rf, 7 2 3 5, White, 3b, 7 2 4 5, Murphy, lf, 5 2 3 2, Real, dh, 6 2 3 1, Navarroto, c, 5 1 1 1, Kelly, 1b, 5 2 1 0, Diemer, cf, 4 4 4 3. Totals 51 23 27 20.

Peoria ▯ ▯ 000 200 100 - 3 10 2

Kernels ▯ ▯ 500 (11)01 33x - 23 27 0

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Flaherty, Lomascolo (1), Liornes (4), Then (4), Deleon (6), Cruz (7), Gronsky (8) and O'Keefe. Steele, Tillery (7), Anderson (9) and Navarreto. W - Steele (5-4). L - Flaherty (8-2). 2B - Gronsky 2 (9), Diemer 2 (6), White (18), Murphy (12), Gordon (21), Real (8), Corcino (13). 3B - Murphy (8), White (6). HR - Bader (6), Corcino (4). E - Mercado (38), Lomascolo (3). T - 3:10. A - 2,021.