

The Byron Buxton Express got back on track Thursday night.

Buxton, the Cedar Rapids Kernels center fielder and lead off hitter, had a pair of doubles to go along with a towering three-run home run beyond the left field wall of Veterans Memorial Stadium. His three hits were among 11 Kernels hits on the night as they trounced the visiting Great Lakes Loons, 16-7.

Buxton had been in a bit of a minor slump with just three hits in the Kernels previous four games. That may not seem like much of a slump to most players, going hitless in only one of the four games. But Buxton carried a .476 batting average into this past Friday's game at Peoria and had seen that average drop to .404 going into Thursday's game with the Loons.

Was he concerned with the recent dip in production? "It got to me a little bit," Buxton acknowledged after Thursday's game, "but I hit in the cage, found my stroke back and took it to the field. It feels good."

Buxton's night didn't get off to a terrific start. In his first trip to the plate, he nearly beat out a ground ball to Great Lakes second baseman Malcolm Holland. Based on crowd reaction, many of the 1,009 in attendance clearly thought Buxton had legged out a hit. If Buxton thought he'd been robbed of a hit, it didn't bother him too much.

"I didn't let it get to me," said Buxton. "Everybody's not perfect so everybody makes mistakes. I just let it go."

Let it go, indeed. Buxton didn't have to wait long for his next at-bat, as the Kernels began hitting Loons starting pitcher Angel Sanchez early and often. In the second inning, Buxton returned to the plate following a Tyler Grimes walk and a double to the right-center field gap by J.D. Williams. Buxton's towering home run cleared the stadium and landed on 8th Avenue, giving the Kernels a 4-0 lead at the time.

## Kernels swat Great Lakes, 16-7

Written by S.D. Buhr

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Buxton wasn't the only Kernels hitter swinging a hot bat Thursday. Shortstop Niko Goodrum launched the first pitch he saw after Buxton's near-infield hit in the first inning for a solo home run to right-center field, giving the Kernels an early 1-0 lead. Goodrum added a single after Buxton's moonshot in the second inning and scored on a Jorge Polanco triple to make the score 5-0 through two innings.

The Kernels added a run in the fourth inning and built a 9-4 lead in the sixth inning on a three-run home run by Adam Brett Walker.

Cedar Rapids then scored five more runs in the seventh inning, sending all nine hitters to the plate without recording a single hit in the inning. Loons relief pitcher Jake Hermesen walked four straight Kernels at one point in the seventh, before giving way to Arismenda Orozco. The Loons' defense also committed a pair of errors in the inning.

The Kernels added two final runs in the eighth inning thanks to three more walks, another Great Lakes error, and Buxton's final hit of the night, an RBI double.

Kernels starting pitcher Brett Lee coasted through the first two innings before starting to struggle with control and command of his pitches. Lee ended his night clinging to a 6-4 lead with two runners on base and two outs in the fourth inning. He was charged with four runs (three of them earned) over 4 2/3 innings of work.

Tyler Jones relieved Lee and struck out the Loons' Pat Stover to end the threat. Jones earned the win for the Kernels, despite giving up three runs, all earned, over 2 2/3 innings.

Matt Tomshaw, fresh from being reactivated from the Disabled List, threw the final 1 2/3 shutout innings for the Kernels.

The Kernels will host Great Lakes in the second game of their scheduled three-game series on Friday night. Game time is 6:35.

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GREAT LAKES (7): Holland, 2b, 5 1 0 1, Smith, c, 5 1 2 1, Ogle, 1b, 5 0 0 0, Hoenecke, 3b, 5 1 2 0, Seager, ss, 3 0 1 1, Valentin, ss, 0 0 0 0, Rathjen, rf, 4 2 2 0, Stover, lf, 4 1 1 1, Ricardo, dh, 5 1 2 1, Baldwin, cf, 3 0 1 1, Sanchez, p, 0 0 0 0, Hermesen, p, 0 0 0 0, Ozoria, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 39 7 11 6.

KERNELS (16): Buxton, cf, 5 4 3 5, Goodrum, ss, 4 3 2 2, Polanco, 2b, 4 1 2 3, Hicks, 1b, 5 0 0 1, Walker, rf, 6 1 2 4, Harrison, 3b, 5 0 1 0, Jimenez, dh, 4 1 0 0, Grimes, c, 2 3 0 0, Williams, lf, 3 3 1 0, Lee, p, 0 0 0 0, Jones, p, 0 0 0 0, Tomshaw, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 38 16 11 15.

Great Lakes 001 210 030 - 7 11 4

Kernels 140 103 52x - 16 11 2

Sanchez, Hermesen (6), Ozoria (7) and Smith. Lee, Jones (5), Tomshaw (8) and Grimes. W - Jones (2-0). L - Sanchez (1-2). 2B - Rathjen (3), Smith (4), Hoenecke (7), Walker (3), Williams (4), Harrison (8), Buxton 2 (4). 3B - Polanco (1). HR - Goodrum (1), Buxton (3), Walker (3). SB - Holland (9), Rathjen (7). SF - Polanco. E - Hoenecke 2 (10), Ogle (2), Valentin (1), Polanco (2), Goodrum (5). T - 3:20. A - 1,009.