

Williams enjoys hitting 9th for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr
Monday, 29 April 2013 11:54 -

Cedar Rapids Kernels outfielder JaDamion (J.D.) Williams is in his fourth season with the Minnesota Twins organization after being selected in the 10th round of the 2010 amateur draft.

After a productive 2011 season at Rookie League level Elizabethton, where he hit .324, Williams hit only .237 for the Beloit Snappers a year ago and accumulated an on-base percentage of .311.

In his second year in the Midwest League, Williams is off to a much better start with the Kernels. Hitting in the ninth spot in Manager Jake Mauer's lineup, Williams spent most of the first three weeks of the season with a batting average approaching .300. Perhaps more impressively, he was reaching base at about a .450 rate.

He's also hit four doubles and three home runs, leading to a slugging percentage sufficient to put his OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage) near the 1.000 mark. Those numbers are almost certainly not sustainable, but they reflect a new, more aggressive, approach to hitting this season.

Williams sat down for an interview over the weekend to discuss his first few weeks in Cedar Rapids and his role, thus far, with the Kernels.

MSR: This is your second season in the Midwest League. Is there anything specifically different about how you feel going into this year as opposed to starting last year in Beloit?

WILLIAMS: Just the fact that I've had a year here in this league and I've learned a lot more. A lot more of a mature player, mature of a hitter and fielder. Learning from different guys.

Our hitting coach Tommy Watkins, this is my second year working with him. Guys such as (Twins minor league hitting coordinator) Bill Springman, those guys just teaching me not necessarily the athletic side of the game but baseball mentality. Just learning to be a baseball player, not just running around.

Williams enjoys hitting 9th for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr
Monday, 29 April 2013 11:54 -

MSR: Was it disappointing to find out you were going to be coming back to the Midwest League or was that something you were pretty much prepared for happening this year?

WILLIAMS: I wasn't sure what was going to happen, but like they say, as long as you've got a jersey on, somebody likes you. I didn't do what I wanted to do here (in the Midwest League) last year, so it doesn't bother me that I'm back here. I'm playing a lot better this year, so it is what it is.

MSR: Did the Twins give you anything specific to work on? Did they say, "This is what we really want you to work on going into the season. That's what you're going to have to do to advance."?

WILLIAMS: Basically, they wanted me to cut down on my strikeouts and put the ball in play a lot more because I can run but you can't steal first base, like they say.

So, I think I'm doing a lot better at that this year. I'm walking a lot more, not just going up there swinging at every pitch I see, opposed to like I was doing last year.

MSR: They probably don't exactly encourage you to run a lot with Byron Buxton coming up behind you, though.

WILLIAMS: (Laughs) He talks to me a lot. He tells me he's going to give me a few pitches to run. We've got our little sign for when I'm gonna run and whatnot. So we work on that a lot, try to get each other a couple of bases.

MSR: Growing up, did you have a favorite player, someone you wanted to be like?

WILLIAMS: Growing up I liked to watch Brandon Phillips. That was back when I was an infielder and I'm an outfielder now. Of course, I like Denard Span and those guys. Michael

Williams enjoys hitting 9th for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr
Monday, 29 April 2013 11:54 -

Bourne, Juan Pierre, those guys that can run, get on base, steal a couple of bases. I want to be just like those guys.

MSR: Is there anything about coming to Cedar Rapids that you've found different than what you expected it to be?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, I love the atmosphere here, the stadium, the people. It's a lot bigger than Beloit, obviously. Just a lot louder atmosphere. It's fun playing here. Much more fun team this year, the guys, everything is different this year.

MSR: You're making a statement at the bottom of the order. There's a cliché about the No.9 guy being a second leadoff hitter, but that's not just a cliché with the way you're getting on base.

WILLIAMS: That's what Jake told me at the beginning of the season. He told me I was probably going to bat ninth and I told him that didn't bother me at all.

If Buxton's doing a great job at the top of the order, I'll score a bunch of runs batting in front of Buxton so I'm not gonna argue with that at all. Basically, like I said, we're just having fun, man. I enjoy hitting in the nine hole in front of those guys.

MSR: Is there anything that Twins fans and Kernels fans don't know about you that you'd like the fans to know?

WILLIAMS: I'm not sure what they know about me yet (laughs), probably not a lot, yet. I'm going to try to change that in the future though, you know? Let these guys know who I am. Not many people know who I am.