

Buxton's slam send Kernels past Bees

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 16 May 2013 22:27 - Last Updated Friday, 17 May 2013 10:56

For the first two hours and 40 minutes of their game with the visiting Burlington Bees Thursday night, the Cedar Rapids Kernels were having one of their worst nights of the season. And then Byron Buxton happened - again.

With his team trailing the Bees 6-3, Buxton came to the plate with the bases loaded and one out in the Kernels half of the ninth inning. The Twins' super-prospect got an inside fastball that he liked and launched another one of his signature high, deep home runs to left field for a walk-off grand slam and a 7-6 Kernels victory.

Through the first 8 1/2 innings of the game, not a lot went right for the Kernels, particularly in the field. Five of Burlington's six runs were unearned, largely due to four Kernels errors spread across just the sixth and seventh innings.

Hard throwing Jairo Diaz, who pitched briefly for the Kernels last season, came on to defend the Bees' three-run lead and close out the game for Burlington in the ninth inning. But it would be Buxton doing the closing this night.

Diaz started the inning by hitting Kernels third baseman Travis Harrison with a pitch. Michael Quesada flied out to the left field warning track for the first out of the inning, but second baseman Candido Pimentel followed by hustling out a looping double to right field to put runners on second and third base.

Tyler Grimes pinch hit for No. 9 hitter Jeremias Pineda and Diaz promptly greeted him the same way he had Harrison, hitting Grimes with a pitch into his side to load the bases and bring up Buxton.

In Buxton's own words, this is what happened next. "He (Diaz) was struggling to get a curve over so I was sitting fastball the whole time. He started me out with a two-seamer low and then a fastball in. I got my hands through and you see what happened."

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Buxton got the traditional shaving cream to the face during a television interview in front of the Kernels dugout after the game. While these sorts of heroics are almost becoming commonplace for Buxton, he doesn't seem to be letting all the attention go to his head. Following the television interview, he spent several minutes signing autographs and posing for pictures with fans by the Kernels dugout before joining the celebration going on in the team's clubhouse.

"He's cool as a cucumber," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said of Buxton after the game.

"People pay a lot more attention to what's going on in the minor leagues," Mauer added, referring to the heightened attention Buxton's prospect status and performance is bringing. "Everybody knows everything about everybody. I think the biggest thing that he knows is he's just got to go out and play. Doesn't have to change who he is or what he does, just go play the game."

Buxton's own self-evaluation echoes that of his manager. "I haven't changed at all. Not letting the attention get to me. I'm just going out, having fun and playing my game."

The way this game started, it didn't appear that the Kernels would need late-game heroics to win. Harrison led off the second inning with a single and Quesada lined his first home run as a Kernel to straight-away center field to give Cedar Rapids a 2-0 lead. The Kernels scored another run in their half of the sixth inning on an Adam Brett Walker sacrifice fly, but after the error-filled sixth and seventh innings, Burlington seemed in control of the game as it built up its 6-3 lead.

Kernels starting pitcher Mason Melotakis gave up just three hits and one walk in his six innings of work. Just one of the four runs charged to Melotakis was earned. After the game, he was philosophical about the lack of fielding support from his teammates. "That's just baseball. They've played some really good defense most of the year."

Tim Atherton entered the game to start the seventh inning and gave up just one hit while striking out four Bees hitters in two innings pitched. Like Melotakis, however, Atherton gave up two unearned runs. Manuel Soliman (2-1) worked the ninth inning, walking one hitter but not giving up any hits.

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BURLINGTON (6): SJohnson, 3b, 4 1 0 1, KJohnson, cf, 3 2 2 2, Hinkle, dh, 4 0 0 0, Bolaski, 1b, 4 0 1 1, Walsh, rf, 4 0 1 2, Bemboom, c, 4 0 0 0, Ray, lf, 3 1 0 0, Soto, ss, 2 1 0 0, Toribio, 2b, 4 1 0 0, Lowery, p, 0 0 0 0, Spomer, p, 0 0 0 0, Diaz, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 32 6 4 6.

KERNELS (7): Buxton, cf, 5 1 2 4, Goodrum, dh, 4 0 1 0, Polanco, ss, 2 1 0 0, Hicks, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Walker, rf, 3 0 0 1, Harrison, 3b, 3 2 1 0, Quesada, c, 4 1 2 2, Pimentel, 2b, 4 1 1 0, Pineda, lf, 3 0 1 0, Grimes, ph, 0 0 0 0, Williams, pr, 0 1 0 0, Melotakis, p, 0 0 0 0, Atherton, p, 0 0 0 0, Soliman, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 32 7 9 7.

Burlington 000 103 200 - 6 4 0

Kernels 020 001 004 - 7 9 4

(One out when winning run scored)

Lowery, Spomer (7), Diaz (9) and Bemboom. Melotakis, Atherton (7), Soliman (9) and Quesada. W - Soliman (2-1). L - Diaz (0-1). 2B - Bolaski (7), Pineda (1), Quesada (1), Pimentel (1). HR - Quesada (1), Buxton (6). SB - Toribio (11), KJohnson (25), Buxton (16). S - Soto. SF - Walker. E - Polanco (6), Quesada (1), Pimentel (4), Harrison (10). HBP - Harrison (by Diaz), Grimes (by Diaz). T - 2:45. A - 2,484.