

Goodrum on the right side in Kernels win

Written by Mike Koolbeck

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Niko Goodrum is one of five switch hitters on the Cedar Rapids Kernels' roster.

The stats say he is most comfortable swinging from the left side. He entered Monday afternoon's game with a .276 batting average and 15 RBI swinging lefty.

From the right side? A paltry .240 with two RBI.

But Goodrum stepped into the right-handed batter's box against Kane County southpaw Nathan Dorris with the bases loaded in the bottom of the sixth inning and the Kernels trailing by two runs. He lined an opposite-field, bases-clearing triple into the right-field corner that put the Kernels ahead. They went on to beat the Cougars, 8-7, before a crowd of 3,017 at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The start of the game was delayed 1 hour, 28 minutes because of a wet field.

The win was the Kernels' third in the conclusion of the four-game set against Kane County (20-22) and all were by one run. The Kernels (30-13) are 6-2 in their last eight games and all six wins have been by a one-run margin.

Goodrum was the fourth Kernels batter Dorris faced after relieving South African Taylor Scott with one out in the bottom of the sixth. He walked two but struck out Kernels slugger Byron Buxton.

Goodrum said he and batting coach Tommy Watkins figured out a way to hit against Dorris, a 6-foot-3 lefty who touched 92 mph on the radar gun.

"With that left-handed guy, throwing a two-seamer (sinking fastball) I was just trying to take it to right field and not do too much with it," Goodrum said. "I talked to (Watkins) and we came up

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with a plan."

The plan was to look for an outside pitch and take it to right.

"He threw it," Goodrum said of the 1-1 fastball he lined. "I was just happy I drove it that way."

Watkins said a lot of hitters try to pull the ball in the situation Goodrum faced, and that was not the way to attack Dorris (1-2).

"That's what (pitchers) want you to do," Watkins said. "I tell them try to look for something up and look to hit it the other way. If it's a ball to pull, it will pull itself."

Goodrum said he is a natural right-handed hitter and it was just a matter of circumstance that his stats are so one-sided swinging from the left side.

"I'm on the left side more, facing a lot of righty pitchers," said Goodrum, who is hitting .267 overall. "So I don't get a chance to hit on the right side very much."

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said Goodrum has been an effective hitter from both sides. In two at-bats earlier in the game, batting left-handed, he advanced a runner to third and plated another by pulling the ball to the right side of the Kane County infield.

"He's been putting together good at-bats all year. I think he's starting to mature," Mauer said. "I think the biggest thing with him is he's starting to get that confidence, not only left-handed but right-handed as well. We put him in the 3 hole (in the batting order) today and he came up big for us.

"Obviously, everybody is going to talk about the bases-clearing triple and that was a big hit, no

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doubt. But being able to score that run (on a fifth inning ground out) made it a two-run game.

"Niko's a very smart kid. He sees things and he thinks about things. He's athletic and he has ability, too. He has a bright future, no doubt about it."

Goodrum had one hit, but it was a big one. It came at a good time, too, with his family winding up a visit from Georgia.

"It was all good to perform good in front of the family, to let them scream and cheer," said Goodrum, a second round pick of the Minnesota Twins in the June 2010 draft. "I don't get to play in front of them too much, but when they get here I have a ball.

"I've had good games while they've been around. This was a good one, too."

The Kernels' eight-run outburst came despite the absence of both Dalton Hicks and Adam Brett Walker. That pair has combined for 15 home runs and 79 RBIs, but both were rested Monday.

"They are our horses in the middle of the lineup," Mauer said. "But we have confidence in all 12 of our (position players). We had a little different look today and that was probably bad managing with the wind blowing out, putting all the fast guys in there with our big boppers on the bench.

"But it worked out all right."

Hicks had started all but two games at first base. Goodrum, who stands a lanky 6-4 and usually plays shortstop, was at first in his place.

"(Goodrum) does an excellent job at short, but probably his quickest way to get to the big

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leagues is being able to be versatile," Mauer said. "He's going to play some third, he's going to play mostly short, he's going to play some first here and there, and he could probably even play in the outfield."

Two sluggers still were in the lineup and they both produced mammoth home runs. Buxton belted his leading off the third inning and Harrison smoked one leading off the seventh.

"Buxton's ball was crushed and Harrison's was a no doubter," Mauer said. "That's what is so much fun about this team. You can put your lineup however you want it."

Buxton also made two fantastic catches in center field. He robbed Gioskar Amaya of possible extra bases in the first inning when he made an over-the-shoulder running catch one step before smacking into the wall in straightaway center. He made a diving grab of Pen-Chieh Chen's sinking liner in left-center leading off the ninth.

Mauer said Amaya's blast appeared to rattle Kernels starter Brett Lee, who pitched five shaky innings. Lee was touched for eight hits, six runs and walked four. He struck out five.

"He kind of backed off on his aggressiveness," Mauer said of Lee. "Pitching is being aggressive and going after hitters."

The relief pitching was outstanding. Tim Atherton (3-2) allowed one hit in two innings and picked up the win. Steve Gruver gave up two hits and a run in two innings, but left the tying run at first base in the top of the ninth to pick up his third save.

The Kernels have the day off on Tuesday. They go to Beloit for a three-game series that starts Wednesday. The last time the Kernels were at Beloit, May 11-13, they lost their only series of the season when the Snappers took two of three games.

The Kernels return home Saturday to open a six-game homestand. Burlington is in for the first

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three, followed by Clinton for three.

KANE COUNTY (7): Chen, lf, 5 0 0 0, Amaya, 2b, 4 2 2 0, Vogelbach, 1b, 5 0 2 2, Candelario, 3b, 5 1 4 2, Shoulders, dh, 2 1 0 0, Contreras, c, 4 1 1 1, Rademacher, rf, 2 1 0 1, Hernandez, ss, 4 0 1 0, Zapata, cf, 4 1 1 1, Scott, p, 0 0 0 0, Dorris, p, 0 0 0 0, Perakslis, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 35 7 11 7.

KERNELS (8): Buxton, cf, 5 2 1 1, Pimentel, 2b, 3 2 2 0, Goodrum, 1b, 5 0 1 4, Polanco, ss, 3 0 0 1, Harrison, 3b, 4 2 3 1, Grimes, c, 4 0 2 0, Williams, lf, 4 0 1 0, Quesada, dh, 2 1 0 0, Pineda, rf, 3 1 1 0, Lee, p, 0 0 0 0, Atherton, p, 0 0 0 0, Gruver, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 33 8 11 7.

Kane County 030 300 001 - 7 11 1

Kernels 012 013 10x - 8 11 0

Scott, Dorris (6), Perakslis (8) and Contreras. Lee, Atherton (6), Gruver (8) and Grimes. W - Atherton (3-2). L - Dorris (1-2). Sv - Gruver (3). 2B - Amaya 2 (10), Zapata (4), Grimes (5). 3B - Goodrum (3). HR - Buxton (7), Harrison (7). SB - Pimentel (7), Buxton (19). E - Hernandez (9). T - 2:42. A - 3,017.