

Stars shine as Kernels wallop Bandits, 14-5

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 05 June 2013 22:43 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 June 2013 23:27

Cedar Rapids Manager Jake Mauer called the Kernels together Wednesday afternoon and let them know that eight of them have been picked for the Midwest League All-Star Game.

The Kernels celebrated the good news and then went out and played like all-stars Wednesday night.

Cedar Rapids collected a season-high 21 hits and belted the Quad Cities River Bandits, 14-5, before 1,885 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Byron Buxton and Jorge Polanco, two of the Kernels all-stars, were both 4-for-4 by the time they finished the fourth inning. They combined for eight straight hits before anyone took the field for the fifth inning.

"That's amazing, isn't it?" marveled Mauer, who admitted he sometimes gets absorbed in watching his guys perform and forgets to wave them around the bases.

Buxton finished with five hits with two singles, a double and two triples, raising his average to .348 and missing the cycle by a home run.

He had a chance to match the Midwest League record of six hits in a single game, but hit a hard grounder to the second baseman in his final at-bat.

"I was seeing the ball real good tonight, I guess because I had two days off with the finger injury," the flashy center fielder remarked. "I came back hot."

Hotter than hot.

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"He had a jammed thumb," mused Mauer. "It didn't look like it was bugging him too much tonight, though."

The Kernels put together a highlight reel in the fourth inning when they wore out three different Quad Cities pitchers. The Kernels began the frame with nine straight hits and finished the inning with 10 runs on 12 hits.

Buxton, Polanco and Candido Pimentel had two hits apiece in the big inning.

"Everybody can hit on our team," said Buxton. "When one guy is not coming around, there's always somebody to pick him up."

Buxton finished 5-for-6 and scored three runs. Polanco was 4-for-6 with two doubles and two RBIs. Dalton Hicks went 2-for-4 with two doubles and four RBIs. Michael Quesada went 3-for-4. Pimentel was 2-for-5 with two RBIs and Tyler Grimes also went 2-for-5.

It was a lot of hitting by a lot of all-stars.

Buxton (outfield), Polanco (middle infield), Hicks (first base) and Adam Brett Walker (outfield) made the starting lineup for the Midwest League All-Star Game in Dayton June 18. Niko Goodrum (shortstop), Travis Harrison (third base), Jose Berrios (pitcher) and Tyler Duffey (pitcher) also made the squad.

Duffey was promoted to Fort Myers in the Florida State League this week and will not play in the Midwest League All-Star Game. Mauer said Kernels relief pitcher Steve Gruver will take Duffey's place in Dayton.

Buxton said he feels "very good" about making the all-star team. "I've got seven other players coming with me, so it's going to be fun. A lot of fun," he said.

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"It's awesome. We've got the most on our side of the Midwest League (in the Western Division), so that's good."

Polanco also said he's looking forward to the all-star trip. "I feel good about that," he said. "We're going to enjoy it together."

The Kernels could put their own all-star infield together with Harrison at third base, Goodrum at shortstop, Polanco at second base and Hicks at first base. They also have two-thirds of an all-star outfield with Buxton in center field and Walker in right. And when Berrios is the starting pitcher, they could have seven all-stars on the field at the same time.

"It just so happens that they're all here at the same time," said Mauer. "Hopefully they'll all move up together at the same time. That would be pretty fun to see."

Mauer enjoyed watching the speedy Buxton sprint first to third on his two triples. He almost enjoyed it too much.

"That's what I told Tommy Watkins (the Kernels hitting coach)," he said. "I've got to be careful watching Byron going from first to third. I almost get caught watching him going around."

The Kernels (37-20) took another step toward clinching the Western Division title for the first half of the Midwest League campaign.

The Kernels hold a 4 1/2 game lead over Beloit (33-25), a five-game lead over Quad Cities (32-25) and a 5 1/2-game lead over Peoria (31-25) with 11 games left in the session.

QUAD CITIES (5): Sosa, lf/2b, 3 2 0 0, Correa, ss, 4 0 1 1, Scott, lf, 1 0 0 0, Wierzbicki, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Joyce, rf, 3 1 1 1, Ruiz, 3b, 4 1 2 1, Pena, c, 4 0 2 1, Blasik, dh, 4 0 0 1, Elkins, 2b/ss, 2 1 0

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0, Hernandez, cf, 4 0 0 0. Totals 33 5 6 5.

KERNELS (14): Buxton, cf, 6 3 5 1, Williams, lf, 5 1 1 1, Polanco, ss, 6 2 4 2, Hicks, 1b, 4 1 2 4, Walker, rf, 5 1 1 1, Harrison, 3b, 4 1 1 1, Grimes, dh, 5 2 2 1, Quesada, c, 4 1 3 1, Pimentel, 2b, 5 2 2 2. Totals 44 14 21 14.

Quad Cities 012 200 000 - 5 6 1

Kernels 200 (10)11 00 - 14 21 0

Jankowski, Lambson (4), Rodriguez (4), Minaya (6) and Pena. Robb, Muren (4), Atherton (8), Brewer (9) and Quesada. W - Muren (4-0). L - Lambson (2-3). 2B - Ruiz (8), Pena (9), Joyce (9), Polanco 2 (17), Hicks 2 (19), Buxton 12, Walker 13. 3B - Buxton 2 (7), Grimes (4). SB - Sosa (1), Elkins (9). E - Ruiz. T - 3:21. A - 1,885.