

## Error-prone Kernels fall to Bandits

Written by S.D. Buhr

Saturday, 03 August 2013 20:26 -

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The Cedar Rapids Kernels have become generous to a fault, lately.

Instead of limiting opponents to their allotted three outs per inning, the Kernels defense has all too often been giving opponents extra outs by committing errors and various other lapses in the field.

The Quad Cities River Bandits were the beneficiaries of the Kernels' generosity Saturday night. The River Bandits cashed in on four Kernels errors to claim a 5-2 win in front of 5,294 fans in the first game of a four-game series at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Quad Cities (25-15) moved to a half-game behind the Kernels (26-15) in the Midwest League's Western Division. The teams meet again Sunday at 2:05 p.m.

The Kernels have lost four of their last five games.

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer held a closed-door meeting with his team after the game, never a good sign for a team trying to prepare for the postseason playoffs.

"We're doing things not to lose, instead of to win a game. That's what we were talking about," Mauer said once the clubhouse doors were opened.

Mauer said he wasn't sure if his team's lax play could be related to so many players not being accustomed to a full 140-game minor league schedule.

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"Could be. That's what we talked about. 'You guys are tired, but everybody in this league is tired,' " Mauer said. "This is the first level where they've had to play all those games and play every day. You can talk to whoever you want, but you've got to experience this. That's part of being a professional ballplayer."

It didn't help that the Kernels' offense went mostly silent against River Bandits lefty Joe Bircher (3-1). The Kernels managed just two hits off of Bircher during his seven innings of work.

Catcher Michael Quesada's one-out single in the third inning gave the Kernels their first base runner.

The Kernels scored their first run of the game in the fourth inning. Shortstop Niko Goodrum doubled to left-center field to lead off the inning, moved to third base on Jorge Polanco's a long fly ball to center field, and scored on a sacrifice fly to left field by Adam Brett Walker.

The most serious offensive threat for the Kernels came in the home half of the eighth inning. Cedar Rapids loaded the bases with one out on two walks and a Jonathan Murphy single off of Bandits' relief pitcher Jamaine Cotton. After a Goodrum strikeout, Jorge Polanco singled in Quesada and left the bases loaded Walker.

After a Quad Cities pitching change, Walker went down swinging to end the threat.

The Kernels threatened once more in the bottom of the ninth inning when Max Kepler and Travis Harrison each singled with no outs. Jordan Jankowski retired the next three Kernels hitters, however, to earn his fifth save.

The Kernels needed starting pitcher Mason Melotakis (9-4) to go deep in the game after the team's bullpen was overtaxed during their last four games in Burlington.

However, thanks in part to the team's fielding issues, Melotakis threw 98 pitches through five

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innings and his night ended at that point with his team trailing 4-1. Only two of the runs Melotakis gave up were earned runs. He gave up eight hits and struck out five batters.

Dallas Gallant relieved Melotakis to start the sixth inning and surrendered a solo home run to Austin Elkins that gave the River Bandits their final run of the night. Elkins, the No.9 batter in the order, was 3-for-4 and also had a triple.

Tim Shibuya came on to pitch in the seventh and finished with three shutout innings for the Kernels.

QUAD CITIES (5): Hernandez, cf, 4 0 0 0, Vasquez, lf, 5 0 1 1, Correa, ss, 5 0 4 2, Gulbransen, rf, 5 0 1 0, Borchering, dh, 5 0 0 0, Pena, c, 4 0 0 0, Joyce, 1b, 4 2 1 0, Blasik, 3b, 4 1 1 0, Elkins, 2b, 4 2 3 1. Totals 40 5 11 4.

KERNELS (2): Murphy, cf, 4 0 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 4 1 1 0, Polanco, 2b, 4 0 1 1, Walker, rf, 3 0 0 1, Kepler, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Harrison, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Grimes, dh, 4 0 0 0, Quesada, c, 3 1 1 0, Pineda, lf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 33 2 6 2.

Quad Cities 010 301 000 - 5 11 1

Kernels 000 100 010 - 2 6 4

Bircher, Cotton (8), Sanchez (8), Jankowski (9) and Pena. Melotakis, Gallant (6), Shibuya (7) and Quesada. W-Bircher (3-1). L-Melotakis (9-4). Sv-Jankowski (5). 2B-Goodrum (20). 3B-Elkins (3). HR-Elkins (5). SF-Walker. E-Correa (13), Goodrium (23), Melotakis (2), Harrison (21), Polanco (14). T-2:34. A-5,294.