

Kernels face No.1 pick Appel Tuesday

Written by Jim Ecker
Monday, 05 August 2013 21:58 -

Mark Appel can throw a baseball 100 mph and hopes to play in the Major Leagues with the Houston Astros as early as next season.

That's probably not good news for the struggling Cedar Rapids Kernels, who have to face Appel in a Class A Midwest League game Tuesday night at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The Kernels collected only four hits and lost to the Quad Cities River Bandits, 6-2, before 2,176 fans at the stadium Monday night and now have to battle one of the top pitchers in the minor leagues.

Appel, the No.1 overall pick in the draft this year from Stanford, unobtrusively sat in the stands Monday, charting pitches with a couple of his teammates and getting ready for his next start.

"First of all, I wouldn't want fans to hold me up to too high expectations," he said after the game. "It's like when you're going to watch a good movie. You don't want somebody to hype it up too much and then you're let down."

Appel, a 6-foot-5 right-hander, received a signing bonus of \$6.35 million from the Astros. He made two starts for the Tri-City Valley Cats in the New York-Penn League this summer and was promoted to Quad Cities, where he has a 0-0 record and 3.07 ERA in four starts. He has struck out 14 batters in 14.2 innings with strict pitch counts to protect his valuable arm.

Appel anticipates throwing 75 to 80 pitches against the Kernels and then taking a shower.

"I throw a fastball, at its best it's gotten up to 99 or 100 miles per hour. It probably won't be there tomorrow," he said. "Again, it's part of getting used to the pro ball thing."

He said he throws a slider in the 86 to 89 range and a changeup that arrives at 82 to 85 mph.

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"I only throw three pitches and I feel comfortable with all of them," he said. "I like to attack hitters with all of them. The only thing I expect of myself is just to compete."

Appel, 22, spent four years at Stanford. He does not plan to spend a lot of time in the minor leagues, but said the Houston Astros have not given him a timetable for arriving in the big leagues.

"They haven't told me anything. They haven't let me know what their plans are or let me sit in on the conversations, and I don't think they ever will," he said, smiling.

"My goal, my plan, is to be there this year, if not next year," he said. "Obviously this year is pushing it, just because I did throw a lot in college and the season is coming to a close pretty quickly.

"My goal for the next season is to be at the Major League level and have an impact in Houston. Growing up in Houston, I love the Astros and now being able to play for them is like a dream come true. I'm hoping to be a part of the first World Series (championship) team that Houston will ever have."

The Astros only appearance in the World Series was in 2005. They currently have the worst record in the Major Leagues and will need to improve quite a bit to make the World Series in the near future, but Houston fans are counting on guys like Appel and Quad Cities shortstop Carlos Correa to help them get there someday. Correa, the No.1 overall pick in the 2012 draft, went 3-for-4 Monday night against the Kernels and is hitting .331.

Correa reportedly signed for \$4.8 million last year, so the River Bandits will have more than \$11 million in bonus money on the field Tuesday night with Appel on the mound and Correa patrolling the infield. It's the first time in Minor League history that two No.1 overall picks are playing for the same team at the same time.

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Cedar Rapids (27-16) has a half-game lead over Quad Cities (26-16) in the West Division race, so the Kernels need a victory over Appel and the River Bandits Tuesday night to stay in first place.

"We'll handle him just like any other right-hander," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer. "To be honest, I'm happy that we get to see a right-hander. We get to see him and see what he's all about. It's a good opportunity for us to go out there and turn this thing around."

The Kernels have a 2-5 record in their last seven games and have scored just 14 runs during that span.

Quad Cities left-hander Josh Hader, acquired in a trade with the Baltimore Orioles last week, held the Kernels to one hit in six innings Monday night. By then the River Bandits had a 5-0 lead and were coasting to victory.

Cedar Rapids scored in the ninth inning on a two-run homer by Adam Brett Walker, giving him 24 homers and 96 RBIs this season. He leads the Midwest League in both departments by wide margins.

The Kernels compounded their problems in the top of the ninth by forgetting how many outs there were with runners on first and third. There was only one out, but shortstop Niko Goodrum and second baseman Jorge Polanco thought there were two outs and casually settled for a force play at second base on an infield grounder instead of trying to turn a double play as a run scored.

"It's embarrassing and it's unacceptable. That's Little League stuff," said Mauer.

QUAD CITIES (6): Hernandez, cf, 4 2 1 0, Kemp, 2b, 4 1 2 0, Correa, ss, 4 2 3 1, Vasquez, lf, 5 0 1 0, Borchering, 1b, 5 0 0 1, Ruiz, 3b, 5 0 2 2, Morales, c, 4 1 1 0, Scott, rf, 4 0 1 0, Elkins, dh, 4 0 0 0. Totals 39 6 11 4.

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

Quad Cities 311 000 001 - 6 11 2

Kernels 000 000 002 - 2 4 1

Hader, Cotton (7) and Morales. Powell, Boyd (6), Muren (8), Gilbert (9) and Quesada. W - Hader (1-0). L - Powell (2-5). S - Cotton (1). 2B - Kemp (1), Walker (26). HR - Walker (24). SB - Morales (1), Elkins (17). E - Ruiz (16), Kemp (1), Kepler (7). T - 2:38. A - 2,176.