

Appel helps Bandits jump over Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 06 August 2013 21:28 -

The Cedar Rapids Kernels got knocked out of first place in the Midwest League Tuesday night by a Hall of Famer.

That's an exaggeration, of course -- the part about the Hall of Fame -- but Mark Appel looked like the real deal Tuesday as the Quad Cities River Bandits topped the Kernels, 7-2, before 2,178 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Appel is the 6-foot-5 right-hander from Stanford who received a \$6.35 million signing bonus from the Houston Astros this summer after being selected as the No.1 overall pick in the amateur draft.

Appel hit 98 mph on the River Bandits' radar gun and left the game after throwing 60 pitches in five innings. It was his first victory in pro ball as he begins what appears to be a very promising career.

"He's pretty good," said Kernels infielder Joel Licon. "He's throwing 98 miles per hour. You have to tip your hat to him. He's good."

Appel breezed through the first three innings, facing the minimum nine batters on a series of weak ground balls, except for a smash by Max Kepler that Quad Cities shortstop Carlos Correa -- the No.1 overall pick in 2012 -- snared and fired to first for the out.

Appel walked a man in the fourth inning, but carried a no-hitter into the fifth before weakening a tad. Kepler reached on an infield error and Travis Harrison flied to right, but Tyler Grimes hit a flair single to right for the Kernels' first safety of the game.

The base umpire tossed the ball toward the Kernels dugout as though somebody wanted it as a souvenir, but Grimes said it wasn't him who asked for the ball. He said there was no special satisfaction in getting a hit off the No.1 draft pick.

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"It doesn't mean anything to me," said Grimes. "It's just another day. You can't go out there and think like that."

Appel got Bo Altobelli on a comebacker, putting runners at second and third with outs in the fifth inning. Licon, a .221 hitter with a good glove, came to the plate in the No.9 spot in the order, hoping to make something happen.

Licon reached out and poked a single to right field on an 0-2 slider, driving in two runs and pulling the Kernels within 5-2.

"It was a breaking ball and he kind of left it up," said Licon. "Yeah, I'm happy, but that doesn't really matter. We needed the win. It was nice, but it don't mean nothing because we didn't win."

The River Bandits won 3-of-4 games in the series and moved ahead of the Kernels in the West Division standings for the second half of the Midwest League campaign. Quad Cities has a 27-16 record and Cedar Rapids is 27-17, a half-game behind.

"It's a cherry on top that we're in first place," said Appel after his first victory.

"I'm just glad the team won," he said. "We're in the playoff race right now. That's my goal every time out, just give myself a chance to win. They made some great plays behind me. Our defense was awesome."

Appel allowed two hits in five innings. He struck out two batters and walked one. Both of the Cedar Rapids runs were unearned.

Appel has hit 100 mph on radar guns and collected a bushel of strikeouts at Stanford, but he's just as happy when a mid-90's fastball produces a weak ground ball for an easy out. He's not

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going to strike out everybody and he's not always going to hit the high 90's on the radar gun.

"That's part of the expectations that people might have," he said. "The only expectation I have ... I'm just trying to go out and compete. Fortunately I did enough to win tonight.

"I think it's pretty unrealistic, unless you're Aroldis Chapman (of the Cincinnati Reds) for every fastball to be 100 mph and strike everyone out."

Appel was not happy with his 0-2 pitch to Licon in the fifth inning. He wanted to throw the slider in the dirt or several inches off the plate, but made it too fat.

"It was a good pitch selection, but not a good location, especially 0-and-2," he said. "I was kind of upset about that, but in the grand scheme of the whole game we were still winning 5 to 2."

Appel thought he might throw 75 or 80 pitches, but the coaching staff and Houston Astros had other ideas and called it a night after 60 pitches to protect his valuable arm. Appel said he felt good and could have kept going.

"Absolutely. I feel like I could have," he remarked. "Again, it's not my decision to make.

"That's not for me to decide. You'll have to ask the guys that make those decisions. As a competitor, I want to keep going as long as I feel good."

Appel had a full season at Stanford this year and has pitched a total of 24.2 innings in the minor leagues for Houston's teams in the New York-Penn League and the Midwest League. There were rumors at the ballpark Tuesday that Appel might be set for a promotion, but Quad Cities Manager Omar Lopez denied anything was imminent.

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Appel thinks he might be summoned to the Houston Astros in September when the Major League rosters are expanded to 40 players, but has no guarantees. His goal is to pitch for the Astros next season, but there are still three rungs in Houston's organization between the Midwest League and the American League.

"They have a science behind it all and they don't have to explain any of the decisions that they make," said Appel. "As of now, I'm a Quad Cities River Bandit until they tell me otherwise."

The River Bandits grabbed a 3-0 lead in the first inning with the highlight a two-run homer by Bobby Borchering against Kernels starter Josue Montanez. The Bandits made it 5-0 in the fifth on a solo homer by Brian Blasik.

The Kernels open a three-game series at Beloit Wednesday night. Their next home game is Wednesday, Aug. 14 against Beloit.

Cedar Rapids has lost six of its last eight games with a struggling offense that has produced only 16 runs during that span.

QUAD CITIES (7): Hernandez, cf, 4 1 1 0, Kemp, 2b, 4 0 0 0, Correa, ss, 4 1 2 1, Vasquez, lf, 3 0 0 1, Borchering, 1b, 4 1 1 2, Ruiz, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Pena, c, 4 2 2 0, Scott, rf, 3 0 1 1, Blasik, dh, 3 2 2 2. Totals 33 7 9 7.

KERNELS (2): Murphy, cf, 4 0 0 0, Goodrum, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Polanco, ss, 4 0 1 0, Walker, rf, 4 0 0 0, Kepler, lf, 4 1 0 0, Harrison, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Grimes, c, 3 1 1 0, Altobelli, dh, 3 0 1 0, Licon, 2b, 3 0 1 2. Totals 32 2 4 2.

Quad Cities 310 010 011 - 7 9 1
Kernels 000 020 000 - 2 4 3

Appel, Christensen (6), Lambson (9) and Pena. Montanez, Gallant (8), Bixler (9) and Grimes. W

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- Appel (1-0). L - Montanez (4-5). 2B - Correa 2 (27), Pena 2 (16), Polanco (27). HR - Borchering (3), Blasik (3). SB - Goodrum (14). E - Murphy (3), Harrison (22), Polanco (15). T - 2:14. A - 2,178.