

## Kernels reach milestone with 80th win

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 22:18 - Last Updated Thursday, 22 August 2013 18:50

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DAVENPORT — The Cedar Rapids Kernels have something in common with the Mississippi River these days.

Just like Ol' Man River, the Kernels keep rolling along.

Cedar Rapids won its eighth straight game Wednesday night with a 6-1 victory over the Quad Cities River Bandits at Modern Woodmen Park along the banks of the Mississippi.

It was the Kernels' 80th victory of the season, marking only the 10th time since pro baseball began in Cedar Rapids in 1890 that the local team has won 80 games or more.

"Oh, wow," said Kernels skipper Jake Mauer when informed of the milestone. "That's something else, for as many good teams that have come through Cedar Rapids."

Cedar Rapids has opened a 6 1/2-game lead over the River Bandits in the Western Division of the Midwest League for the second half of the season. The Kernels have a 40-18 mark for the second half, compared with a 40-28 record for the first half of the season when they finished second in the Western Division and clinched a playoff berth.

Their overall mark of 80-46 is the best record in the Midwest League.

The Cedar Rapids Bunnies, who finished 92-37 in 1922, hold the franchise record for most victories in the regular season. The Kernels have 12 games left in the regular season and could tie that mark by winning another 12 in a row. That's unlikely, but the second-best total of 88-46 mark in 1990 could be within reach.

"It's been pitching and defense," said Mauer. "We hit the ball good tonight and we hit the ball good last night, but the past two or three weeks our pitching has been really good."

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The Kernels did not walk any batters in a victory at Peoria on Tuesday night and they walked only one batter Wednesday night.

"We're not putting people on," said Mauer. "They've got to earn it. It seems to make our infield defense play better. We're getting off the field a lot quicker."

Miguel Sulbaran, acquired in a trade from the Los Angeles Dodgers organization in late July, pitched five strong innings for the Kernels. He struck out six batters (including the first four batters he faced), allowed five hits and was touched for one unearned run.

Alex Muren tossed three scoreless innings in relief, and Mason Melotakis worked a scoreless ninth inning.

Joel Licon socked a two-run homer for the Kernels in the fourth inning. Mike Gonzales went 2-for-4 with two RBIs, Bo Altobelli was 2-for-4 with two RBIs and Adam Brett Walker went 2-for-5.

Altobelli hit a bases-loaded double in the fifth inning and appeared to drive in three runs on the play, but Licon was called out for missing third base.

"I thought I touched third," said Licon. "I asked Jake and he thought I touched it, too. I was pretty sure I touched it. But I don't know, the umpire disagreed."

Ironically, the Kernels have compiled a better record in the second half of the Midwest League campaign since stalwarts like Byron Buxton, Dalton Hicks, J.D. Williams and some of their top pitchers were promoted.

"These kids are pretty loose," said Mauer. "They've been with each other for five months now,

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for the most part."

"We've all jelled as a team and everybody is pretty close," said Licon, who joined the club June 3. "We have to do the little things right."

The Kernels and River Bandits will meet again Thursday night in the second game of their three-game series. The Kernels return home Saturday night to face Peoria.

KERNELS (6): Murphy, cf, 3 1 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 3 1 1 0, Gonzales, 1b, 4 1 2 2, Walker, rf, 5 1 2 0, Harrison, 3b, 3 1 0 0, Grimes, 2b, 1 0 0 0, Licon, 2b/3b, 4 1 1 2, Altobelli, dh, 4 0 2 2, Quesada, c, 3 0 1 0, Pineda, lf, 4 0 0 0. Totals 34 6 10 6.

QUAD CITIES (1): Kemp, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Hernandez, cf, 4 0 1 0, Correa, ss, 4 0 0 0, Vasquez, lf, 3 0 1 0, Joyce, lf, 1 0 0 0, Borchering, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Ruiz, 3b, 4 0 2 0, Elkins, dh, 4 0 0 0, Pena, c, 2 0 0 0, Morales, ph/c, 2 0 2 0, Scott, rf, 4 1 1 0. Totals 35 1 8 0.

Kernels 001 221 000 - 6 10 0

Quad Cities 000 010 000 - 1 8 0

Sulbaran, Muren (6), Melotakis 99) and Quesada. Minor, Minaya (4), Rodriguez (7) and Pena. W - Sulbaran (7-4). L - Minor (7-3). 2B - Gonzales (6), Altobelli (1), Ruiz (27). HR - Licon (2). SB - Scott (25). T - 2:41. A - 2,019.