

All-Star Stewart shines for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr
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Cedar Rapids Kernels pitcher Kohl Stewart tuned up for his upcoming Midwest League All-Star Game appearance with four shutout innings of work in front of 3,765 fans on “Iowa State Night” at Veterans Memorial Stadium, where Cedar Rapids topped the Burlington Bees 7-6 on a walk-off throwing error by Bees pitcher Ben Carlson.

Originally scheduled to start the final game of the first half of the season on Sunday, Stewart had his start moved up a day so he’d be able to pitch in the All-Star Game.

Stewart was the Minnesota Twins’ first round draft choice a year ago and is among the most highly rated players in the Twins organization.

“He’s been on a pitch count all year, so we believed that in order for him to represent the Kernels and represent the Minnesota Twins and enjoy his time in the All-Star Game, he needed to be ready to pitch,” explained pitching coach Ivan Arteaga afterward. “We didn’t feel comfortable having him pitch on one day’s rest.”

Stewart left the game with a 6-0 lead, but Burlington battled back off of three Kernels relievers, finally tying the game 6-6 with back-to-back solo home runs to begin the visitors’ half of the ninth inning.

Mitch Garver started off the home half of the ninth by drawing a walk off Carlson and Bryan Haar followed with a single.

Jason Kanzler’s bounced his subsequent bunt high in to the air in front of the plate, Carlson fielded the ball but rushed his throw and launched the ball down the left field line, allowing Garver to score all the way from second base with the winning run.

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Stewart, who along with pitcher Yorman Landa and third baseman Bryan Haar will be representing the Kernels in Tuesday's MWL All-Star tilt, gave up six hits and walked three batters, while also striking out three Bees.

The right hander was hit in the right hip by a line drive off the bat of Bees right fielder Ranyelmy Mendoza in the fourth stanza. The ball ricocheted off Stewart in to right field for a hit. Stewart stayed in the game to complete the inning but was replaced by Josue Montanez to start the fifth frame.

Stewart will be flying home to Texas after Tuesday's All-Star Game to have a regularly scheduled check-up with the doctor that treats the pitcher's diabetes.

"You're supposed to see a doctor every three months," explained the pitcher. "This (the All-Star break) is the only time I can really do it. So I'll probably fly out of West Michigan to home, go see my doctor, then meet the team in Kane County."

The Kernels knocked out 10 hits in just the first four innings as they built an early 6-0 lead and finished the night with 18 hits.

Chad Christensen, honored before the game as the Kernels' May Player of the Month, continued his hot hitting with three hits in five at-bats, including a two-run home run in the fourth inning that gave Cedar Rapids their 6-0 lead.

Ryan Walker, Jon Murphy and Engelb Vielma each also added three hits to the Cedar Rapids attack. Murphy and Vielma each had three singles and Walker contributed a single and two triples. Like Christensen, Walker also drove in two Kernels runs.

Burlington got on the board with three runs in their half of the seventh inning off of Josue Montanez and added another in the eighth off Brandon Bixler.

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Hudson Boyd (4-1) worked the ninth inning, getting credit for the win. He retired three straight Burlington batters after giving up the back-to-back home runs to start the frame.

The same two teams will face off Sunday at 2:05 in the final game of the first half of the season for both clubs.