

Kane County KO's Kernels from playoffs

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 07 September 2014 20:37 -



GENEVA, Ill. - John Curtiss faced a lot of high-pressure situations on the mound during his days as the closer for the Texas Longhorns, but he never faced a situation as unique as what he faced Sunday night in Geneva, Ill.

Curtiss made his Midwest League debut Sunday after being called up to join the Kernels on Saturday.

He threw five shutout innings for Cedar Rapids, but it wasn't enough to keep the Kernels' season going as they fell, 4-2, to the Kane County Cougars in a back-and-forth ballgame before 1,239 fans at Fifth Third Bank Ballpark.

Curtiss spent his spring with the Longhorns and his summer in Elizabethton with the Twins' rookie level team in the Appalachian League after Minnesota made him its sixth-round pick in the June draft. But with the Kernels' starting pitching corps running thin, Curtiss got the word he needed to board a plane to Cedar Rapids on Saturday morning and by Sunday night he was starting a game the Kernels needed to win to keep their playoff hopes alive.

All Curtiss did was throw five innings of one-hit baseball at the team with the Midwest League's best record. He did not give up a hit until the fifth inning, though he did walk a pair and gave up a couple of warning-track sized fly balls.

The Kernels, likewise, had little luck hitting against Cougars starter Paul Blackburn. Blackburn held the Kernels scoreless through five innings and gave up just a third-inning single to Ryan Walker.

After both starting pitchers put up nothing but zeroes through five innings, the game came down to a battle of bullpens. Through most of this season, you would have liked the Kernels' chances in that situation. Their bullpen has been one of the best in the league for the second half of the

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season.

But the bullpen magic failed them this time, as Kernels relievers gave up four runs on six hits over their final three innings.

Cougar first baseman Jacob Rogers put Kane County in front, 1-0, with a sixth-inning solo home run off Cedar Rapids reliever Jared Wilson. But the Kernels' own first sacker, Chad Christensen, went Rogers one better with a two-run homer off Kane County reliever Tyler Ihrig, putting Cedar Rapids on top 2-1 in the seventh.

That lead was short-lived. In the home half of the seventh inning, Cougar shortstop Carlos Penalver failed to get a sacrifice bunt down and then ripped a two-run roundtripper to left field to put Kane County back on top, 3-2.

The Cougars added an insurance run in the home half of the eighth inning. Three Cedar Rapids outs later, the game was over and, with it, the Kernels' season.

Manager Jake Mauer was proud of his group's effort in their final game and throughout the season.

"They battled their ass off, all of them, every single one of them. They competed and they competed and they won't go away and that's all you can ask for," he said.

"You've got to tip your cap to (Kane County). They're tough, too. Their pitching staff's good all the way up and down. They're deep. They'll be a tough opponent, whoever they get in the next round.

"We beat ourselves a little bit (Saturday) night, not making the plays, but tonight we hit the ball over the fence," said Mauer. "They hit two and we hit one of them and that's just kind of how it

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goes.”

Kane County won the Western Division title and will play for the Midwest League championship.

KERNELS (2): English, cf, 4 0 0 0, Hinojosa, 3b, 4 1 1 0, Chrisensen, 1b, 4 1 1 2, Murphy, lf, 4 0 1 0, Swim, rf, 3 0 0 0, Wade, dh, 3 0 0 0, Walker, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Quesada, c, 3 0 0 0, Vielma, ss, 3 0 0 0. Totals 31 2 4 2.

KANE COUNTY (4): Dunston, lf, 4 0 0 0, Zaguins, dh, 4 0 1 0, Candelario, 3b, 1 0 0 0, Rogers, 1b, 4 1 1 1, Brockmeyer, c, 4 0 0 0, Baez, rf, 3 1 1 0, Young, 2b, 3 1 1 1, Penalver, ss, 4 1 3 2, Martin, cf, 4 0 0 0. Totals 31 4 7 4.

Kernels 000 000 200 - 2 4 1

Kane County 000 001 21x - 4 7 1

Curtiss, Wilson (6), Gilbert (7) and Quesada. Blackburn, Ihrig (6), Carrillo (9) and Brockmeyer. W - Ihrig (1-0). L - Wilson (1-1). S - Carrillo (2). 2B - Murphy (3). HR - Christensen (2), Rogers (1), Penalver (1). SB - Baez 2 (2). E - Hinojosa (3), Penalver (2). T - 2:23. A - 1,239.