

Clay sparkles for Kernels in setback

Written by Metro Sports Report
Wednesday, 15 April 2015 21:57 -



Sometimes your mother knows best when it comes to pursuing a college baseball career.

Cedar Rapids Kernels pitcher Sam Clay is proof of that.

He never thought about playing baseball in college, but his mother saw it differently when he was a high school junior in Georgia.

"I never really thought I was that good," Clay said Wednesday. "Then I went out to some showcase, because my mom pushed me out there.

"Apparently I did pretty well and started getting some looks from colleges."

Clay ended up having a good career at Georgia Tech as a relief pitcher. And then the kid who didn't think he was good enough to pitch in college was selected in the fourth round of the 2014 draft by the Minnesota Twins and given a \$400,000 bonus to sign.

Clay sparkled for Cedar Rapids Wednesday night with three scoreless innings in relief, but the Kernels ended up falling to Peoria 3-2 in 12 innings before 951 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

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It was the Kernels' first loss of the season after beginning the year with six straight victories.

Clay, a 6-foot-3 left-hander, kept Peoria off the board in the 7th, 8th and 9th innings. He allowed only two hits, did not walk anyone and collected four strikeouts.

Clay struggled in his debut for the Kernels on Sunday when he walked three batters and was charged with two earned runs in just one-third of an inning. He looked like a different guy Wednesday with much better velocity and much better control.

"He got right back out there in a one-run ballgame, and we ended up tying it and he was able to put up another zero," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer. "That was really, really good on his part. I was happy to see that.

"He looked more comfortable," said Mauer.

Clay said he wasn't too worried about one bad outing.



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"I was anxious to get back out there, but I didn't think about it on the mound," he remarked. "I try not to think at all on the mound. I just throw."

This time he threw well.

"It was fun," he said. "It definitely felt really good tonight. The stuff was coming out of my hand pretty well. When I was warming up in the bullpen, I felt like my stuff was sharp and in the zone."

Mauer said there was no reason to give Clay a pat on the back after Sunday's misfortune. It was simply one rough inning, early in the year.

"I don't think there was anything that needed to be said," Mauer remarked. "They're all going to get a chance. They're going to have a clunker here and there. It's just the way the game is."

Mat Batts gave the Kernels a quality start, allowing two runs in six innings. Clay followed with his three scoreless innings, then Trevor Hildenberger pitched two scoreless innings before being clipped for a scratch run in the 12th.

"The relievers were really good," said Mauer. "Sam Clay and Trevor Hildenberger, they were both really good. To get six innings from your bullpen and only give up one run, we'll take that any day of the week, without a doubt."

Zack Granite went 3-for-5 in the leadoff spot for Cedar Rapids and drove in both runs, but the rest of the Kernels combined for only five hits.

The Kernels and Chiefs meet again Thursday night at the stadium at 6:35.

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PEORIA (3): Sierra, cf, 6 0 1 0, Mercado, ss, 4 1 1 0, Diekroeger, 3b, 4 1 1 0, Thompson, lf, 5 0 0 0, De Leon, 1b, 5 0 1 1, Radack, rf, 5 1 2 0, Bean, c, 2 0 0 0, Sohn, dh, 5 0 0 1, Seferina, 2b, 5 0 2 0. Totals 41 3 8 2.

KERNELS (2): Granite, lf, 5 0 3 2, Hinojosa, ss, 5 0 1 0, Larson, rf, 5 0 1 0, Murphy, dh, 4 0 0 0, Fernandez, c, 4 0 0 0, Kuresa, 1b, 5 0 0 0, White, 3b, 5 0 1 0, Kelly, 2b, 4 1 1 0, English, cf, 5 1 1 0. Totals 42 2 8 2.

Peoria 100 100 000 001 - 3 8 0
Kernels 000 001 010 000 - 2 8 2

Perdomo, Polanco (6), Loraine (8), Grana (8), Bray (10) and Bean. Batts, Clay (7), Hildenberger (10) and Fernandez. W - Bray (1-0). L - Hildenberger (0-1). 2B - English. E - Fernandez (1), Batts (1). A - 951.