

Gonsalves whiffs 12 Rattlers for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr
Tuesday, 26 May 2015 22:40 -



It's hard to imagine what more Cedar Rapids Kernels starting pitcher Stephen Gonsalves has to do to convince his bosses with the Minnesota Twins that he's earned a promotion up the organizational ladder.

Gonsalves entered Tuesday night's game with the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers with an Earned Run Average of 1.50 and he led the Midwest League with 54 strikeouts while allowing opposing hitters a .168 batting average.

With his performance Tuesday, Gonsalves actually improved in all three of those categories.

Gonsalves allowed just a single unearned run on three hits over six innings, while striking out 12 Rattler batters, and leading the Kernels to a 4-1 win in front of 1,081 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The 20-year-old lefty did accomplish one thing Tuesday that he hadn't managed to accomplish this season. Gonsalves was credited with his first win in front of the home crowd at Veterans Memorial Stadium. All four of his previous wins had come on the road.

Gonsalves retired the first nine batters he faced, eight of them via the strikeout, and did so with Twins Director of Minor League Operations Brad Steil in attendance. Steil said after the game that Gonsalves just needs to "keep doing what he's doing" to earn the coveted promotion to Class High-A Fort Myers. Operat

"Trying to get him to throw his curveball more and use that," Steil added. "That's one thing he's going to need as he goes up the ladder here, so that's one thing we're working on right now. His opportunity will come in time."

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Gonsalves knows that improving his breaking ball is the key to his advancement.

“The curveball started off pretty good, but kind of disappeared a little bit in the later innings,” he said. “I threw a couple of good ones tonight, threw a lot of bad ones.”

As one would expect from a pitcher carrying a miniscule 1.31 ERA through eight starts, Gonsalves feels he’s ready to test himself at the next level, while trying to wait patiently for the Twins brass to agree.

“I believe so,” he said, when asked if he felt ready for that promotion, “but they have the best intentions for me so I’m always going by their game plan and I support that.”

In addition to Gonsalves’ 12 strikeouts, the team’s relief corps added four more, giving Kernels pitchers 16 strikeouts in nine innings.

Kernels hitters, meanwhile, staked their pitcher to a 3-0 lead in the first inning.

Tanner English led off the home half of the first inning with a walk and moved to third base on a perfectly executed hit-and-run single through the shortstop hole by Nick Gordon. The two then followed with a double steal, with Gordon stealing second base and English stealing home on the catcher’s throw to second.

Trey Vavra kept the rally going with an RBI double, scoring Gordon. Three batters later, Vavra scored on a double by Jorge Fernandez.

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In the top of the third inning, Vavra, who leads the Kernels in batting average and most other offensive categories, left the game with an injury, after twisting his ankle while colliding with the tarp roll as he tried unsuccessfully to chase down a foul ball.

The Kernels (29-17) added a run in the fourth inning when two Wisconsin pitchers combined to walk the first three batters of the inning and Zack Larson, who entered the game as Vavra's replacement, lined a sacrifice fly to left field, scoring Tyler Kuresa.

The injury bug bit the Kernels again in the seventh when catcher Brian Navarreto left the game with an injury to his thumb. Navarreto had just been re-activated from the Disabled List after recovering from a wrist injury.

Michael Cederoth relieved Gonsalves to begin the seventh inning and worked two innings, striking out three.

Cam Booser earned his fifth save with a perfect ninth inning, striking out one.

The same two teams face one another Wednesday night. Game time is 6:35.