

## Red-hot English powers Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 23 July 2015 21:38 - Last Updated Friday, 24 July 2015 01:19

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Cedar Rapids Kernels center fielder Tanner English entered this week with just two home runs on the season, but he's showing his power this week, even if it's not what his coaches are asking him to do.

English hit his third home run in the past four games Thursday night, contributing to the Kernels' 6-5 win over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, as 2,457 fans saw the locals complete a sweep of their three game series with the Rattlers at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

English nearly didn't get the chance to use his bat Thursday.

He dove for a line drive off the bat of Wisconsin's Greg McCall in the top of the first inning, came up short and crashed face-first in the left-center field turf. After taking several minutes to get the bleeding around his nose stopped, English returned to center field.

"I'm glad I didn't break it," a bloodied and bruised English said afterward. "I broke it on the same exact play my sophomore year of college."

In the third inning, he reached base on a hit-by-pitch, stole second and came around to score the Kernels' first run on an RBI single by Nick Gordon.

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Two innings later, English led off the home half of the fifth inning by driving a ball deep over the wall in left field, pulling the home team to within 5-4 at the time.

English says he's not purposely powering up to take the ball out of the park. Good thing, too, considering the instructions he's been getting from his coaches and manager Jake Mauer.

"We've been asking him to hit the ball on the ground," a smiling Mauer said.

English confirmed he's trying to follow those instructions. "I'm just trying to have a short, simple swing and honestly just trying to hit the ball on the ground," he said.

It's not working out that way, but neither English nor his manager were feeling inclined to complain Thursday night.

The Kernels needed every run they could get after falling behind 5-3 through four innings.

After tying the game 5-5 in the fifth, the Kernels sent seven hitters to the plate in the seventh inning, but scraped together just one run.

Gordon walked to lead off the inning and moved to third base on Edgar Corcino's double. After a strikeout, the Rattlers intentionally walked Rafael Valera to load the bases and set up potential force plays around the diamond.

Rattlers pitcher Devin Williams grazed the jersey of Pat Kelly with a pitch, however, and that forced Gordon home to give the Kernels a 6-5 lead that would stand up to be the final score.

Cedar Rapids starting pitcher Zach Tillery lasted just 3 2/3 innings in his first start after being activated from the club's disabled list and was charged with all five Wisconsin runs.

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The bullpen combination of Michael Theofanopolous (4-2) and Jared Wilson combined to throw 5 1/3 shutout innings in relief, giving the Kernels bats the opportunity to come back.



Theofanopolous struck out four in his 3 1/3 innings on the mound and didn't give up a hit. Wilson struck out a pair in his two innings, earning his first save of the season.

It was a big step for Theofanopolous, who had been struggling in July. He gave up four runs in just one inning of work on Monday against Quad Cities.

"Everything was working, it felt good. It's been a tough month," the lefty said. "I've been struggling. But when you go through that kind of thing, it's just baseball. You've got to just keep doing your thing. Just try to move on to the next time and I was able to do that today."

Mauer felt it was important for Theofanopolouos to have that kind of outing.

"Just to get back on track and get his confidence back. Commanded his breaking ball. A lot of positive things there tonight," Mauer said.

Catcher Brian Navarreto led the Kernels with three hits and Nick Gordon chipped in two.

Gordon, English and Zack Larson each accounted for a pair of the Kernels' six runs.

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With the win, the Kernels swept a series from the Timber Rattlers for the fourth time this season.

Friday, the Beloit Snappers open a three-game series with the Kernels at Perfect Game Field. Game time is 6:35 p.m.

**WISCONSIN (5):** Allemand, ss, 5 1 1 1, Sharkey, 1b, 5 1 2 1, Leal, dh, 4 0 1 0, Rubio, rf, 3 1 1 0, McCall, c, 4 0 1 2, Matos, lf, 4 0 0 0, Neuhaus, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Aviles, cf, 4 1 3 0, Munoz, 2b, 3 1 1 1. Totals 36 5 10 5.

**KERNELS (6):** English, cf, 4 2 1 1, Gordon, ss, 3 2 2 1, Corcino, rf, 5 0 1 0, Larson, lf, 3 2 1 1, Valera, 3b, 2 0 1 2, Kelly, 1b, 3 0 0 1, Navarreto, c, 4 0 3 0, Real, dh, 3 0 0 0, Miller, 2b, 4 0 0 0. Totals 31 6 9 6.

**Wisconsin** ▯ 200 300 0 – 5 10 0

**Kernels** ▯ ▯ ▯ 003 020 x – 6 ▯ 9 1

Hanhold, Curtis (4), Williams (6) and McCall; Tillery, Theofanopoulos (4), Wilson (8) and Navarreto. W – Theofanopoulos (4-2), L – Williams (2-7), S – Wilson (1). 2B – McCall (10), Leal (15), Aviles (3), Gordon (15), Navarreto (6), Corcino (11). 3B – Sharkey (3), Larson (2). HR – English (5). SB – Munoz (12), English (29). E – Gordon (14). T – 2:45. A – 2,457.