

LeBlanc handles any task - including gators

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 09 August 2015 16:46 -



When you ask ballplayers about their outside interests, it's not unusual for them to express an interest in hunting. In that regard, Kernels pitcher Randy LeBlanc fits in with the crowd.

It's when you ask what he hunts that LeBlanc begins to vary from the norm.

He'll tell you he spent most of his offseason fishing and duck hunting, with a little deer hunting thrown in. Although, "my dad does more deer hunting than I do," he said.

After a pause, he added the kicker.

"I've been gator hunting a few times. A couple of years ago, my cousin got a tag and we got one that was 10 feet."

As it turns out, LeBlanc can handle an alligator or any role on the Kernels pitching staff.

LeBlanc made his first start of the season Sunday afternoon and tossed five shutout innings in a 4-0 victory over Bowling Green before 2,164 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

LeBlanc made 28 relief appearances this year before moving into the starting rotation in place of Luke Westphal, who was promoted to Fort Myers Aug. 3. He threw only 67 pitches, got lots of ground balls and enjoyed being the starter.

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"It felt good," he said. "It's been awhile since I did it, but it definitely felt good. I was glad to be back out there."

LeBlanc, 23, was primarily a starter at Tulane. He was happy to work in the bullpen, but was glad when pitching coach Henry Bonilla told him he was moving into the starting rotation.

"I know Henry has been pushing for it all year. He thinks I can start," said LeBlanc, a 10th round pick by Minnesota last year. "I told them at the beginning of the year that I'll do whatever they want me to do."

LeBlanc (8-4, 2.30 ERA) leads the Kernels in victories, despite spending most of the season in the bullpen. Manager Jake Mauer liked what he saw Sunday and plans to keep LeBlanc in the six-man rotation.

"Real good. A lot of ground balls. That's him," said Mauer. "Real good today."

LeBlanc allowed only one hit in five innings, with two strikeouts. "I walked three, though," he said. "I was a little disappointed about that."

Ethan Mildren and Yorman Landa finished the shutout, pitching two innings apiece.

T.J. White belted a two-run homer for the Kernels. Pat Kelly went 3-for-4 and looked good on defense in a rare appearance at first base. Tanner English had two hits in the leadoff spot.

Cedar Rapids raised its record to 66-47, the first time the Kernels have been 19 games over .500 all year. The Kernels are idle Monday and play at Lake County Tuesday night.

LeBlanc, a 6-foot-4 right-hander, hails from Covington, La. And even though his offseason

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hunting activities might be right in line with his Cajun heritage, you'd barely know it to speak to him.

"I've had people tell me up here that I don't have any kind of accent," he said. "People down south tell me I have an accent. It's different than an Alabama accent. I'm definitely Cajun. My dad grew up in Cajun-land."

You can take the boy out of Cajun-land, but it's not so easy to take the Cajun-land out of the boy.

In all the years the Minnesota Twins have been conducting spring training in Florida, they've certainly dealt with a wide variety of minor disciplinary issues with their ballplayers. Boys will be boys, after all.

But this spring, LeBlanc and fellow Louisiana native (and former Kernels pitcher) Ryan Eades may have been among the first Twins farmhands to get talked to about toying with the local alligators in Fort Myers.

"Me and Ryan got in some trouble messing with some of the ones in Florida during spring training," LeBlanc admitted with a small smile. "We had a meeting about it.

"Everybody's so scared of them," he added, in a way that made it sound like he could not grasp why that would be the case.

Despite being relegated to the often anonymous role of middle relief pitcher, LeBlanc has opened eyes this summer with the Kernels. He had a string of 26 consecutive scoreless innings in June.

BOWLING GREEN (0): Unroe, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Jackson, cf, 4 0 0 0, Kay, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Williams, rf, 3 0 0 0, Sole, 1b, 3 0 0 0, James, c, 2 0 0 0, Ciuffo, dh, 3 0 1 0, Blanchard, lf, 3 0 1 0, Toribio, ss,

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3 0 1 0. Totals 28 0 5 0.

KERNELS (4): English, cf, 4 1 2 0, Valera, 2b, 4 0 1 1, Gordon, ss, 5 0 1 1, Corcino, rf, 4 1 1 0, White, 3b, 4 1 1 2, Paul, dh, 4 1 1 0, Doe, c, 4 0 1 0, Diemer, lf, 3 0 0 0, Kelly, 1b, 4 0 3 0. Totals 36 4 11 4.

Bowling Green □ 000 000 000 - 0 5 3
Kernels □ □ □ □ 110 000 20x - 4 11 0

Formo, Harrison (6), Miller (8) and James. LeBlanc, Mildren (6), Landa (8) and Doe. W - LeBlanc (8-4). L - Formo (4-5). SB - English (35). E - Toribio (26), Unroe 2 (9). T - 2:16. A - 2,164.