

Pitchers shine for Kernels again

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 20 August 2015 20:59 - Last Updated Thursday, 20 August 2015 21:21

In a series dominated by pitching, the Cedar Rapids Kernels took the rubber game of their three-game showdown with the Kane County Cougars 2-1 Thursday night before 3,135 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The Kernels outscored the Cougars, 6-4, in the low-scoring series. Manager Jake Mauer acknowledged the lack of production by his team, but was not complaining about the end result.

"If you're an offensive lover, there wasn't very much of that, that's for sure," he said. "But we played pretty good defense, especially in the infield."

Once again, it was the Kernels' pitching that gets primary credit for the win as the Cedar Rapids lineup managed just four hits.

"It was really good to see how our pitching responded. We gave up a lot of home runs, a bunch of runs, on that road trip," Mauer said. "Coming back home here, obviously, they (Kane County) are one of the better hitting teams in the league."

Ethan Mildren, reinserted this week into the Cedar Rapids rotation after spending most of the past month in the bullpen, worked the first four innings, giving up just three hits, including a second-inning home run by Monty Herum that accounted for the sole Kane County run.

"Mildren was good, what we hoped," Mauer said of his starter. "He didn't back off, kind of used his movement. He's a guy that's kind of an innings guy, eat up innings and give you a chance to give the bullpen a rest."

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Kane County is going to be joining the Kernels in the Midwest League playoffs, though the two teams would not meet until the second round.

Still, Mauer and his team believe these games against potential playoff opponents are important.

"Real important," agreed outfielder Zack Larson, who doubled and scored one of the Kernels' runs. "Jake has just been talking to us about gaining momentum going into the playoffs.

"A team like Kane County, they're a good team and one mistake can win or lose you a game, so we're really working hard on trying not to make mistakes and just playing hard. Feels good to beat them two out of three games."

Mauer echoed his outfielder.

"We talked a little bit about that," he said. "We play these teams that are all, talent and abilities, pretty close. And a lot of it comes down to who makes a mistake."

For the second consecutive night, it was Kane County that made the fatal mistake, allowing the Kernels to come from behind for a win. After the Kernels fell behind on Herum's homer, the Kernels struck back in their half of the fourth inning.

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After Larson's one-out double, Brian Navarreto singled and advanced to second base on a throw home. Kane County catcher Michael Perez, trying to throw Navarreto out at second base, instead launched the ball into right-center field. Navarreto jumped to his feet and was waved all the way home by Mauer for a "Little League home run."

"I never had a hit like that in my life," said a smiling Navarreto, recounting his peculiar trip around the bases. "I was just trying to get another base. He threw bad, so I took a chance."

After Larson and Navarreto put the Kernels ahead, Mildren and a relief corps of Yorman Landa (2-1), Zach Tillery and John Curtiss slammed the door on the Cougars.

The Kernels are now six-of-seven in "rubber games" this season, with all six series-deciding wins coming in the second half of their season.

Cedar Rapids begins a three game commuter series Friday night in Clinton.

KANE COUNTY (1): Taylor, cf, 4 0 0 0, Vargas, ss, 4 0 0 0, Castillo, 2b, 4 0 3 0, Herum, 1b, 4 1 1 1, Regis, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Lugo, dh, 3 0 1 0, Perez, c, 3 0 0 0, Mack, lf, 2 0 0 0, Reyes, rf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 30 1 6 1.

KERNELS (2): Valera, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Gordon, ss, 3 0 0 0, Corcino, cf, 3 0 0 0, White, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Real, dh, 3 0 0 0, Larson, lf, 3 1 1 0, Kelly, 1b, 3 0 0 0, Navarreto, c, 3 1 1 1, Diemer, rf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 28 2 4 1.

Kane County □ 010 000 000 - 1 6 1

Kernels □ □ □ □ □ 000 200 00x - 2 4 1

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Huang, Burr (7) and Perez. Mildren, Landa (5), Tillery (7), Curtiss (9) and Navarreto. W - Landa (2-1). L - Huang (7-3). S - Curtiss (2). 2B - White (16), Larson (19). HR - Herum (6). E - Perez (3), Larson (3). T - 2:07. A - 3,135.