

Buxton bunt keys Kernels' 9th straight win

Written by Mike Koolbeck

Tuesday, 30 April 2013 14:56 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 April 2013 16:33

Byron Buxton belted a bomb in his second at-bat Tuesday afternoon at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

While that blast staked the Kernels to a 4-0 lead, it was a bunt he laid down in the eighth inning that provided the winning margin in a 5-4 win that ran the Kernels' winning streak to nine games. The Midwest League baseball game was played before a crowd of 1,445 at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

One more win and the Kernels get to strap on the feedbag at the Ox Yoke Inn in the Amana Colonies as guests of the club's board of directors.

"That's what everybody reminds me," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said. "All of the players reminded me of that, too, walking up the tunnel (to the clubhouse)."

"We're hunting that free meal," Buxton said.

Dalton Hicks and Buxton both blasted monstrous two-run home runs for the Kernels. It was the fourth homer of the season for both players.

Hicks' homer sailed over the batter's eye canvas screen in straight away center field.

"You don't even feel it and that's the best feeling of all," Hicks said of the fastball he mashed off of Lansing right-hander Roberto Osuna, an 18-year-old from Mexico considered the No.2 prospect in the Toronto Blue Jays organization. "If he's 18 he has a bright future. He just got a couple pitches out over the middle and he'll learn from that.

"Plus, with the wind blowing out like that, the ball is going to go far."

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There was a prevailing southerly breeze on a hot, sunny day that helped push the ball toward the wall. But both homers were no-doubters when they were struck.

Buxton's blast went over the left-field wall, bounced on 8th Avenue and hit about halfway up in a large tree across the street.

"That's the only part that it's going out at," said Buxton, who had a similar blast during an earlier Kernels homestand.

Lansing chipped away with a pair of runs in the seventh inning that halved the Kernels' lead to 4-2.

J.D. Williams singled leading off the Kernels eighth inning, bringing Buxton to the plate. Buxton, the Midwest League's leading hitter entering the game at .382, had beaten out an infield single in the first inning to go along with his home run.

He was not your typical candidate to lay down a bunt.

"It wasn't a sacrifice," Mauer said. "He took it upon himself - knowing the score and knowing the game (and) it turned out to be the winning run.

"It's hard to put the sacrifice bunt on when the man hit one 450 feet, or whatever that thing was."

Mauer said he had talked to Buxton about the possibility of laying down a bunt if Williams got on base in Sunday's game against Lansing.

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"I didn't say boo to him in that eighth inning," Mauer said. "He did it by himself.

"He plays to win. He plays for the team and that's really refreshing."

Buxton said he remembered what Mauer had told him and pushed the ball to the third base side of the pitchers mound. The speedster was out by a step, but he got Williams to second.

"I remembered what he told me and I took it up there with me," Buxton said. "My parents taught me people shouldn't have to say things twice to get things done. You get it done the first time."

Candido Pimentel followed with a single to left that advanced Williams to third. Williams scored on a passed ball.

That run proved huge in the Lansing ninth when the Lugnuts loaded the bases. Included was a single by former Jefferson prep Kellen Sweeney, who was 1-for-3 for the Lugnuts.

The Kernels had played nearly flawless defense but, with two outs, Lansing's Jorge Flores hit a chopper to Kernels third baseman Travis Harrison. His rushed throw to force out Sweeney at second base ended up in right field and allowed two runs to score, closing the gap to 5-4.

Tyler Jones came on for the Kernels and induced Christian Lopes to hit a short fly ball to right that Romy Jimenez gathered for the final out.

The Kernels got a solid pitching performance from southpaw Matt Tomshaw (1-0), who was making his first start of the season.

"He can mix pitches and he can keep guys off-balance," Mauer said of Tomshaw, who started four games for the Fort Myers club Mauer managed two years ago. "That was outstanding. That

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was a big lift for us."

Tomshaw allowed for hits over five innings. He escaped a one-out, bases-loaded jam in the fourth inning when Lansing's Shane Opitz hit a grounder up the middle that Kernels shortstop Jorge Polanco fielded on top of second base and whipped a throw to first for an inning-ending double play.

"I felt pretty comfortable today," said Tomshaw, who came into the game with a 9.00 ERA in four relief appearances. He also had a stint on the seven-day disabled list. "I was working on some things with my windup and mechanics and trying to be a bit more deceptive. Once I got in the groove it felt nice.

"I've started my whole life and I'm just a little bit more comfortable with it. As a reliever, it's kind of get up and go. As a starter I know six days ahead now what I'm going to be doing and what I need to be working on."

Manuel Soliman pitched 1.2 innings and was touched for two runs. David Hurlbut came on and worked two innings, coming within one out of his second save. But he was lifted after the two-run error and Jones came and collected his fourth save.

The Kernels hit the road for a 12-game road trip to West Michigan, South Bend, Quad Cities and Beloit. They return home May 14 against Burlington.

"Nothing changes. It's still a diamond and you still have to take it pitch-by-pitch," Hicks said.

LANSING (4): Pompey, cf, 5 0 1 1, Flores, ss, 5 0 0 0, Lopes, 2b, 5 0 2 0, Ramirez, rf, 4 0 1 0, Hawkins, lf, 4 1 2 0, Pierre, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Opitz, dh, 3 2 2 0, Munoz, c, 2 1 1 1, Sweeney, 1b, 3 0 1 0, Osuna, p, 0 0 0 0, Sikula, p, 0 0 0 0, Kadish, p, 0 0 0 0, Donahue, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 35 4 10 2.

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KERNELS (5): Buxton, cf, 3 1 2 2, Pimentel, 2b, 4 1 1 0, Polanco, ss, 3 0 0 0, Hicks, 1b, 4 1 1 2, Walker, dh, 3 0 0 0, Harrison, 3b, 2 0 0 0, Jimenez, rf, 3 0 0 0, Rodriguez, c, 3 0 0 0, Williams, lf, 3 2 1 0, Tomshaw, p, 0 0 0 0, Soliman, p, 0 0 0 0, Hurlbut, p, 0 0 0 0, Jones, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 28 5 5 4.

Lansing 000 000 202 - 4 10 2

Kernels 202 000 01x - 5 5 2

Osuna, Sikula (5), Kadish (7), Donahue (8) and Munoz. Tomshaw, Soliman (6), Hurlbut (7), Jones (9) and Rodriguez. W - Tomshaw (1-0). L - Osuna (1-2). Sv - Jones (4). HR - Hicks (4), Buxton (4). S - Buxton. SF - Munoz. E - Flores (3), Hawkins (2), Jimenez (1), Harrison (6). T - 2:29. A - 1,445.