

Kernels' Duffey enjoys starting (and winning)

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 21 April 2013 21:51 - Last Updated Sunday, 21 April 2013 21:59



BURLINGTON - Tyler Duffey had a fancy vibrating gadget with all sorts of wires and sensors attached to his right arm after he pitched a strong game for the Cedar Rapids Kernels Sunday.

He was all smiles.

The machine was helping remove all the "bad stuff" that collects in a pitcher's arm after he throws for an extended period of time, and that's exactly what the 6-foot-3, 225-pounder righthander did for the Kernels Sunday.

Duffey tossed seven strong innings and got the victory as Cedar Rapids trimmed Burlington, 3-2, before a skimpy gathering that was announced as 531 fans on a sunny day in southeast Iowa.

Duffey, 22, was strictly a relief pitcher at Rice University and spent the 2012 season in the bullpen for the Minnesota Twins organization after being drafted in the fifth round and signing for \$267,100.

He did well as a reliever in pro ball last season, with 12 outings at Elizabethton and one at Beloit in the Midwest League playoffs, but the Twins told him last fall in the Instructional League that they wanted to see how he would do as a starter.

So far, so good.

Duffey pitched seven perfect innings in his first start for Cedar Rapids this year, had a quality start last Sunday against Clinton and had another quality start Sunday against the Bees.

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He has a 2-1 record and 2.29 ERA this season. He's allowed only 10 hits in 19.2 innings, with 17 strikeouts and only three walks.

"It's been fun, getting into starting again," said Duffey, an affable guy who did not mind talking while his pulsating right arm was attached to the vibrating gizmo.

"Whatever gets me on the field I'm going to do," he said. "If they want me to go rake the field pre-game, as long I'm playing, that's fine.

"I'm embracing it and I'm enjoying it for now."

Duffey was perfect for four innings Sunday, retiring 12 batters in a row with four strikeouts. He ran into a spot of trouble in the fifth inning when a leadoff walk and back-to-back doubles with two outs produced two runs and a 2-1 lead for the Bees.

"We talked in the dugout," said Kernels pitching coach Gary Lucas. "When you're up in the zone, you're going to get hurt, and he did in that one inning. When he was down, he had virtually a perfect game."

The Kernels (11-5) grabbed a 3-2 lead in the top of the seventh on a two-run, two-out single by shortstop Niko Goodrum, chasing in Drew Leachman and Byron Buxton. Leachman led off the inning with a triple. Buxton walked and stole second base with two outs, setting the stage for Goodrum's line shot to center field.

Burlington (6-9) put runners on first and second base with one out in the bottom of the seventh. Duffey got the second out with a sharp curveball and Kernels second baseman Jorge Polanco ended the threat with a sensational diving stop of a hard smash to his left. Polanco jumped to his feet and got the runner at first.

Duffey retired with a 3-2 lead, having thrown 89 pitches (one under his pre-game allotment).

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"He's learning," said Lucas. "He bounced back after that (fifth) inning and kept us in the game."

Duffey thinks the Twins made him a starting pitcher this season due to his repeatable delivery, size and ability to throw three pitches for strikes. He hit 94 mph as a relief pitcher, but normally sticks in the 89 to 92 range as a starter.

"It's been fun so far. Hopefully I'll keep it up," he said.

Lucas likes what he's seen of Duffey so far and understands why the Twins want to see what he can do as a starter.

"I think they see size, durability, arm strength, a chance to pitch deep in a game. That's what they want to find out," said Lucas, who enjoyed a long career in the major leagues as a lefthanded pitcher.

Leachman, the Kernels' designated hitter, went 3-for-3 with his triple and a sacrifice fly. He's 7-for-8 in the last two games, raising his batting average to .409.

David Hurlbut pitched two scoreless innings for Cedar Rapids to collect the save.

The Kernels and Bees will meet again Monday night at 6:30 at Community Field.

KERNELS (3): Buxton, cf, 3 1 1 0, Goodrum, ss, 5 0 1 2, Polanco, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Hicks, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Walker, rf, 4 1 1 0, Harrison, 3b, 4 0 2 0, Leachman, dh, 3 1 3 1, Grimes, s, 3 0 0 0, Jimenez, lf, 4 0 0 0, Duffey, p, 0 0 0 0, Hurlbut, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 34 3 9 3.

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BURLINGTON (2): S.Johnson, 3b, 4 0 1 0, K.Johnson, rf, 4 0 0 0, Hinkle, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Bolaski, dh, 3 1 1 0, Bemboom, c, 4 0 1 0, Ray, lf, 3 0 0 0, Clarke, cf, 3 1 1 0, Toribio, 2b, 3 0 1 2, Soto, ss, 3 0 0 0, Love, p, 0 0 0 0, Spomer, p, 0 0 0 0, Krehbiel, p, 0 0 0 0, Diaz, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 31 2 5 2.

Kernels 010 000 200 - 3 9 0

Burlington 000 020 000 - 2 5 2

Duffey, Hurlbut (8) and Grimes. Love, Spomer (6), Krehbiel (7), Diaz (9) and Bemboom. W - Duffey (2-1). L - Spomer (1-2). S - Hurlbut (1). 2B - Polanco (4), Harrison (7), Clarke (1), Toribio (2). 3B - Leachman (1). SB - Buxton (6). E - S.Johnson (3), Hinkle (2). T - 2:23. A - 531.