

Kernels suffer stinging defeat to Bandits

Written by Jim Ecker
Thursday, 13 June 2013 22:55 -



DAVENPORT - There was not a peep in the somber Cedar Rapids Kernels locker room Thursday night in the bowels of Modern Woodmen Park.

The Kernels had just suffered their toughest loss of the season, 9-8, to the Quad Cities River Bandits on a two-out, two-run double by a .208 hitter in the bottom of the ninth inning.

It was now 15 minutes later. Players stared at the floor. Slowly, some undressed and headed silently to the showers. Manager Jake Mauer sat in a room with his coaches, mulling it over.

A victory would have given the Kernels a two-game lead in the loss column over the Beloit Snappers and an excellent shot at the Western Division pennant for the first half of the Midwest League season.

Instead, the Kernels are stuck in a virtual tie for first place with the Snappers with three games left in the first half for both clubs, although the Kernels have a mathematical edge and would win the pennant if they're still tied on Sunday.

The Kernels begin a pivotal three-game series against Peoria Friday at 6:35 p.m. at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Cedar Rapids rallied for seven runs in the eighth inning for an 8-4 lead, but Quad Cities responded with five runs in the bottom of the ninth for the victory.

It was a tough, tough loss for the Kernels, undoubtedly the toughest of the season. "I would say

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so," Mauer remarked.

"That's a shame. Come back and take the lead. A five-run ninth inning," he said, reliving the nightmare.

"Walks got us a little bit. Then they bunched some hits. We don't make a play at short. Here we go."

Cedar Rapids had an 8-4 lead with two outs and the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth. Ruben Sosa hit a grounder to Kernels shortstop Jorge Polanco to seemingly end the game, but the ball took a little hop and got past Polanco. It was ruled an error, two runs scored and suddenly it was 8-6 and the drama began.

Singles by Austin Elkins and Brian Blasik made it 8-7 and put runners on first and second for the Bandits. Mauer replaced Tyler Jones with left-hander Josue Montanez at that point, forcing the switch-hitting Jobduan Morales to turn around and bat right-handed against Montanez.

Montanez got a 2-2 count on Morales, but the River Bandits' catcher lined the next pitch into the left-field corner. Elkins scored easily from second base to tie the game and Blasik raced all the way around from first base with the winning run.

The River Bandits raced onto the field to celebrate their improbable victory. The Kernels simply walked toward their dugout, made the long trek down the hallway to their locker room and sat there in stone silence.

Beloit split a doubleheader with Wisconsin Thursday. Mauer knew that and knew his club could have taken a big step toward the first-half flag with a victory.

They had it, then it slipped away.

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"We had a good opportunity there," he said. "It got away from us and we just couldn't stop it."

Cedar Rapids has a 40-25 record for a winning percentage of .615. Beloit is sitting at 41-26 for a winning percentage of .612. They are tied in the "games-back" category, but the Kernels are in first place by percentage points.

If they are still tied in the "games-back" category after the first half of the season ends on Sunday, the Kernels will be the first-half champions with a better winning percentage.

Cedar Rapids is scheduled to play only 68 games during the first half of the season, because two of its games were canceled due to inclement weather. Beloit is scheduled to play all 70 of its games, which could come back to hurt the Snappers.

The Kernels could finish 43-25 and the Snappers could finish 44-26. In that case, the Kernels would be the first-half champs.

Regardless of how the race turns out, both clubs will make the Midwest League playoffs because the first-place team and the second-place both qualify for the postseason playoffs.

"We're in as far as that goes, but we want to win the division," said Mauer. "Hopefully tonight won't hurt. Hopefully this won't come back to bite us."

"We have to put it behind us and go home and try to play a little better these next three days."

Cedar Rapids and Beloit both play at home this weekend. The Kernels host Peoria and the Snappers host Clinton.

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Mauer hopes the home-town fans can help his club capture the first-half pennant.

"Hopefully they're a great help, because we're going to need everything we can get," he said. "It's been a struggle the last month. When we pitch, we don't hit. When we hit, we don't pitch.

"It's been tough on us this last month, trying to win these games."

Byron Buxton began Thursday's game with his eighth homer of the season for Cedar Rapids, but the Kernels did not score again until they tallied seven runs on five singles, four walks and an error in the eighth inning.

Christian Powell made his second start for Cedar Rapids and pitched five strong innings. The game was tied, 1-1, when he retired for the night.

The Kernels could get a boost from shortstop Niko Goodrum this weekend. Goodrum, sidelined since June 3 with a concussion, has indicated he will come off the disabled list on Saturday.

KERNELS (8): Buxton, cf, 5 1 1 1, Williams, lf, 4 1 1 1, Polanco, ss, 5 1 1 0, Hicks, 1b, 5 1 1 0, Walker, rf, 5 1 2 2, Harrison, 3b, 3 1 0 0, Grimes, dh, 4 0 1 0, Quesada, c, 3 1 0 1, Pimentel, 2b, 3 1 1 0. Totals 37 8 8 5.

QUAD CITIES (9): Hernandez, cf, 3 2 1 0, Correa, ss, 5 1 2 0, Hamblin, dh, 3 2 1 1, Wierzbicki, 1b, 5 1 2 2, Joyce, rf, 2 0 0 0, Sosa, lf, 2 1 1 1, Elkins, 2b, 3 1 1 1, Blasik, 3b, 4 1 3 1, Morales, c, 4 0 1 2, Scott, lf/rf, 4 0 0 0. Totals 35 9 12 8.

Kernels 100 000 070 - 8 8 1
Quad Cities 000 010 305 - 9 12 2

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Powell, Muren (6), Jones (7), Montanez (9) and Quesada. Jankowski, Minaya (5), Neely (8), Lambson (8) and Morales. W - Lambson (3-3). L - Jones (3-3). 2B - Walker (16), Hamblin (3), Wierzbicki (13), Morales (5). HR - Buxton (8). SB - Buxton (27), Blasik (5), Sosa (7). E - Polanco (8), Blasik (9), Elkins (6). T - 3:20. A - 5,385.