

Pelfrey passes test in rehab start

Written by S.D. Buhr

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Everyone was a winner Monday night at Veterans Memorial Stadium. Everyone but the Peoria Chiefs, anyway.

Minnesota Twins starting pitcher Mike Pelfrey, in Cedar Rapids for a rehabilitation start after being sidelined on the Twins disabled list with a back strain, pitched six innings and struck out six hitters. He gave up a home run in the first inning and a triple in the sixth inning, but no hits in between.

The Kernels organization was definitely a winner, drawing a crowd of 2,246 through the gate, several hundred more fans than their usual Monday night crowd.

And, oh yes, the Kernels rode Pelfrey's start to a 6-3 win over the Peoria Chiefs, for their 11th straight win to start the second half of their Midwest League season.

Before the game, Pelfrey sat down with Metro Sports Report to talk about his goals for the rehab start, among other things.

Metro Sports Report: Tell me a little about your approach to a rehab assignment. Is there anything in particular you're trying to accomplish? What is the goal tonight?

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Mike Pelfrey: It's five innings or 75 pitches, whichever comes first. Obviously, getting back into it, I'm supposed to start Saturday against Toronto but I told them I need to see hitters. I can't go into a start without seeing hitters in 15 days.

Sometimes when you have two off days in between starts, it feels like it's been forever since you've been out there. I'm healthy. The whole idea is just to go out there and just kind of get your work in. Get to see hitters, which I think is the big thing.

MSR: Do you have any particular plan with regard to making sure you use all your pitches?

Pelfrey: The key to success is always commanding your fastball so, first and foremost, I'm going to do that. As the game goes on, I'm going to work in the secondary pitches, as I normally would.

You definitely want to go out here and you definitely want to do well no matter if it's a rehab start or not a rehab start. You play to get people out. That's why you're out there. That's not going to change. At the end of the day I just want to walk off feeling good.

I have a buddy on (the Kernels), Tyler Grimes, and he told me they have a 10-game winning streak. I told him not to put any pressure on me.

Hopefully, I'll just be able to keep it going.

MSR: Your manager in Minnesota, Ron Gardenhire, was quoted as saying he thinks maybe this time of year coming off Tommy John surgery, maybe missing a couple of starts might not be the worst thing that could happen to you. Do you feel that way or do you feel you just want the ball every five days?

Pelfrey: A little of both. I felt like I started out pretty rough. I felt like I started to pitch a little better there the last three starts. I felt like I got into a little bit of a groove. Then the back

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spasms came up and that kind of ruined that. After a couple days off, I felt kind of refreshed when I threw my bullpen the other day. I felt good so maybe it will end up being good in the long run.

As a starter, you don't ever want to miss your turn in the rotation, so that's the down side of it. But basically I think it will do a little good.

MSR: You were pretty aggressive with your rehabilitation schedule coming back from surgery. Are you having any second thoughts on that or do you still think it was the right approach?

Pelfrey: I don't necessarily know. Obviously, I've come back and I came back really quick. I struggled the early part of the year. I can't tell the future or anything like that. I don't know if I would have come back in June and had the same kind of setbacks, you know?

I worked my tail off and my whole mindset going into it was I was going to be ready by opening day. Luckily, I was blessed and my body was able to bounce back the way that it has. I felt good through the whole thing.

I know there were some times out there that the ball doesn't quite feel right coming off my fingertips, which it always did in the past. You could always have that feel. They always say feel is the last thing to come. I get kind of what they're saying now, especially on the curveball and the slider. I can't always feel the ball coming off the tip of my fingertips, but I feel like it's getting better. I feel like I'm making progress.

If I would have known, if I could go back now and say April and May would have been like that, I probably would have waited, but I can't change that. Who's to say I wouldn't have had those same things in June? But I feel good, which I think is the most important thing. I feel like I'm getting better.

MSR: What went into the decision to do your rehab start in Cedar Rapids? Did you have a choice or did you just go where they tell you to go?

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Pelfrey: We talked about it. I said I need to face hitters. They brought up live BP. They said, "Hey, we want to get you out in a game." This (Cedar Rapids) is the closest place. How about we go down to CR, it's pretty close. It'll be convenient. You know, my family's in town, instead of having to get on a plane to go somewhere else.

It's nice to have an affiliate this close.