

Farmer hands Kernels 4th loss in row

Written by Jim Ecker
Friday, 18 April 2014 21:28 -



The \$4.5 million bonus baby pitched fairly well for the Cedar Rapids Kernels Friday night, but the \$225,000 college kid pitched better for West Michigan.

Buck Farmer struck out 11 batters and allowed only two hits as the Whitecaps handed the Kernels their fourth straight defeat, 5-2, before 1,346 fans on a mild night at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Kohl Stewart had a solid outing for Cedar Rapids, allowing only two runs in five innings, but he absorbed his first loss in the Midwest League when the Kernels had trouble mounting an attack.

A year ago, Farmer was a senior at Georgia Tech and Stewart was a senior in high school. Farmer might be slightly ahead of Stewart as a professional pitcher at this point, but Farmer is 23 years old and the 19-year-old Stewart is a millionaire.

Stewart sailed through the first three innings Friday, but was touched for three hits - including two doubles - and two runs in the fourth inning.

"I left a couple of balls up," he said. "I got behind a couple of times in the count to those guys in the fourth inning. But overall, yeah, I felt good."

Stewart felt he made too many fat pitches when the count was 2-0 or 3-1. Those are hitters counts, not pitchers counts.

"I don't want to walk anybody, so I have to throw fastballs and I think I probably caught too much of the plate on some of them. If I could go back, that's one thing I would try to fix," he

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said.

Stewart touched mid-90's with his fastball at times. Farmer pitched in the low 90's and used a nasty slider as his wipeout pitch. He said it was his best outing as a pro.

"Absolutely," he said after his career-high 11 strikeouts. "I think I threw the ball well."

Farmer, from Conyers, Ga., was drafted in the 46th round by the Atlanta Braves as a high school senior in 2009 and was selected in the 15th round by Milwaukee as a college junior in 2012, but elected to remain an amateur both times. The Detroit Tigers picked him in the fifth round last year and reportedly gave him \$225,000 to sign.

College seniors don't have much bargaining power and Farmer (2-1, 1.61 ERA) said he was satisfied with how things turned out. "Last year was one of those years," he said. "Take whatever they give me, go and just start my professional career."

Farmer said he needs one more semester at Georgia Tech to finish his degree and plans to do it at some point. "I'm fairly close," he remarked.

Stewart is following a different career path after being the No.4 overall pick in the 2013 draft. He turned down a chance to play baseball and football at Texas A&M to play pro ball and signed for \$4,544,000.

He has not done anything too flashy yet for the Kernels with an 0-1 record and 4.50 ERA in 14 innings, but feels he's making reasonably good progress.

"Day-to-day, I think I am," he said. "There are some things I'm really trying to work on, especially fastball command. Keep the fastball down. Stuff like that. Every day, I think I'm getting a little better at that."

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Last year, he was blowing high school kids away with his fastball. Now, he's learning to pitch against much better hitters.

"More mistakes are hit. I got away with way more stuff in high school," he said.

"It's an every-day job," he said about pro ball. "It's not something where you have a couple of hours after school. It's an all-day thing now."

West Michigan (9-6) took a 5-0 lead in the seventh inning when Wynton Bernard hit a three-run homer against Josue Montanez.

The Kernels (8-7) scored two runs in the bottom of the ninth and brought the tying run to the plate with one out, but Jason Kanzler grounded into a double play to end the game.

Chad Christensen returned to the Kernels lineup Friday night as the designated hitter after missing four games with a sore right elbow. He extended his hitting streak to seven games in a row, but did it the hard way with three strikeouts and a broken-bat single.

The Kernels have been streaky this year. They won six in a row and now have lost four in a row.

West Michigan and Cedar Rapids meet again Saturday afternoon at 2:05 p.m. The Kernels are idle Sunday for Easter.

WEST MICHIGAN (5): Castro, dh, 4 0 0 0, Betancourt, 2b, 4 1 1 0, Rhymes, lf, 3 1 1 0, Ficociello, 1b, 3 0 0 1, Verlander, rf, 4 0 2 1, Harrison, 3b, 4 1 1 0, Adames, ss, 4 0 0 0, Pickar, c, 3 1 0 0, Bernard, cf, 2 1 1 3. Totals 31 5 6 5.

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KERNELS (2): Kanzler, cf, 5 0 1 0, Vavra, 2b, 3 0 0 0, Haar, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Garver, c, 3 0 0 0, Christensen, dh, 4 1 1 0, Larson, rf, 4 1 2 0, Wade, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Vielma, ss, 4 0 0 1, Pineda, lf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 34 2 5 1.

West Michigan 000 200 300 - 5 6 4

Kernels 000 000 002 - 2 5 0

Farmer, Davenport (8) and Pickar. Stewart, Montanez (6), Powell (8) and Garver. W - Farmer (2-1). L - Stewart (0-1). 2B - Rhymes (1), Verlander (5), Harrison (3). HR - Bernard (1). E - Adames 2 (5), Betancourt 2 (3). T - 2:30. A - 1,346.