

Kernels can taste playoff spot now

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 22 August 2014 21:47 - Last Updated Friday, 22 August 2014 21:56



BURLINGTON - The Cedar Rapids Kernels can start putting the champagne, beer and cider on ice any time they want now.

A cherished spot in the Midwest League playoffs is just a sip or two away and it's nearly time to celebrate.

The Kernels won for the 10th time in their last 11 games Friday by whipping Burlington, 8-2, before 870 fans on a steamy night near the Mississippi River.

When the Kernels hopped on the bus for the ride back to Cedar Rapids Friday night, they left Burlington with an eight-game lead for the final playoff position with only 10 games left in the regular season.

"We want to keep rolling here," said Manager Jake Mauer after the convincing victory.

The Kernels can clinch a playoff spot when they face Burlington again Saturday night, depending on how the other games in the Western Division turn out. If they don't clinch Saturday, they could clinch Sunday, Monday or Tuesday in Davenport.

Cedar Rapids probably will face Burlington in the first round of the Midwest League playoffs. The Bees have the option of deciding which games would be played in Burlington and they have decided to play the first game of the best-of-3 series on the road with the second and third games (if necessary) in Burlington.

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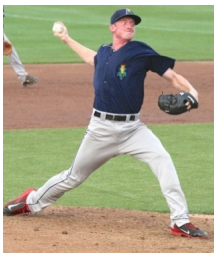
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That means the Kernels will likely host the first game of the MWL playoffs on Wednesday, Sept. 3, with Games 2 and 3 in Burlington the next two days.

Ryan Eades (9-11, 5.48 ERA) pitched six strong innings for Cedar Rapids Friday night for the victory, but the most dazzling - and unusual - performance on the mound was turned in by relief pitcher Chris Mazza.

Mazza began the game as the bullpen catcher because all three of the Kernels' regular catchers - Mitch Garver, Michael Quesada and Alex Swim - were in the ballgame. Then Mazza ended the game by striking out all five batters he faced in the eighth and ninth innings.

Mazza, a shortstop and relief pitcher in college, was glad to help as the fourth catcher as the Kernels kept winning.



"I kind of volunteered," he said while a trainer attached ice to his right arm. "I don't really mind it. It keeps me in the game and gives me something to do, instead of just sitting down all the time."

He was ready to pitch when Mauer sent him into the game in the eighth inning with runners at first and second base and only one out.

"Catching and playing catch, I was already pretty loose during the game. That helped," he said. "It only took a few pitches to get loosened up in the bullpen."

Everybody he faced struck out.

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"I must admit, that's probably the first time I've ever done that. It felt good," he said.

It was a good night all-around for the Kernels on offense, defense and pitching. They pulled off an unusual play in the fourth inning when Swim fielded a line-drive in right field and gunned the batter out at first base.

Quesada, playing first base, made a nice scoop of the ball for the out.

"I've never seen that in pro ball," Mauer said about the 9-to-3 putout. "I've seen in in Little League before. Very unusual."

Jonatan Hinojosa belted a two-run triple for the Kernels. Logan Wade went 2-for-3 with a triple and three RBIs. Max Murphy was 2-for-3 and Quesada scored twice.

KERNELS (8): Hinojosa, 3b, 4 2 1 2, Vielma, ss, 4 0 0 0, Wade, 2b, 4 0 2 3, Garver, c, 5 0 0 0, Swim, rf, 3 1 0 0, Murphy, cf, 3 1 2 0, Williams, lf, 4 1 1 1, Quesada, 1b, 4 2 1 1, Vavra, dh, 3 1 1 0. Totals 34 8 8 7.

BURLINGTON (2): Way, dh, 3 0 1 0, Dalton, ph/p/dh, 1 0 0 0, Eaves, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Houchins, ss, 4 0 2 0, Aguilera, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Fish, cf, 3 1 2 0, Bayardi, rf, 4 1 1 0, Gretzky, lf, 3 0 0 1, Moye, c, 4 0 0 0, Dionicio, 3b, 4 0 1 1. Totals 34 2 8 2.

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Kernels 040 310 000 - 8 8 0

Burlington 010 000 100 - 2 8 2

Eades, Wilson (7), Mazza (8) and Garver. Newcomb, Gordon (2), Mahle (6), Dalton (8) and Moye. W - Eades (9-11). L - Newcomb (0-1). 2B - Murphy (7), Williams (18), Bayardi (8), Fish (25). 3B - Wade (4), Hinojosa (4). E - Dinocio (6), Eaves (28). T - 2:56. A - 870.