

Kernels keep pace as Twins soar

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 31 May 2015 18:28 - Last Updated Sunday, 31 May 2015 20:35



These are heady times for the entire Minnesota Twins organization.

The Twins have moved into first place in the American League Central Division and have the best overall record in the entire league, setting the tone for all their farm clubs.

Rochester, their Triple A team, is in first place in the North Division of the International League.

Chattanooga, their Double A outfit, stands in first place in the North Division of the Southern League.

The Cedar Rapids Kernels, their Class A affiliate in the Midwest League, have the second-best overall mark in the MWL and keep finding ways to win games.

Only Fort Myers in the Advanced Class A Florida State League has a losing record in the organization at 24-26, but overall the five teams in the Minnesota Twins system are sporting an impressive 143-105 mark as the calendar turns to June.

The Kernels did their part again Sunday with a 6-5 comeback victory over Clinton in 11 innings before 2,324 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The Minnesota Twins finished with a losing record last year and got off to a slow start this season, but they've been one of the hottest clubs in baseball under new Manager Paul Molitor.

Kernels keep pace as Twins soar

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 31 May 2015 18:28 - Last Updated Sunday, 31 May 2015 20:35

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer is not surprised by the parent club's success.



"I think we all had a pretty good feeling coming out of spring training," he said Sunday. "It's kind of the attitude they have up there. You can feel it in the clubhouse.

"A lot of people gave up on them and kind of wrote them off, including in Minnesota," he said. "There were a lot of writers that were pretty hard on them early. Whether it's Molitor or whoever, they just stayed the course."

Now it's paying off.

"We thought we under-achieved a little last year," said Brad Steil, the Twins farm director who has been in town watching the Kernels.

This is Steil's third season as director of minor league operations and the farm system appears healthy after the first two months of the season with Rochester, Chattanooga and Cedar Rapids all contending for titles and Fort Myers not far off.

"I think we've had some good drafts the last few years," Steil said. "We're seeing the results of that."

Mauer has been in the Minnesota organization for 15 years as a minor league player, coach and manager. He likes what he sees, from top to bottom. His top assistants, Tommy Watkins and Henry Bonilla, are long-time veterans with Minnesota as well.

Kernels keep pace as Twins soar

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 31 May 2015 18:28 - Last Updated Sunday, 31 May 2015 20:35

"It's similar to back when Tommy and I and Henry were in the minor leagues," said Mauer. "We had the Morneaus and we had Joe (Mauer) and guys like that who kept funneling through.

"What we didn't have back then is what we have now with our pitching depth, especially bullpen guys. We have guys who are throwing it up there pretty good.

"We drafted pretty pitching-heavy the last two, maybe three, years now," said Mauer.

It's really showing, all the way through. I think our pitching depth is probably the best it's been in a long time."

There's a long way to go, so nobody in the Twins organization is celebrating just yet. But the first two months of the season have given Twins fans a chance to smile.

The Kernels trailed 5-0 Sunday, but they scored three times in the sixth inning and twice in the eighth to tie it 5-5 and force extra innings. T.J. White had a big two-run triple in the sixth inning and an RBI double in the eighth to lead the comeback in front of family members who were visiting from Las Vegas.

The Kernels caught a break in the bottom of the 11th inning to win the game. They had runners at first and second with two outs when Tanner English hit a blooper behind second base.

The Clinton second baseman drifted back and called for the ball, but stumbled and lost the ball in the sun. The ball fell cleanly in short center field for a base hit as Pat Kelly scored the winning run from second base.

"That was a good one. Five down, came back," said Mauer. "It was good. Good all the way around."

Kernels keep pace as Twins soar

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 31 May 2015 18:28 - Last Updated Sunday, 31 May 2015 20:35

New Kernels pitcher Sam Gibbons, a right-hander from Australia, was touched for three runs in five innings in his first appearance with the club. Clinton scored two runs against Michael Cederoth in the sixth inning for a 5-0 lead, but the next two Kernels pitchers shut the door.

Michael Theofanopoulos pitched three scoreless innings and Trevor Hildenberger tossed two scoreless frames for the victory.

Brett Doe went 2-for-4 for the Kernels, raising his average to .323.

The Kernels (33-18) and LumberKings (23-28) meet again Monday at 12:05 p.m. with left-hander Steven Gonsalves (5-1, 1.31 ERA) on the mound for the home team.

CLINTON (5): Fields, cf, 5 0 2 1, Ascanio, ss, 3 1 2 1, Ward, 2b, 5 0 1 2, Morales, rf, 6 0 0 0, Mack, lf, 4 1 1 0, DeCarlo, 3b, 5 0 0 0, Wawoe, dh, 5 0 0 0, Zeutenhorst, 1b, 5 2 1 0, Torres, c, 4 1 1 0. Totals 42 5 8 4.

KERNELS (6): English, cf, 6 0 1 1, Gordon, ss, 4 1 1 0, Larson, lf, 4 2 1 0, Fernandez, 1b, 4 1 1 0, White, 3b, 5 0 2 3, Kelly, 2b, 5 1 1 1, Doe, dh, 4 0 2 0, Navarreto, c, 5 0 0 0, Corcino, rf, 4 1 1 0. Totals 41 6 10 5.

Clinton ▯ ▯ 000 032 000 00 - 5 8 4

Kernels ▯ ▯ 000 003 020 01 - 6 10 3

Littell, Morales (6), Kerski (8), Scott (11) and Torres. Gibbons, Cederoth (6), Theofanopoulos (7), Hildenberger (10) and Navarreto. W - Hildenberger (2-1). L - Scott (2-2). 2B - Mack (9), Corcino (1). 3B - Ward (7), White (4). SB - Zeutenhorst (1), Gordon (12). E - Ascanio (2), Zeutenhorst 2 (2), Ward (4), Cederoth (2), Gordon (7), White (9). T - 3:10. A - 2,324.