

## These guys could catch on with Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:33 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 March 2013 18:28

---

*(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article about catchers is the first in a series of position-by-position looks at the 2013 Cedar Rapids Kernels. Next: Corner infielders.)*

On April 4, the Cedar Rapids Kernels will begin the first year of their four-year player development agreement with the Minnesota Twins. In the final weeks leading up to Opening Day, we'll be helping Kernels fans get acquainted with most, if not all, of the Twins' minor league prospects that may be donning Kernels uniforms this summer.

While there's no way of knowing with certainty who will actually be on the Kernels' roster to open the season, we can make some educated guesses.

The Opening Day roster will be limited to 25 players, but it's easy to assemble a list of at least 35 to 40 players in the Twins organization that look like reasonable bets to spend some time in Cedar Rapids this summer.

Some will start the year in extended spring training and perhaps spend time with one of the Twins' rookie league teams before getting promoted to Cedar Rapids. Others may open the season a rung higher on the organizational ladder with the Advanced Class A Fort Myers Miracle and miss out on being a Kernel altogether.

But there's a very good chance that most of the players we include in this series will wear a Kernels uniform at some point during the upcoming season.

For the benefit of those Kernels fans who are less familiar with the Twins organization, we should explain that the Twins have two "rookie level" short-season teams below the Class A Kernels. The lowest level is the Fort Myers (Fla.) team in the Gulf Coast League and the next level up is Elizabethton (Tenn.) in the Appalachian League.

Those Kernels who earn a promotion out of Cedar Rapids will find themselves with the Fort Myers (Fla.) Miracle in the Florida State League.

## These guys could catch on with Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:33 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 March 2013 18:28

---

Let's kick off this series by looking at a group of catchers that Kernels fans might want to get to know. The most likely catching options for Cedar Rapids to start the season would come from the trio of Jhonatan Arias, Tyler Grimes and Jairo Rodriguez. Here's just a bit about them:

Jairo Rodriguez - Age 24 – Bats R/Throws R

2012: Beloit (Class A – MWL)

{loadposition 13kernelsjairorod12beloitstax}

Except for six games at DH, Rodriguez made the rest of his starts behind the plate in 2012. He threw out 24 of 66 runners attempting to steal for a very respectable 36 percent throw-out rate.

Rodriguez was signed by the Twins out of Venezuela and spent his first three seasons in summer leagues in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. He spent 2010 and 2011 playing in U.S. rookie leagues and the full 2012 season at Beloit.

At 24 years old, Rodriguez would be older than most players in the Midwest League, so even if Rodriguez starts the year in Cedar Rapids, the Twins could push him up to Fort Myers at the first opportunity, assuming he performs at acceptable levels.

Tyler Grimes – Age 22 – Bats R/Throws R

2012: Beloit (Class A – MWL)

{loadposition 13kernelstygrimes12beloitstax}

Grimes made 77 appearances at shortstop and 18 at second base (plus one at 3B and seven as DH) in 2012. He was drafted by the Twins in the fifth round of the 2011 amateur draft out of Wichita State.

He has not hit the ball well in roughly a season and a half at Beloit, though he has shown a little power. After the 2012 season, he spent time at the Fall Instructional League learning the catcher position.

Grimes could open the season with the Kernels, repeating Class A, or potentially be held back in extended spring training to work more on his catching skills with the Twins instructional staff in Fort Myers before starting his season. It will be very interesting to see how the catching experiment works out for Grimes.

## These guys could catch on with Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:33 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 March 2013 18:28

---

Jhonatan Arias – Age 23 – Bats R/Throws R

2012: Elizabethton (Rookie – Appalachian League)

{loadposition 13kernelsjhonatanarias12elizabesthstax}

Arias got in just 27 games behind the dish in 2012, but he threw out 11 of 30 attempted base stealers for a 37 percent rate. Of the three catchers most likely to spend significant time in Cedar Rapids, he appears to have the most promising offensive skills.

Arias was signed out of the Dominican Republic and spent 2007 and 2008 playing in the Dominican Summer League. In 2009 he played for the Gulf Coast League Twins and in 2010 he moved up to Elizabethton.

In 2011, he split time between Elizabethton and Beloit, but struggled at the plate in his time with the Snappers. During the 2011 Fall Instructional League, Arias reportedly was tried out on the pitching mound, but he spent 2012 in Elizabethton back behind the plate.

It may be expected that the majority of the Kernels' catching duties in 2013 will be shared by some combination of these three players, but there are a few younger catchers who spent time with one or both of the short-season teams in 2012 and could end up in Cedar Rapids at some point this season.

If the Twins decide to bring in other catchers, look to see Bo Altobelli, Kelly Cross and/or Bryan Santy.

Altobelli, who turned 22 in February, was drafted in the 21st round last June out of Texas Tech and signed with the Twins in time to get 18 games in behind the plate in Elizabethton. He hit just .230 and threw out just one of the 15 baserunners who attempted to steal against him.

Cross will turn 21 during spring training. He was drafted in the 26th round out of his Texas high school in 2010. He signed his contract just before the signing deadline and caught three games for the GCL Twins that summer.

## These guys could catch on with Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:33 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 March 2013 18:28

---

Cross also spent most of the past two seasons with the same GCL team. He caught just eight games for Elizabethton last season. He's struggled at the plate, hitting just .167 in his GCL and Appy games combined during 2012, but he did throw out an impressive 47 percent of attempted base stealers (15 of 32).

Santy played just 19 games for the GCL Twins in 2012 after the 22-year-old was drafted in the 30th round out of the University of Washington. He not only threw out seven of the 16 runners who attempted to steal off him, but he also hit .296 and got on base at a .418 clip.

Those are offensive numbers you won't see in many other young Twins catching prospects. Of course, Santy was older than most of the pitchers he was likely facing in the GCL, which could mean the Twins would consider pushing him up a couple of levels over the course of 2013. If so, we might see him in Cedar Rapids.

There are two other catching prospects that we could possibly see in a Kernels uniform this season.

The Twins drafted Jorge Fernandez in the seventh round of the amateur draft last year, but Fernandez was drafted out of the International Baseball Academy in Puerto Rico and will turn just 19 in March.

He caught 30 games for the GCL Twins last year with moderate success. He will probably spend all of 2013 in rookie leagues at either Fort Myers or Elizabethton, but there's a chance he could find his way to Cedar Rapids late in the year.

One other catcher, Michael Quesada, contributed a bit at Elizabethton in 2012. Quesada was a low round draft pick in 2010 but as he was signed out of junior college, he's older than most rookie league players at 23 years old.

Like some others on this list, Quesada has struggled a bit at the plate, but has had some success throwing out runners. Quesada, however, was suspended in August after failing a drug test, so he will start the season completing the remainder of a 50-game suspension.

## **These guys could catch on with Kernels**

Written by S.D. Buhr

Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:33 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 March 2013 18:28

---

Since he was on the Elizabethton roster when he tested positive, the suspension doesn't pick back up again until Elizabethton's short-season schedule resumes in June, so it will be August before he can suit up for any Twins affiliate.

Overall, the Twins could stand to upgrade their catching at the low-minors level and it would not be surprising to see them draft a college catcher or two in the top 10 to 15 rounds of this year's June amateur draft. It is possible, though unlikely, that could result in Cedar Rapids seeing such a 2013 draftee behind the plate before the end of the season.