

Kernels 'ready to roll' on Opening Day

Written by Morgan Hawk

Thursday, 28 March 2013 19:11 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 March 2013 19:28



(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of two articles by Kernels broadcaster Morgan Hawks from spring training in Florida.)

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- It's decision time regarding the 2013 Cedar Rapids Kernels roster.

Twins minor league managers and coaches, along with Twins minor league director Brad Steil, will make the tough decisions on who to send to which affiliate, including which players are on Tuesday's flight to Cedar Rapids.

"The teams are starting to take shape," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer. "I think we have about four to five spots we've got to make decisions on. However, for the most part we're pretty much ready."

Looking at Wednesday's lineup against the Boston Red Sox Class-A affiliate, it appears the Kernels could have a mix of youngsters and a few players with Midwest League experience.

Players in the lineup with no Midwest League experience included 3B Travis Harrison, outfielder Adam Walker, 1B D.J. Hicks, outfielder Romy Jimenez and 2B Candido Pimentel.

Players with some Midwest League experience included outfielder J.D. Williams, SS A.J. Pettersen, DH Drew Leachman and C Jairo Rodriguez.

Right-hander Hudson Boyd got Wednesday's start on the mound for the Kernels. He pitched last season at rookie-level Elizabethton.

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Prospect Byron Buxton, who spent time last year at Elizabethton, was with the big-league Twins on Wednesday and not with any minor league affiliate.

It appears the squad will have some good team speed. Pimentel led Elizabethton last season with 16 stolen bases in 56 games. Williams had 23 stolen bases last season at Beloit, which was second on the team. In addition, Pettersen is a speedy infielder.

Many of the players in Wednesday's lineup played together and won the Appalachian League championship last year at Elizabethton. Mauer described this group as having "a lot of energy" and very good chemistry.

"They had a real nice year there, so I don't think team chemistry will be a problem this year," he said. "We're going to have a fun group of guys, no doubt about it. We'll be up there ready to roll Opening Day."