

Kernels will use 6-man rotation

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Kernels plan to use a six-man rotation with their starting pitchers this season, an unusual gambit that's one pitcher more than normal.

The directive came from the Minnesota Twins, the local club's new Major League affiliate.

The idea is to spread the workload and give pitchers an opportunity to develop at the Class A level in the Midwest League.

"Obviously there's a need in our organization for starters, and we're pretty excited about some of these young men we took in the draft last year," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said Wednesday.

The six-man rotation is a new approach for the Twins. They used a five-man rotation last year when they had a Midwest League club in Beloit, Wis.

The Kernels have 12 pitchers on their 25-man roster, so there will be six starters and six relievers. That could place an early demand on the bullpen, because the starters will be limited to 75 or 85 pitches early in the season.

Once the starters get some work, their pitch count will climb to approximately 100 before settling off.

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"I'm not going to have a quick hook by any stretch of the matter," said Mauer. "If some of these guys get themselves into trouble, we want to see if they can get out of trouble."

"I think that's part of developing, and I think that will kind of tell you what staff you're going to have."

Taylor Rogers, a 6-foot-3 lefthander, will be the Opening Day starter against Beloit. Hudson Boyd, a 6-2 righthander, gets the ball Friday night. Mason Melotakis, a 6-2 lefty, is scheduled to start on Saturday afternoon.

Rogers thinks a six-man rotation will work fine.

"Once we develop a routine we won't really see any differences," he said. "I think it will be OK."

Boyd said the six-man rotation probably will lead to additional "side" sessions or bullpen workouts between assignments.

"I think it will be good to give our arms an extra day to get ready, especially in the colder weather," he said. "I think it will be fun. I'm looking forward to it."

Gary Lucas, a former Major League pitcher and veteran coach, will keep tabs on the Kernels' young arms as their pitching instructor. He likes what he's seen of the staff so far.

"There's the potential to strike people out," he said. "I think fans come to the ballpark looking for home runs and strikeouts a lot of times."

"We've got some arms, we've got some velocity coming out of those arms," he said. "It's up to me not to screw them up and make sure they get it over the plate."

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"We've got our share of real good arms who can throw it up there pretty good," said Lucas.
"That's the main thing."