

Top prospect Berrios headed to Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

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Jose Berrios, a top pitching prospect of the Minnesota Twins, is expected to join the Cedar Rapids Kernels as soon as Thursday when the Kernels open a six-game road trip at Peoria.

Berrios was a supplemental first-round pick by the Minnesota Twins in the June 2012 amateur draft out of Papa Juan XXIII High School in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. He was the 32nd pick overall in the draft. He signed with the Twins for a reported \$1.55 million bonus shortly after being drafted.

Berrios, a right-hander, won't turn 19 until May 27. Yet he gained valuable experience this spring pitching for Puerto Rico in the World Baseball Classic. Puerto Rico finished second in the tournament. Berrios made two appearances of one inning each out of Puerto Rico's bullpen and struck out New York Yankees star second baseman Robinson Cano swinging in one of those appearances.

Berrios was expected to open the 2013 season with the Kernels but was held back in extended spring training by the Twins. The Twins project Berrios as a potential top-of-the-rotation starting pitcher and, while his experience in the WBC was valuable, his limited work in that tournament meant he was not ready to step immediately into a starting pitching role at the beginning of April.

Last summer, the 6-foot Berrios made eight appearances for the Gulf Coast League Twins, all but one of which were in relief. After being promoted to Elizabethton, he moved to the rotation and started all three games he appeared in for the Appalachian League champions.

Berrios, a consensus Top 10 Twins prospect, is reported to have a fastball he throws in the low-to-mid 90s and a sharp low-80s slider. Last summer, he compiled a 3-0 combined record

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with the two Rookie League teams, with a 1.17 ERA. In 30 2/3 innings of work, he struck out 49 hitters and walked just four.