

Stretch run getting bumpy for Kernels

Written by Mike Condon
Friday, 07 June 2013 22:04 -

What appeared to be a comfortable run to a first half championship is becoming a little uncomfortable for the Cedar Rapids Kernels.

With nine games to play before the All-Star Game in Dayton, the Kernels' lead in the Western Division of the Midwest League is down to 2 1/2 games after a 6-1 loss to the Quad Cities River Bandits before a crowd of 4,001 on Friday night at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Cedar Rapids' cushion over Quad Cities was shaved to three games as the River Bandits got outstanding pitching from their bullpen to take the decisive game of the three-game set.

Cedar Rapids Manager Jake Mauer said his team can't get caught up looking at the standings. Cedar Rapids' magic number to clinch a playoff berth is seven. The division champion and runner-up qualify for the playoffs.

"We can't look at magic numbers and all that stuff because we're just not playing very good," he said. "We've got to go out and not worry about what other teams are doing. We have to take care of what we can."

After exploding for 14 runs in the series opener, the Kernels lost 9-5 on Thursday night and were only able to muster four hits in Friday's loss before a big crowd on Salvation Army Night.

The Kernels have seen some roster movement as of late, especially on their pitching staff. Starter Tyler Duffey and reliever Manuel Soliman were promoted to Fort Myers on Thursday, a week after lefty Matthew Tomshaw was also promoted to the same club.

Mauer admitted the changes are forcing the Kernels to adjust, but was quick to add that the changes give others a chance to show their worth.

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"It's an opportunity for some of these guys," he said. "There are guys in our bullpen who have been here for awhile that we need to have step up and we need to have some of the starters step up as well."

The first to have that chance was Christian Powell, who made his Kernels' debut on Friday. He allowed eight hits and six runs over five innings. Powell's undoing was a four-run third inning that featured three extra-base hits and one of his three wild pitches.

"Powell walked one guy, which is fine," Mauer said. "He threw the ball over the plate and they strung some hits together. He struck out five and they barreled some up, which is going to happen, but he went after guys and that is all you can ask of him."

While Quad Cities was stringing hits together in the third, the Kernels bats did little after taking a 1-0 lead in the first on Dalton Hicks' RBI double. Cedar Rapids had two hits in the first, but only two the rest of the way, none after Travis Harrison's two-out single in the third.

The Kernels had no answer for anybody in the River Bandits' bullpen. Starter Daniel Minor went just three innings, allowing all four hits. Lance McCullers came on to throw four-innings of no-hit baseball, striking out five, three of those on called third strikes.

"McCullers, he threw the ball really good," Mauer said. "You know, we didn't even threaten after that starter went out. Their bullpen was getting the ball over and we just didn't do much with it."

Cedar Rapids' bullpen was equally as solid as the River Bandits didn't record a hit over the final four innings.

"Our bullpen was solid and gave us a chance," Mauer said. "We just couldn't really scratch anything together. It's a funny game. We get 21 hits the first night (of the series) and then combined we only have 15 the last two games."

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Kane County comes to town on Saturday to open a three-game series at 6:35 p.m. Mauer said his pitchers will be challenged.

"They swing the bats," he said of the Cougars. "They got some boys who can really put a charge into the ball. We're really going to have our hands full with those guys. Hopefully our bats can get hot again and we can make a little more noise than we made the last few nights."

Kernels outfielder Adam Brett Walker sat out for a second straight night after slightly injuring his wrist in the series opener.

"He just tweaked it a little bit," Mauer said. "He took (batting practice) today and it went OK. If he improves tomorrow as much as he has the last two days, he should be fine."

QUAD CITIES (6): Sosa, lf, 4 0 0 0, Correa, ss, 5 2 2 1, Wierzbicki, 1b, 5 1 1 1, Ruiz, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Pena, c, 4 0 1 1, Elkins, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Ovando, dh, 4 1 1 0, Hernandez, cf, 3 1 1 0, Scott, rf, 3 1 1 2, Minor, p, 0 0 0 0, Lambson, p, 0 0 0 0, McCullers, p, 0 0 0 0, Neely, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 35 6 8 5.

KERNELS (1): Buxton, cf, 4 0 0 0, Williams, lf, 2 1 0 0, Polanco, ss, 3 0 1 0, Hicks, 1b, 3 0 1 1, Harrison, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Grimes, dh, 4 0 0 0, Licon, 2b, 3 0 1 0, Quesada, c, 4 0 0 0, Pineda, rf, 3 0 0 0, Powell, p, 0 0 0 0, Brewer, p, 0 0 0 0, Atherton, p, 0 0 0 0, Gruver, p, 0 0 0 0. Totals 30 1 4 1.

Quad Cities 004 020 000 - 6 8 0
Kernels 100 000 000 - 1 4 0

Minor, Lambson (4), McCuller (5), Neely (9) and Pena. Powell, Brewer (6), Atherton (8), Gruver (9) and Quesada. W - McCullers (3-4). L - Powell (0-1). 2B - Hernandez (11), Correa (12), Wierzbicki (12), Hicks (20). 3B - Scott (3). SB - Elkins (10), Pineda (5). T - 2:44. A - 4,001.