

## Bixler continues good work for Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 17 April 2014 21:41 - Last Updated Friday, 18 April 2014 03:37

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The Cedar Rapids Kernels' pitching rotation is filled with names commonly found among any number of Minnesota Twins "top prospect" lists. But while the results have been mixed for the big names on the mound so far this season, the bullpen has been carrying more than its share of the load in the early part of the season.

Thursday's starting pitcher Randy Rosario, among the Twins organization's top minor league prospects entering the season, has yet to find his groove and survived just three innings in the Kernels' 7-3 loss to the West Michigan Whitecaps in front of 770 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids.

The Kernels' bullpen, however, has been keeping the team competitive. On Thursday, two Cedar Rapids relievers combined for five innings of scoreless middle-inning relief work.

Brandon Bixler's performance Thursday night epitomized the work of the Kernels' pen. After Rosario departed, Bixler entered the game to start the fourth inning and gave Cedar Rapids 2.2 innings of shutout relief work.

In fact, Bixler has yet to give up a run this season. He has thrown 10 innings of scoreless ball over five appearances. He has prevented all three of the runners he's inherited this season from scoring.

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Bixler said there's no secret to his scoreless work. "I'm just working with Ivan (pitching coach Ivan Arteaga) a lot and just trying to repeat everything I do," he said.

The 22-year-old lefty from Florida Gulf Coast University was the Twins' 16th-round draft choice a year ago. He started his professional career with the Twins organization's Rookie level team in Elizabethton (Tenn.) and was promoted to the Kernels, where he struck out 12 batters in his 9.2 innings of relief work during the final month of the season.



This year, Bixler has picked up where he left off a year ago, fanning 12 hitters over his 10 innings. He's not focused on the strikeouts, however.

"I'm just trying to get the ball over the plate and let the defense work," he said. "Strikeouts are nice, too, when they come."

The lefty does not overpower batters, however, with a fastball in the low 90s. "When I'm up (in the count), I'd say definitely my curveball is my strikeout pitch," he said.

Brandon Peterson added 2.1 innings of shutout relief to Bixler's work, striking out another three Whitecaps.

Second baseman Logan Wade delivered the biggest offensive punch of the night for Cedar Rapids, driving in two runs with a two-out RBI double in the eighth inning to tie the game, 3-3.

Bryan Haar's RBI double in the fourth inning accounted for the first Kernels run of the game.

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Cedar Rapids' stellar relief work ended in the final frame, however, when Hudson Boyd (2-1) allowed West Michigan to push across four runs on four hits and a Kernels error, giving the Whitecaps their 7-3 win.

The Kernels continued to play with a short bench Thursday night. The first look at catcher Michael Quesada's X-rays on his injured right hand were negative, according to Manager Jake Mauer, but the X-rays have been sent to Minnesota for evaluation by the Twins' medical staff. It appears Quesada is headed for the disabled list.

Mauer said Chad Christensen's sore right elbow was "much better," and said Christensen could be available soon.

The series with the Whitecaps continues Friday night at 6:35.