

Kernels climb into tie for 1st place

Written by S.D. Buhr
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It has been a long road back to the top for the Cedar Rapids Kernels, but when they topped Burlington, 3-2, in 11-inning walk-off fashion on Wednesday night, they pulled into a tie atop the Midwest League's Western Division standings.

The Kernels rode their way to the top on the shoulders of second baseman Ryan Walker.

Walker had three hits in six at-bats and all three Cedar Rapids RBIs, including the game-winner in the 11th inning when he drove in Max Murphy and sent 2,424 fans home happy from Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Walker has ridden the bench much of the past two weeks, seeing action in just one of the team's six games on their recent road trip, but he's making the most of his opportunities.

"We had two guys behind me who I knew could do the same thing," Walker said. "Luckily he threw me one and I got good contact on it."

Walker may have played down his role, but his manager was impressed.

"He's been on the bench a little bit, didn't say a word," Jake Mauer said. "When he gets a chance to play, he made the most of it."

Kane County fell to Wisconsin, 2-0, Wednesday night, allowing the Kernels to pull even with the Cougars on top of the Western Division standings for the second half of the season.

The Kernels started the night in a three-way tie for second place with Quad Cities and Peoria.

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Both of those teams lost Wednesday, dropping them both even with Wisconsin, a game behind Cedar Rapids and Kane County.

The victory assures the Kernels of a series win over Burlington, the club's seventh straight series win.

In addition to Walker's heroics, the Kernels' pitching staff once again delivered.

Cedar Rapids starting pitcher Ryan Eades had perhaps his best start of the 2014 season, facing just three Burlington Bees batters over the minimum possible in his seven innings of work.

Eades left the game after seven innings with the score tied 2-2, after allowing just four hits and a pair of walks. He struck out three.

Once again, it was up to the Kernels' bullpen to hang zeroes on the scoreboard and, as they have done throughout this stretch of seven straight series wins, they came through.

Nick Burdi and Dallas Gallant (1-0) combined for four shutout innings, each pitcher striking out five Burlington batters in the process.

Gallant finished the game with two perfect innings to earn his first win of the season.

"The bullpen's been outstanding," Mauer said. "They've all been doing their part. That's the biggest thing."

Burlington first baseman Eric Aguilera accounted for both Bees runs with two solo home runs,

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both off Eades.

Kernels designated hitter Michael Quesada had two hits.

The same two teams complete their three-game series Thursday night at 6:35.