

Kernels can clinch No.1 seed at home

Written by Jim Ecker

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DAVENPORT - Mitch Garver and the Cedar Rapids Kernels are coming home with a great chance to clinch a No.1 seed for the Midwest League playoffs before their own fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The Kernels tripped Quad Cities, 6-1, Tuesday night before 1,943 folks at Modern Woodmen Park to finish with a 4-2 record on their commuter road trips to Burlington and Davenport the past six days.

Cedar Rapids owns a six-game lead over Wisconsin with six games left in the regular season for the No.1 seed in the Western Division for the second half of the campaign. That means their magic number is now 1 for getting that No.1 seed.

The Kernels can secure the No.1 seed by defeating Kane County at home on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. The Kernels also can secure the No.1 seed with a loss by Wisconsin, but they'd rather not back into the honor.

"That would be ideal, if we could beat Kane County a couple of times," said Manager Jake Mauer.

Kane County has been the class of the Midwest League all season and owns a No.1 seed by winning the first-half title in the Midwest League. The Cougars lead the Kernels by three games

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in the second-half standings, so the Kernels could pull into a tie for first place by sweeping the three-game series from Kane County this week.

Assuming the Kernels get that No.1 seed, they'll open the Midwest League playoffs next Wednesday at home against Burlington.

"I think everybody is excited to get into the playoffs and get into playoff baseball," said Garver, who was named to the Midwest League all-star team Monday as the only catcher. "We're all excited and I think we have the team to do it."

Garver has enjoyed a terrific season for Cedar Rapids and ranks in the Top 10 in the Midwest League in all three Triple Crown categories with a .299 batting average, 15 home runs and 76 RBIs. He was the only Kernel to make the postseason all-star squad.

"An outstanding year," said Mauer. "We knew he had a pretty good chance to hit. He's gotten way better behind the plate. His throwing has gotten way, way better."

Mauer said Garver also has learned how to handle the pitching staff, giving the Kernels two quality defensive catchers with Garver and Michael Quesada.



The Kernels have used 51 different players this season, yet somehow managed to stick together for a 71-63 overall record.

"It's a tribute to our organization and the depth of the guys we have," said Garver, who has been with the Kernels all season. "We can swap guys in and out and still have a winning team."

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Garver was proud to make the all-star team.

"It's exciting," he said. "It's exciting to get some recognition. I think a couple of our other guys had a chance to make it, too."

Garver steered the Kernels in the right direction Tuesday night with a two-run single in the first inning for a 2-0 lead. The Kernels scored another run in the frame for a 3-0 advantage and made it 5-0 in the third.

Starting pitcher Lewis Thorpe struck out eight batters in four innings, allowing one run on one hit and four walks. Chris Mazza (4-3) tossed two scoreless innings in relief for the victory. Brian Gilbert and Dallas Gallant also put zeroes on the board in relief.

The four Kernels pitchers combined for 14 strikeouts.

Max Murphy led the 14-hit attack with three base hits. Engelb Vielma, Chad Christensen, Alex Swim and J.D. Williams had two hits. Williams had a triple and two RBIs.

"It was a good one tonight," said Mauer. "We swung the bats really well. That was good to see after last night with 18 strikeouts."

KERNELS (6): Walker, 2b, 5 1 1 0, Vielma, ss, 5 1 2 0, Christensen, 1b, 5 2 2 0, Garver, c, 3 1 1 2, Swim, rf, 4 1 2 1, Williams, dh, 4 0 2 2, Wade, 3b, 4 0 0 0, Murphy, cf, 4 0 3 0, Larson, lf, 4 0 1 0. Totals 38 6 14 5.

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QUAD CITIES (1): Boyd, cf, 2 1 0 0, Mejia, ph/lf, 2 0 1 0, Fernandez, 2b, 4 0 1 0, McDonald, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Reed, dh, 4 0 2 0, Davis, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Wik, rf, 3 0 0 0, Bottger, lf/cf, 3 0 0 0, Booth, c, 4 0 1 0, Lindauer,

ss, 4 0 1 0. Totals 33 1 7 0.