

Kernels fall to Kane County, 6-1

Written by S.D. Buhr

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The plan was pitcher-by-committee for the Cedar Rapids Kernels Friday night, with Manager Jake Mauer rationing the innings of his pitching staff as they near prescribed limits.

With one of the best bullpens in the Midwest League, turning the game over to the pen early might not be a bad strategy, but it did not work for the Kernels this time.

Cedar Rapids fell to the Kane County Cougars, 6-1, in a rain-shortened home finale that ended one out short of six complete innings.

Fans waited 52 extra minutes before the first pitch could be thrown and the rain started back up during the fourth inning. With two outs in the Kernels' half of the sixth inning, home plate umpire Matt Bates called for the tarp. After waiting the mandatory 30 minutes, the game was declared over due to unplayable field conditions.

Both the Kernels and Cougars already have their postseason seeds locked in place, making the results of the game of little consequence to either team.

Mitch Garver provided all of the Kernels' firepower on the night with a deep solo home run to lead off the second inning.

Kane county tallied two unearned runs in the fourth inning, three runs in the fifth and its final run in the sixth.

Kernels starting pitcher Mat Batts worked two perfect innings to start the game before stepping aside in favor of reliever Jared Wilson. Mauer explained the unusually brief appearance of his starting pitcher after the game.

"We're going to run into innings (limit) with him," Mauer said of Batts, who he's hoping to use in

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the playoffs, despite the looming innings limit. "We're hoping we get the okay to throw him Thursday (game 2 vs Burlington)."

The skipper has already named Chih-Wei Hu his Game 1 starting pitcher on Wednesday.

"After (Thursday), we'll see where we'll be. With the off day (Tuesday), the other two lefties (Stephen Gonsalves and Lewis Thorpe), we could go with either one."

Mauer wouldn't rule out the potential need to turn to relief arms for a spot start in the playoffs.

"We're trying to stretch Jared Wilson out a little bit, just in case the situation comes up (where he's needed to start)," said Mauer. "These long relief guys have been kind of spoiled these last two months. They haven't been asked to work so much."

That could change in the playoffs, when a struggling starter could get a quicker hook than usual.

"These guys have to understand, in a playoff situation, you've got to try to give your boys a chance to win. You get in playoff time, you're trying to develop, but we're trying to win. We owe it to your teammates and we owe it to everybody here."

Wilson added a perfect third inning to Batts' two perfect stanzas, but ran into trouble after Cougar left fielder Mark Zagunis reached on shortstop Enjelb Vielma's fielding error to start the visitor's fourth inning.

Brandon Bixler relieved Wilson with two outs in the fifth inning and also worked the sixth.

Pitcher Kohl Stewart, who has been on the shelf with shoulder discomfort for most of the past month or more, threw a bullpen session on Friday and Mauer indicated the 19-year-old

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righthander felt good afterward.

No decision concerning reactivating Stewart will be made at least until he's evaluated on Saturday, but Mauer was hopeful that he'd be getting Stewart back before the regular season finale on Monday in Clinton.

An announced crowd 3,257 fans entered the turnstiles at Veterans Memorial Stadium on the evening, pushing the total attendance for the Kernels to 171,011. That total is 9,677 fewer fans than the 180,688 that watched the Kernels at home a year ago, in the first year of Cedar Rapids' affiliation with the Minnesota Twins.

The Kernels wrap up their regular season with a Labor Day Weekend series in Clinton Friday through Sunday.

The Kernels will host Wednesday's playoff Game 1 against the Burlington Bees at 6:35.