

Tillery helps Kernels start 4-0

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 12 April 2015 19:51 - Last Updated Sunday, 12 April 2015 20:48



Zack Tillery got off to a terrific start as a hitter when he was a freshman at Florida Gulf Coast University a few years ago, but he's making his money as a pitcher now.

The Cedar Rapids Kernels are glad he is.

Tillery gave the Kernels a strong performance out of the bullpen Sunday as Cedar Rapids topped Beloit, 8-3, before 1,732 fans in the home opener at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Tillery, 22, allowed only one hit in 3 ²/₃ innings as the Kernels won their fourth straight game to begin the season. He struck out four batters and did not allow a run with his club clinging to a 5-3 lead at the time.

Tillery hit .314 with six home runs and 39 RBIs as a freshman at Florida Gulf Coast. He was also a pitcher in college, but for a time it looked like his future might be at third base.

"I've had some guys tell me I could have signed to go play pro ball as a hitter, but a lot of the scouts I talked to said we'll probably see you off the bump," he said while signing autographs after the game.

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The Minnesota Twins picked Tillery in the 14th round of the draft last year. He pitched in 11 games in the Gulf Coast League last season and made one appearance with Elizabethton in the Rookie Appalachian League before being promoted to the Class A Midwest League this season.

Tillery, a 6-foot-4 righthander from Naples, Fla., throws four pitches and showed a live arm Sunday.

"I'm just trying to learn and get better every single day," he said. "Everything has been a growing progression. Every day I find something new to work on, every day I find myself getting a little better."



The Kernels pitching staff has gotten off to a good start this year with a 2.25 team ERA and 45 strikeouts in 36 innings.

Michael Cederroth allowed only one run in four innings as the starting pitcher Sunday, but his pitch count ran into the 80's and he gave way to the bullpen. Sam Clay struggled in the fifth inning, walking three batters and getting only one out, but Tillery came into the game and got things under control.

Tillery was credited with the victory in his first appearance with the Kernels.

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Cam Booser pitched the ninth inning for Cedar Rapids in a non-save situation and looked impressive. He walked the first batter he faced, then struck out three straight batters and hit as high as 99 mph on the radar gun.

The Kernels broke the game open with three runs in the bottom of the eighth. Zack Granite hit a two-run, two-out double to make it 7-3 and Nick Gordon followed with an RBI single for the final run.

Zack Larson drove in four runs for Cedar Rapids and has eight RBIs in four games. He had a three-run triple in the second inning to give the Kernels a 5-1 lead.

Manager Jake Mauer, fighting a cold, is happy to see his club get off to a good start.

"It's always important," he said. "We had pretty good team chemistry coming up (to Cedar Rapids). And obviously winning some ballgames makes it even better. Everybody is in a good mood, including the staff."

BELOIT (3): Vertigan, cf, 5 0 1 0, Munoz, ss, 5 0 0 0, Bennie, dh, 3 1 1 0, Pimental, 1b, 4 0 1 0, Kuhn, lf, 4 2 1 0, Duinkerck, rf, 3 0 0 0, Diaz, 3b, 2 0 1 2, Gilbert, 2b, 4 0 0 1, Raga, c, 3 0 0 0. Totals 33 3 5 3.

KERNELS (8): Granite, lf, 3 3 2 2, Gordon, ss, 4 1 1 1, Larson, rf, 5 0 2 4, Fernandez, dh, 3 1 0 0, Kuresa, 1b, 4 0 1 1, White, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Hinojosa, 2b, 4 1 2 0, Navaretto, c, 4 1 1 0, English, cf, 3 1 1 0. Totals 34 8 11 8.

Beloit ▯ ▯ 010 020 000 - 3 5 0

Kernels ▯ ▯ 230 000 03x - 8 11 1

Fillmyer, Bayless (6), Fagan (8) and Raga. Cederoth, Clay (5), Tillery (5), Booser (9) and Navarreto. W - Tillery (1-0). L - Fillmyer. 2B - Pimentel (2), Diaz (1), Kuresa (1), Larson (2),

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White (2), Granite (2). SB - Bennie (1), Granite 2 (2), English (1), Larson (3). E - Hinojosa. A - 1,732.