

Vavra delivers for Kernels in pinch

Written by Jim Ecker
Friday, 17 April 2015 21:25 -



Trey Vavra loves coming to the ballpark. There's nothing he'd rather do, and he plans to keep doing it long after his playing days are over.

He'll play first base and the outfield for the Cedar Rapids Kernels. When they need a bullpen catcher, he's their man. He also practices at third base and second base, and he takes his job seriously when he's asked to coach first base.

"That's my game," he said. "Wherever they need me, I try to get in the lineup and help the team win."

Friday night he was asked to take a swing in the eighth inning as a pinch-hitter. He did it superbly.

Vavra clobbered a three-run homer to deep left-center to help the Kernels trip Peoria, 5-1, before 1,914 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Kernels starter Stephen Gonsalves was terrific for seven innings, but got a no-decision. He struck out 10 batters, walked only one and allowed just one run.

The game was tied, 1-1, heading into the bottom of the eighth. Zack Granite walked, stole second base, advanced to third on a grounder and scored the go-ahead run on a wild pitch.

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The Kernels kept attacking and Vavra ended up belting his first home run of the season to give his club some breathing room in his only at-bat of the night.

He hit a fat slider over the wall. "I had a hunch and he threw me a good pitch to hit," he said.

Vavra comes from a baseball family. His father, Joe, is a coach with the Minnesota Twins. His older brother, Tanner, played for the Kernels last year and is now with the Fort Myers Miracle in the Florida State League.

Vavra looks like a member of the Kernels' coaching staff when he's asked to coach first base when he isn't playing. He's got a stop-watch to clock the pitchers, he talks to base runners and he looks for tendencies that might help a teammate.

"Hopefully one day I'll get an opportunity to coach," he said. "My dream is to keep playing as long as I can and start coaching afterwards."

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer loves having Vavra on the club.

"He's the same as Tanner. They grew up around the game their whole life," said Mauer. "He gets it. He's a baseball guy, and he's always ready."

"If he has a day off, it doesn't mean umbrella drinks and hanging out. He gets something out of it."

"He's into the game. He pays attention. He talks to his teammates, communicates with them. He's a baseball player, there's no doubt about it."

Mauer would like to see Vavra get into coaching at some point.

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"He'll be a good one," said Mauer. "It's a long ways away. He's got a lot of baseball left in him. He'll be a good one when the time comes."

The Kernels (7-2) had trouble scoring runs against Peoria for the third straight day until their four-run outburst in the eighth inning.

Gonsalves, a 6-foot-5 left-hander from San Diego, kept his club in the game with his excellent work on the mound.

"Outstanding. He was really good," said Mauer. "The ball was coming out of his hand. He ran some up there in the mid-90's at a couple of points in the game.

"Very impressive," the skipper said. "Ten strikeouts. Seven innings. He had that look in spring training that he's on his way. He's definitely on his way."

Zack Tillery got the victory with two shutout innings in relief.

Max Murphy went 3-for-4 and scored two runs for Cedar Rapids. Tyler Kuresa had two hits.

The Kernels open a three-game series at Burlington Saturday night. They'll return home next Friday night for a three-game series against Kane County.

PEORIA (1): Sierra, cf, 4 0 2 0, Mercado, ss, 4 0 0 0, Diekroeger, 3b, 3 0 0 0, De Leon, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Radack, rf, 4 0 1 0, Thompson, dh, 3 1 2 0, Cruz, c, 3 0 0 0, Drake, lf, 3 0 1 1, Seferina, 2b, 3 0 0 0. Totals 31 1 6 1.

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KERNELS (5): Granite, cf, 3 1 0 0, Gordon, ss, 4 0 0 0, Larson, rf, 3 1 0 0, Murphy, lf, 4 2 3 0, Fernandez, dh, 3 0 1 0, Vavra, ph/dh, 1 1 1 3, Kuresa, 1b, 4 0 2 1, Kelly, 2b, 2 0 0 0, Navarreto, c, 4 0 0 0, White, 3b, 2 0 0 0. Totals 30 5 7 4.

Peoria ☐ ☐ **010 000 000 - 1 6 2**
Kernels ☐ ☐ **010 000 04x - 5 7 1**

Poncedeleon, Loraine (7) and Cruz. Gonsalves, Tillery (8) and Navarreto. W - Tillery (2-0). L - Loraine (0-1). 2B - Drake (2), Thompson (2). HR - Vavra (1). E - Radack (1), Cruz (1), Gonsalves (2). T - 2:33. A - 1,914.