

Kernels bite Timber Rattlers, 7-3

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 28 May 2015 05:20 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 May 2015 06:40



With two of the best starting pitchers in the Midwest League facing off Wednesday night, the 2,237 fans who showed up to watch the Kernels take on the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers had every right to expect a pitchers' duel.

That didn't exactly happen, though, as the Kernels topped the visitors 7-3 at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Cedar Rapids starter Felix Jorge (3-2) entered Wednesday with the MWL's 10th best earned run average at 2.13. He did not have nearly his best night on the mound, but he limited Wisconsin to three runs on five hits over six innings.

It was the seventh time in eight starts that Jorge has given the Kernels at least six innings of mound work.

Jorge certainly out-dueled his Wisconsin counterpart, Cy Sneed, who held the seventh best ERA mark in the league at 1.81 entering the night. Sneed gave up four runs in just four innings before being pulled.

Jorge's fastball did not appear to have its usual velocity early in the game, but the young left-hander from the Dominican Republic said beginning a game with a bit lower velocity was part of the plan.

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"That's how I start," he said. "I start low and then go a little higher."

His fastball was not his money pitch on this night, anyway. "The slider was working," he said.

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer acknowledged that Jorge was not his sharpest, but was pleased with the starter's effort.

"He's been, other than (Stephen) Gonsalves, probably our most consistent (starting pitcher)," the skipper observed. "He's gone out there and given us a chance to win every night and continues to do so."

"When guys that don't have their best stuff are able to go out and give you six innings, it's a pretty good sign."

The win allowed the Kernels to keep pace with MWL Western Division leading Quad Cities, which topped Kane County 13-4 Wednesday. Cedar Rapids sits in second place in the division, just four games behind the River Bandits.

The Kernels shared the offensive wealth as all nine batters notched a hit. Only Max Murphy tallied a pair of hits for Cedar Rapids. Murphy also led the team with three RBIs.

The Kernels needed someone to step up offensively because Trey Vavra, their leading hitter, was not available after suffering a mild leg injury Tuesday night. Vavra is "day to day," according to Mauer.

"Murphy had a nice night," Mauer said of his right fielder. "We needed that with Vavra down. We need somebody to step up and kind of take over that role as far as driving in those runs. He did a nice job tonight."

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Murphy claimed he was not feeling any extra pressure with his teammate hobbled for a few days.

"No, not really," he said. "We've got a ton of guys that can do it. It's always good when the entire lineup can do something for you. Someone's going to get it done."

Early on, it looked like it could become one of those games where the Kernels would squander scoring chances and end up regretting it.

The Kernels threatened to score first, but Nick Gordon and TJ White were left stranded in scoring position in the bottom of the first inning.

In the home half of the third, Blake Schmit took a fastball to the back of his shoulder to open the inning and worked his way around to third base, but was stranded there as well.

Those lost opportunities would cost the Kernels as Wisconsin jumped to a 2-0 lead in the second inning on a two-run home run just over the left-center field wall by Sthervin Matos.

Two batters later, Jorge gave up a single but, from there, retired 11 batters in a row.

In the meantime, the Kernels plated a pair of runs in the home half of the fourth inning to tie the game and added two more in the fifth to claim a 4-2 lead.

Murphy led off the fourth with a walk and advanced to second on Jorge Fernandez's ground-out. Murphy scored on a Pat Kelly single to center field and Kelly moved to second base on Tyler Kuresa's infield single. Schmit's single up the middle drove in Kelly with the tying run.

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Gordon led off the Kernels' fifth with a one-hop double to the left-center field fence and White followed with a walk. Both runners advanced a base on a wild pitch and both scored on Murphy's RBI single, putting Cedar Rapids up 4-2.

Wisconsin first baseman Dustin DeMuth ended Jorge's consecutive out streak with a deep solo home run to start the visitor's sixth inning, closing the Rattlers to within 4-3, but that would be the end of the Rattlers' scoring for the night.

The Kernels notched a fifth run in the sixth on a Brett Doe lead-off double, a wild pitch and a Kuresa sacrifice fly.

The final two Cedar Rapids runs came across in the seventh. Gordon led off with a walk, stole second base and moved to third on a ground-out. He scored on Murphy's RBI double. Murphy scored on an RBI double by Fernandez.

Two recent additions to the Kernels' bullpen staff made their home debuts in relief of Jorge.

Jose Velez worked the seventh and eighth innings, giving up just one hit and striking out a pair. Luke Bard worked a scoreless ninth inning, also giving up one hit, while walking one and striking out one Rattler batter.

The Kernels will go for the sweep of the three-game series Thursday night at 6:35.

WISCONSIN (3): DeMuth, 1b, 4 1 1 1; Munoz, 2b, 4 0 0 0; Castillo, lf, 4 0 0 0; McCall, C, 4 1 3 0; Matos, 3b, 4 1 1 2; Neuhaus, dh, 3 0 0 0; Gatewood, ss, 4 0 1 0; Diaz, rf, 3 0 1 0; Harrison, cf, 3 0 0 0. Totals: 33 3 7 3.

KERNELS (7): English, cf, 4 0 1 0; Gordon, ss, 3 2 1 0; White, 3b, 3 1 1 0; Murphy, lf, 3 2 2 3; Fernandez, rf, 4 0 1 1; Kelly, dh, 4 1 1 1; Doe, c, 4 1 1 0; Kuresa, 1b, 3 0 1 1; Schmit, 2b, 3 0 1 1. Totals: 31 7 10 7.

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Wisconsin 000 001 000 - 3 7 0
Cedar Rapids 000 221 20x - 7 10 0

Sneed, Linehan (5), Rizzo (7) and McCall. Jorge, Velez (7), Bard (8) and Doe. WP - Jorge (3-2). LP - Sneed (2-6). 2B - Gordon (5), Doe (4), Murphy (9), Fernandez (8), English (6). HR - Matos (3), DeMuth (3). SB - Diaz (11), White (7), Gordon (11). T - 2:41. A - 2,237.