

Kernels oust Bandits, eye Peoria next

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 10 September 2015 22:58 - Last Updated Thursday, 10 September 2015 23:07



DAVENPORT - It's a cliché, but sometimes it really is the little things that win ballgames at playoff time.

That was the case again Thursday night as the Cedar Rapids Kernels and Quad Cities River Bandits could not finish their game in regulation, needing 11 innings before the Kernels finally topped the Bandits, 3-1, before a crowd of 1,555 at Modern Woodman Park.

Chris Paul delivered a two-run single in the 11th inning for the Kernels and finished the game with three hits and all three of his team's RBIs.

With the win, the Kernels claimed the first-round playoff series two games to none and advance to face Peoria in the Midwest League's Western Division Championship series.

The Kernels will open the best-of-3 series at 6 p.m. Saturday at Peoria, The second game will be played at at 4:05 p.m. Sunday at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids, with Game 3 (if necessary) at 6:35 p.m. Monday in Cedar Rapids.

Kernels manager Jake Mauer has been preaching pitching and defense to his team and that combination paid off again.

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Starting pitcher Sam Gibbons retired the first 10 batters he faced before Edgar Corcino appeared to lose a fourth-inning line drive to right field in the lights, turning a single into what was scored a triple and leading to the only run Quad Cities would score.

Gibbons set down the final nine batters he faced. The Australian right-hander put the Bandits down 1-2-3 in six of his eight innings. He surrendered just four hits and struck out four.

It was a bit of déjà vu for Gibbons, who also started the second game of the first playoff series for the Elizabethton Twins a year ago in the Appalachian League.

"I didn't do very well," he recalled of that effort, in which he lasted just three innings in a 10-9 setback.

It was a very different ending for Gibbons and his team this time around.

"I think I did much better than last year," Gibbons understated. "I just wanted to make sure we put our team in good position to clinch the series, so I thought I did that and we were able to win."

Gibbons was pleased with his efficiency.

"It's always good when you get quick innings. It helps you when you're done, when you have those innings when you get first-pitch strikes I think are very important," he remarked.

On the defensive side of the ledger, the Kernels took advantage of three Quad Cities errors while committing none themselves.

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The most important defensive gem of the night came courtesy of Kernels center fielder LaMonte Wade, who threw a strike to catcher Brian Navarreto in the fifth inning to nail Garrett Stubbs trying to score on a single. As it turned out, that was a game-saving throw and Gibbons, for one, appreciated it.

"That play from LaMonte was outstanding," he said. "You never really expect someone to be thrown out at the plate but for him to come up firing, it was awesome."

Kernels hitters managed just seven hits, all singles. Paul notched three of those, including the game-winner in the 11th inning that drove in two Cedar Rapids runners.

All three of the Kernels' runs were aided by Quad Cities miscues.

Corcino scored the first run of the game in the Kernels' half of the fourth inning after reaching base on an error by Bandits first baseman Bryan Muniz.

In the 11th, T.J. White worked a leadoff walk and things got interesting. Wade laid down a bunt in front of the plate and Stubbs, the Bandits catcher, opted to try to throw White out at second base, rather than make Wade the easy out at first.

Stubbs' throw bounced and ended up in shallow center field, allowing Wade to reach on the fielder's choice, but the River Bandits "circus" did not end there. Quad Cities shortstop Kristian Trompiz chased the ball and made a wild throw to third base, which allowed Wade to move into scoring position at second base.

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That brought up Paul with two runners in scoring position and he cashed in with his third single of the night, lining the ball to right field and driving in both White and Wade. Paul was the only Kernel with more than one hit.

“Sometimes you just see it better than other days,” the first baseman said in reflection. “I was just trying to get a good pitch to hit all day and I got some good pitches.

“I was just hoping to get an opportunity like that and it ended up being with two runners on base for me so I figured I had to take advantage.”

Yorman Landa took a string of eight consecutive batters retired into his relief appearance to begin the ninth inning for Cedar Rapids and extended that streak to nine innings before giving up a leadoff single in the 10th inning. He quickly erased that runner with a defensive gem of his own, running down a bunted pop-up and turning it into a double play.

After Cedar Rapids took the lead, Nick Anderson closed out the game and the series with a perfect 11th inning.

When it was all over, Kernels Manager Jake Mauer was succinct with his observations on the game and the series.

“We pitched, we caught the ball and didn’t make any mistakes,” he said. “We told the guys, when teams are evenly matched, it’s who executes that’s going to win. When you don’t, it gets magnified.”

Mauer confirmed that Keaton Steele will get the start in Game 1 on the road Saturday at Peoria and indicated he expects that series to look a lot like the one his team just claimed from the River Bandits.

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"Just like this one, they've got pitching. They've got a couple of guys who can bop it a little bit," he said. "We're going to have to go in and execute, catch the ball. Hopefully, our starters give us seven or eight innings and we're going to be in good shape.

"We're going to take (Friday) and ice some of the boo-boos a little bit and be ready to go."

Quad Cities had the best record in the Midwest League this year at 88-50, including a 9-4 advantage over the Kernels during the regular season, but that did not help them in the playoffs.

Lansing will meet West Michigan in the Eastern Division finals, with the division champs meeting for the league title.

Peoria swept its series from Kane County, 2-0.

KERNELS (3): Valera, 2b, 5 0 1 0, Gordon, ss, 5 0 1 0, Corcino, rf, 5 1 0 0, White, 3b, 3 1 1 0, Wade, cf, 4 1 0 0, Paul, 1b, 4 0 3 3, Murphy, dh, 3 0 0 0, Navarroto, c, 5 0 1 0, Diemer, lf, 5 0 0 0. Totals 39 3 7 3.

QUAD CITIES (1): Boyd, cf, 5 0 1 0, Martin, dh, 4 1 1 0, Tanielu, 3b, 4 0 1 1, Muniz, 1b, 4 0 0 0, Ferguson, lf, 3 0 1 0, Laureano, rf, 4 0 0 0, Stubbs, c, 4 0 1 0, Trompiz, ss, 4 0 0 0, Fernandez, 2b, 4 0 0 0. Totals 36 1 5 1.

Kernels □ □ □ 000 100 000 02 - 3 7 0

Quad Cities 000 100 000 00 - 1 5 3

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Gibbons, Landa (9), Anderson (11) and Navarreto. Dykxhoorn, Peterson (7), Heredia (9) and Stubbs. W - Landa. L - Heredia. S - Anderson (2). 2B - Stubbs. 3B - Martin. E - Muniz, Stubbs, Trompiz. T - 2:51. A - 1,555.