

Mauer ejected as Kernels tumble

Written by S.D. Buhr

Thursday, 17 September 2015 22:12 - Last Updated Thursday, 17 September 2015 22:21



COMSTOCK PARK, Mich. - For six and 1/2 innings Thursday night, the second game of the Midwest League Championship Series between the Cedar Rapids Kernels and West Michigan Whitecaps was exactly the kind of low-scoring pitchers duel that Kernels fans have come to expect in the postseason.

Kernels starting pitcher Sam Gibbons had held the Whitecaps scoreless until that point and Cedar Rapids had managed just one run.

By the time the seventh inning ended, the Whitecaps owned a 4-1 lead, Gibbons was finished for the night and Kernels Manager Jake Mauer was in the clubhouse after being ejected by plate umpire Richard Genera.

The Whitecaps held onto that lead to the pleasure of 3,336 home-town fans enjoying their final game of the season at Fifth Third Ballpark and knotted the championship series at 1-1. The two teams now pack up and head to Cedar Rapids for Game 3 Saturday and the rest of the best-of-5 series.

Saturday's game will start at 3:35 p.m. and Sunday's Game 4 will begin at 2:05 p.m. If a Game 5 is necessary, it will be at 6:35 p.m. Monday in Cedar Rapids.

Hot-hitting Chris Paul, who took a .368 postseason batting average into the game, doubled with two outs in the second inning and Max Murphy drove

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Paul home with a triple to put Cedar Rapids out front 1-0.

That's where the score remained when the Whitecaps came to bat after the seventh-inning stretch.

Gibbons started the seventh by surrendering his first and only walk of the night to Kade Scivicque, then gave up a double to Christin Stewart. Then things got really interesting.

Joey Pankake lined a Gibbons pitch to left field, easily scoring Scivicque, but Austin Diemer's throw from left field appeared to beat Stewart to the plate. Stewart's head-first slide was very wide of home to avoid the tag and he slid past the plate.

Kernels catcher Brian Navarreto chased Stewart down and applied a tag as umpire Genera made several pointing motions toward the plate, giving the appearance that he was calling the runner out, either on the tag or for going well out of the baseline to avoid the tag.

When only one run went up on the scoreboard, Whitecaps Manager Andrew Graham approached Genera from the third base coach's box to get an explanation and that's when a second run was put on the board for West Michigan.

Mauer emerged from the Kernels dugout to get an explanation and was soon livid with what he heard. After several minutes arguing the call with both Genera and third base umpire Brock Ballou, the manager returned to the dugout. Genera soon heard something more he didn't like from the direction of the Kernels dugout and ejected Mauer.

When play resumed, Pankake was on first base and Will Kengor laid a bunt down that was fielded by Gibbons in front of the mound. Instead of taking

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the out at first base, Gibbons made a throw to try and get the lead runner at second. The ball bounced into shallow center field and the Whitecaps ended up with runners at the corners and no outs.

Acting manager Tommy Watkins brought in Yorman Landa to relieve Gibbons at that point, but the damage continued. Landa walked Francisco Contreras to load the bases and, with the infield drawn in, Kernels shortstop Nick Gordon could not come up with a sharp ground ball, allowing another run to score.

One out later, a Landa breaking ball struck A.J Sincox in the shoulder, forcing in the fourth West Michigan run of the inning and capping off the game's scoring for the night.

Afterward, there remained confusion in the visitors clubhouse concerning exactly what happened on the play that so dramatically turned around the Kernels' fortunes.

"I just set up like they've taught me how to set up and go after him," Navarreto explained. "(The umpire) called him out first. I was so excited we got him. Then he changed the play and he said, 'obstruction of home plate.' So I don't know."

Mauer wasn't much more certain about the call than his catcher.

"He called the guy safe, then called him out, then called him blocking the plate," the manager said. "I think he was confused and then I don't know what changed his mind or why he decided, but he ruled that Navarreto was blocking the plate without the ball. Hadn't been called all year. So, in my opinion, he really kind of changed it three different times.

"So it's very confusing and very unfortunate. It's unfortunate it came down to that and then they

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took advantage of some mistakes.”

Mauer was also philosophic, however.

“One (run) I didn’t think was going to be enough anyway,” he said. “These guys, you’re not going to keep shutting them out.”

It will be up to Mauer and his coaches now to assure that one play does not turn into a momentum changer as the teams head to Cedar Rapids to resume the series on Saturday.

“You can’t let it, plain and simple. We’ve got a day off tomorrow. Come in and run around a little bit, play a little catch and then play in front of our home crowd,” said Mauer. “Just got to go out and play. This is a funny game.”

Keaton Steele will take the mound for the Kernels on Saturday and Randy Rosario on Sunday for the Kernels.

KERNELS (1): Valera, 2b, 4 0 1 0, Gordons, ss, 3 0 1 0, Corcino, rf, 4 0 0 0, White, 3b, 4 0 1 0, Wade, cf, 4 0 0 0, Paul, 1b, 4 1 1 0, Murphy, dh, 4 0 2 1, Navarreto, c, 3 0 0 0, Diemer, lf, 3 0 0 0. Totals 33 1 6 1.

WEST MICHIGAN (4): Kivett, cf, 4 0 0 0, Simcox, ss, 3 0 0 1, Gerber, rf, 4 0 2 0, Scivicque, c, 3 1 0 0, Stewart, lf, 4 1 2 0, Pankake, dh, 4 1 1 2, Kengor, 1b, 3 1 0 0, Contreras, 3b, 3 0 1 0, Gonzalez, 2b, 3 0 0 1. Totals 31 4 6 4.

Kernels      **010 000 000 - 1 6 2**

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West Michigan 000 000 40x - 4 6 1

Gibbons, Landa (7) and Navarreto. Ladwig, Belisario (8), Jimenez (9) and Scivicque. W - Ladwig (2-0). L - Gibbons (0-1). S - Jimenez (2). 2B - Paul (2), Stewart (20. 3B - Murphy (1). SB - White (1). E - Gibbons (1), Gordon (1), Kengor (2). T - 2:16. A - 3,336.