

Brown walk-off part of fireworks in Watkins

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WATKINS - There were fireworks going off all night during the annual Iowa Valley League holiday doubleheader between Norway and Watkins.

Most of the blasts were of the traditional variety with loud booms and blasts. Nick Brown provided one to remember on the field.

The former University of Iowa standout hit a two-run walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth inning Saturday night to give Watkins a 7-5 victory and a sweep of the twinbill before an overflow crowd at Gabe Kuester Memorial Ball Park.

The Mud Hens (5-7) got a two-run single from Jonny Frese in the bottom of the third to rally past the Bandits (6-8) for a 3-2 win in the opener.

Brown completed his career at Iowa in 2012. He played for the Mud Hens for part of that summer before returning to the Chicago area. Brown moved back to Iowa and has been on the Watkins roster full-time since 2014.

And when was the last time Brown had a walk-off homer?

"Not since my freshman year in high school," he said with a smile before heading off to sit with his family on the field for the spectacular 25-minute post-game fireworks display.

"It was absolutely insane here tonight," Brown said. "There were fireworks going off all night

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long off in the background. People were screaming and having a good time.

"I'm not going to lie, that was one of the top-5 baseball experiences just in general. Win or lose that game, it was absolutely fun."



Brown's homer capped a wild back-and-forth game that saw both teams take a lead, only to be tied by the other.

Norway jumped to a 3-0 lead. Travis Mueller's two-run single was the key blow in a three-run third inning. Watkins came back with three of its own in the home fourth. Chris Krystowiak's two-out, two RBI double tied the game.

Skylar Frese gave Watkins a 5-3 lead in the fifth with a two-run single up the middle. Braedon Brown doubled home Mueller in the top of the sixth and when Jason Mathews beat out an infield hit to score Braedon Brown, the game was tied again.

It remained tied until the bottom of the ninth. Krystowiak led off with a single, bringing Nick Brown to the plate.

"(Manager) John (Kuester) looked at me and I had him go through the signs again making sure he was taking off the bunt," Nick Brown said. "They were thinking bunt and (Norway pitcher Carlo Rivera) gave me a fastball up in the zone and I just drove it."

The blast curled just inside the left-field foul pole, setting off a wild celebration on the field. Brady Kraus pitched three strong innings in relief to earn the victory.

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The opener saw all the runs scored in the first three innings. Christian Stekl's two-RBI single gave Norway a 2-1 lead in the top of the third.

Then Jonny Frese came through with a two-run single to right and the rest was left to the Watkins pitching staff.

Skylar Frese pitched five strong innings to earn the win. Luke Franzenburg came on in the sixth. He worked around a pair of singles in the inning before retiring Norway in order in the seventh to earn the save.

The sweep helped the Hens move closer to the .500 mark. Nick Brown is confident the team can continue its roll over the final three weeks of the regular season.

"I really like the way we are playing," he said. "The younger guys are learning and picking up things all the time from the older guys and it is really starting to show on the field."

Watkins will play again at home next Sunday in a 4 p.m. twinbill against Red Top. Norway will play a 1 p.m. doubleheader next Sunday at Walford.