

Kennedy spreads major league advice to Ems

Terry Kennedy knows a thing or two about what it's like to be in a pennant race.

He knows the feeling of beating a division rival to inch another full game ahead of them in the standings.

He knows how important every at-bat, every pitch and every defensive play is to a team when it is involved in a division race in the latter parts of the season.



COMMENTARY
Jeff Smith

After all, Kennedy did play in the major leagues for 14 seasons and did appear in the World Series in 1984 with the San Diego Padres and in 1989 with the San Francisco Giants.

And as he will tell you, it doesn't matter what level of play it is — from Little League on up to the big leagues — competition only makes the quality of baseball rise.

Kennedy was in Eugene Monday night for the series opener between the Emeralds and the division rival Portland Rockies, who entered the series only a half game

behind the Ems for first-place.

Kennedy has spent the past three seasons as a minor league manager in the Cubs system and this is first season as the Cubs' minor league field coordinator.

And this was also his first experience watching the Ems at Civic Stadium — an experience that he enjoyed as the Ems thumped the Rockies 6-2 to move 1 1/2 games ahead in the South Division of the Northwest League.

"I've been really excited to see these guys and I know that they're playing well," said Kennedy, who appeared in four major league All-Star games as a player. "This is an important series for them and it's good at any level to be in a pennant race because then you know what it takes."

Granted, it is only Aug. 1, but with the short-season Single-A schedule the way it is, the Ems (21-19) have only 36 games remaining. Of those 36, eight are against these same Rockies, who Eugene is now 3-1 against this season.

Eugene centerfielder Michael Mallory admitted that this game carried just a tad more emotion than your average NWL game.

"We try to take every team the same, but I think everybody wanted to turn it up a little more tonight," said Mallory, whose RBI single in a three-run fifth helped

extend Eugene's lead to 5-1. "They are the team closest to us and with the crowd getting us pumped up, it all worked out."

Eugene starting pitcher Mark Freed pitched five strong innings to record his league-leading 6th win opposed to zero losses. Kennedy was quick to point out that with young pitchers like Freed and Wilton Chavez — who sat near Kennedy in the first row behind home plate — the Ems have a great chance to win a title.

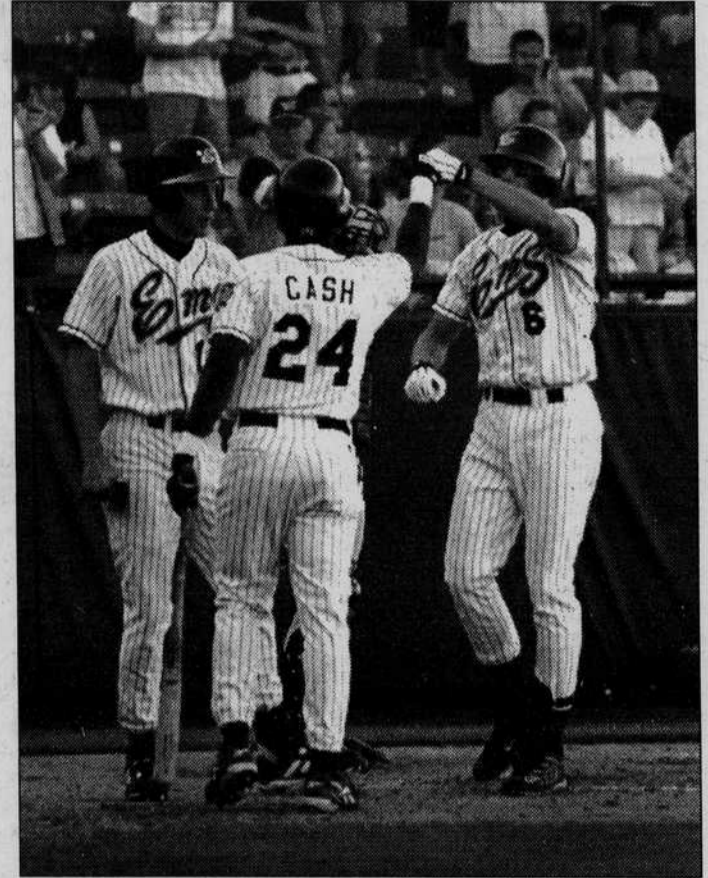
"They have some experienced pitchers which sort of counteracts the youth of their everyday line-up," said Kennedy, who was joined in the stands by Chicago minor league pitching coordinator Lester Strode.

Kennedy was chosen as Baseball America's 1998 Minor League Manager of the Year for leading Triple-A Iowa to a division championship, but says he's thrilled with his new gig that has him seeing all different levels of minor-league ball.

"Oh yeah, I enjoy it a lot," Kennedy said. "I'm really getting the chance to personally know every player in the organization."

And spread some words of wisdom to a young group of ballplayers who are getting their first taste of a pennant race.

"That's what you play for," Kennedy said. "You know, it's just fun. It's a lot more fun."



Azle Malinao-Alvarez Emerald
Condor Cash (24) and Brandon Sing (6) are two big reasons why the Ems are in first.

Ems win

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After holding a slim one-run lead for five innings, the Ems broke out in the sixth. Jackson's triple scored Blasi, who reached on a grounder to lead off the inning. Eugene scored twice more in the inning on extra-base hits from Sing and Adam Morrissey.

Catcher Ryan Jorgensen went one-for-five with a double and a run-batted-in.

Eugene also got a big boost from the pitching staff. Starter Mark Freed scattered five hits over five innings and gave up only one run. Freed improved to 6-0 on the season — tops in the Northwest League.

Francis Beltran and Scott Fries

each came in for two scoreless innings of relief. Beltran got out of a bases-loaded, no-out jam in the seventh inning with a double-play ball and his fourth strikeout of the night.

The win moved the Emeralds to 21-19 on the season, but more importantly, a game and a half ahead of Portland in the division standings.

The Rockies' lone bright spot was center fielder Vernard Moren-

cy, who went four-for-five with two doubles. His lone out came at third base when he easily had a double but went for the extra base and got thrown out.

"This was obviously a big game for us," Sheaffer said. "This league is so evenly matched that every game is important."

The Ems got back to Eugene at 5:30 a.m. after a rough road trip in

Boise, where they lost three of five. The Ems will get a chance for revenge on the Hawks later this month at Civic Stadium.

"A lot of the guys were real happy to be home," Blasi said. "It's nice to get back to Eugene with the fans."

The Ems play their next five games at home against division rivals Portland and Vancouver.

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