

ROCK CITY SHOW: COLE DAZZLED IN ROAD REHAB START FOR SWB

On June 14, reigning AL Cy Young award-winner Gerrit Cole made a rehab start for Scranton/Wilkes-Barre in Rochester; drawing a crowd and rave reviews.

by Emily Messina



An organization's Triple-A roster can be a revolving door as teams work to fill in gaps for the big-league team. The RailRiders are no strangers to this process as each year the coaching staff prepares players for the next step of their journey.

As Scranton/Wilkes-Barre sends players to New York, the Yankees other Minor League affiliates transfer players to the RailRiders roster in the meantime. Each season the team sees a hundred or so players through hundreds of roster moves. Some spend all summer in Moosic, gaining their “mountain time” as the players sometimes refer to it. However, in some instances, a player will record a handful of games here or even just one appearance with the RailRiders in their story.

So far the team has seen 57 different members on their roster and has sent 18 players to New York this summer with undoubtedly more to come. This season, the team has seen a few call-ups from Low-A Hudson Valley that have helped them through understaffed periods. They have also had a few that have passed through just as a stepping stone back to New York.

On June 14, the RailRiders announced that they would have a one-of-a-kind player join the team as a stepping stone on his way back to New York.

The New York Yankees transferred pitcher Gerrit Cole to the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre roster as a part of his Major League Rehab Assignment. Cole was initially placed on the Yankees 60-Day Injured List on March 28 with right elbow inflammation. He had pitched two outings prior with Double-A Somerset but was looking to face more experienced hitters in his return from injury. He needed a couple of outings in the minors to make sure he was healthy before returning as the Ace of the Yankees. The reigning American League Cy Young joined the team in Rochester as the RailRiders were set to play the Red Wings, the Triple-A squad of the Washington Nationals, at Innovative Field.

While not exactly a surprise that Cole needed another start in his rehab assignment, it was certainly unique that he chose to travel to an affiliate that was on the road. But the timing and

the circumstances were right and Gerrit put that in front of all else.

As the team was already in Rochester, Cole flew in separately and reported to the field on the day of his start. He made sure to get all of his rehab work in and also focus on his pregame exercises. RailRiders trainer Jimmy Downam says Cole was very meticulous about his preparation and routine.

“It was important to make sure his training was built up in a controlled manner,” Downam noted. “It helps a pitcher set up for future success so once he has returned he is ready for the consistency of being a starter in the big leagues.”

Despite his busy schedule, Cole made sure to catch up with some familiar faces from Spring Training, meet with the local media, and even autograph some items.

When it came time for him to head out for warmups, he waved to the screaming fans excited about his presence in their hometown ballpark. Innovative Field was packed to the brim, boasting 13,605 fans for their largest regular-season crowd in history. Despite it being a road game for the RailRiders, the seats were filled with Yankees jerseys in support of their New York affiliate.

Cole was set to face off against righty Joan Adon who also has Major League experience, although certainly not as much as the ten-year vet and certainly not to the caliber of the two-time ERA title holder.

The Friday night contest began at 6:47 PM in pristine conditions. A 74° temperature with just a slight breeze made for a beautiful summer night in upstate New York. Although Jasson Domínguez nabbed a single to center in the top of the first, the RailRiders did not make Cole and the fans wait long to throw his first pitch in the bottom half.

The first batter he faced was the Nationals #22 prospect Darren Baker, son of legendary Dusty Baker. His first offering, a called strike, was a 92.1mph fastball. He mixed in the slider but ended the five-pitch at-bat with a 93.8mph four-seamer. The next batter, Jack Dunn, doubled but Cole stranded him on the bases with two more quick outs.

In the second frame, Cole sat down the Red Wings 1-2-3 finishing it off with his third strikeout.

After a home run from Jeter Downs in the third gave Cole some run support, the Major Leaguer struck out the side swinging.

In the fourth, Cole allowed an unearned run on a RailRiders error and an RBI single off the



bat of Riley Adams, a catcher with big-league time. Manager Shelley Duncan gave Cole the ball for the fifth and, after striking out his 10th batter, he was relieved with 70 pitches even, 46 for strikes.

In total, Cole tossed 4.1 innings, letting up just the one unearned run on two hits and no free passes. His ten K's marked the first time a pitcher in a RailRiders uniform had notched double-digit strikeouts.

Following his start, Cole attended to his post-game work before giving some thoughts on his appearance. He felt that all of his pitches landed well and that he had some momentum rolling while hitting his spots.

"Definitely a step in the right direction," Cole said. "I needed to get the pitch count up. I also think that making sure that you are laying some rubber on the road a little bit so that if you do get into a spot, you have enough to get out of it."

Cole credited Triple-A hitters with being very close to big-league talent. And, that the packed house made for a fun night.

"It is a special feeling when you go somewhere and the fans come out and support you," Cole smiled. "There are so many Yankee fans out there in the world and there's nothing we like more than playing in front of them."

He wrapped up the night by providing a special dinner for his Triple-A teammates. It is a long-standing custom for a Major League rehabber to arrange a spread for the clubhouse and Cole did not disappoint. The veteran provided a bounty of steak, fish and vegetables to cap off the evening.

Cole's rehab assignment originally began with the Patriots, making two starts. On June 4, he worked 3.1 innings on 45 pitches, allowing two hits and striking out five. Five days later, he struck out four Double-A batters on 57 pitches, surrendering one run on two hits over 4.2 innings.

The 33-year-old was initially selected by the Yankees in the first round of the 2008 MLB Draft but chose to attend UCLA instead of signing. Pittsburgh took Cole first overall in 2011 and he made his Major League debut two seasons later. After five seasons and 127 starts, he was traded to Houston, where he pitched for two years, going 35-10. In December 2019, Cole signed a nine-year, \$324 million-dollar contract, the largest by any pitcher in history.

In 2020's shortened season, Cole was 7-3 and finished fourth in Cy Young voting. He led the AL in wins during the 2021 campaign and finished second in the Cy Young race. Cole turned in another All-Star season in 2022, going 13-8 with a 3.50 ERA. Last season, the six-time All-Star went 15-4 with an AL-best 2.63 ERA, striking out 222 and walking 48 over 209 innings to claim his first Cy Young honor. All told, Cole is 145-76 over 11 Major League seasons with 2,157 strikeouts in 302 games, all starts.

Cole was the fifth member of the Yankees to play for Scranton/Wilkes-Barre on an MLB Rehab Assignment this season, joining reliever Nick Burdi and infielders DJ LeMahieu and Oswald Peraza and outfielder Jasson Domínguez.

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