

LoMo's homer not enough in finale vs. Angels

By Bill Chastain and Maria Guardado, MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- C.J. Cron blasted a pinch-hit, two-run home run off Adam Kolarek to snap an eighth-inning tie and lift the Angels to a 4-3 win over the Rays in Sunday's series finale at Angel Stadium.

In his first at-bat after the All-Star break, Cron crushed a first-pitch sinker to right field for his third homer of the season, breaking a 2-2 deadlock and putting the Angels ahead, 4-2. It was an encouraging sign for Cron, who has struggled to find his swing this season and has received scant playing time since being recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake.

"It's been a little bit since I've had an at-bat, and I didn't want to give him a pitch there," Cron said. "I wanted to be aggressive, because that's the kind of hitter I am. Fortunately it was a good pitch to hit, and I put a good swing on it."

"I feel just as confident facing righties as I do lefties," Kolarek said. "My plan of attack was to just trust my sinker and to try and get the ground ball there. Unfortunately, that one was just a little bit up. Good hitters take advantage of any little mistake in the zone."

Steven Souza Jr.'s RBI single pulled the Rays within one in the ninth, but Bud Norris escaped a bases-loaded jam by coaxing a game-ending double play from Tim Beckham to preserve the Angels' win and deny Tampa Bay a three-game sweep in Anaheim.

Angels right-hander Parker Bridwell, who was recalled from Salt Lake prior to Sunday's game, kept the Rays scoreless through six innings before surrendering a game-tying, two-run homer to Logan Morrison in the seventh. Bridwell, who lowered his ERA to 3.18 this season, departed after allowing two runs on six hits while walking one and striking out a career-high eight over 6 1/3 innings.

"We couldn't figure out their pitcher," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "It's funny, we saw him take the mound and he looked like a young Jered Weaver. Real thin, and you could tell he had some deception. We couldn't quite figure him out until LoMo came up with the big two-run homer to tie it."

Chris Archer pitched six solid innings for the Rays, yielding two runs on five hits while walking five and striking out nine. The Halos put 10 men on base against Archer, but the 28-year-old right-hander managed to minimize the damage, allowing only an RBI single to Albert Pujols in the fifth and a safety squeeze by Martin Maldonado that scored Andrelton Simmons in the sixth.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

LoMo ties it: Morrison erased the Rays' two-run deficit in the seventh by crushing his 26th home run of the season and his second in two days. After Evan Longoria led off the inning with a single, Morrison launched a 2-0 fastball from Bridwell to right-center field, tying the game at 2. The blast had an exit velocity of 109 mph and traveled a projected 429 feet, according to Statcast™.

"It was a two-seam, and it cut a little bit," Bridwell said. "Started on the outside of the plate, where I wanted it, but obviously when it cut, it went right over the plate."

Rays threaten in the ninth: The Angels summoned Norris to protect their 4-2 lead in the ninth, but Norris fell into trouble, surrendering a one-out double to Longoria and back-to-back singles to Morrison and Souza, which trimmed the Halos' lead to 4-3. Brad Miller then walked to load the bases, but Norris induced a 6-4-3 double play from Beckham to end the game. Simmons, who initiated the double play, celebrated the victory by punting his glove on the field.

"I was really pumped to get the double play because it was iffy," Simmons said. "Coming in to get the ball, I was like, 'I don't know, should I just try to get the out at home and keep the lead, or take a chance?' And it worked out perfect. I was pumped."

QUOTABLE

"You like to find a way to win this game today, but we didn't. We move on. We continue to play really good baseball in Oakland." -- Cash, on taking two out of three in Anaheim

"I just came in from the inning before that and drank a whole bottle of water, and I went back out and I was waterlogged. So, kind of nasty. I kind of felt like I had to burp, and it wasn't a burp." -- Bridwell on throwing up water in the second inning of his outing

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Pujols' RBI single in the fifth snapped the Angels' 0-for-20 stretch with runners in scoring position. Situational hitting still continues to be an issue for the Halos, who finished 1-for-9 with RISP on Sunday.

DIAZ DFA'D

Following the game, the Rays designated right-hander Jumbo Diaz for assignment. Right-hander Andrew Kittredge was selected from Triple-A Durham and he will join the team in Oakland.

UNDER REVIEW

The Rays challenged in the second after Souza singled to lead off the inning and was called out at second trying to stretch the hit into a double.

After a review, the call on the field was confirmed.

In the seventh, Kole Calhoun was thrown out at second by Adeiny Hechavarria while trying to stretch a double into a single. The Angels challenged that Beckham had tagged Calhoun before he touched the base, but umpires confirmed the call after a replay review.

WHAT'S NEXT

Rays: Jake Odorizzi (5-4, 4.63) gets the nod when the Rays begin a three-game series against the Athletics Monday night in a 10:05 p.m. ET contest at the Oakland Coliseum. Odorizzi has served up 20 home run balls this season, and he's allowed one in 21 of his last 22 starts dating back to Aug. 16.

Rays optimistic after 3 quality starts vs. Halos

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Chris Archer wasn't at his best Sunday. Still, the Rays right-hander notched a quality start while allowing just two runs in six innings in a 4-3 loss to the Angels.

The two runs were the most allowed by a Rays starter in the three-game series vs. the Angels. Jacob Faria and Alex Cobb each allowed a home run in their respective outings Friday and Saturday night. They, too, came away with quality starts.

"I'll be honest with you, the three starts here, I think all three of them would tell you they didn't have their best weapons going, their best execution," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "But they found a way to really, really limit damage. And sometimes that's as good as getting a dominant start. They're all going to kind of feed off that together knowing that we weren't feeling our best, but we still limited a good offense."

Despite Sunday's effort by Archer, the Rays were unable to come away with a sweep.

Starting pitching has long been touted as the foundation of the Rays organization. This year the offense has chipped in with something they haven't had in the past, firepower. Thus, if the Rays starters can pitch the rest of the season anywhere near like they pitched over the weekend, the team should be considered a serious playoff contender.

Archer had control problems Sunday and got bit early by a high pitch-count. The right-hander had 45 pitches through two innings. Such an imbalance can lead to an early shower. Instead, Archer showed composure by finding a way to get the job done.

He needed just eight pitches to negotiate the third and 14 to get through the fourth.

"I felt a little sluggish," Archer said. "A little rusty. Not making any excuses. But I just had to get myself going after the second inning. I liked how I threw the ball toward the end of the game, even though some runs scored. I like that better than throwing 45-50 pitches early on."

After walking the first two hitters he faced in the fifth -- including a leadoff walk to former Ray and Angels No. 9 hitter Nick Franklin, Archer nearly escaped by striking out Kole Calhoun and Mike Trout. Needing just one more out, Archer surrendered an RBI single to Albert Pujols that put the Angels up 1-0.

"Two walks to start the fifth inning is not good," Archer said. "Walking the nine-hole never ends up good. They capitalized on that, but fortunately we were able to limit the damage."

Martin Maldonado's sacrifice bunt scored Andrelton Simmons in the seventh to put the Angels up, 2-0. In the past, that deficit might have been the ballgame and Archer would have come away with a loss. Instead, Logan Morrison's two-run homer got Archer off the hook.

Archer "did a nice job of battling through jams," Cash said. "I don't think he had his best command today, obviously by the walks, but he seemed to make a lot of big pitches when he needed to. Similar to Alex Cobb's start the night before. You can't complain too much about one run or two runs over six innings. We'll take that start or that performance every night."

Now the Rays will rely upon Jake Odorizzi and Blake Snell to start the team's first two games in Oakland, and hopefully continue the trend.

Archer told reporters the results by Faria, Cobb and Archer were "encouraging" over the weekend, but ...

"We need to turn it around," Archer said. "Falling behind guys and full counts, and walking people. You're not going to have continued success. Maybe one out of every couple of starts. We had a couple of games in a row where it happened. But in Oakland, we need to continue what we've been doing. Just pounding [the strike zone] and getting ahead."

SF righty Strickland attracts Rays' attention

By Chris Haft, MLB.com

SAN DIEGO -- Giants right-hander Hunter Strickland has attracted the attention of the Rays, who are seeking relief help as the July 31 non-waiver Trade Deadline approaches.

A Rays scout was at Petco Park to witness effective appearances by Strickland in the first two games of this series. On Friday, Strickland faced three batters, allowing a hit while striking out two. On Saturday, he worked a scoreless eighth inning against the Padres.

These outings lengthened Strickland's recent surge in performance. Entering Sunday, he had allowed two runs in his last 13 1/3 innings, which spanned 15 games. This trimmed Strickland's overall ERA to 1.91, tying him for 10th-best among National League relievers. He also has amassed 36 strikeouts in 33 innings.

The Giants must decide whether they're better off keeping Strickland, 28, than parting with him. Strickland's velocity routinely hovers around or above 95 mph.

The Giants are hoping to obtain Major League-ready players in any deal they might make, since they're reluctant to undergo a full-fledged rebuilding process that would require stockpiling lower-level talent.

Odorizzi determined to rebound against A's

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

The Rays and the Athletics will meet for the second time this season when they begin a three-game series Monday night at the Oakland Coliseum.

The Rays took three games out of four when the teams met earlier this season in a series that included a doubleheader split on June 10.

Jake Odorizzi will start for the Rays and he'll be opposed by Daniel Gossett.

Odorizzi struggled with his mechanics throughout the first half, ending the half on a low note when he allowed seven earned runs against the Red Sox on July 7, leaving him one run shy of tying his career high (8 on Aug. 25, 2014, at Baltimore).

He is hopeful the mechanical problems are in the rearview mirror.

"I just basically hit a mental restart, and I'll take it start by start," Odorizzi said. "That's the only way you can do it in the second half after a first half like that. So I'll be ready to go."

Odorizzi has two no-decisions at the Oakland Coliseum with a 1.29 ERA in those starts.

Gossett has dropped his last two decisions and has allowed 13 earned runs in his last 14 1/3 innings (over three starts).

Things to know about this game

- Odorizzi has surrendered 20 home runs, which is tied for fourth in the American League, despite the fact he missed two starts with a left hamstring strain. He has yielded home runs in 13 consecutive appearances since May 1.
- Catcher Wilson Ramos (sore left hamstring) is expected to be back in the starting lineup Monday.
- Gossett will be making the seventh start of his Major League career and his first career start/appearance against the Rays.

Ramos sits out finale with sore hamstring

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Catcher Wilson Ramos did not start again Sunday because of a sore left hamstring, but "The Buffalo" is optimistic he'll be back in the lineup Monday when the Rays begin a three-game series against the Athletics in Oakland.

"Just a little bit sore," Ramos said. "Feel better today. Hopefully I'll be in the lineup tomorrow."

Ramos scored from first base on Brad Miller's 10th-inning double Friday night. That turned out to be the winning run in a 2-1 Rays win over the Angels.

"It's hard for me to score from first base, but I do my best every single time," Ramos said. "I go out there, I like to play hard no matter what. ... I'm not a fast runner, but, like I say, I try to do my best every time I go out there."

"As soon as he got to the dugout [Friday night], I said, 'Hit a homer next time, I don't want to score from first.'"

Ramos caught the bottom of the 10th, but he did not play Saturday and he was out again Sunday.

"It's better to miss just two games than miss nine months like before," said Ramos, who had offseason knee surgery and did not join the Rays until late in the first half after undergoing an extensive rehab.

When asked how he planned to handle Ramos' soreness, Rays manager Kevin Cash answered: "Hopefully, I don't have to worry about it. Once he feels good, he'll be back to playing."

Cash said he'd check with the veteran catcher before starting him on Monday, but he added: "I'm hopeful of that also."

Rays Trevor Plouffe returns to Oakland tonight with something to prove

Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

INF Trevor Plouffe didn't do all that well in his 2-½ months with Oakland, hitting .214 with a .634 OPS, before being DFA'd and traded to the Rays.

But he felt the A's could have given him more of a chance after signing him to a one-year, \$5.25-million free-agent contract after part of seven seasons with the Twins.

"I thought they pulled the plug a little quick," Plouffe said. "I went on a little skid there, I was 0-for-24, obviously that's not good, but people go through those."

Plouffe was dropped as the A's began a youth movement they have continued, replacing him at third with prospect Matt Chapman.

Going back with the Rays tonight won't be that big a deal.

“It wasn’t a great time for me,” he said. “I enjoyed the guys over there and there were some good people in the clubhouse I enjoyed.”

Plouffe, 31, has yet to get much opportunity with the Rays, hitting .229 with a .613 OPS in just 13 games, as they have faced few lefties of late.

“I know my role over here,” he said. “I have to stay ready.”

Topkin: After stinging loss, Rays need relief and need it now

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Next?

The Rays made the arguably overdue decision to ditch Jumbo Diaz after Sunday’s latest bullpen blowup, a 4-3 sweep-spoiling loss to the Angels.

The initial corresponding move is to try another newbie from their stash of Triple-A arms, summoning Andrew Kittredge, who will be the eighth pitcher to debut in the majors for them this year.

Whether Kittredge is marginally more effective than Jose Alvarado or Chih-Wei Hu or Austin Pruitt or Ryne Stanek or the others they’ve tried — and may keep trying, such as Diego Castillo and, when healthy, Jaime Schultz — the bigger point is that they need to do better than apprentices getting on-the-job training.

If the Rays are going to stay in a playoff race — which they seem otherwise capable of doing — the front-office execs need to put their three heads together and go get a proven reliever to bolster the bullpen.

Over the next two weeks until the trading deadline, the most important Ray may well be general manager Erik Neander.

Hunter Strickland’s name was flying around Sunday because the Rays have a San Diego-based scout who was watching him pitch, and well, for the Giants at Petco Park.

Tigers lefty Justin Wilson may be even higher on the shopping list, one that likely is heavy with hard throwers who the Rays would have control of beyond this season.

The prices are steep in terms of acquisition cost, and though the Rays have indicated they’ll be aggressive, they also still are going to be, as Neander said last week, “responsible.” In other words, don’t expect them to bid at the top of the market (like for San Diego’s Brad Hand), and certainly they won’t give up one of their most promising prospects for a guy who might pitch 35 innings.

But they may have to give up a little more than they want to. And they should have a little money to play with. (They also are looking for a right-handed bat.)

The Rays scout well and will have many bullpen-boosting options. But they also will have much competition, with the Nationals on Sunday snagging two of the top relievers, Sean Doolittle and Ryan Madson, from the A’s.

The Rays have to do something. It’s obvious outside — and more important, inside — their clubhouse.

“I like the guys we have down there but ... it never hurts to have extra depth,” starter Chris Archer said after Sunday’s game, and about as politely as one could. “We have depth on our bench. We have starting-pitching depth. And it never hurts to have depth in the bullpen as well.”

They should be motivated to get it sooner rather than later, to avoid another stinging loss like Sunday’s.

You can blame Diaz, who allowed the one-out hit in the eighth that started the Angels’ rally after the Rays tied it 2-2, and leaves with a jumbo-size 5.70 ERA. You can blame rookie lefty Adam Kolarek, who on his first pitch, a sinker that didn’t sink enough, gave up the homer to pinch-hitter C.J. Cron that won the game.

And you can blame manager Kevin Cash for making the decisions that put them in those positions and saying afterward it was “unfortunate” that things didn’t work out:

Cash pulled Archer after six innings (though blame All-Star Archer, too, for throwing 107 pitches to that point and giving up five walks). He limited Tommy Hunter to one inning though he threw only eight pitches. He preferred Diaz over Erasmo Ramirez to start the eighth. He went to Kolarek knowing the Angels would likely pinch-hit a righty for lefty Luis Valbuena (but in Cash’s defense, he didn’t want Valbuena to face Diaz, whom he took deep Saturday.)

But also put some blame on the front office for fielding a relief crew with only three pitchers who can be trusted: Brad Boxberger (thus far, in six appearances since coming off the DL), Hunter and closer Alex Colome. There are too many high-leverage situations to get by without more options.

“We’ve got to be able to rely on some other guys,” Cash said. “Got to have some better, more consistent options.”

Ramirez is the biggest key of the experienced internal options because he has had success, more so than Chase Whitley, who has thrown well at times but more so, it seems, when the stakes are lower. After that?

And with neither Alvarado nor Kolarek showing he can handle it, finding a higher-impact, more-proven lefty seems imperative, unless the Rays are willing to risk waiting into August for Xavier Cedeno to come off the DL.

There was some good to take out of Sunday: the way Archer made pitches to get himself out of trouble; the two-run tying homer (and highlight-worthy bat flip) by Logan Morrison in the seventh; most notably, the rally in the ninth, rapping three straight hits to score a run, then a walk to load

the bases before Tim Beckham grounded into a game-ending double play.

And there were other areas of frustration: the Angels scoring twice with runners somehow avoiding tags at the plate by Jesus Sucre; making three outs on the bases; Beckham swinging at the first pitch from obviously shaky Bud Norris.

The biggest concern, though, was what happened when the Rays went to the bullpen. But that's something they can address.

Marc Topkin's takeaways from Sunday's Rays-Angels game

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

C Jesus Sucre didn't have much of an explanation for how ex-Ray Nick Franklin (swiping with his left hand) and Andrelton Simmons (going underneath) slid in ahead of his tags to score runs. "That was crazy," Sucre said. "I thought I got them."

RHP Chris Archer attributed his slow start — 45 pitches in the first two innings — to being "a little sluggish, a little rusty" in his first start in a week. He also said he was "content" with dodging most of the trouble and allowing just two runs, but five walks is not good enough.

Manager Kevin Cash took solace in the series win and the ninth-inning comeback, and both have merit. Winning the first two games out of the All-Star break carried over the momentum from the previous Red Sox series. The intensity of the ninth inning at-bats bodes well.

Rays journal: Big home run fires up Logan Morrison, loss not so much

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Rays 1B Logan Morrison was trying to hit the ball really far, and he did, a StatCast estimated 429 feet for a two-run, game-tying homer in the seventh inning Sunday.

He insisted he had no intentions of following it up with an equally attention-getting bat flip, eye-test estimated at 15-20 feet.

"I hit it really good. I didn't mean to flip it that far, but it went," Morrison said. "I think the ball went further."

Morrison said there was no motivation or message in the bat flip beyond his satisfaction in getting the Rays even during a bad day that would later turn worse.

"Just frustration," Morrison said. "We played like crap today. Like I was talking about (Saturday), it just takes one swing to get us back in the game. ...

"We didn't swing the bat. We didn't really run the bases well. We've got to find a way to win that game."

In homering for the second straight game, Morrison has 26 for the season, third most in the AL. He also ranks in the top 10 with a team-high 61 RBIs.

Odorizzi looking back to go forward

RHP Jake Odorizzi is confident he can put his inconsistent and somewhat ineffective first half (5-4, 4.63) behind him, starting tonight at Oakland. And he only has to look to last season, when he went 3-5, 4.47 before the All-Star break and 7-1, 2.71 after. Odorizzi said he feels great and has been working since his last start July 7 on yet a few more small mechanical adjustments, specifically to get him taller on the mound so he throws more downhill. He thinks that will make a big difference. "Hit a mental restart basically," he said. "Forget what happened and take it start by start. That's the only way you do it in the second half after a first half like that."

About the new guy

A few notes about RHP Andrew Kittredge, called up from Triple-A Durham to join the bullpen: He is 27. Was acquired from the Mariners in the November 2016 trade of INFs Taylor Motter and Richie Shaffer. Was a 45th-round pick out of high school, went to pitch at the University of Washington, signed with the Mariners as a nondrafted free agent in 2011. Was 5-1, 1.90 at Triple-A Durham with 54 strikeouts (and only 12 walks) in 52 innings. After being added to the 40-man roster he will be the ninth player to make his big-league debut for the Rays this season, and the eighth pitcher.

Beckham back, Ramos hopeful

INF Tim Beckham was activated off the after missing just six games around the All-Star break with a left ankle sprain, going 1-for-4 while playing second. That will be his primary position, but he also will get some time at short, and Brad Miller some starts at second. ... C Wilson Ramos said the left hamstring he tweaked Friday was feeling better, and he hopes to return to the lineup tonight. Ramos, who debuted June 24 after recovering from right knee surgery, said he initially feared an extended absence, noting he went on the DL with left hamstring issues in 2013 after returning from his first right knee surgery.

Numbers of the day

18, 0

Homers by Rays right-handed hitting OF Steven Souza Jr. versus righty pitchers, and lefties.

Miscellany

- Top draft pick Brendan McKay made his pro debut Sunday for short-season Class A Hudson Valley, going 0-for-4 as the DH with two strikeouts.

Let the record show in his first at-bat he grounded into an inning-ending double play.

- Sunday's loss kept the Rays from a five-game winning streak, which would have matched their longest in three seasons under Kevin Cash, and ended a seven-game streak at Angel Stadium.
- The Rays might soon have more pitching depth at Triple-A Durham as RHP Jaime Schultz (groin strain) and RHP Jose De Leon (lat strain) are working their way back. Schultz, out since April 7, has made three Gulf Coast League appearances; DeLeon, out since June 8, is expected to pitch in the GCL this week, then move up to the Stone Crabs and then Bulls.
- The Rays caught a bit of a break as the A's on Sunday traded their two top relievers, LH Sean Doolittle and RH Ryan Madson, to the Nationals.

Rays DFA Jumbo Diaz, promote Andrew Kittredge

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

The Rays decided they had seen enough of RHP Jumbo Diaz, designating him for assignment after Sunday's 4-3 loss.

To take his place, they are summoning RHP Andrew Kittredge, who will make his big-league debut.

Kittredge, 27, was acquired from the Mariners in the November 2016 deal that sent INFs Taylor Motter and Richie Shaffer west, and has been doing very well at Triple-A Durham, going 5-1, 1.90 with 54 strikeouts in 52 innings.

Diaz, who took the loss Sunday after allowing a one-out single in the eighth, was 1-4 with a 5.70 ERA over 31 games.

Bullpen falters as Rays miss chance to sweep Angels (w/video)

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Rays bullpen failed them again in Sunday's 4-3 loss to the Angels, rookie left-hander Adam Kolarek allowing a two-run pinch-hit homer to C.J. Cron in the eighth inning.

With starter Chris Archer working only six innings, the Rays needed their bullpen to cover the final three, and with no margin as they scored twice in the top of the seventh to tie it 2-2.

Tommy Hunter worked the seventh, throwing only eight pitches. With Brad Boxberger unavailable after working Friday and Saturday, manager Kevin Cash turned to Jumbo Diaz to start the eighth against the lower half of the order.

Diaz got one out, then allowed a single to Andrelton Simmons.

Cash next summoned his lone lefty, Kolarek, to face lefty swinging Luis Valbuena. The Angels countered with righty-swinging Cron, and he laced Kolarek's first pitch over the rightfield fence.

The Rays (49-44) rallied in the ninth with one-out singles by Evan Longoria, Logan Morrison and Steven Souza Jr. to cut the lead to 4-3 but got no closer as Tim Lincecum grounded into a game-ending double play.

The Rays felt good about their chances for a series sweep in sending All-Star Archer to the mound, but it seemed obvious from the start he didn't have the elite stuff he talks of.

Allowing five walks and five hits put traffic on the bases in five of his six innings, though Archer did well to limit the damage to two runs, especially since both scored on plays at the plate where a runner got by catcher Jesus Sucre's tag.

Add in the nine strikeouts, and Archer was able to work only six innings, throwing 107 pitches, 63 for strikes.

The Angels got their first run in the fifth, when Archer walked ex-mate Nick Franklin, the No. 9 hitter, and then Cameron Maybin. Archer did well to strike out Kole Calhoun and Mike Trout (on a 97 mph fastball) but allowed a single to Albert Pujols, Franklin sliding by Sucre's tag and swiping his left hand across the plate.

The Angels added on in the sixth when Nelson Simmons led off with a double, went to third on a sac fly and scored on a squeeze bunt by Martin Maldonado, sliding under Sucre's tag.

The Rays tied it with much less circumstance in the seventh. Longoria, continuing to enjoy his SoCal homecoming, singled and then Morrison crushed a 2-and-0 Parker Bridwell pitch an estimated 429 feet for a home run, then tossed his bat probably another 20 to highlight it.

The Rays headed north after the game, opening a three-game series on Monday night against the A's in Oakland, with Jake Odorizzi on the mound.