

A's News Clips, Wednesday, August 19, 2009

CC ends Coliseum jinx as Yankees humble A's

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

There was a time when CC Sabathia struggled against the A's. Now he's treating Oakland like any other team in the American League.

Sabathia struck out seven in eight innings, and the New York Yankees scored five times in the sixth to break open a tie game and walk away with a 7-2 win before a highly charged crowd of 25,383 at the Oakland Coliseum.

"He's pitching the way he usually does," said A's outfielder Ryan Sweeney, who went 1-for-4 to pick up his first career hit in seven at-bats against the Yankees' left-hander. "I can't speak for the righties, but from a lefties standpoint, his slider is almost unhittable."

The A's had one chance to hang a big inning on Sabathia (14-7). But with the bases loaded and two outs in the fourth, he got Sweeney to ground out.

The Vallejo native has won six of his last seven outings. He's also won 10 straight starts in August dating back to last season.

Sabathia gave up six earned runs to the A's on April 22. But in his last two outings against Oakland, he's allowed a combined five earned runs in 15 innings with 11 strikeouts.

Coming into the game, he had a 4-7 career record in 17 starts against the A's with a 6.09 ERA. In eight career starts at the Coliseum, he was 1-4 with a 7.12 ERA.

"It means a lot," said Sabathia, who won in Oakland for the first time since July 30, 2003, with Cleveland. "I feel like every time I come here, this is going to be the night I pitch well. Tonight just happened to be the night. ... I can put that behind me and go forward now."

Sabathia did allow solo home runs to Kurt Suzuki in the first and Tommy Everidge in the second, both on fastballs, as the A's took a 2-1 lead. But he allowed just three more hits as the Yankees (75-44) maintained their 7½-game lead in the American League East.

"You've just got to get a fastball up in the zone," Sweeney said. "A lot of the time, he's staying low and away, so it's tough to pull him or anything like that."

A's starter Vin Mazzaro stranded seven runners in five innings, but the Yankees scored five runs in the sixth off relievers Jay Marshall and Santiago Casilla.

Derek Jeter went 3-for-4, including an RBI single in the sixth when the Yankees sent 10 batters to the plate. Marshall retired just one batter and was charged with four earned runs as Casilla allowed three of his inherited runners to score.

Mazzaro avoided the big inning that had plagued him for most of his starts between late June and early August as the Yankees came away empty after loading the bases in the first and fourth innings. But the rookie right-hander still had to expend 103 pitches in five innings as he repeatedly wiggled out of trouble.

New York scored its first run in the second after a Jeter grounder got through the legs of third baseman Adam Kennedy to allow Melky Cabrera to cross home. The Yankees tied it 2-2 in the third when Jorge Posada's ground rule double to left scored Alex Rodriguez.

Mazzaro allowed four earned runs or more in six of eight starts between June 23 and Aug. 2. He didn't get to the seventh inning in either of his last two starts against Kansas City and Baltimore, but thought he was taking steps in the right direction by allowing a combined five walks and five earned runs.

"I'm still in that groove," Mazzaro said. "I'm feeling good. My pitches are going my way and I'm hitting my spots. I'm just trying to keep it going."

A's notebook: Cust takes exception to Mitchell

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Outfielder/designated hitter Jack Cust has always had issues with the Mitchell Report from the moment it was released roughly 20 months ago. And he's started to wonder why certain names were not included in the 409-page document about steroid use in baseball.

In a recent interview with the Associated Press, Cust, who is in his third season with the A's, blasted the report for having no member of the Boston Red Sox among the 85 players mentioned. The New York Times, citing unnamed sources, reported last month that David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez were among the 104 players who allegedly tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance during Major League Baseball's survey in 2003, when they both played for Boston.

Former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell, who compiled the report that was released in December 2007, has been a director of the Red Sox since 2002.

"With all the other stuff going on, with a lot of the guys coming out recently — big-name guys — to me it's kind of funny they spent all that money on the Mitchell Report and a bunch of hearsay and the guy who made all the money off it happened to work for the Red Sox," Cust told AP. "Were there any Red Sox on the report? To me, that's kind of a joke. How does that happen? It's coming out now with guys on that team."

Cust didn't wish to talk about the Mitchell Report when approached by Bay Area News Group on Tuesday afternoon, saying, "Someone asked me

the other day and I answered the question. That's over with."

Cust was named in the report, which said he and Larry Bigbie discussed steroids when they were members of Baltimore's Triple-A team in Ottawa six years ago. The report said Cust asked Bigbie if he had tried steroids. Bigbie said he had, and Cust said he had, as well. The report said, "Cust told Bigbie that he had a source who could procure anything he wanted."

At the 2008 A's Fanfest, Cust categorically denied taking steroids and told AP that he's been tested a few times this season.

Braden's nerves

Pitcher Dallas Braden (left foot rash/infection) was feeling better Tuesday but said he still has lingering issues with his deep peroneal nerve, which runs along the bottom of the foot to near the base of the big toe. Braden said it could be some time before he's able to pitch without any discomfort.

"It's very concerning," he said. "The fluidity in my step isn't there right now, and I feel like my athleticism has kind of been hampered a little. They say it takes nerves the longest to calm down. ... It's going to be irritating and it's going to be irritating for a while."

Braden was eligible to come off the 15-day disabled list Sunday, but A's manager Bob Geren said it'll be awhile before the left-hander pitches. Geren said Braden still has to throw a side session, a simulated game and/or a rehab start.

Short hops

Geren said first baseman Daric Barton (strained left hamstring) will stay with the Arizona A's of the rookie Arizona League until he's feeling good enough to go to Triple-A Sacramento. Barton went 1-for-3 with a walk and run scored in a start in Arizona on Monday. ... Geren didn't have an update on pitcher Justin Duchscherer.

A's owner Wolff read to pull plug on power-hitting vets

By Elliott Almond, San Jose Mercury News

Lew Wolff, the public face of the A's ownership group, said Tuesday he hopes the ballclub "thinks twice" before bringing in veteran power hitters as it did this season.

The last-place team signed Jason Giambi, 38, and Nomar Garciaparra, 35, and traded for Matt Holliday, 29, in the offseason to help bolster an anemic offense.

The A's traded Holliday, who batted .286 with the club, to St. Louis in late July. They released oft-injured Giambi on Aug. 7 after he hit .193. Garciaparra, a designated hitter, was batting .267 in 120 at-bats before Tuesday's play.

"The pitching was fine but not the hitting," said Wolff, who also reiterated his desire to move the team to San Jose. "We didn't think we'd be more than a .500 ballclub this year, but the division is so weak we thought we'd have a chance."

The idea, Wolff said, was to give Oakland's promising young pitchers enough offensive support to gain a year's maturity.

Despite the cheerless record of 53-65, the owner isn't discouraged.

"The year before this, we sat down and said, 'Look, we need to rebuild,'" Wolff recalled of plans to develop the minor-league system. "This is all done deliberately, quietly. Certain fans see it, other fans don't."

Poor defense, bullpen sink A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wobbly defense and weak relief pitching undid some tricky tight-rope walking by Vin Mazzaro on Tuesday night.

The rookie right-hander limited the damage the Yankees did while he was in the game and left with the score tied, but Jay Marshall and Santiago Casilla stumbled in New York's 7-2 victory over Oakland at the Coliseum.

The A's made four errors, hit two batters and had a passed ball. Mark Ellis had a 52-game errorless streak snapped when he couldn't field a hard grounder by Derek Jeter in the seventh.

"That was kind of a strange one," Oakland manager Bob Geren said of his team's fielding. "Ellis is one of the best ever to play at that position, and a couple got by him. That wasn't a real crisp defensive game."

Mazzaro hit Alex Rodriguez in the elbow in the first inning, then walked Hideki Matsui to load the bases before striking out Jorge Posada to end the inning.

In the bottom of the inning, Yankees starter CC Sabathia sent a pitch behind Kurt Suzuki's hip with two outs, earning a trip to the mound from home-plate umpire Jerry Layne and a warning to both benches.

Suzuki then clubbed the next pitch over the wall in left center on a line drive.

"He has that edge," Geren said of Suzuki's knack of coming up with a big hit after getting buzz. "It's a don't-wake-up-the-sleeping dog kind of thing."

Oakland's second run also came on a solo homer, Tommy Everidge's blast into the back into the seats above the scoreboard in left. Everidge wasn't in the lineup the night before, getting what Geren called a "physical and mental" rest, and the rookie's homer snapped his 0-for-9 streak.

With two outs in the second, Melky Cabrera doubled off Mazzaro. Derek Jeter hit a grounder to third that went right between Adam Kennedy's legs, letting Cabrera score an unearned run.

There was more poor defense the next inning when, with Rodriguez at third and one out, Scott Hairston got turned around on a long fly ball by Posada and couldn't recover. The ball bounced untouched and went over the fence, an RBI ground-rule double.

"That's another one that didn't go as an error but I thinking he probably catches that more times than most," Geren said.

Mazzaro got in another bind in the fourth, walking Johnny Damon to load the bases for AL MVP candidate Mark Teixeira, but mimicking Brett Tomko's work against Rodriguez the previous night, Mazzaro got Teixeira - who had homered off him in New York last month - to hit into an inning-ending double play.

Mazzaro allowed one earned run in five innings, his lowest total since June 7, and he has given up six earned runs over his past 151/3innings. He said he feels as if he's in a good groove and hitting his spots.

The A's luck didn't hold when Marshall took over. With two men on after Marshall hit Cabrera (who comically toppled over Suzuki), Jeter knocked a single to left, sending in one run, and Damon dunked an RBI double to left that sliced away from Hairston on the football-ravaged grass. Casilla came in and walked Teixeira intentionally, walked Rodriguez on four pitches to send in another run, and gave up an RBI single to Matsui and a sacrifice fly to Posada.

Kennedy struck out a career-high four times and he's 2-for-14 with 10 strikeouts lifetime against Sabathia.

Priority made to keep starters' innings down

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's are watching with some concern as the innings mount for their young starters, who are pretty much the focal point of the season - the team's rebuilding hopes center around **Vin Mazzaro**, **Trevor Cahill** and **Brett Anderson**.

That's why manager **Bob Geren** had hoped to go to a six-man rotation when **Justin Duchscherer** returned from the disabled list, but with chances of that fading and with left-hander **Dallas Braden** out until September, Oakland is looking elsewhere. According to a team source, the A's are focusing on starters who might be available.

Vicente Padilla and **John Smoltz** recently were released (although both have been linked with contenders), and ex-A's left-hander **Mark Mulder** is thought to be nearly ready to pitch.

Cust on report: An Associated Press story Tuesday quoted DH **Jack Cust** as slamming the 2007 Mitchell Report because no then-current Red Sox were named and **George Mitchell**, who headed the report on steroid use in baseball, is Boston's company director.

Cust said he was surprised his comments were newsworthy. "To me, it's old news," Cust said. "There are other things going on now, they're trying to clean up the game. I don't know why people are still talking about this (Mitchell report) now, with some of the biggest names in baseball coming out (recently for reportedly positive steroid tests)."

Cust did not play Tuesday. He has not hit a homer in his past 26 games or driven in a run since July 23. Cust is batting .179 since that date, which coincides with the last game **Matt Holliday** played with Oakland.

"Since Matt left, I've been struggling," Cust said. "But we didn't have Matt last year or the year before."

Briefly: Bobby Crosby is day-to-day with calf tightness. ... Catcher **Max Stassi** and left-hander **Ian Krol**, signed Monday, will go briefly to Phoenix, then report to short-season Class A Vancouver.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, 8/19/09

Gaudin's return: Ex-A's right-hander Chad Gaudin starts for New York tonight after stops with the Cubs and Padres.

"It's been a crazy year," he said. "It's awesome to be with this team. There's no egos. Everyone comes to the field to play, to work, to win."

'Pen, miscues cost A's against Yanks

Mazzaro solid, but five-run sixth, four errors lead to loss

By Adam Loberstein / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Vin Mazzaro's second start against the team he grew up rooting for went better than his first.

After allowing six earned runs in 4 1/3 innings at Yankee Stadium on July 23, the Hackensack, N.J., native got out of a pair of bases-loaded jams to hold New York to two runs (one earned) over five innings.

It's the next inning that was the problem.

The Yankees got to Jay Marshall and Santiago Casilla for five runs in the sixth en route to a 7-2 win over the A's on Tuesday night.

"The bullpen has been used very heavily," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We needed someone to step up in the middle innings, and we didn't get that tonight."

New York sent 10 to the plate in the sixth. Nick Swisher hit a one-out double to get things going. Marshall hit Melky Cabrera with a pitch, then Derek Jeter singled home Swisher. Johnny Damon followed with a soft double to left to score Cabrera, move Jeter to third and chase Marshall from the game.

"His command wasn't there," Geren said of Marshall. "He's a young pitcher. He'll get more opportunities. Today just wasn't his day."

After intentionally walking Mark Teixeira, Casilla walked Alex Rodriguez with the bases loaded. Hideki Matsui delivered an RBI single, then Jorge Posada scored Teixeira with a sacrifice fly to center. Robinson Cano reached on a fielder's choice, but Rodriguez was caught off third, bringing the inning to a close.

Mazzaro, meanwhile, allowed six hits and struck out two. He's 2-0 with a 3.52 ERA (six earned runs in 15 1/3 innings) over his past three starts.

"I felt pretty good out there," Mazzaro said. "I had some long at-bats, got my pitch count up a bit. ... I was able to get the ground ball when I needed it."

"He battled well," Geren said. "He pitched inside pretty well. They're a patient lineup. They don't swing at bad pitches. If you tell me he's going to give up two [runs] in five [innings] before the game, that's a good outing."

The A's and Yankees wasted little time in getting tensions high.

After Mazzaro plunked Rodriguez in the top of the first, CC Sabathia threw behind Kurt Suzuki in the bottom half. Both benches were warned.

Suzuki then gave a warning of his own. The A's backstop deposited Sabathia's next offering in the left-field bleachers, giving Oakland the early 1-0 lead.

It's the second time this month Suzuki has hit a home run after being thrown at. On Aug. 5, Suzuki was plunked by Rangers starter Vicente Padilla, then homered in his next at-bat.

"He's a very aggressive hitter," Geren said. "Sometimes a spark like that can get your concentration up a level."

The Yankees tied things up in the second. Cabrera hit a two-out double, then scored when Adam Kennedy couldn't come up with Jeter's shot at third base.

Tommy Everidge, entering the game in a 4-for-29 (.138) funk, hit a shot to deep left in the bottom of the frame to regain the lead for Oakland, 2-1.

The lead, once again, was short-lived. Rodriguez singled to start the third inning, took second on a Mazzaro wild pitch, then advanced to third on a groundout by Matsui.

Jorge Posada then sent a fly ball to deep left. Scott Hairston misread it off the bat, and the ball landed on the left-field warning track, hopping the fence for a ground-rule double to send Rodriguez home and tie the game at 2.

"He'll probably catch that more times than not," Geren said.

Mazzaro, who loaded the bases in the first, got himself into trouble again in the fourth. Swisher reached on an error by Nomar Garciaparra at first. Jeter singled, then Damon walked to load the bases with one out.

After a quick mound visit, Mazzaro got Teixeira to hit into a 4-6-3 double play to end the threat.

The A's then let a bases-loaded situation of their own get away. Garciaparra followed Hairston's one-out single with a double, putting runners on second and third. After Mark Ellis lined to Swisher in right, Sabathia walked Everidge intentionally. The lefty got Ryan Sweeney to ground out to third to leave them loaded.

Sabathia allowed five hits in eight innings, recording seven strikeouts to improve to 14-7.

"He was very good tonight," Geren said. "His fastball was hitting 97 [mph], his breaking ball was very sharp. That's why he's one of the best guys in the game. Sometimes you've just got to tip your cap."

Ellis saw his 52-game errorless streak come to a close when he let one get by in the seventh. The A's committed four errors, but only allowed one unearned run.

"It was kind of a strange night," Geren said. "Ellis is one of the best ever over there."

Rajai Davis was 0-for-4, snapping his career-best 12-game hitting streak.

Braden likely out until September

Foot improving, but hurler needs time to build arm strength

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's left-hander Dallas Braden hasn't pitched since July 31 because of a rash/infection on his left foot, and it's killing him.

The inactivity, that is. The foot is getting better every day.

"It's a grind," Braden said of being on the disabled list. "You know me. I'm not a do-nothing kind of guy."

Braden isn't exactly doing nothing. In fact, he's doing all he can to get back onto the active roster. But he's already missed a few turns in the rotation, and he'll miss at least a couple more while working to build his arm strength back up.

"It'll be a while," Oakland manager Bob Geren said Tuesday before the second game of a three-game series against the visiting Yankees at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. "Once he gets on the mound, it could be another five, 10 days after that."

Before Braden is cleared to return to the roster, he'll have to throw a bullpen session or two, pitch in a simulated game and possibly make a Minor League rehab start.

"I doubt [his return] will be this month," Geren said.

Braden, who is 8-9 with a 3.89 ERA in a career-high 22 starts this season, struggled while trying to pitch through the discomfort in his foot, allowing 12 earned runs in his final two starts before being placed on the DL.

Prior to that, he'd been the most consistent starter on the A's staff. Braden, 25, went 7-7 with a 3.13 ERA before the All-Star break despite consistently ranking at the bottom of the American League in run support.

"Dallas has been everything we hoped he'd be and more," Geren said of his Opening Night starter. "Hopefully we can get him back here pretty soon and he can finish the season pitching the way he's been pitching for us all year."

Anderson prepared for innings limit

Oakland (53-66) vs. New York (75-45), 7:05 p.m. PT

By Adam Loberstein / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Manager Bob Geren started thinking about shifting to a six-man rotation in mid-July.

The rationale? Simple. He had five healthy starters -- Dallas Braden and rookies Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro -- and Justin Duchscherer, who had elbow surgery in March, was rehabbing to get back to the bigs.

Times have changed. Duchscherer has missed two Minor League starts due to non-baseball related issues. The rookies are reaching their maximum number of innings. Braden (left ankle inflammation) is out. Brett Tomko is in.

Thoughts of the six-man schedule, however, are still very much alive.

"Anybody could become a candidate, really," said Geren, whose A's wrap up a three-game set with the Yankees on Wednesday. "We have five right now. Hopefully, Braden will be the sixth."

Braden's return isn't imminent, though. He might not be back until September. Asked if there was an update on Duchscherer's condition, Geren just shook his head.

In the meantime, the A's focus on what they have. Anderson, 21, toes the rubber Wednesday night. He's thrown 126 2/3 innings this year, 6 2/3 innings away from the 133 1/3 figure he hit between Class A, Double-A, the Olympics and the Triple-A playoffs last year.

Anderson estimated he threw an additional 15 unofficial innings in preparation for the Olympics.

"I know they're going to try their best to limit us here the next month and a half," Anderson said.

Limit is the key word. Geren said he had no intentions on shutting down a healthy starter.

"I'd rather limit their innings and not have to do that," Geren said.

Anderson, who leads Major League rookies with 103 strikeouts, knows where he is with his innings totals, but isn't letting that affect his approach.

"I'm going to keep throwing how I have been," he said. "The innings are up a bit, but my velocity is still up. ... You just need to keep grinding and pitch through it."

Pitching matchup

NY Yankees: RHP Chad Gaudin (5-10, 5.13 ERA)

Originally scheduled to face the Mariners on Sunday, Gaudin was pushed back as the Yankees continue looking for a pattern that fits Joba Chamberlain's innings limit. This is Gaudin's first start since joining New York after being used almost exclusively as a starter with the Padres. Gaudin hasn't faced the A's since June 5, 2005, when he allowed seven earned runs in only one inning.

OAK: LHP Brett Anderson (7-8, 4.55 ERA)

Anderson struggled for the first time in a long time on Friday against the White Sox. Holding a 4-1 record and a 2.22 ERA in 52 2/3 innings over his past eight starts, Anderson allowed seven earned runs on nine hits and three walks in five innings. He surrendered six of those runs in the first two frames. "Give him a lot of credit," Geren said. "He gave us a chance and didn't quit." The 21-year-old rookie has given up nine earned runs over 12 innings (6.75 ERA) in two starts against the Yankees.

Tidbits

Former Athletic turned Yankee Gaudin gets the start against his old team Wednesday. "Some of [the hitters] know what he has, some of them don't," Geren said. Gaudin pitched parts of three seasons with the A's. ... Daric Barton (strained left hamstring) will stay in extended spring camp in Arizona until he feels ready to go to Sacramento. "It's an easier pace [in Arizona] than Triple-A," Geren said. ... Mark Ellis entered Tuesday's game batting .426 with a Major League-best 20 RBIs in August. ... Brett Wallace went 2-for-4 and hit his 10th home run of the season on Monday. He's batting .361 with three homers in his past nine games.

Crosby injury further depletes A's bench

Eight-man 'pen leaves two healthy position-player reserves

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- So much for rookie first baseman Tommy Everidge's mental day off.

Everidge was supposed to get Monday night off -- and possibly Tuesday -- to cool his competitive jets and work on some minor swing changes, but his replacement in the starting lineup, utilityman Bobby Crosby, exited Monday's game in the sixth inning with tightness in his left calf.

That forced Everidge into action, and with Crosby still hobbled Tuesday, Everidge was in the starting lineup -- at designated hitter -- for the second game of a three-game series against the visiting Yankees at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

"He's day-to-day," A's manager Bob Geren said of Crosby, "and today isn't his day."

Geren noted that Crosby wasn't completely unavailable, saying he'd be the "last in line" in term of players coming off the bench. The bench, though, is pretty short as it is. That's why Nomar Garciaparra started at first base in only his second defensive appearance since the All-Star break.

The A's optioned outfielder Aaron Cunningham to Triple-A Sacramento on Monday to make room for Brett Tomko, who was promoted to start that night and beat the Yankees with five shutout innings. Tomko earned himself another assignment, and the A's are sticking with an eight-man bullpen for the time being, so Geren is down to three reserve position players.

On Tuesday, they were backup catcher Landon Powell, outfielder/DH Jack Cust and Crosby.

Back with a Buck and a bang

Mychael Urban, mlb.com OAKLAND, Aug. 18, 2009

I caught up with Travis Buck yesterday, just to check in, catch up and see where his head's at these days. What I learned during our exchange was encouraging.

Obviously, Buck's being buried by the big league club right now -- to the point that he's not even a lock to get a September callup. So he has a choice: pout through the rest of the Triple-A season, or do something dramatic and positive.

Buck is going with the latter, and the dramatic change he's making is being roundly applauded by the scouts to whom I've talked about it.

You know that wiggle-waggle Buck does with his bat as the pitcher is in his windup? He's working on cutting it way down, and he's ditched the thumb guard he's worn his whole career.

The scouts say good riddance, particularly to the waggle.

"That's great to hear," one told me. "I like Travis. Always have. But I can't stand all that movement he had going on, and it made him late [on pitches]."

"It's nice to hear about a guy who isn't too stubborn to make changes," said another. "He's holding himself accountable. I've always loved his talent, and if he makes that adjustment and sticks with it, he'll go right back to being that everyday big league outfielder everyone knows he can be."

Buck, who went 2-for-2 on Monday, told me that his results have been inconsistent since he started making the changes, but he figured it would be better to make the change now -- in a competitive environment with immediate feedback -- as opposed to making it on his own in the offseason and unveiling them while under the pressure that will come with trying to get back into the team's good graces at Spring Training.

Smart play.

And now, with rusty legs after a good long while away on assignment and on vacation, it's time for a whole mess of sprints around The Coli ...

... Twice this month Kurt Suzuki has been thrown at, both times quite clearly with intent, and both times he's responded by taking the pitcher deep. Sick play to gun down Jorge Posada at third base later in the game, too. He's the Great Dane.

... It must be comfy pitching in pajamas. Right, CC?

... Tommy Everidge got his third start of the year at DH today, and I'm thinking he'll get about 100 or more starts there next year. I just don't see Jack Cust in green and gold next year, and Everidge probably isn't good enough on defense to be an everyday first baseman. But as his man-sized home run off Sabathia showed, he's got Custian pop, and he's more of a complete hitter. And he's cheaper. No-brainer.

... I just checked out a few of the acronym stats I don't understand in an effort to be a better-informed baseball writer, but I gave up upon seeing that Mark Teixeira is considered a defensive negative according to UZR (Ultimate Zone Rating). Anyone who thinks Teixeira is anything less than a godsend for the Yanks defensively is spending way too much time VORPing and not nearly enough time WATCHING THE GAME.

... Not sure how I feel about live dot racing, but I know I feel bad for the P.A. announcer when he has to call the race. And I know that, for some strange reason, I want to be one of them dots before I die.

... Ran into Nick Swisher and Johnny Damon yesterday. They were working out together before batting practice in the tiny underground gym. Kind of a melancholy moment. Happy to see 'em, bummed they're gone. Two of the all-time easiest A's to cover.

... I'd love to tell you what's going on with Justin Duchscherer, but this is the best-kept secret I've ever encountered in nearly a decade covering the A's. That in itself should tell you that whatever the problem is, it's very, very serious. I don't even want to speculate. I just want him to get better in every way.

... The Melky Cabrera/Suzuki mashup at the plate tonight was a classic, as was Swisher's reaction. If that dude got paid by the smile, he'd make more than CC, Teixeira and A-Rod combined.

... Am I the only one who can see that bright white glow surrounding Rajai Davis these days? It's called supreme confidence, and wow, does he wear it well. Reminds me of a story I wrote about his "system" for success this spring. Check it out right here.

... Max Stassi, the fourth-round pick with first-round game and a first-round bonus, should be ready for the big leagues right about the time Suzuki is eligible for free agency.

... Is it wrong of me to miss Corey Wimberly? Someone needs to teach Everidge how to do back flips.

... I have a Dog Days of August Resolution: No more kidney shots on the skipper. Why? Because I recently reminded myself that a good question to ask before you do something is, "Who benefits from this?" If the answer is "me" or "nobody," it's probably a bad idea.

... I'm all for pointing to the sky to honor a loved one, if that's what a player wants to do. But just once I'd like to see it done by a guy as he trudges back to the dugout after striking out with the bases loaded.

... I'm Tweeting, blogging and IMing at once. Where's my cell phone? I need to text, too.

... OK, I was going to wait until the end of the game to post this, but the game basically just ended in the seventh inning when Mark Ellis, of all people, made Oakland's fourth error of the night. Just an ugly game, right on the heels of a pretty sweet game last night. Ah, the perils of youth.

... Then again, it IS just a game. We're lucky to be part of it, whatever that part might be.

That's it for now, gang. Peace, a crisp and fresh Insalata Caprese, and the first song to which my wife and I ever danced together -- AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long" -- to all ...

A rare victory for N.Y. ace

Associated Press 8/19/09

OAKLAND – Derek Jeter had his third consecutive three-hit game, and also knocked in the go-ahead run to help CC Sabathia win for the first time in six years in Oakland in the New York Yankees' 7-2 victory over the A's on Tuesday night.

Jeter's RBI single in the sixth inning against Jay Marshall (0-1) broke a 2-2 tie, and the Yankees went on to add four more runs that inning to end a two-game losing streak.

Sabathia (14-7), a Vallejo product, grew up going to games at the Oakland Coliseum, but has always struggled pitching there with a 1-4 record and 7.12 ERA in eight starts before Tuesday. He had no such problems this game, winning his 10th consecutive August start and first in Oakland since July 30, 2003, with Cleveland.

Sabathia gave up solo homers in the first two innings to Kurt Suzuki and Tommy Everidge that were coincidentally hit in the vicinity of where his season tickets for Raiders games are located.

But Oakland could manage nothing else against New York's big ace, who allowed five hits and struck out seven in eight innings in front of scores of friends and family members.

Sabathia didn't seem to be playing to the crowd when he brushed back Suzuki with two outs and nobody on in the first inning – apparent retaliation for Alex Rodriguez getting hit in the left arm the previous inning. Home plate umpire Jerry Layne immediately warned both teams. Then on the next pitch Suzuki got his own form of revenge with his 10th homer of the season.

The score was tied 2-2 when the Yankees broke it open with five runs in the sixth against the A's bullpen. The inning featured a comical moment when Melky Cabrera tried to avoid a pitch from Marshall but got hit and ended up tripping over Suzuki, drawing laughs from his teammates.

Jeter followed with his RBI single that gave the Yankees the lead. Johnny Damon added an RBI double, Rodriguez drove in a run when he walked with the bases loaded, Hideki Matsui hit an RBI single and Jorge Posada capped the inning with a sacrifice fly.

Jeter is is 20 for 36 over his past nine games.

The Yankees loaded the bases in the first and fourth inning without scoring as Vin Mazzaro struck out Posada to end the first threat and got Mark Teixeira to hit into a double play to end the other.

A'S NOTES

Yankees manager Joe Girardi spent the morning watching a joint practice between the Oakland Raiders and San Francisco 49ers as a guest of Niners coach Mike Singletary. Girardi met former Raiders coach John Madden and owner Al Davis. "Mr. Davis told me to tell Mr. Steinbrenner, 'Hi,'" Girardi said. ... The Yankees, who lead the majors with 182 homers, failed to go deep for the second straight game. ... Yankees OF Brett Gardner will need to keep the splint on his broken left thumb on for another week and Girardi said he will probably need 10 days after that before he can return to the majors. ... Kennedy had his first career four strikeout game and also committed an error.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento blasts past Nashville

By Andrew Hazard, rivercats.com

Tuesday night was like a home run derby in Nashville as the Sacramento River Cats and the Nashville Sounds combined for six bombs.

Sacramento's bats came alive with four runs each in the third and seventh innings. Nashville made things interesting with four runs in the bottom of the ninth but the River Cats held on for a 11-9 win.

Sacramento starter Jerome Williams struggled early. With one out in the second, Sounds designated hitter Mat Gamel hit a home run to give Nashville a quick 2-0 lead.

Tony DeFrancesco's bunch was not down for long. The third inning turned into a nightmare of an inning for Nashville pitcher Chris Cody. Catcher Anthony Recker began the fun with a one-out, two-run home run to tie the game. Nashville thought they had faced the worst of the action when they recorded two outs in the inning. In moments, Sacramento had the lead as Brett Wallace and Chris Denorfia hit back-to-back home runs for the second consecutive night. The River Cats had a 4-2 lead going into the fourth inning.

Williams was on a role until the eighth inning. The River Cats had a commanding 9-2 lead and then Williams seemed to lose it. First baseman Joe Koshansky hit a home run as part of a three-run inning. The River Cats still held a 9-5 lead.

First baseman Jeff Baisley hit a home run off of Dave Johnson in the ninth, and with an 11-5 lead it looked like the River Cats were well on their way to another victory.

In typical Cardiac Cats fashion, the Sounds made the game exciting with a four-run ninth inning. Henry Rodriguez came in the ninth to end the game, but did not have his best stuff. He only gave up one hit, but walked two batters and gave up three earned runs before being replaced with Sam Demel after only one out. Demel made things interesting as well. He gave up three hits but managed to only give up a run. He struck out back-to-back batters to finally end the game.

Williams (4-4) pitched great until his wild eighth inning. He gave up seven hits, five earned runs, three walks and he struck out four batters in 7.1 innings of work for the victory.

Left fielder Aaron Cunningham was the man of the night for Sacramento. He went 4 for 4, scored three runs, had two RBIs and his third inning home run.

With the win and the Fresno Grizzlies' 5-3 win over Memphis, the River Cats' magic number to win the Pacific South Division is now 10. The River Cats (77-46) play in Nashville again Wednesday to take on the Sounds at 5:05 p.m.

Desme's RBI Single Lifts Ports, 2-1, in 11 innings

Stockton defeats Modesto in series opener

STOCKTON, Calif.—The Stockton Ports (55-66) won their second extra-innings game of the season, defeating the Modesto Nuts (66-55) by a score of 2-1 in 11 frames on Tuesday night. The victory snapped a four-game skid for the Ports.

With the bases loaded in the 11th, right fielder Grant Desme brought home the winning run by slamming the ball to left field for his first hit of the game. The Ports improve to a 4-6 record against the Nuts at Banner Island Ballpark.

Southpaw reliever Derrick Gordon picked up his fourth win of the season, tossing two scoreless innings with three strikeouts. Chris Malone, who came on to pitch the 11th inning for Modesto, collected his first loss. Ports starter Pedro Figueroa had a strong outing, striking out four and allowing one run on six hits in 7.1 innings. Jason Ray also tossed 1.2 hitless, scoreless innings for Stockton.

Both teams struggled to bring home base runners in the contest, as the Ports stranded 17 batters while the Nuts left 10 on base. Stockton collected nine hits and walked eight times on Tuesday.

The Ports took a 1-0 lead in the second inning. Catcher Yusuf Carter led off the frame with a single. Desme and Kala Ka'aihue were issued back-to-back walks to load the bases. Center fielder Jermaine Mitchell knocked a sacrifice fly to left fielder Michael Mitchell to score Carter.

The Nuts tied up the game in the sixth frame. Second baseman Jason Van Kooten singled to lead off the frame. Figueroa retired the next two batters, but then allowed an RBI single to catcher Lars Davis.

From there, both teams tangoed in a 1-1 tie. Both teams managed to get runners on the basepaths, but struggled to bring them home.

In the 11th frame, the Ports mounted their final offensive attack of the game, as Malone came into pitch for Modesto. Left fielder Todd Johnson led off with a walk. He was followed on base by second baseman Frank Martinez, who singled to snap an 0x22 hitless streak. Malone then intentionally walked first baseman Steve Kleen to load the bases. Carter struck out for the first and only out of the frame. Desme then stepped up to the plate and slammed the ball to left field to score the winning run.

The Ports and Nuts will compete in Game 2 on Wednesday at Banner Island Ballpark at 7:05 p.m. RHP Scott Hodsdon (6-8, 5.58) will take the mound for Stockton, while RHP Ethan Hollingsworth (1-2, 4.95) will toe the rubber for Modesto.

TEAM BONDING GIVES PORTS A CHANCE

By [Bob Highfill](#), Stockton Record, 8/19/09

STOCKTON - It will take a lot of work to get there.

But with less than a month remaining in the regular season, the Stockton Ports are in the playoff hunt - a seemingly unlikely possibility at best when they finished the first half with the worst record in the California League.

"The last 20 (games) are crucial for us if we want to make the playoffs," said manager Aaron Nieckula, whose team has five more wins this half than the entire first half. "These guys have put themselves in a good position."

On Tuesday, the Ports began perhaps their most crucial stretch of the season with a 2-1 victory in 11 innings over Modesto, which is in good shape for a wild-card berth, in the first game of a three-game series in front of 1,746 at Stockton Ballpark.

San Jose, which swept the Ports (30-21 second half, 55-66 overall) last weekend to extend its lead over Stockton to six games for the second-half division lead, comes to town Friday to start a three-game series. Then, the Ports travel Monday for a three-game set at Bakersfield, which holds a five-game lead over Stockton for the second wild-card berth. The Blaze (26-25, 60-61) defeated Inland Empire 8-1 on Tuesday.

The somewhat recent additions of veteran first baseman Steve Kleen, outfielder Grant Desme and pitchers Mickey Storey and Anthony Capra certainly have helped with the Ports' turnaround. But some of the players who have been with Stockton for much or all of the season credit their growth as a team.

"The biggest difference between the first half and the second half is guys have bonded," said outfielder Todd Johnson, who has played in 100 games for Stockton this season and is batting .264 with five home runs and 49 RBI. "The biggest thing was coming together as a team."

Catcher Yusuf Carter, who has spent the entire season with the Ports, said the players have adopted the approach that Nieckula has preached to them since spring training.

"We're letting the game come to us," said Carter, who is batting .319 with 14 home runs and 51 RBI. "We're not trying to do too much. We're playing small ball, getting it to the next guy and coming through."

"Small ball" is another way of saying the Ports lack dominant power. They're sixth in the league with 93 home runs. But this team has found success behind a pitching staff that leads the league with 1,058 strikeouts and is third with a 4.22 ERA, and an offense that relies on timely hits. Nieckula said it took a while before he and the players realized their strengths and began to exploit them.

"You have to manage based on your talent," Nieckula said. "We just have to execute the fundamentals on a consistent basis."

And that couldn't be more true than now.

Cougars Blown Out in Finale in Iowa

Kane County suffers most lopsided loss of season

BURLINGTON, Iowa – The Kane County Cougars suffered one of their worst losses of the season Tuesday night, a 14-1 drubbing at the hands of the Burlington Bees at Community Field. The Cougars dropped three of four in the series. Tuesday marked the end of a stretch in which the Cougars played 28 games in 28 days, and they went 11-17 during the uninterrupted period.

Down 2-0 in the third, the Cougars got what became their only run of the game. Steve Parker belted a two-out solo homer to cut it 2-1. But the Bees erupted for a six-run fourth and then had three more two-run frames the rest of the way.

Mathieu Leblanc-Poirier (3-7) suffered the loss. He gave up eight runs on seven hits in 3 1/3 innings and threw five wild pitches. Scott Deal gave up four runs in 2 1/3, Josue Selenis tossed 1 1/3 scoreless frames and Matt Fitts yielded two more runs in one inning.

The Cougars (24-28, 65-57) are off Wednesday and start a four-game series in Beloit on Thursday night at 6:30 CT. Shawn Haviland (6-9, 4.36) is scheduled to pitch for the Cougars, and the Snappers (21-31, 48-74) will counter with Daniel Osterbrock (6-9, 5.68).

C's grab 2-1 victory over Dust Devils on Tuesday

By Rob Fai / Vancouver Canadians

CANADIANS SALVAGE SERIES FINALE vs. TRI-CITY
Vancouver grabs 2-1 victory on Tuesday out at Nat Bailey Stadium

(Nat Bailey Stadium - Vancouver, BC) - A throwing error from Tri-City starter *LHP Josh Hungerman* allowed Canadians **SS Michael Gilmartin** to score all the way from first base that produced the first of two runs that ended up being all Vancouver would need for a 2-1 victory over the Dust Devils on Tuesday afternoon.

Canadians **LHP Julio Ramos** (5-5) was steady over his seven innings of work scattering just four hits, striking out three for his fifth straight victory. Vancouver's **RHP Conner Hoehn** came in for a scoreless 8th inning before giving way to closer **RHP Paul Smyth** who picked up his 8th save of the season.

Note: LHP Julio Ramos has now won his past five consecutive starts after beginning the season 0-5.

For a complete box score from Tuesday afternoon's game vs. Tri-City please click on the link at the top of this story.

The Canadians will enjoy a travel day on Wednesday before opening up a nine-game road trip on Thursday, August 20th in Eugene, Oregon. Vancouver will send **RHP Ronny Morla** (1-3) to the mound in the series opener from Civic Stadium at 7:05pm.

Vancouver returns to Nat Bailey Stadium on Saturday, August 29th to open a three-game series vs. West Division rival Eugene Emeralds starting at 7:05pm