

A's News Clips, Sunday, August, 23, 2009

Kennedy helps A's beat Tigers to end three-game losing streak

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Adam Kennedy's recent hitting struggles were indicative of the A's offensive struggles as a whole.

Oakland's leadoff man was back to his usual form Saturday night, banging out three singles and sparking the winning rally in a 3-2 walkoff victory over the Detroit Tigers in front of a fireworks-night crowd of 26,266 at Oakland Coliseum.

Kennedy led off the ninth with a single to center and advanced to second on Rajai Davis' sacrifice bunt. Kurt Suzuki then jumped on the first pitch from Zach Miner, lining a single to left that brought Kennedy home with the winning run to snap the A's three-game losing streak.

Detroit left fielder Ryan Raburn trapped Suzuki's sinking liner and made it a close play at home. But Kennedy slid in safely as Raburn's throw got by catcher Alex Avila.

Kennedy came in hitting just .176 (6-for-34) over his previous eight games, and five of his six hits in that span came in one game against the White Sox.

But manager Bob Geren said before the game he had no intention of bumping Kennedy out of the leadoff spot.

The A's blew a golden opportunity to break the tie in the bottom of the eighth. Singles by Scott Hairston and Ryan Sweeney and an intentional walk to Jack Cust loaded the bases with one out.

But Daric Barton popped out and Cliff Pennington grounded to first to keep it 2-2.

That sequence was indicative of how the A's offense has sputtered of late. They began their nine-game homestand having shown signs of an offensive revival since the All-Star break.

But they were hitting just .238 over their last 13 games and had scored just 13 runs in that time.

On Saturday, they did the little things right - executing successful sacrifice bunts to move runners into scoring position - even if it didn't always translate into runs.

A's starter Trevor Cahill didn't allow a home run for the third straight start, significant for a pitcher who's yielded 25 homers on the season and has surrendered 19 at home, tied for the Oakland single-season record.

He surrendered a run in the first when Curtis Granderson led off with a double and eventually scored on Carlos Guillen's fielder's choice grounder.

But Cahill would settle in. He struck out the side in the second and escaped a jam in the fourth, stranding runners on the corners by striking out Clete Thomas and getting Brandon Inge on a fielder's choice.

He gave up just five hits and two runs in seven innings. And though he's now gone six consecutive starts without a win, he's posted three straight quality starts (at least six innings, three earned runs or less).

The A's gave him a lead with two runs in the second, as Detroit starter Armando Galarraga hurt his cause with two walks that helped load the bases with no outs.

Daric Barton delivered a sacrifice fly, and Cliff Pennington lined an opposite-field single to bring another run home and give the A's a 2-1 lead.

But the Tigers evened things in the sixth. Miguel Cabrera lined a shot off the right-field wall that only went for a single but scored Placido Polanco from second to make it 2-2.

Newhouse: The other side of Rickey Henderson

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist

Sometimes the truest indicator of a celebrity's personality and character isn't public perception but the testimony of those closest to the celebrity.

Fred Atkins, Jim Guinn and Earl Robinson know Rickey Henderson in a different way from the general public. Atkins is Henderson's closest friend. Guinn scouted Henderson and recommended to the Oakland A's that they draft him. And Robinson knew Henderson as an A's executive and, years later, as his speaking tutor.

Those Laney College speech class sessions earlier this summer — which Guinn had recommended to Robinson — enabled Henderson, publicly perceived as self-engrossed, to deliver spectacular, yet humble, acceptance speeches at his Baseball Hall of Fame induction July 25, and again when the A's retired his number Aug. 1.

Guinn, 71, was a Berkeley policeman and part-time A's scout when he looked over Henderson at Oakland Tech in the mid-1970s.

"The one thing that stood out with Rickey — and I'm old school — is his respect for seniors," said Guinn. "He is very sensitive toward seniors and the issues of seniors. He's just an all-around good person."

Henderson's a multimillionaire who owns homes in Oakland, Hillsborough and in Arizona, plus a ranch near Yosemite and other Oakland property. But he mows lawns, pulls weeds, shovels hay, chops wood, paints, vacuums — a blue-collar mentality.

"He's conservative," said Guinn. "But in addition to cutting some corners to save money, he enjoys working and doing some things himself."

Henderson's one of the 10 greatest offensive players ever, which doesn't happen by accident.

"At 17 years old," Guinn recalled, "Rickey told me he wanted to become the greatest base-stealer that ever lived."

Which he then achieved in baseball — both single-season and career stolen bases — along with scoring the most runs, receiving the most unintentional walks and hitting the most leadoff homers.

Atkins and Henderson have been best friends since they were 9, without one incident of Henderson, the superstar, ever "big-timing" his buddy.

"That shows the kind of person he is," said Atkins, now 51 and working with special education children. "When I had shoulder surgery after my first year of professional ball, he told me in my hospital bed, 'Fred, if you can't come back, I'll play for the both of us.' They don't come any better than him."

Robinson, 73, was on the same payroll as Henderson in the early 1980s when the former was an assistant to then-A's president Roy Eisenhardt.

"Rickey impressed me with his ability to get along with people," said Robinson. "Billy Martin was a difficult person to get along with. He didn't want anyone to threaten his leadership, so most people never said anything back to him. But Rickey would say something back to him, and Billy would only laugh."

Robinson, now a speech teacher at Laney, encountered Henderson again in July when he needed some crash-course speaking techniques for Cooperstown.

"Rickey has a special way of engaging people, whether they are in baseball or off the street," said Robinson. "My students didn't look at Rickey as someone going into the Hall of Fame, but as a nice person. He made himself totally vulnerable, and he was accepting. There was something special going on here."

During a three-week training give-and-take, Henderson humbled himself in front of strangers.

"Rickey's a very special human being," said Robinson, "one of the top 10 human beings I've ever met — by his professionalism, by the friendships he's able to develop, by his loyalty, by his doing things for people you don't ever hear about."

Such as Henderson's attending the funeral of another ballplayer's mother, a ballplayer he wasn't all that close to but wanted to support because he had lost his mother.

"He cares about people," said Guinn.

The key word about Henderson: Genuine.

Lurie: Who'll win baseball's division races? Check the schedule

By Marty Lurie, Special to Oakland Tribune

With one-quarter of the 2009 baseball season remaining, the teams in contention for the playoffs are gearing up for the stretch run.

This is the time of year when the schedule becomes a factor.

Check and see if your favorite team plays a majority of its final games at home. Check the schedule to see how many games your team must play against clubs still in the playoff hunt.

Every baseball season has its unique trends. In 2009 the common thread is the best teams are playing extremely well at home, while except for a few squads, most teams have losing records on the road.

How will the contenders fare down the stretch? Let's take a look at their remaining games beginning with those games that get underway tomorrow, Monday, Aug. 24.

AL East:

The Yankees are playing solid baseball at home (41-18). The Bombers have turned their new stadium into their own version of home run derby.

The Yanks have 22 home games and 16 road games left on the schedule. The most dangerous road series are against Los Angeles (3), Tampa Bay (3), and Seattle (3). New York will face tough opponents Boston (3), Texas (3), Tampa Bay (4), and the White Sox (3) in the Bronx.

The Yankees' schedule is very favorable heading down the stretch.

Boston has been much stronger at home (39-19) than on the road (31-33). For some reason Boston's bats have been less than spectacular away from Fenway Park.

Boston has 22 home games and 17 road games ahead. Boston is 32-19 within their division. The Sox have 20 division games left, with 11 of those at home.

If the Red Sox are going to prevail in the Wild Card race, they better win key road series against Chicago (4) and Tampa Bay (3) before finishing their road games in New York (3).

The Yankees will be primed to knock Boston out of the playoff race if they have the opportunity Sept. 25- 27 in the Bronx.

Boston has an advantage over Texas and Tampa Bay as the teams head for home since the Sox have more home games than road games remaining.

Tampa Bay has been awesome at home (42-20), while less than stellar on the road (25-35).

The Rays have 18 home games and 21 road contests coming up.

Tampa faces tough competition away from the Tropicana Field. Joe Maddon's team plays Detroit (4), New York (3), Boston (3), and Texas (3) on the road. The Rays also will play some difficult games at home, meeting Boston (3), Detroit (3), Seattle (2), and the Yankees (3).

If Tampa is to repeat its miracle season of 2008 it must continue to dominate at home and play better on the road down the stretch. September won't be an easy month for the defending AL Champions as they still have yet to pitch consistently this year.

AL Central:

The Tigers have been an excellent team at home (40-20) and a struggling squad on the road (25-37). They have 21 home games and 18 road games remaining.

The Tigers must beat Tampa Bay (4), Minnesota (4), and Chicago (3) in Detroit to offset any expected trouble away from Comerica Park when they have road dates with Los Angeles (3), Tampa Bay (3), Chicago (3) and Minnesota (3).

The Tigers have six games at home and six games on the road with Cleveland and Kansas City difficult division rivals.

Chicago wins at US Cellular Field (36-29) and like Detroit plays less than .500 (27-31) away from home. The Sox must tighten their game on the road as they have 23 on enemy turf and only 15 in Chicago down the stretch.

Remaining road series for the Sox are against Boston (4), New York (3), Minnesota (3), Cubs (1), Los Angeles (3), Seattle (3), Cleveland (3), and Detroit (3). The Sox face the A's (2), Boston (4), and Detroit (3) at home, among others.

Unless Chicago tightens its defense, gets Jake Peavy on the mound soon, and gets stellar relief from closer Bobby Jenks, then Detroit will win the AL Central.

AL West:

The Angels are playing great ball in Anaheim (36-22) as well as on the road (38-25). Los Angeles has 23 home games and 17 road games coming up.

The Halos are built to win during the 162-game schedule, relying on a prolific offense each day. Los Angeles is still looking for the right combination on the mound as the playoffs near.

The Angels have challenging road series with Boston (3) and Texas (3). Fortunately, the Halos will face Detroit (3), Chicago (3), New York (3), and Texas (4) at home.

The Angels, barring a complete reversal of form, will win the AL West based upon their favorable home schedule down the stretch.

Texas has weathered the summer heat in Arlington going (41-24). On the road the Rangers are (27-30). Texas has 15 home games left on the schedule and a daunting 23 road games.

The schedule does not favor the Rangers and their inexperienced pitching staff, as they must face New York (3), Minnesota (3), Los Angeles (4), Seattle (3), and the A's (4) on the road.

At home, the Rangers will see Los Angeles (3), Tampa Bay (3), and the A's (3).

This will be a tough next few weeks for the Rangers.

NL East:

Like the Cardinals and the Yankees, the Phillies win both at home (32-29) and on the road (38-21).

With Cliff Lee, Joe Blanton and J.A. Happ leading the way, the Phillies have enough pitching to fend off any long losing streaks over the next month. The Phils have 20 home games and 21 road games remaining. Philadelphia has 12 games coming up with the Marlins and the Braves with those games split evenly at home and on the road.

Other than a three-game series with the Giants in Philadelphia, the final month should be a comfortable tune-up for the playoffs for the defending world champions.

Florida is a team to watch. The Marlins play good ball at home (34-28) and hold their own on the road (31-30), a sure sign of a well-balanced ball club. Florida is clearly in the wild card chase. The Marlins have 16 home games and 22 road games facing them to end the season.

Florida faces road series against New York (6), St. Louis (3), Atlanta (3), and Philadelphia (3). At home the Marlins will see New York (3), San Diego (3), Atlanta (4), Washington (3) and Philadelphia (3).

Florida, led by Hanley Ramirez, is hitting the ball extremely well. The Rockies and the Giants must watch the scoreboard very closely, checking on the Marlins scores as the season winds down.

Florida does not have an easy road schedule. Its fate will be determined by how well the team plays away from Miami.

Atlanta has the pitching to make a run at the playoffs. The Braves are 33-28 in Atlanta and 32-30 away from Turner Field.

The Braves have 19 games remaining at home and 19 on the road. Pitching wins championships and Atlanta's might be peaking at the right time. Still the Braves must hit better on the road as they face Philadelphia (3), Florida (4), Houston (3), St. Louis (3), New York (3) and Washington (3) to end the season.

Only the Phils (3) and the Marlins (3) pose a threat to Atlanta in Turner Field. Don't overlook this club in September based on their schedule.

St. Louis is cruising into the playoffs behind the best one-two starting punch in the NL Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright.

St. Louis wins at home (36-24) and on the road (35-30). The Cards have 18 home games and 12 road games left on the schedule. This club should easily win the division by September 20.

The Cubs must win big at home (35-22) because they are horrible on the road (26-38). Chicago has 23 home games and 16 games away from the friendly confines of Wrigley Field remaining in 2009. Road series against the Giants (4) and St. Louis (3) loom ahead.

At home the Cubs face Washington (3), New York (3), Houston (3), Chicago (1), Cincinnati (3), Milwaukee (4), Pittsburgh (3), and Arizona (3). Don't stick a fork in the Cubs just yet -- their home schedule keeps their fleeting playoff hopes alive.

NL West:

The Dodgers are a tough ballclub winning at home (40-24) and on the road (34-26). It's not easy to lead your division since April, but the Dodgers are doing it with only a few bumps along the way.

Los Angeles has 16 home games left all within the division except for Pittsburgh (3). On the road the Dodgers face Colorado (3) and San Francisco (3) with the remaining 16 against the Reds, Diamondbacks, Nationals, Pirates, and Padres all teams that will be planning summer vacations by the time they face the Dodgers in September.

The remaining schedule is clearly in the Dodgers favor.

Colorado has been one of baseball's best teams since Jim Tracy took over the reins in May. Colorado wins at home (33-24) and on the road (36-30).

The Rockies pitching will be need to be sharp in hitter-friendly Coors Field as the club has 23 home games left with only 15 road games to play as the season winds down.

The Rockies will visit the Giants (6) and the Dodgers (3). The rest of the road games are within the division Arizona (3) and San Diego (3). At home the Rockies face St. Louis (3), Los Angeles (3), and San Francisco (1). In addition, challenging home series still remain with Milwaukee (3) and New York (3).

The Rockies have a great finishing schedule. This NL West race will be something to see in September.

San Francisco wins at home (39-20). The Giants lack of a consistent identifiable offense hampers the club on the road (28-36). The Giants have 22 home games ahead and only 16 more away from AT&T Park.

With the Giants' pitching, they are a favorite to win every home game. They will face only NL West teams at home for the remainder of the year except for a huge four-game series with the Cubs in late September.

On the road, the Giants have three games in Philadelphia and three in Milwaukee. The concluding road games are with Colorado (1), Los Angeles (3), Arizona (3), and San Diego (3).

The Giants are very much alive for a playoff berth, but because of their struggles away from San Francisco, this club cannot afford to lose many home games down the stretch.

Every year a spoiler emerges to dash the hopes of a playoff hopeful.

Toronto still has some pitchers who can give a contender trouble. Milwaukee hits the ball while closer Trevor Hoffman is still one of the best in the NL. San Diego has set-up man Mike Adams and closer Heath Bell on the top of their game. The Mets have pitchers Johan Santana and Mike Pelfrey. Kansas City's Zack Greinke is tough, as is Seattle's Felix Hernandez.

The "pros" will step up over the next 40 games carrying their teams to the playoffs. This year the schedule also will play a huge part in determining which teams play baseball deep into October.

Suzuki, Kennedy team up for A's winning run

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Kurt Suzuki had multiple game-winning hits last season, but until Saturday night, he had none in 2009. Moved up to the middle of the order recently, he looked as if he were pressing a bit.

On Saturday night at the Coliseum, Suzuki hit into a force to leave the bases loaded in the second, and he stranded a runner at second in the seventh. But with the game tied in the ninth, one out, and Adam Kennedy at second base, Suzuki dunked a base hit in front of Detroit's Ryan Raburn in left.

Kennedy sped toward the plate with Raburn's throw coming in about the same time, and Kennedy slid in hard, feet first, as the ball skipped away. The 3-2 victory snapped a four-game Oakland losing streak. The A's had lost their previous two games by the same score.

"I didn't hit that ball very well, so I was thinking, 'Please drop in,' " Suzuki said. "I was praying. Once I rounded (first) I was watching the play - I probably should have been running - and Adam did a great job. He got a good jump, he anticipated it dropping."

Kennedy said his idea was to hit catcher Alex Avila before Avila hit him, and he carved out a clear path.

A's manager Bob Geren, a former big-league catcher, called it a good slide, and said, "Adam's a professional player. He does everything well. He's going to do whatever he needs to score."

Entering Saturday, Kennedy's average had slipped to .278 and he was 6 for his previous 34 (.176) - with five of those hits coming in one game.

The infielder said before the game that he's been looking at video to see what he's doing with particular pitches he feels he should be hitting, where balls are being pitched that he's swinging at. Hitting coach Jim Skaalen had told Kennedy he's getting ready to hit a little late, which is why he's fouling off a lot of pitches.

Kennedy finished with three hits, which he said was lucky. He said he's still fouling off too many strikes.

Trevor Cahill started Saturday evening against the Tigers and he had another encouraging performance. He hasn't allowed more than three runs in any of his past three starts, nor has he allowed a home run in those outings.

Against the Tigers, that's not easy. Detroit entered Saturday's game with a 10-game streak of going deep, and Cahill recently ended a run of allowing homers in nine consecutive starts, the third-longest streak in Oakland history.

The Tigers got a run in the first when Curtis Granderson led off with a double, went to third on a single by Placido Polanco and scored on a groundout by Carlos Guillen. In the sixth, with the A's up 2-1, Oakland-killer Polanco singled, went to second on a groundout and came in on a base hit by Miguel Cabrera.

Cahill allowed five hits, but only one for extra bases, and three walks. He struck out four - including the side in the second inning.

"He's starting to come into his own," Geren said.

Oakland put up two in the second, but probably should have come away with more. Ryan Sweeney led off with a base hit to right off Armando Galarraga, Mark Ellis and Jack Cust walked, and Daric Barton hit a sacrifice fly. Cliff Pennington drove in Ellis with a single, but that was it. Even though Rajai Davis beat out an infield single to load the bases again, Suzuki hit into a force to end the inning.

The A's loaded the bases with one out in the eighth but got nothing out of it when Barton popped up and Pennington grounded out.

Bailey boosts awards bid

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

When the A's and Tigers meet today in the final game of the homestand, Detroit's Rookie of the Year candidate, Rick Porcello, will be on the mound. Oakland has its own Rookie of the Year candidate - Andrew Bailey, who got the win Saturday night, his sixth of the season.

Bailey could be the second A's closer to be named Rookie of the Year in five seasons; Huston Street won it in 2005. Bailey has converted each of his past 13 save opportunities dating back to June 17, he leads rookies in saves with 18, and his 74 strikeouts are third most among all big-league relievers. He needs five more saves to tie Street for the most saves by an Oakland rookie.

Bailey also has the lowest ERA among AL rookies, with a 2.01 mark.

Other candidates, along with Porcello, include Chicago third baseman Gordon Beckham, Toronto left-hander Ricky Romero, Tampa Bay right-hander Jeff Niemann, Baltimore outfielder Nolan Reimold and Texas shortstop Elvis Andrus.

Asked if Bailey should be a frontrunner, manager Bob Geren said, "Without a doubt. This guy looks like a veteran, experienced closer."

Small ball: Geren didn't feel comfortable using first baseman Tommy Everidge to bunt in the ninth inning Wednesday because Everidge hadn't bunted in five years. Everidge came in Friday and told Geren that if asked to bunt he'd "stick his nose in there and get it done." The rookie moved Jack Cust over in the ninth Friday.

"He had a whole different outlook," Geren said. "Sometimes attitude is more important than technique."

Braden on hold: The A's are trying to keep Dallas Braden from putting much pressure on his left foot. An infection resulted in an inflamed nerve that has kept him from throwing off the mound. Braden has not played long toss in several days.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser

Giambi to Rockies: Sources said Saturday that Jason Giambi, released by the A's last month, is about to sign with Colorado. He'll get at-bats at Triple-A Colorado Springs, then join the big-league club.

Suzuki delivers walk-off blow vs. Tigers

A's catcher evens series with sixth game-winning hit

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Adam Kennedy admits Saturday's battle with Detroit didn't start out "pretty" -- for himself, or the team.

Kurt Suzuki would probably agree.

Luckily for the A's, who stranded a combined five runners in the second inning, every beginning -- no matter how ugly -- has an end. And Saturday's end resulted in a more-than-pretty finish.

Of course, what made Saturday's story-book ending -- a 3-2 victory over Detroit -- all the more glorious was the fact it was Kennedy and Suzuki, along with catalyst Rajai Davis, who made the magic happen in front of 26,266 at the Coliseum.

In the ninth inning knotted at 2, Kennedy led off with a single against the Tigers' Zach Miner (5-4) for his third hit of the night. Davis then set down a perfectly placed bunt less than a minute later, setting up what turned out to be Suzuki's sixth career walk-off hit -- a hard-hit single to left field that brought Kennedy home on a close call at the plate.

"Once I rounded the bag, I was watching the play and should have been trying to get to second," the A's catcher said. "It was a complete effort. That hit kind of takes the monkey off the back. I've had chances in big situations and haven't been coming through, so it's a nice feeling when you get that big hit."

Kennedy, feeling the same sense of pressure at the plate as of late, surprised himself with a 3-for-5 night after going 8-for-36 in his previous eight games.

"I kept grinding away," the third baseman said. "Hits give you confidence. When you keep getting guys on base and have more chances, the more confident you'll feel. Keep going, and it will come."

The A's had their fair share of chances on Saturday in the second game of a three-game set against Jim Leyland's Tigers. The A's stranded 11 on the night, downplaying a tremendous effort by starter Trevor Cahill.

The A's righty, who entered the contest 0-4 with a 6.75 ERA over his past five starts, gave his team seven strong innings of work -- surrendering two runs on five hits and three walks while striking out four.

"A team win is all that matters," said Cahill, who took the no-decision. "I don't worry about [my record] too much, it's all good. My goal is to go out and pitch as many innings as I can."

"The bullpen's been doing a great job, but they're probably also getting tired, so my job is to help them, too."

The rookie pitcher has received run support of two runs or fewer in 14 of his 26 starts and is 0-8 in those starts. Manager Bob Geren, however, knows Cahill is better than the story being written by his numbers.

So do other managers, including Leyland.

"We had a chance in the first, but he settled down after that," Leyland said. "He went to his changeup quite a bit against left-handers. He pitched well and did a good job."

The same can be said of Oakland's tireless bullpen, which delivered two scoreless innings of work, courtesy of Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey, who grabbed his sixth win of the season after putting up a ninth-inning zero on the board.

On the opposing end, Detroit starter Armando Galarraga went 6 1/3 innings, giving up two runs -- both coming in the second inning thanks to Daric Barton's sacrifice fly and an RBI base hit off the bat of Cliff Pennington -- while allowing seven hits and two walks.

"Their pitcher struggled early in the game," Cahill offered of Galarraga. "He settled in, and I was impressed how deep he went into the game."

Maybe so, but it's safe to say Cahill was even more impressed with his own teammates' efforts in the dramatic ninth inning, as was his manager.

"What I really liked was the situational hitting," Geren said. "We're playing the game the right way, and it's fun to watch.

"The excitement level was way up with so many fans there tonight. Obviously with a great turnout like that, you want to do something special."

Call it special. Call it pretty. Either way, the walk-off win gives a struggling team a chance to avoid losing its third consecutive series with Sunday's rubber match up for grabs.

It also gives a struggling hitter a little extra something, as well.

"[Suzuki] has been pressing a lot and trying too hard," Geren said. "Hopefully this will boost his confidence a bit."

Marshall gives A's another lefty option

Oakland (54-68) vs. Detroit (65-57), 1:05 p.m. PT

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Less than two weeks ago, Craig Breslow was the only southpaw sitting in the A's bullpen.

Now, the left-hander has a buddy.

Jay Marshall, who spent all season at Triple-A Sacramento until being called up Aug. 9, is readjusting to the big league scene while giving manager Bob Geren further options in the 'pen.

"He's throwing extremely well," Geren said at the time of Marshall's promotion. "It should be nice for Breslow to have another lefty down there."

Marshall, who pitched in 51 games for the A's in 2007 after being selected from the White Sox organization in the Rule 5 Draft, posted a 1-2 record and a 6.43 ERA but did not pitch in the Majors last season.

Since rejoining the big boys in Oakland, Marshall has been given four innings of work, giving up four runs -- all against the Yankees on Tuesday -- while walking none and fanning one.

Although the 26-year-old has much to prove, he's already got the support of his manager.

"He's older and more mature," Geren said. "This time around he seems to look more comfortable. Before, everything was probably a little more accelerated.

"He's had time to digest the experience, which makes him better."

Marshall recorded seven saves and a 3.20 ERA in 50 appearances with the River Cats, and his return to the Bay comes after lowering his release point at the beginning of the season.

"It kind of makes him similar to Ziegler," said Geren, referring to sidearmer Brad Ziegler. "Basically, it just gives us another arm out of the bullpen, which is nice."

Marshall, who recorded an out in Friday's 3-2 loss to visiting Detroit, has a decent shot at seeing action in the finale of the three-game set on Sunday due to the heavy left-handed-hitting nature of the Tigers' lineup.

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Brett Tomko (2-2, 4.21 ERA)

The A's signed Tomko to a Minor League contract on Aug. 5. On Monday, he was back in the Majors, facing the same Yankees team that released him earlier this season. The 36-year-old held New York to five hits over five innings, leading the A's to a 3-0 win. "It's been a long road this year," Tomko said. "It was kind of ironic that my first start here came against the Yankees." He'll look to keep things going against the Tigers. He hasn't faced them this season.


DET: RHP Rick Porcello (10-7, 4.21 ERA)

Porcello's first outing after his five-game suspension for throwing at Boston's Kevin Youkilis should provide a better idea whether he's on his way to a high-strikeout finish. He used the combination of a devastating offspeed pitch and his usual biting sinker to rack up eight strikeouts over 5 2/3 innings against the Mariners on Tuesday at Comerica Park, but he left with trouble on the bases with two outs in the sixth and 93 pitches thrown. The hope for the Tigers now is that they won't have to watch his innings quite so closely with the time off he got from the suspension and the second-inning ejection that led to it.


Dribblers ...

Geren said there is no timetable for the return of Dallas Braden (left foot infection) to the mound. "He's not getting better as quickly as we hoped," the skipper said. "He's a couple weeks away from the mound." The lefty has not thrown in a couple of days and is scheduled to stay off his feet for awhile to help calm his foot's nerves. ... Leadoff hitter Adam Kennedy grabbed three hits in Saturday's game after going 8-for-36 in his previous eight games. "It's hard to put a finger on it," Geren said of the third baseman's recent struggles at the plate. "He's battling up there, going through ups and downs. When you get in a right situation, you still want him up there." ... Gio Gonzalez's father, Max, spent time on the field with his son and met several of the lefty pitcher's teammates during batting practice on Saturday.

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Up next

- Monday: Athletics (Vin Mazzaro, 4-8, 5.31) at Mariners (Ian Snell, 3-9, 5.60), 7:10 p.m. PT 
- Tuesday: Athletics (Brett Anderson, 7-9, 4.51) at Mariners (Ryan Rowland-Smith, 2-1, 4.24), 7:10 p.m. PT 
- Wednesday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 4-4, 5.78) at Mariners (Lucas French, 3-3, 3.83), 7:10 p.m. PT 

Suzuki leads A's to 3-2 win

Associated Press

OAKLAND — Kurt Suzuki hit an RBI single with one out in the bottom of the ninth inning to lead the Oakland Athletics past the Detroit Tigers 3-2 on Saturday night.

Andrew Bailey (6-3) pitched the ninth for the victory. Zach Miner (5-4) took the loss.

Carlos Guillen and Miguel Cabrera drove in runs for the Tigers, who had won six of their previous eight.

Daric Barton and Cliff Pennington also drove in runs for the A's, who ended a three-game slide.

Tigers starter Armando Galarraga went 6 1-3 innings, allowing two runs and seven hits. He walked two and struck out three.

A's starter Trevor Cahill allowed two runs and five hits over seven innings. He walked three and struck out four and is winless in his past six starts.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento falls at home, magic number at 4

rivercats.com

Not even three high school cheer squads could ignite a sufficient River Cats rally Saturday night.

Seemingly in a daze from a midnight bus ride and flight home from Nashville, Sacramento fell 5-2 to the Portland Beavers before 11,818 fans at Raley Field.

Shown: *Sacramento Mayor and former NBA All-Star Kevin Johnson throws out the first pitch Saturday night. Johnson represented Sacramento High in the High School Heroes Bobblection.*

The River Cats (80-47), who own the best record in Triple-A baseball, were coming off a 7-1 road trip to Memphis and Nashville, during which they smashed 18 home runs and made giant strides toward their third consecutive division title. But after a quick turnaround from Friday night's game in Tennessee, the River Cats' offense couldn't muster a threat until the ninth inning Saturday.

Sacramento fans, however, were guaranteed a winner off the field in the High School Heroes Bobblection. Fans scooped up all of Dusty Baker's bobbleheads first to make the current Cincinnati Reds manager Sacramento's Favorite High School Hero. Baker, a Del Campo High graduate, beat out the bobbleheads of Chicago Cubs first baseman Derrek Lee (El Camino High) and Sacramento Mayor and former NBA All-Star Kevin Johnson (Sacramento High), who threw out the first pitch. All three stars' bobbleheads were cheered on by their respective schools' cheer or dance squads.

On the field, starter Dana Eveland (8-5, 4.81) kept the River Cats' muzzled offense within striking distance, allowing two runs and seven hits over 7.0 innings. The left-hander struck out seven batters, but left with a 2-0 deficit. Relievers Chris Schroder and recently acquired Scott Patterson allowed three more runs to score before the River Cats entered the bottom of the ninth with a 5-0 deficit.

That's when Sacramento's bats finally came alive. Aaron Cunningham opened the inning with a single, then Eric Munson walked and Travis Buck was plunked by a pitch to load the bases with no outs. Anthony Recker then singled home Cunningham to bring up the potential tying run.

However, Jeff Baisley and Gregorio Petit both struck out before Eric Patterson scored Munson with an infield single, bringing up the potential winning run in Chris Denorfia. Denorfia hit a sharp line drive to right-center field, but Drew Macias tracked it down for the final out.

With Fresno's 2-0 loss to visiting Tacoma on Saturday, the River Cats maintain a 12.5-game lead over the second-place Grizzlies in the Pacific Coast League's Pacific South Division. Sacramento's magic number to clinch the division is now four.

Cats' Patterson could win PCL MVP award

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee, 8/23/09

Eric Patterson makes things happen. If he's not stealing a base or scoring a run, he's contributing a timely hit or flashing an occasional power surge.

The River Cats utilityman – he has played second base, third base, left field, center field and designated hitter – is the player who jump-starts a team closing in on its eighth Pacific Coast League South Division title in 10 years.

Will that be enough for him to earn Pacific Coast League MVP honors?

Patterson's credentials appear MVP-worthy. Entering Saturday night's 5-2 loss to Portland, he ranked third in the league in stolen bases with a team-record 41, was fourth in runs with 89 and was 13th in average at .313.

He's also just the second River Cat in team history to manage at least 10 home runs, triples, doubles and steals in one season. Sacramento's leadoff hitter also can hit for power, as 12 home runs and 54 RBIs attest.

"He's the catalyst for the team," said River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco, whose team's magic number to clinch the division fell to four after Fresno lost Saturday night.

"He's having an outstanding year. Sometimes there's the power numbers and the RBIs, (but) they don't look at how well a kid plays the game, what he means to a team, a true MVP."

Las Vegas first baseman Randy Ruiz and Colorado Springs second baseman Eric Young look to be the other front-runners for the award, determined by a vote of the league's managers and radio play-by-play broadcasters.

Ruiz led the PCL in RBIs (106) and doubles (43) and was tied for third in home runs (25). He was also eighth in batting average (.320).

Young's case, like Patterson's, is built around speed. He led the league in stolen bases (56) and runs (114). He also had 20 doubles and a .296 average.

DeFrancesco said he was impressed by Ruiz's numbers.

"He's one guy that definitely deserves it," DeFrancesco said.

Patterson, 26, said he's more interested in a third consecutive PCL championship.

"I just try to do my job on the field and be a good teammate," he said. "It's a tremendous honor. At the same time, there are a lot of other guys who are very deserving of it, too."

"Clinching the playoffs, that's really all I'm focused on."

River Cats infielder Gregorio Petit said Patterson deserves the award.

"I always say, 'You're my hero,' " Petit said. "I hope he wins it. He's got everything."

"He doesn't let a bad day affect him. He'll be there for you giving you support, even if he's 0 for 4."

Patterson's MVP-contending season has included two trips to the major leagues, followed by returns to the minors.

"It's obviously disappointing," he said. "We're all trying to play in the big leagues. At the same time, every time you go up there, it's a learning experience."

Patterson said he feels more comfortable this season moving around to different positions.

He has played 42 games at second base, 25 in center field, 17 in left field, 11 at designated hitter and 10 at third base.

"I'm comfortable each and every day, no matter where I'm at," he said. "Definitely steps in the right direction."

Though an MVP award would be a nice finishing touch, Patterson, who played 25 games with the Cats last season before going up to Oakland, said a championship would be even better.

"We're all in this together, grinding it out each and every day," he said. "To be able to see it through and be here for it, that would definitely be special."

Weiser Shuts Hounds Down

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

If the RockHounds thought it was tough to hit into the wind at Citibank Ballpark ... and it was ... hitting against Tulsa's Keith Weiser was even tougher. Weiser escaped a first-inning jam and never looked back, retiring 20 batters in-a-row at one point, as Tulsa won a battle of division leaders, 6-1, Saturday night.

The Drillers took a 3-0 lead in the top of the first but, three batters into the home half of the inning, the RockHounds had the bases loaded and no one out. Matt Spencer then sent a fly ball to right. While not hit hard enough to get out of the park, the ball appeared to be hit deep enough for a sacrifice fly. By the time Mother Nature was through with it, the fly ball caught in shallow right, with no damage done. Weiser then snared Shane Peterson's sharp grounder back up the middle, saving a hit and a run, throwing home for the force out. The Tulsa lefty would not allow another base runner until Josh Donaldson's 2-out single in the seventh.

Of the 20 consecutive batters Weiser retired, a dozen outs came on fly balls to the outfield and going nowhere ... "runnin' against the wind."

Weiser went 7.0 strong innings, allowing three hits and one walk for the win ... Kyle Middleton suffered his first loss after five, consecutive "quality starts" for the 'Hounds ... Alex Valdez extended his hit streak to nine games with a ninth-inning single ... but Peterson's 22-game on-base streak came to an end.

Texas League South

Frisco was the only South Division team to win, so the RoughRiders are back to within four games of the RockHounds. Corpus Christi stays seven games back and San Antonio is nine games behind the RockHounds. Tulsa took over first place in the North with the win, leading NW Arkansas by one game. There are 16 games remaining in the 2009 Texas League regular season (nine at home & seven on the road for the RockHounds).

The RockHounds and Tulsa are the top two teams, overall, in the 2009 Texas League. The 'Hounds are a league-best 69-55, and the Drillers are 68-56.

Popcorn, Peanuts, Fresh Cut Grass

The RockHounds are home at Citibank Ballpark Sunday and Monday, hosting the Tulsa Drillers, AA affiliate of the Colorado Rockies. The RockHounds open a one-week road trip (Corpus Christi and Frisco) Tuesday, and conclude the regular season with a critical, one-week home stand September 1-7.

Reminder: RockHounds Monday-Saturday home games in August and September will start at 6:30 p.m..

For tickets, groups, picnics, youth teams of the night and more ... call the RockHounds office at 520-2255. The Citibank Ballpark box office will be open all day, and through the games, each night of the home stand. RockHounds Radio The 'Hounds' new radio home is Jack-FM (102.1-FM). RockHounds broadcasts are also available online. Look for the link to Jack-FM on the RockHounds' web site ... then click "Jack On The Box." Broadcast time from Citibank Ballpark Sunday evening is 5:45.

Drillers end RockHounds win streak

By Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter Telegram

Three batters into Saturday's game and it appeared Tulsa Drillers starter Keith Weiser was well on his way to a fifth straight atrocious start.

The Midland RockHounds had tagged two base hits and worked a walk to load the bases on Weiser with no outs. Weiser not only got out of the inning unscathed, he went on to retire 20 consecutive batters. Behind Weiser's effort, the Drillers put an end to the RockHounds' three-game winning streak with a 6-1 victory at Citibank Ballpark.

"He could have folded and let the inning blow up on us and they could have tied the score or taken he lead, but he settled down," Drillers manager Ron Gideon said.

Weiser entered Saturday having allowed 28 runs in his previous four starters, spanning 18 1/3 innings. But once he settled down against the 'Hounds, he looked as polished as any pitcher in the league. Letting his defense play behind him with the wind at his back, Weiser induced 14 outs in the air compared to six on the ground and one strikeout, while

shutting out the RockHounds over seven innings.

Weiser (8-13) faced the RockHounds in his last start and allowed six runs on 11 hits in six innings. It appeared the 'Hounds had his number again in the first inning.

Already trailing 3-0 after the top of the first inning, the RockHounds loaded the bases with base hits from Corey Wimberly and Josh Horton and a walk by Chris Carter. But a fly out, ground out and foul out later and Weiser was out of the inning.

"That was big," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said. "We want to be able to push across runs, but it didn't happen."

Weiser didn't look back from that point on. He was perfect his next five innings before allowing a single to Josh Donaldson in the seventh inning. But Weiser ended the inning with Donaldson standing on third and the Drillers leading 6-0.

A night after hitting four home runs, the RockHounds put plenty of balls in the air, but none came close to getting out. During Weiser's five perfect innings, the 'Hounds made 11 outs in the air.

Both Gideon and Bush said Weiser was a fly ball pitcher, so the 20 mph winds coming in from center field played to his advantage.

"He was around the zone, and he's always been a pitcher who stays around the zone," Bush said. "We hit some balls hard, but we didn't have anything to show for it."

Unlike Weiser, RockHounds starter Kyle Middleton (3-1) entered Saturday having won three of his last four starts and hadn't allowed more than two earned runs in a game.

By the time he left the game, the Drillers had touched him up for six runs. Middleton left the game after throwing 92 pitches to get through five innings, his shortest appearance of the season.

"The last time we faced Middleton, we lacked any kind of effectiveness off him. He shut us down," Gideon said. "We made some adjustments and when we were down in counts we didn't chase bad pitches."

Those adjustments worked as the Drillers scored three runs off him to start the game. They then tacked on three more runs in the fifth inning with a two-out rally.

Weiser was at 82 pitches after seven innings, but Gideon pulled him and let the bullpen finish off the victory. The RockHounds loaded the bases the final two innings, but managed to come away with only one run when Horton grounded into a costly double play in the eighth.

Gideon said after the game Weiser had been battling arm soreness and he needed to get his relievers some work anyway, so he didn't want to risk leaving Weiser out too long.

His main concern was putting Weiser in position to have a similar start his next time out.

"It should be a confidence booster for him," Gideon said.

'HOUND BITES: A night after hitting four home runs, the RockHounds didn't record a single extra base hit on Saturday. ... The RockHounds activated right-handed reliever Angel Garcia from the disabled list on Saturday and placed right-handed reliever Rocky Roquet on the disabled list to make room for Garcia on the active roster. Garcia (2-0, 4.00) pitched an inning of relief on Saturday. He hadn't made an appearance since June 14. "It was nice seeing him back on the mound and he pitched well," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said. ... Chris Carter went hitless for just the fourth time in his last 35 games, but still got on base with two walks. ... Shane Peterson's 22-game on-base streak ended Saturday with an 0-for-4 night. ... With a walk in the eighth inning, Archie Gilbert reached base for the 30th time in his last 33 games. ... Frisco picked up a game on Midland on Saturday, beating Northwest Arkansas, 3-2. The RoughRiders

now trail the RockHounds in the South Division by four games.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: RockHounds right-hander Tyson Ross (2-3, 6.33) takes the mound today in search of his first quality start since his Midland debut. After winning his first Double-A start, Ross has allowed 18 earned runs in 21 innings. He faced the Drillers his last time out and allowed three runs in four innings, giving up three hits and four walks while striking out none. Ross will go against Drillers right-hander Samuel Deduno (12-2, 2.56), who hasn't lost a decision since June 6 at Midland in a 2-1 game. By his standards, Deduno hit a rough patch in his first three starts in August, but his last time out, opposite Ross, he held the RockHounds scoreless over seven innings, striking out seven and walking only two.

Mitchell's Triple Powers Ports to Win

Stockton evens series with 8-7 victory against San Jose

STOCKTON, Calif.— Despite a grim start to the game, the Stockton Ports (56-69) overcame the San Jose Giants (80-45), 8-7, off an important three-RBI triple by Jermaine Mitchell.

The Ports got off to a rough start, making two errors and giving up four runs in the first inning. San Jose started the game with a double by center fielder Darren Ford. Tyler Graham then stepped up to the plate and hit the ball toward Ports starter Daniel Haigwood for a sacrifice. Haigwood slid to try to make a play, and bobbled fielding the ball to Ports first baseman Christian Vitters, allowing Graham to reach first. Left fielder Thomas Neal then walked to load the bases with no out.

Designated hitter Roger Kieschnick hit into a fielder's choice to put out Graham at second, and allowing Ford to score. Catcher Nestor Rojas then grounded to Vitters. Vitters threw the ball to get Kieschnick out at second, but the ball went into the outfield. Graham scored on the play and Kieschnick made it safely to second. With a runner on second and two out, third baseman Conor Gillaspie singled up the middle, brining home Kieschnick. Shortstop Brian Bocock kept things rolling with a bunt single, and first baseman C.J. Ziegler loaded the bases for the second time in the inning with a walk. While Ryan Lormand was at the plate, Haigwood threw a wild pitch, which allowed Gillaspie to score. Lormand flew out to end the frame and give the Giants a 4-0 lead.

The Ports answered back in the bottom of the first, making it 4-1. Left fielder Todd Johnson led off with a single, and advanced to third on a double by Steve Kleen. Right fielder Grant Desme brought home the first Stockton run with an RBI single.

The Giants scored their fifth run of the game in the third inning. Bocock scored on an RBI double by Ziegler to make it 5-1.

The Ports cut the lead back to three in the bottom of the third. Johnson led off with a single, and moved to second on a walk to Kleen. Desme hit into a fielder's choice, which put out Johnson at third. With runners at first and second and one out, catcher Yusuf Carter stepped up to the plate. A wild pitch by Giants starter Paul Oseguera allowed both runners to advance. Carter grounded out, but Kleen scored on the play to make it 5-2. Second baseman Frank Martinez flew out to end the inning.

Graham slammed his eighth home run of the season, a two-run shot, to the right field corner in the fourth frame. Haigwood was removed following the home run in favor of Jamie Richmond. Richmond retired the first three batters he faced in order to get out of the inning.

Heading into the bottom of the fourth, the Ports were down, 7-2. But the Ports cut the lead again by adding a pair of runs. Designated hitter Kala Ka'aihue led off with a walk, and moved to third on a double by Vitters. Mitchell then singled to bring home Ka'aihue. Johnson reached on a fielder's choice that put out Mitchell at second, but allowed Vitters to score.

The Ports added four runs in the fifth, to pull ahead, 8-7. Desme led off the frame with his second single of the game. Carter singled and Martinez walked to load the bases. But then Ka'aihue grounded out and Vitters struck out. Shortstop Dusty Coleman walked, and San Jose manager Andy Skeels argued the call with home plate umpire Bronson Martinez.

Martinez ejected Skeels, who continued to argue with Martinez and base umpire Antonio Gutierrez for several minutes. Following the ejection, Mitchell stepped up to the plate, and knocked a triple down the left field line to clear the bases. Shane Keough pinch hit for Johnson, and walked. Kleen flew out to end the inning.

But the Ports had secured the lead, and due to stellar relief from their bullpen, Stockton left the diamond victors on Saturday night.

Richmond struck out five in 3.0 hitless innings of work. He picked up the win for the contest, and Mickey Storey picked up his ninth save of the season. Derrick Gordon and Jason Ray also threw a scoreless inning apiece in the contest.

The Ports will look to secure the series victory with a win in a rubber match on Sunday at 6:05 p.m. at Banner Island Ballpark. LHP Pedro Figueroa (2-4, 3.91) will take the hill for Stockton, while LHP Craig Clark (14-2, 3.01) will start for San Jose.

PORTS HANG ON FOR VICTORY

By Kevin Niendorf, Stockton Record, 8/23/09

STOCKTON - Mounting frustration experienced by the Ports this season against the San Jose Giants finally ended - for at least one game anyway - Saturday as the Ports dumped the Giants 8-7 at Stockton Ballpark.

The night's planned fireworks after the game started early when Giants manager Andy Skeels, furious over a ball-four call by the umpire that loaded the bases, was immediately ejected. However, Skeels spent 10 minutes in the faces of both umpires before leaving the field much to the delight of the 4,046 fans.

Just 24 hours earlier, Ports skipper Aaron Nieckula was ejected for arguing a called third strike that ended a critical eighth-inning rally. The Ports lost 4-3 Friday after leaving the bases packed in that inning.

On Saturday, following the walk to No. 9-hitter Dusty Coleman, a triple by Jermaine Mitchell cleared the bases and gave the Ports an 8-7 lead. Gary Davenport, San Jose's hitting coach, immediately left the dugout and unsuccessfully argued that Mitchell's triple down the left-field line was actually foul.

"Once I got two strikes on me I just tried to drive the ball and put it in play," Mitchell said.

The Ports (31-24 second half, 56-69), losers of their last four games to the league-leading Giants by a combined five runs, held on for the win. The Ports are still seven games behind Bakersfield for the second wild-card seed.

The Giants roughed up Ports starter Daniel Haigwood in the first inning with four runs, two unearned, on three hits and a pair of Stockton errors. The Ports answered with an RBI single by Grant Desme, scoring Todd Johnson (single), to make it 4-1. Each team added a run in the third inning before a two-run homer in the fourth inning by San Jose's Tyler Graham made the score 7-2.

Again, the Ports answered with a pair of runs as Mitchell singled in Kala Ka'aihue (walk) and Christian Vitters scored on a fielder's choice out by Johnson.

Down 7-4 going into the fifth inning, the Ports' Desme and Yusuf Carter opened the inning with singles. An infield-fly rule out by Ka'aihue and a strikeout by Vitters kept Desme and Carter from scoring. Coleman then drew his walk and the Ports took the lead.

"Haigwood didn't have his best stuff," said relief pitcher Jaimie Richmond (2-0, 4.09 ERA), who earned the win with three innings of no-hit ball with five strikeouts. "I tried to throw strikes and give the team a chance to turn it around. It was great to see (Mitchell) get that (triple)."

The Giants threatened in the top of the ninth as leadoff batter Thomas Neal singled and stole second base. He reached third by tagging up on a ball to the outfield. With one out, relief pitcher Mickey Storey got Nestor Rojas to ground out and Conor Gillaspie to fly out, ending the game.

"It was nice to hold the lead today," Richmond said. "You know the game's over when Mickey comes in. He doesn't have too many bad innings."

Today's game

Giants at Ports

First pitch: 6:05 p.m., Stockton Ballpark

Broadcast: 1420-AM

Cougars Suffer 4th Consecutive Loss

Kane County drops ninth series out of last 11 with Saturday defeat

BELOIT, Wisc. – The Kane County Cougars fell to seven games under .500 Saturday night with a 4-0 loss against the Beloit Snappers at Pohlman Field. The Cougars were held hitless until the seventh inning and managed four hits in the game.

Kenny Smalley (9-7) took a loss for the third straight start. He gave up four runs -- two earned -- on five hits over 5 2/3 innings and fanned eight. He yielded a two-run homer in the third and two unearned tallies with two outs in the sixth before leaving. Jose Guzman worked 1 1/3 innings, and Justin Murray turned in a perfect eighth.

Leonardo Gil's leadoff seventh-inning single broke up the no-hit bid by Beloit's Liam Hendriks (2-4). Hendriks finished the seventh and gave up one hit, walked one and struck out five. The Cougars tried to rally late in the game but stranded two in the eighth and two in the ninth. Billy Bullock posted his seventh save.

The Cougars (24-31, 65-60) and Snappers (24-31, 51-74) are playing each other eight times in a row. They conclude the Wisconsin portion of the stretch Sunday afternoon at 2 CT. Anivoris Ramirez (3-2, 3.47) will face Brad Tippett (8-6, 3.09). Then the two clubs play a four-game series at Elfstrom Stadium starting Monday night.