

A's News Clips, Monday, August 24, 2009

Cust blasts two homers to help A's, Tomko top Tigers

By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune

Jack Cust, who had hit just one home run in his previous 26 games, belted two on Sunday, supporting another excellent pitching performance by Brett Tomko as the Athletics closed out a nine-game homestand with a 9-4 victory over Detroit.

With 17,690 fans watching, Cust delivered a 3-run homer to left to cap a four-run third inning, then hit a solo shot to right leading off the sixth to power the A's past the AL Central-leading Tigers.

The A's designated hitter hadn't done much of it since the club traded Matt Holliday on July 24, batting just .215 with one homer over that span. But his three-hit game Sunday was his second in three days.

Tomko, signed by the A's earlier this month after being released by the New York Yankees, scattered three hits and allowed just one run over six innings to post his second win in six days for Oakland. He had struck out just 12 batters in 25 2/3 innings all season, but fanned eight Tigers.

The 36-year-old right-hander made his A's debut last Monday, pitching five scoreless innings against the Yankees in a 3-0 victory. In 11 innings for the A's, he has allowed eight hits and one run.

The Tigers led 1-0 when Curtis Granderson opened the game with a home run off the right-field pole, his 21st career leadoff homer. One pitch earlier, Granderson hit a foul ball near the A's dugout that catcher Landon Powell could not haul in.

Powell later redeemed himself by throwing out Carlos Guillen on a first-inning steal attempt, then picking off Alex Avila at first base in the fifth, both ending innings after strikeouts.

Then, with the A's clinging to a 5-4 lead in the eighth, Powell blasted the club's second three-run homer of the day. Oakland had hit just one three-run homer since July 22.

Cliff Pennington added a solo homer later in the inning.

Miguel Cabrera hit a two-run homer in the eighth for the Tigers, the 200th of his career.

The A's, 4-5 on the homestand, begin a three-game series at Seattle on Monday night.

A's Notes: Bailey's knee no longer causing him any trouble

By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune

Bailey's knee no longer causing him any trouble

Rookie closer Andrew Bailey was walking around the A's clubhouse before Sunday's game with his left knee heavily wrapped. It was just business as usual for the 25-year-old All-Star, who said he was feeling great the morning after his first pitching appearance in five days.

"The knee's not sore at all," Bailey said. "It's been feeling pretty good for two or three weeks now."

Bailey, who leads major league rookies with 18 saves, said it was merely game circumstances that had kept him off the mound since last Monday. He pitched a scoreless inning and picked up the victory Saturday night.

"I warmed up a few times," Bailey said of the three games when he was not used.

A's manager Bob Geren confirmed that Bailey's knee is fine, and that he asked him before Saturday's game whether he needed an inning to stay sharp, even if the situation didn't call for him. He was needed, then got Sunday off.

Bailey said he tweaked the knee about a month-and-a-half into the season. "I was walking up the steps and felt a little pinch," he said.

n Geren said he won't be surprised if Jason Giambi provides the Colorado Rockies with some extra offensive pop over the final month of the season.

"He's hit quite a few homers in his career. He's definitely got some more in him," Geren said.

Multiple sources have reported that Giambi, 38, has signed with Colorado and will report to its Triple-A team in Colorado Springs, before joining the Rockies when rosters expand Sept. 1.

n Catcher Kurt Suzuki, who delivered the game-winning hit Saturday, got Sunday off. Suzuki leads the AL with 904 2/3 innings behind the plate.

Geren said first baseman Daric Barton, who came off the disabled list Friday after rehabbing a hamstring injury, has no pain in his leg. Barton is 2-for-9 in three games since returning.

The A's have won two straight to finish the homestand at 4-5.

Jenkins: Cust's day worthy of a big stage

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer

The Detroit Tigers came to Oakland in first place, and they left town that way, but they gained few admirers. They irritated manager Jim Leyland with their lack of clutch hitting, and they were no match for a startling power display Sunday as the A's closed out the three-game series with a 9-4 win.

Heading into this beautiful East Bay afternoon, the A's had belted only one three-run homer in a month. By day's end, they had a pair, by Jack Cust and Landon Powell, along with a solo shot from Cliff Pennington and Cust's second homer of the day. To top off this venture into the unlikely, they beat the Central Division leaders with journeyman Brett Tomko, who pitched a solid six innings.

Cust's performance deserved a bigger stage, something more relevant than Oakland's stadium of the doomed. It belonged in Boston, Colorado or anywhere else the home fans are consumed by a pennant race. As it was, there were 17,690 witnesses to the type of day you'd associate with the Ryan Howards and Prince Fielders of the world.

Stepping to the plate in a 1-1 tie in the third, Cust hit one of the most impressive opposite-field homers of the season. Facing Rick Porcello, touted by the Tigers as the leading candidate for American League Rookie of the Year, Cust imposed his dead-uppercut swing on a fastball and sent it several rows deep into the bleachers above the out-of-town scoreboard in left-center - way, way out.

In the sixth, with Porcello still out there, Cust came back with a searing line drive to dead right field, a solo shot that left the impression of a speeding bullet. Nobody around baseball pays much attention to Cust, given the Oakland malaise and his .240 batting average, but when he connects, it's one of the prettiest sights in the game.

The Tigers' afternoon didn't look so bad on paper, including home runs by Curtis Granderson and Miguel Cabrera (career No. 200), but in truth, it's a good thing they gave utilityman Ryan Raburn a start Friday night (when he homered twice). Beyond that, they came up badly short, and lost a road series for the 10th consecutive time. When Detroit writers mentioned the lack of hitting to Leyland, he snapped, "That's been a problem for us all year."

It hasn't exactly been the A's strong suit, but there are hints of better days in the minor leagues. The A's haven't yet stated this season's strategy on September call-ups, but if they'd care to jack up their attendance - from the standpoint of sheer curiosity - they'll strongly consider Brett Wallace and Chris Carter as part of the mix.

Wallace is the robust youngster with refrigerators for thighs, a prospect said to be the best pure hitter in last year's draft. The A's barely missed taking Wallace (they selected Jemile Weeks one slot ahead of St. Louis, which chose Wallace), but they landed him in the Matt Holliday trade last month. Now he's in the process of devouring the Pacific Coast League. He went 0-for-4 Sunday, but had built an eight-game hitting streak (15-for-36) that included five home runs.

The A's need to find out if Wallace can play third base. A number of scouts don't think so, ticketing him as a first base-DH type, but with Adam Kennedy subbing (quite capably) and Eric Chavez's future in serious doubt, the A's would love to establish some permanence at that position.

Besides, the A's might have a dandy first base-DH option in Carter, an imposing right-handed hitter who, thank goodness, doesn't remind anyone of Daric Barton, Dan Johnson or the latter-day Jason Giambi. The A's need a new look in this slot (no offense to Cust), and Carter is having an all-world season in the Double-A Texas League, hitting .335 with 23 HRs and 98 RBIs.

I don't know about most A's fans, but I'd pay to see Wallace and Carter get a taste of the big leagues next month. Giddy afternoons like Sunday's don't come around often enough.

Ratto: For A's, disaster is an art form

Ray Ratto, Chronicle Staff Writer

It would be just the A's luck to watch Jason Giambi rediscover the art of hitting a fastball in Colorado. Then again, who better to have more bad luck than a team that has been up to its collective eyelids in it all year?

With all due respect to Sunday's 9-4 win over Detroit, this has been in many ways a far worse year for the A's than even 2008, a year so bad that Lew Wolff leaned on Billy Beane to sign a few players who people outside the Baseball America subscription list actually recognized. Everything the A's have tried has run the gamut from lame to disastrous to coroner-bait.

Matt Holliday didn't become Frank Thomas and was traded so that he might cure the St. Louis Cardinals. Huston Street was part of the big offseason deal to get Holliday and is now one of the three best closers in the National League. Orlando Cabrera was a bargain signing who proved the adage "You get what you pay for," and is now in Minnesota.

Eric Chavez's Give Health a Try campaign failed within a month. Justin Duchscherer, the putative staff ace at one time, lost the entire year and now is being treated for clinical depression. The young starting staff, save Brett Anderson, has not inspired, the lineup - save Adam Kennedy and Kurt Suzuki - has been drab, and closer Andrew Bailey is third in wins.

Oh, and attendance is down another 12 percent off last year's plummeting total, the Fremont stadium died the death it deserved, and the San Jose plan is relying on public money at a time when there is no such thing.

In other words, Giambi just might have positioned himself to become the first Comeback Player of the Year to come back in the same year. If nothing else, he's no longer under the grisly thunderhead that is A's '09, and even if he has to kill a week in Colorado Springs, there are worse things. Just ask him.

A's power way to win; Cust slugs two

Four homers, Tomko's solid start are highlights of rubber game

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's may have taken the term "getaway day" a little too literally Sunday.

With four balls finding their way out of the yard for Oakland, the team essentially turned it into get-out-of-the-park day.

Whatever gets a win, manager Bob Geren always says.

That they got, as the four dingers highlighted a 9-4 victory over the Tigers that gave the A's their second straight win and first series win of the nine-game homestand which concluded Sunday.

"A win's a win," Geren said, "and I'm happy with it."

So was his team -- and rightfully so, considering all but two players in the starting lineup snagged at least one hit in the series finale.

Two of the long balls came from Jack Cust, who enjoyed a 3-for-3 day with a walk. The A's designated hitter, who homered Wednesday against New York to snap a 26-game homerless streak, seems to be reintroducing himself to fans as the power hitter he knows he's always been.

"I'm feeling a little bit better," Cust said. "Well, a lot better. I'm finding a little something in my swing and not thinking too much out there.

"I'm just looking for good pitches and staying away from the bad ones."

Cust had his picking against Detroit starter Rick Porcello, who took the loss after allowing five runs -- including both of Cust's shots -- on eight hits with one strikeout and one walk.

"He couldn't keep the ball in the ballpark," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. "Other than that, he was pretty good."

Cust, who was promoted to the five-hole in the lineup after spending a week batting seventh, knocked his first homer -- a three-run shot -- out in the third following an RBI single by Rajai Davis and a walk issued to Ryan Sweeney.

"I just fell behind him," Porcello explained of his approach to Cust. "The first one, I got behind with a slider and changeup out of the zone. Then I left a fastball right over the plate, and he jumped on it."

It was deja vu in the sixth when Cust led off the inning with his 19th home run of the season.

"The second one," Porcello said, "down 3-1 [in the count], it was pretty much the same story. He just turned on it."

At that point, the A's offense had jumped out to a 4-1 lead and was already in the process of overshadowing a tremendous effort from the right-handed arm of veteran Brett Tomko, who gave Oakland six strong innings of work.

The 36 year-old journeyman, who was released by the Yankees on July 29 and signed by the A's on Aug. 5, surrendered a leadoff home run to Curtis Granderson in the first but allowed just two hits and two walks thereafter while fanning eight.

"I felt pretty good," said Tomko, who is 2-0 with a 0.75 ERA in two starts since being called up from Triple-A Sacramento on Aug. 17. "It's been a long road for me, especially this year. When you get run support like that, it definitely makes it easier to be aggressive with hitters knowing you have some room to make mistakes."

Despite the wiggle room, Tomko didn't make any mistakes after the first-inning homer. He threw 87 pitches -- 55 for strikes -- and appeared right at ease with catcher Landon Powell, whom he had never thrown to before Sunday.

"I've basically gone from zero to 90 pitches in three weeks," Tomko said. "It's been an accelerated Spring Training for me. I don't really feel 36 -- maybe a little younger."

His fellow pitchers, however, couldn't quite solve the Tigers lineup as well. After Brad Ziegler gave up a seventh-inning run, Craig Breslow allowed a hit to the only batter he faced before Michael Wuertz had his scoreless innings streak of 9 1/3 snapped thanks to a two-run homer in the eighth by Miguel Cabrera -- his 200th career dinger -- to make it a 5-4 game.

Luckily for the worn-out bullpen, a couple of fresh-faced youngsters gave the A's back complete control over the game.

Both Powell and Cliff Pennington knocked out homers of their own in the eighth to seal the win. Powell, who had a 2-for-4 day while enjoying a rare start behind the plate, brought home three runs with his shot. Two batters later, Pennington got one out barely over the right-field wall off the Tigers' Ryan Perry.

"I like the idea that late in the game, we're close with a great team," Geren said. "The young guys did great today and I didn't have to use my closer there at the end.

"As a manager, it's a luxury to have two catchers who are good both defensively and offensively. Landon sure had a big hit there."

For Powell, the home run proved to be a bit of a relief.

"I've been feeling fine swinging the bat but haven't gotten the hits," he said. "A home run makes you feel a lot better.

"It's been a big adjustment for me here. As a guy in the Minors who played every day, it's been different. But if I keep playing like this, hopefully I'll be playing more and helping out the team."

The A's, who start a seven-game road trip through Seattle and Los Angeles on Monday, will take all the help they can get while facing the two division foes -- even if it's simply confidence.

"I don't know about momentum," Geren said, "but I do believe more in confidence. Some people see them as the same thing, but I'll take the confidence."

Suzuki to be back in lineup vs. Mariners

Oakland (55-68) at Seattle (63-61), 7:10 p.m. PT

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Just hours after delivering the game-winning hit in Saturday's 3-2 dramatic win over Detroit, Kurt Suzuki was back at the field -- just not on the field.

"Day game after a night game," manager Bob Geren explained before the A's took on the Tigers in Sunday's series finale. "Just giving him a chance to rest."

And when it comes to the A's starting catcher, there's never reason to debate whether he deserves a day off -- whether it be for mental or physical reasons.

Suzuki, who shared the A's lead in games played (148) last year, has started at catcher 101 times this season. The 25-year-old has also helped his team out offensively as designated hitter on seven occasions.

Even when Suzuki's name can't be found in the starting lineup, though, Geren often makes sure it's there on the scorecard by day's end.

"He never has a day off," the skipper said. "He's just not starting."

While Landon Powell got his 22nd starting nod behind the plate Sunday, Suzuki will be back commanding the game when the A's take on the Mariners in Seattle on Monday.

He enters the road series hitting .182 against Seattle on the season but hopes to carry momentum from Saturday's late-inning magic.

"He's been pressing a lot and trying too hard," Geren said of his catcher, who hit just .194 on the nine-game homestand. "Hopefully, that will boost his confidence a bit."

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Vin Mazzaro (4-8, 5.31 ERA)

In his last start, Mazzaro got out of a pair of bases-loaded jams to hold the Yankees to two runs (one earned) over five innings, allowing seven hits and striking out two. The rookie is 2-0 with a 3.52 ERA over his past three starts after going 0-8 with a 7.22 ERA in his previous 10. This will be Mazzaro's first start against the Mariners.

SEA: RHP Ian Snell (3-9, 5.60 ERA)

The fourth time was the charm for the right-hander acquired from the Pirates on July 29. In his best outing since the trade, Snell held the potent Tigers lineup to one run over 5 2/3 innings to notch his first win for his new club and his first win in the big leagues since June 17. Snell went with sinkers most of the way. A small tweak in his delivery seemed to help with his command. Opponents are batting .324 against him at Safeco Field.

Dribblers

Geren remains confident Bobby Crosby (strained left calf) will be able to come off the disabled list Sept. 2. "We want to make sure he's ready when he comes off," the skipper said, "and I think he will be." The A's infielder has yet to do any baseball activity. ... Dallas Braden, battling a left foot infection, did not throw again Sunday and it remains unclear when the lefty will be able to return to the starting rotation. ... Sidelined reliever Joey Devine, who played catch for the first time Aug. 15 since having right elbow surgery in April, will return home to Atlanta this week after having spent the nine-game homestand with the A's. ... Max Stassi, the A's fourth-round pick in this year's Draft, made his professional debut with the A's affiliate in the Arizona Rookie League on Saturday and went 0-for-1 at the plate with a walk and a strikeout playing catcher. ... Rajai Davis' stolen base in the seventh inning of Sunday's game gave him 27 on the year, which are the most by any A's player since Johnny Damon reached that number in 2001.

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


On television

- CSNCA

On radio

- KTRB 860, KDIA 1640 (Español)

Up next

- 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 
- Thursday: Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 6-12, 4.86) at Angels (Ervin Santana, 7-6, 6.13), 7:25 p.m. PT 

Hot-hitting Sweeney moved to three-hole

Outfielder takes spot of Suzuki, who gets day off

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Manager Bob Geren insists there's no special meaning behind Ryan Sweeney's promotion to the three-hole in Sunday's starting lineup against the visiting Tigers.

"[Kurt] Suzuki's not playing today," the skipper said before the rubber match of his team's three-game set against Detroit. "If he's not playing, he can't be in that spot. So that's the only reason Ryan is there."

Still, it's no secret Sweeney's left-handed bat is deserving of the move up in the lineup.

The A's outfielder entered Sunday's contest batting .333 (16-for-48) with seven extra-base hits over his last 13 games after collecting just 10 extra-base hits over his previous 57 games.

"He hasn't made any drastic changes," Geren offered. "Guys have hot streaks and cold streaks. One of the things I say about a lot of hitters who are swinging the bat well is they're able to use the whole field. Ryan's doing that.

"Some try to do too much in one direction, but if you're spreading your hits out, that makes you tough to pitch to."

Sweeney's success against the Tigers makes him all the more attractive to his manager, as he entered Sunday with a .333 career mark against Detroit. This season, the 24-year-old was 12-for-32 (.375) with a home run and four RBIs in eight games when facing the Tigers, prior to Sunday's game.

"He's been swinging the bat pretty well," Geren said. "He's had a lot of success against Detroit, so we'll see what he can do today."

With Sweeney in the three-hole, the left-handed-hitting Jack Cust was also moved up in the batting order to No. 5 after spending the past week hitting seventh.

"He moved up because Sweeney moved up," Geren said with a laugh. "It's kind of a domino effect. Plus, it diversifies the lineup and allows us to switch up the lefties and righties."

Cust entered the game 3-for-6 with an RBI and two walks in the series and 6-for-16 with two RBIs and five walks in the first eight games of a nine-game homestand.

Cust leads Athletics to win

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Detroit Tigers have managed to hold onto first place in the AL Central despite winning just eight of their last 23 road games. Manager Jim Leyland is hoping his offense wakes up before their road woes cost them.

Jack Cust homered twice and drove in four runs, Landon Powell hit a three-run homer and the Oakland Athletics beat the Tigers 9-4 on Sunday.

"We still didn't do too much offensively," Leyland said. "We didn't put it in play very well. You can't play that way in the middle of a pennant race. We made some mistakes. We missed a hit-and-run, we got picked off ... you can't do those things."

Brett Tomko (3-2) allowed one run and three hits in six innings to improve to 2-0 with a sparkling 0.82 ERA since he was promoted from Triple-A Sacramento on Aug. 17. Tomko signed a minor league deal with Oakland after he was designated for assignment by the Yankees on July 21.

"I basically went from zero pitches to 90 pitches in 3 1/2 weeks," Tomko said. "It was kind of an accelerated spring training for me. I went home and still worked out, played catch and threw bullpens. I was only curious about how my arm would react and it's been OK."

Cliff Pennington also homered and finished with two hits for the A's.

Miguel Cabrera had three hits, including his 200th homer, and drove in two as the Tigers lost for the third time in five games. Curtis Granderson also connected and Marcus Thames added a pinch-hit RBI single.

"Right now I don't feel good because we lost to a team we should have played better against," Cabrera said. "I do feel good about getting the opportunity to play every day. I feel fortunate."

Cabrera is the fifth player from Venezuela with at least 200 homers, joining Tony Armas, Bobby Abreu, teammate Magglio Ordonez and Andres Galarraga.

Rick Porcello (10-8) yielded five runs and eight hits in 5 1-3 innings for Detroit. The rookie right-hander was 1-0 with a 2.21 ERA in his four previous starts.

"He didn't have a brutal game. He couldn't keep the ball in the park," Leyland said. "Other than Cust he did pretty good."

The Tigers lost their 10th consecutive road series, last winning one June 8-11 at the Chicago White Sox.

"The offense has got to be better than its been but we've been talking about that for a while now," Leyland said. "Maybe we don't hit as good as I think we can. I'm beginning to wonder that maybe I got our hitting overrated. If you play good enough you win. If you don't, you get beat. We haven't played good enough on the road."

Granderson led off the game with his 24th homer but Oakland responded with four in the third. Rajai Davis tied it with an RBI single and Cust had a two-out, three-run shot to left.

"I ended up falling behind on him and ended up giving him a cookie over the plate," Porcello said. "The ball sailed over the plate and he was ready for it. He turned on it and that was that."

Cust led off the sixth with his 19th homer to make it 5-1.

"I feel a lot better since I found something in my swing," Cust said. "Now I'm not thinking as much and not missing pitches I was missing for about a month."

Thames singled home a run in the seventh and Cabrera added a two-run homer in the eighth as the Tigers pulled within one.

The A's clinched it with four runs in the eighth, three on Powell's drive and another on Pennington's homer.

NOTES: The A's are 11-10 in August after finishing the first four months with a losing record for the first time since 1993. ... Cust has six career multihomer games. ... Tomko's career record is 98-101. ... Granderson's shot was his fourth leadoff homer of the season and the 21st of his career. ... Porcello has an 8.71 ERA (10 runs in 10 1-3 innings) in Oakland. ... The Tigers won six of their first eight series away from Detroit.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento can't recover from early deficit

By Andrew Hazard, rivercats.com

Sacramento needed somebody to throw them a bone Sunday afternoon.

Despite a rough two days of travel and sleep-deprivation, the River Cats fell 7-5 to the Portland Beavers during Bark in the Ballpark at Raley Field.

Shown: *Sacramento's Aaron Cunningham races to third base as Portland's Sean Kazmar chases after the ball in shallow left field.*

Starters Jerome Williams and Cesar Ramos had nice movement on their pitches in the brisk air, and each pitcher matched the other with a 1-2-3 first inning.

The offense broke through in the second; unfortunately, it was the Beavers who scored all the runs. Catcher Eliezer Alfonzo hit one of the longest singles you will ever see, smashing the ball off the left-field wall. Alfonzo must have thought the blast was going to go over the fence because he had no chance of reaching second after a quick retrieval by left fielder Chris Denorfia. Sacramento was unable to relax for long as the always-dangerous center fielder Drew Macias hit a full-count two-run home run.

The River Cats tried to answer quickly as Aaron Cunningham led off the second inning with a double and moved to third on a sacrifice. Ramos went on to strike out catcher Anthony Recker, and Adrian Cardenas grounded out to Russ Adams at second, leaving Cunningham stranded 90 feet from home.

Portland's momentum carried into the third. Peter Ciofrone led off the inning with a walk, and moved to second on a sacrifice. Mike Baxter found a hole near third and was able to squeeze the ball past Brett Wallace as Ciofrone scored from second. Williams got out of the inning when designated hitter Valentino Pascucci grounded into a 5-4-3 double play.

The River Cats still looked sluggish after their 3 a.m. flight from Nashville for Saturday night's game (a 5-2 loss) and a

quick turnaround for Sunday's 1 p.m. start, as they trailed 4-0 through three innings.

Sacramento woke from its catnap in the fourth.

Cunningham led off the inning by reaching on an error by shortstop Sean Kazmar. After another infield hit by the River Cats, first baseman Jeff Baisley hit a rope to left field for an RBI double. Kazmar was the goat again when Recker reached first on another error from Kazmar. Then, Tony DeFrancesco's bunch played the way baseball is supposed to be played, as Cardenas grounded out to Baxter to score Matt Carson. The River Cats clawed back into the game when designated hitter Yung-Chi Chen grounded out to Ciofrone, whose only play was at first to throw out Chen. Baisley scored on the play, and Sacramento trailed 4-3 after four innings.

A wild pitch from River Cats reliever Michael Benacka allowed Baxter to score from third to make the score 5-3 in favor of the Beavers in the seventh. Baxter stepped up for Portland again in the eighth. This time it was Brad Kilby on the mound. Baxter hit a two-out double to left-center as former River Cat Danny Putnam came around to score. All the energy seemed to be sucked out of Raley Field, but as they always do, the River Cats would not go down quietly.

Cunningham hit an infield single off Edwin Moreno to begin an eighth-inning rally. Center fielder Matt Carson gave the Cats new life when he hit a two-run blast off Moreno to left to close within 6-5.

Henry Rodriguez came in the game in the ninth to keep the deficit at one. Huffman led off the inning with a double to center field, and Alfonzo had a mirror image hit to center for an RBI double to add an insurance run for the Beavers.

Eulogio De La Cruz entered in the ninth to close for Portland, and close out the game he did, sitting down Cardenas, Chen and Patterson with ease for his seventh save of the season.

Williams (4-5, 5.88 ERA) threw 5.0 innings, gave up five hits, four walks, four earned runs and had three strikeouts in defeat. The River Cats' top three batters in the order (Patterson, Denorfia and Wallace) went 0-for-11. Cunningham went 2-for-4 and scored twice. Carson also went 2-for-4 with two runs and two RBIs.

With the loss, Sacramento's magic number to clinch the division remains at four. The second-place Fresno Grizzlies, who trail Sacramento by 12.0 games, host the Tacoma Rainiers at 6:05 p.m.

The River Cats (80-48) take on the Portland Beavers again (56-73) on Monday. Sacramento right-hander Clayton Mortensen (8-7) is scheduled to take on left-hander Aaron Poreda (0-2) at 7:05 p.m.

Ross Shuts Down Drillers

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

RockHounds right-hander Tyson Ross played (pitched) some serious "role reversal" Sunday, leading the RockHounds to their Texas League best 70th win of the season.

In his last start, August 18 at Tulsa ... Tyson and the RockHounds were shut out by the Drillers' Samuel Deduno, who entered Sunday's game as the league's top pitcher (12-2, 2.56 ERA).

On Saturday ... Tulsa starter Keith Weiser allowed a hit in the first inning, but would not allow another until two men were out in the seventh inning, as Tulsa defeated the 'Hounds at Citibank Ballpark.

Role Reversal: On Sunday, Tyson Ross allowed a hit in the first inning and would not allow another until two men were out in the seventh inning, combining with Jon Hunton on a 3-hit shutout as the RockHounds defeated Tulsa, 5-0.

The losing pitcher? Deduno, who allowed four runs in 5.0 innings, suffering just his third loss all season. Two of his three defeats have come against the RockHounds at Citibank Ballpark.

Ross was sensational, going 7.0 innings and allowing just two hits and two walks while striking out four. Of the 21 outs he recorded, 15 were ground ball outs, a half-dozen of those coming on three double plays.

Josh Horton reached base all five times up, going 2-for-2 with three walks, two runs and two RBI to lead the RockHounds. Chris Carter went 2-for-4 and drove in two runs, bringing his season total to 98 RBI.

Frisco also won but, chances are, the RoughRiders figured they would certainly gain ground with the RockHounds facing the league's top pitcher in Deduno.

Texas League South

Frisco stays four games in back of the RockHounds ... while Corpus Christi now drops to eight games out of first after falling, 3-1 at Springfield. First half champion San Antonio, although nine games out, has its playoff ticket punched. Thanks to Frisco's win over Northwest Arkansas, Tulsa still holds a one-game lead in the North. There are 15 games remaining in the 2009 Texas League regular season (eight at home & seven on the road for the RockHounds).

The RockHounds now have a Texas League best 70-55 overall record.

Popcorn, Peanuts, Fresh Cut Grass

The RockHounds conclude their current home stand Monday evening, hosting the Tulsa Drillers, AA affiliate of the Colorado Rockies, at 6:30.

Beginning Tuesday, there are exactly two weeks ... 14 games ... remaining in the 2009 Texas League regular season. The 'Hounds are one road for the first week (Corpus Christi and Frisco) ... then back home at Citibank Ballpark September 1-7 for a critical, 7-game stay hosting San Antonio and Frisco.

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 Monday evening is 6:15.

Baseball: Ross, Hunton combine for 3-hitter in RockHounds' victory

Midland splits first two games with Drillers

By Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter Telegram

If a three-hit shutout was to take place at Citibank Ballpark on Sunday, it wouldn't have been a surprise if it belonged to Tulsa Drillers ace Samuel Deduno.

Instead, Tyson Ross stole the spotlight on the mound and combined with Jon Hunton for a three-hit shutout in a 5-0 Midland RockHounds victory. Deduno, in the process, took his first loss since June 6, which also came at Citibank.

"He was outstanding," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said of Ross. "He attacked the zone all game and it showed."

The game was a reversal of fortunes for both Deduno and Ross, who faced off six days earlier in Tulsa. In that game, Deduno (12-3) shut out the RockHounds over seven innings while Ross (3-3) completed just four innings of work.

This time around, though, it was Ross who shut out the Drillers for seven innings while Deduno exited after five uncharacteristic innings. Ross came into the game with a 6.33 ERA but, with a little help from his defense, he lowered it to 5.03 by the end of the night.

"I just wanted to come out and be myself and throw a lot of strikes," Ross said. "I just have to trust my stuff."

Ross faced the minimum through the first five innings and finished the night having retired 21 of the 23 batters he faced with only two hits and two walks allowed.

Thanks to three double plays turned by his defense, Ross was never in any immediate danger. Not until the sixth inning did the Drillers have a runner reach second base and it didn't happen again. Ross kept his defense on its toes by inducing 12 groundball outs.

"(Ross) worked quick and didn't walk too many guys, so it kept us in the game," said RockHounds shortstop Josh Horton, who started all three double plays.

Ross' performance was his best since his promotion to Double-A in late July and it came after allowing 18 earned runs his last four outings.

Bush said pitching coach Scott Emerson worked with Ross on feeling confident in his pitches and it appeared Emerson's message finally clicked against the Drillers.

"He just has to trust his stuff is good enough to get outs when he pitches in the zone," Bush said. "He just has to maintain an aggressive mindset, mentality."

For Deduno, though, as dominant as he's been at times this season, his control problems came back to cost him against the RockHounds. He allowed two of his five walks in the first inning as the 'Hounds loaded the bases on him before he escaped with no harm done.

The next inning, though, he got in trouble again and his defense didn't help him any.

With two outs and runners on first and second, Horton singled to shallow left field and Bush gave Matt Sulentic the green light to score. Drillers left fielder Cole Garner's throw from the outfield looked on line to easily get Sulentic out at the plate, but third baseman Darin Holcomb cut the throw to get Wimberly in a rundown.

Wimberly likely would have been tagged out, but shortstop Danny Sandoval bumped him, awarding Wimberly third base and moving Horton to second base with Chris Carter up next. Carter came through with his 97th and 98th RBI of the season with a single to left to give the 'Hounds a 3-0 lead.

Horton was 2-for-2 in the game with three walks, two runs and two RBI while Wimberly and Carter also had two-hit games.

In the fifth inning, Deduno's defense let him down again as a dropped foul ball and a bobbled would-be double play ball resulted in a fourth RockHounds run.

Nursing a 5-0 lead, Hunton relieved Ross and retired six of the seven batters he faced to clinch the win for Ross and give the RockHounds their second victory against Deduno this season.

"He's beat us twice, too," said Bush of Deduno. "You just have to take advantage of the opportunities he gives you. When he missed a couple times, we took advantage."

'HOUND BITES: With his two-run single in the second inning, Chris Carter recorded a hit for the 32nd time in his last 36 games. ... The RockHounds turned three double plays on Sunday, all of which of the 6-4-3 variety. In their short time together, shortstop Josh Horton and second baseman Jemile Weeks have formed a strong bond up the middle. "It's good," Horton said. "We joke around because we actually played against each other in college. But it's a lot of fun and he's a great second baseman." ... Although RockHounds starter Tyson Ross was going up against one of the best pitchers in the Texas League on Sunday in Samuel Deduno, he said he doesn't spend much time worrying about who the opposing pitcher is. "I don't have to hit against him, so it doesn't matter to me," Ross said. ... Neither Tulsa nor Midland recorded a single extra base hit on Sunday. Tulsa only had one runner reach second base.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: The RockHounds' best pitcher the second half of the season, Graham Godfrey (11-6, 3.54) will start today's series finale with the Drillers. Godfrey is unbeaten in his last seven starts, going 4-0 with a 3.63 ERA during that span. He went over the 100-strikeout plateau his last start and is only 22 punchouts shy of a season high in his third minor league season. Godfrey's counterpart will be Drillers left-hander Brandon Durden (6-2, 2.90). Since his promotion from Single-A Modesto, Durden hasn't put up sparkling numbers (26 strikeouts to 20 walks in 80 2/3 innings), but he's kept Tulsas from crossing the plate and, as a result, he's gone 5-0 in his last eight starts with a 2.76 ERA. He did allow four earned runs in his last start at Frisco, but took a no-decision.

Giants Rally Late for 7-2 Win over Ports

Stockton falls to San Jose in final regular season game

STOCKTON, Calif.— The Stockton Ports (56-70) had a narrow 1-0 lead until the sixth inning, when the San Jose Giants (81-45) offense came to life. The Giants defeated the Ports, 7-2, at Banner Island Ballpark.

Ports starter Pedro Figueroa held the Giants to just three hits in 5.0 scoreless innings, walking five and fanning six. Reliever Leonardo Espinal picked up his second blown save and his third loss, giving up three runs in 1.1 innings. The Giants collected four runs off Nick Walters in the eighth frame.

The Ports were the first to score, pulling ahead, 1-0, in the bottom of the second. With one out, designated hitter Yusuf Carter singled. He came home on a double by second baseman Frank Martinez, which dropped near the Ports bullpen in left center field.

Figueroa loaded the bases by walking three San Jose batters in the third, but induced Roger Kieschnick to fly out to end the frame and get out of trouble.

The Giants also stranded a pair in scoring position in the fourth. Catcher Nestor Rojas walked to start the inning, and moved to third when shortstop Brian Bocock doubled off the Bank of Stockton sign in left field. But Figueroa knuckled down to strike out David Maroul for the second out. Then designated hitter Ryan Lormand hit the ball to center field and Ports outfield Jermaine Mitchell made a terrific diving catch to end the inning and prevent San Jose from scoring two runs.

The Giants posted their first two runs in the top of the sixth, as Espinal came out of the pen to pitch for Stockton. Third baseman Conor Gillaspie singled to lead things off. Bocock walked, and both runners advanced to scoring position on a sacrifice by Maroul. Lormand then hit the ball to first baseman Christian Vitters, and Vitters threw home to try to put out Gillaspie. But the throw went wild, and both Gillaspie and Bocock scored, and Lorman went to second on the throwing error. Following the error, the Ports retired the next two batters.

A solo home run by Steve Kleen, his sixth with Stockton, tied the game 2-2 in the bottom of the sixth. But the Ports did not score after that, putting just three more batters on base after that inning.

An RBI single by Gillaspie in the seventh made it 3-2, and the Giants pulled ahead 7-2 in the eighth. With one out, Walters issued two consecutive walks and a single to load the bases. Left fielder Thomas Neal slammed a two-RBI double down the left field line. Walters was pulled from the game in favor of Lance Sewell. Sewell faced off against Kieschnick, and Kieschnick notched a two-RBI triple to center field. After issuing a walk to Rojas, Sewell retired the next two batters to get out of the jam.

But the damage had been done. The Ports were unable to get a runner past first base in the last three innings of the game, and dropped the series.

The Ports set off for their last road trip of the season. They will take on the Bakersfield Blaze at Bakersfield on Monday at 7:15 p.m. RHP Scott Hodsdon (6-9, 5.53) will start for Stockton, while RHP Ryan Tatusko (6-6, 4.56) will start for Bakersfield.

Ports' playoff chances continue to fade

By [Jagdeep Dhillon](#), Stockton Record, 8/24/09

STOCKTON - The circumstances were eerily familiar for the Stockton Ports on Sunday evening, and so were the results.

The San Jose Giants continued their season-long domination of the Ports by scoring all of their runs in the sixth, seventh and eighth innings to get a 7-2 victory before 2,621 fans at Stockton Ballpark. The Giants have won 24 of 34 games

against the Ports this season, including 10 of 17 at Stockton. Stockton's failures against San Jose have hampered their playoff hopes as much as anything this year, with the Giants taking seven one-run decisions.

"They're just the better team," Stockton manager Aaron Nieckula said. "They execute it well on offense and defense and pitch it well."

The Ports have now lost eight of their past 10 games and are eight games behind San Jose in the second-half Northern Division race and eight games behind Bakersfield for the California League's final playoff spot. Stockton does have six games remaining against the Blaze in the final two weeks of the season.

"We have to play it out hard," Nieckula said. "Finish strong, whether we win or lose."

Nieckula blamed an ice-cold offense for the current losing streak, as the Ports (31-25 second half, 56-70) have scored three or fewer runs in all of the losses.

Stockton starter Pedro Figueroa earned his third consecutive no decision despite pitching five shutout innings. Figueroa's wildness limited his innings as he walked five and struck out six.

The Ports managed just six hits against San Jose starter Craig Clark and two relievers. Clark (15-2) allowed two runs on five hits in six innings to get the win.

Thomas Neal and Roger Kieschnick provided San Jose with the offense it needed against Stockton relievers Leonardo Espinal and Nick Walters. Neal finished 2 for 3 with two doubles, two runs and two RBI, while Kieschnick went 2 for 5 with a two-run triple in the eighth. Kieschnick said the Giants have played well in late innings all season and they are confident coming from behind, as they did twice this weekend.

The Giants (39-17 second half, 81-45) have been the dominant team in the Cal League all season, and they act like it.

"We come out every day and we expect to win whenever we step on the field," Neal said. "We put in a hard work this year and things have come together, especially against (Stockton)."

Cougars Win Finale, Snap Skid at Four

Ramirez leads Kane County to victory in road trip finale

BELOIT, Wisc. – Anvioris Ramirez pitched six shutout innings for his third straight quality start, and Franklin Hernandez and Chris Berroa each had two hits as the Kane County Cougars beat the Beloit Snappers, 3-2, Sunday afternoon in front of 1,427 at Pohlman Field. The victory snapped the Cougars' losing streak at four, and they finished 2-6 on an eight-game, nine-day road trip.

Ramirez (4-2) has won three outings in a row and has posted a quality start five times in seven tries as a Cougar. He scattered six hits, walked one and fanned three in the victory. The Cougars never trailed in the game, as newcomer Conner Crumbliss drove in Berroa in the third against Brad Tippett (8-7) to make it 1-0. Then in the sixth Hernandez nailed an RBI double and scored on a single by Carlos Arrieche for a 3-0 game.

Scott Deal replaced Ramirez in the seventh and gave up one run, and Trey Barham yielded one run in the eighth to cut it to 3-2. Daniel Thomas handled the ninth and struck out two straight hitters to notch his third save.

The Cougars (25-31, 66-60) and Snappers (24-32, 51-75) now shift their eight-game head-to-head stretch to Elfstrom Stadium. They begin another four-game set Monday night at 6:30 CT. Mathieu Leblanc-Poirier (3-6, 4.20) will face Winston Marquez (0-1, 4.00).

Max Stassi joins Canadians at 11th hour

By Rob Fai / Vancouver Canadians

(Volcanoes Stadium - Keizer, OR) - Less than two days from watching **OF/INF Conner Crumbliss** get promoted to Kane County (A), the Athletics send highly touted 4th round draft pick **C Max Stassi** to join the Canadians on the road in Oregon on Sunday.

Arriving at Volcanoes Stadium at 2pm, Stassi had little time to get acclimatized to his new surroundings as the Yuba City, California product was issued his #37 jersey and was told he will likely be in the line-up on Monday as the C's prepare to face the Northwest League's top team, Salem-Keizer for three straight starting tonight (Sunday).

Stassi was drafted by the Oakland Athletics in the fourth round of the 2009 First-Year Player Draft after a standout high school tenure at Yuba City High School in Yuba City, California.

The 18-year old Stassi hit .538 with 11 home runs and 38 RBI this year and was named the Tri-County Conference Co-Player of the Year in California.

The 5-10, 205-pound right-handed hitter finished his high school career with a .513 batting average.

Stassi was ranked 30th overall by Baseball America just days prior to the 2009 draft, and with the A's meeting his contract demands keeping him from attending UCLA on a scholarship, many baseball analysts are calling this signing one of the top steals in this year's draft.

Stassi will join catchers Ryan Ortiz and Gabriel Ortiz for the final 15 games of the 2009 regular season.