

A's News Clips, Friday, August 28, 2009

Cahill lifts A's over Angels

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Trevor Cahill made his major league debut at Angel Stadium on April 7 and since then has experienced the peaks and valleys expected of a rookie.

He returned to the same mound Thursday night and delivered the finest outing of his brief big league career, shutting out the Los Angeles Angels for seven innings as the A's hung a 2-0 defeat on the American League West leaders before a crowd of 43,139.

Cahill walked his first two batters but set down 20 of the next 22 and certainly looked strong enough to pitch deeper. But his back began tightening up in the sixth, and manager Bob Geren took him out before the eighth inning as a precaution.

Cahill (7-12) allowed Vladimir Guerrero's two-out single in the fourth and Jeff Mathis' leadoff double in the sixth for his only hits allowed and had two strikeouts in a 98-pitch outing.

Michael Wurtz delivered a perfect eighth inning and Andrew Bailey converted his 14th straight save opportunity in the ninth.

After the early walks "he was sensational," Geren said of Cahill. "He keeps getting better. He's getting a feel for his slider and changeup."

Cahill helped combat his first-inning wildness by picking off Chone Figgins at second base, and he was off from there, snapping a six-start drought without a win.

"I was able to keep them off-balance with my changeup," Cahill said. "And keeping the ball down is the biggest key for me. "... This was the best my two-seam fastball (sinker) has been in a while."

Angels No. 3 hitter Torii Hunter agreed.

"He had the ball moving like crazy," Hunter said. "He has one of the best sinkers in the game."

Ryan Sweeney supplied the offense on a night when the A's, as is customary, couldn't get much going against Angels right-hander Ervin Santana.

Sweeney crushed a deep home run to right-center in the second. The lanky outfielder, who entered the night with the AL's third-lowest slugging percentage (.374) among full-time players, has hit the ball with more authority of late.

After singling in the fourth, Sweeney hustled out a triple in the sixth and finished a double short of the cycle.

Daric Barton plated Sweeney in the sixth with a single to make it 2-0.

Sweeney has six homers, and three have come in the past 18 games.

Geren liked the fact Sweeney turned on an inside fastball on his homer.

"That's something we've talked about. If he can get into that pitch, he can be a special player," Geren said.

Santana, who entered the night with a 10-1 career mark and 1.34 ERA against Oakland, went six innings and allowed eight hits and two runs.

The game featured some standout defense from both teams.

In the seventh, Kurt Suzuki stung a ball up the middle. Angels second baseman Maicer Izturis made a diving stop and shuffled a backhand glove flip to shortstop Erick Aybar, who threw Suzuki out by a step.

Oakland left fielder Scott Hairston raced into the gap to make a sliding catch and rob Guerrero in the bottom of that inning.

A's third baseman Adam Kennedy went 2-for-5 in his first game at Angel Stadium since leaving Los Angeles as a free agent after the 2006 season.

He received a nice ovation, understandable considering his key role in the Angels' 2002 World Series championship run.

A's notebook: Tomko eyes more success against a division leader

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Tomko eyes more success against a division leader

ANAHEIM — Each start Brett Tomko makes for the A's would seem to be an audition for next season.

The well-traveled right-hander has allowed just one run in his first two outings with Oakland. And considering Tomko, 35, is still throwing in the mid-90s, a strong finish to this season could garner him interest as a free agent this winter.

But Tomko insists he's not looking past tonight's start against the Los Angeles Angels. It will mark Tomko's third straight start against a division leader. He tossed five shutout innings to beat the New York Yankees on Aug. 17 and threw six innings last Sunday in beating Detroit.

Not a bad turn of events for a pitcher who was gaining rust in the Yankees bullpen before being released July 29 and signing with the A's on Aug. 5.

"I've gotten an opportunity, and I just want to pitch well," Tomko said before Thursday's game against the Angels. "I'm not trying to prove a point or audition. It doesn't matter what team it's against, I want to put in a good effort."

He's made just five career appearances (two starts) at Angel Stadium with an 0-1 record and 4.50 ERA. But he's very familiar with the venue. Tomko was born in Cleveland but grew up and went to high school in Placentia, just a short drive from Anaheim.

"I sat in center field and saw (Roger) Clemens pitch," said Tomko, who attended many Angels games.

A's manager Bob Geren has been impressed with what he's seen from Tomko through two starts.

"He's been great. He's done everything we've wanted him to do," Geren said.

≈ Geren said long reliever Edgar Gonzalez is a candidate to take Tuesday's start against Kansas City, which would signal the start of the six-man rotation the A's have talked about to reduce the workload on their young starters.

Rosters can expand to 40 on Tuesday, and Geren said previously he'd like Gonzalez to become his sixth starter after some relievers are brought up to fortify the bullpen.

Geren added that no position players are likely to be called up Tuesday, though they could join the team anytime after that.

Cahill continues dominant stretch

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Trevor Cahill is quietly following Brett Anderson's lead in showing some second-half improvement.

Anderson has turned into Oakland's best starter with his strong work since the end of June, and Cahill has now put together four sharp outings in a row, and Thursday night at Anaheim, the team's youngest player was at his very best. Cahill, 21, held the AL West leading Angels to two hits in seven innings, and the A's took the first game of the four-game series 2-0. It was Cahill's first victory since July 22.

Over his past four starts, Cahill has a 2.33 ERA. It was just the fifth time an A's starter has gone seven or more innings without allowing a run; Anderson has three of those, including eight scoreless innings in a 1-0 loss to the Angels on July 19.

It wasn't the smoothest of starts for Cahill. After an Angels' pregame ceremony went 15 minutes long, he came out and walked the first two batters.

"So many balls in a row, I thought, 'Is there something wrong with him?' " Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "There was a very long wait, I don't know if that affected him. Let's say it did because he was good after that."

Cahill struck out Torii Hunter and then he whirled and caught Chone Figgins breaking for third. Vladimir Guerrero grounded out to end the inning.

"I couldn't seem to find it, and I was trying to throw it down the middle," Cahill said. "They have a lot of fast guys, I figured they'd try to run and I got lucky."

Cahill came out after 98 pitches having had some back stiffness much of the game (he got stretched out at one point and felt better). Michael Wuertz took over and whisked through a 1-2-3 inning.

Rookie of the year candidate Andrew Bailey pitched the ninth and earned his 14th save in as many opportunities. With two outs, Hunter bunted for a base hit, and Bailey, fielding the ball near the third-base line, appeared to tweak his right knee; the left has bothered him much of the season. Geren checked on Bailey, who was OK, so he took an official visit and gave Bailey instructions about pitching to Vladimir Guerrero.

Bailey got Guerrero to skip a grounder off the mound toward second baseman Mark Ellis, who made the easy throw to first to end the game. Over his past 10 innings, Bailey has six saves and two wins, he's allowed two hits and he's walked none.

Ryan Sweeney also contributed one of his top performances, handling nearly all of the A's offensive chores. He clobbered a homer to center in the second inning off Ervin Santana, he singled in the fourth and he tripled in the sixth and scored on a base hit by Daric Barton.

"I'm trying to drive the ball in gaps a little more when I get a pitch to hit, not just try to get a base hit," Sweeney said. "Not be tentative. I don't know why I don't do that all year."

With a chance to hit for the cycle in the eighth, Sweeney grounded out to second; Sweeney said the same thing happened to him several times in the minors.

The Angels made the nicest defensive play. With one out in the seventh, Kurt Suzuki hit a grounder up the middle. Angels second baseman Maicer Izturis dove for the ball, then flipped it from his glove to shortstop Erick Aybar, who grabbed it barehanded and threw on to first for the out.

Thursday's game was a makeup game for the game canceled in April following the death of Angels starter Nick Adenhardt in a car accident.

Hairston's progress is slowed by injury

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Scott Hairston has been in the American League nearly two months now and he's still adjusting. Mostly, it's a matter of learning the pitchers, but Hairston has the added degree of difficulty of playing with a strained left quad.

He is starting to pick up the pace, though. After batting .228 in his first 21 games with Oakland, Hairston was batting .263 in the 19 games before Thursday.

"It's not a big difference," Hairston said of moving leagues when the Padres traded him July 5. "It's just new arms. I'm reading the scouting reports, I watch a lot of video, I pay attention to how guys similar to me are getting pitched."

The quad strain has affected Hairston primarily on the defensive side. He said he is not able to perform as well as he'd like in the outfield, but he believes he can be effective enough to help the team. He made a nice sliding catch Thursday on a ball hit by **Vladimir Guerrero** in the seventh.

Moved down to fifth in the order Thursday for the first time with Oakland, Hairston went 0-for-4 and hit into an inning-ending double play with the bases loaded in the fifth.

From bullpen to starter? Geren said that long reliever **Edgar Gonzalez** is likely to start Tuesday as the A's shift into a six-man rotation. Gonzalez hasn't worked in a game since Aug. 15, but he threw about 45 pitches in a bullpen session Wednesday and he might get into a game in the next few days.

The A's will bring up at least one additional reliever Tuesday when rosters expand and a third catcher, probably **Eric Munson**, is a strong possibility.

Briefly: Infielder **Bobby Crosby** (calf) did some straight-ahead running before the game. He's eligible to come off the disabled list Tuesday. ... Left-hander **Ian Krol**, a seventh-round pick who signed at the Aug. 17 deadline, made his debut with the organization, pitching a scoreless inning for rookie-league Arizona.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Kennedy's return: Thursday was Adam Kennedy's first game in Anaheim since leaving the Angels in 2007. He hoped his welcome would be "Nomar-esque." He got scattered cheers, but nothing like Garciparra's return to Boston.

Sweeney fuels Cahill's gem in Anaheim

Outfielder's near-cycle backs righty as A's top Angels

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Thursday's opener of a four-game series between the Angels and A's got off to a late start as the result of a ceremony to honor Brian Downing and Chuck Finley as the newest members of the Halos' Hall of Fame.

It was supposed to start at 7:25 p.m. PT, but it didn't get going until 20 about minutes after that.

Once it did, rookie right-hander Trevor Cahill pitched like he had an appointment to keep. After walking the first two batters he faced, Cahill made quick work of the Angels on the way to a 2-0 victory.

"You like to get into your routine and stick to it, but it's just one of those things you have to adjust to," said Cahill, who didn't walk another batter on the way to seven shutout innings of two-hit work. "Kind of like a rain delay."

Backed by another big night at the plate from the resurgent Ryan Sweeney and solid work from relievers Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey, Cahill helped put the American League West leaders into a deep freeze on a hot and muggy night at Angel Stadium.

After the aforementioned walks, to Chone Figgins and Bobby Abreu, Cahill struck out Torii Hunter and picked Figgins off second base before retiring Vladimir Guerrero on a bouncer to second base -- the first of 12 ground-ball outs for Cahill.

The key to the escape was the pickoff, on which Cahill kicked up his left leg as if he were going to the plate but spun toward the bag. Figgins was on the move and couldn't beat Cahill's throw to second baseman Mark Ellis.

"That," Cahill said, "was huge."

So was Sweeney's homer well into the bleachers beyond right-center field off Angels righty Ervin Santana with one out in the second inning. It was all the offense Oakland needed, but Sweeney also banged a stand-up triple to left before scoring on a Daric Barton single in the sixth.

The home run came on an inside fastball clocked at 93 mph.

"If he starts getting to that pitch," A's manager Bob Geren said, "he's could really be a special player."

Sweeney, who fell a double short of the cycle, has been pretty special for the past three weeks, batting .328 with 10 extra-base hits over his past 18 games.

"I'm just trying to drive balls in the gaps more and not just trying to get base hits," Sweeney said by way of explaining his recent hot streak. "Don't ask me why I wasn't doing that all year."

Ask the Angels why Cahill was so tough on Thursday and they'll tell you that after the first, he simply didn't give them much to hit.

"He had a good sinker and changeup, too," said Maicer Izturis. "The changeup had good downward movement, very good break. It was a tough pitch to hit tonight."

Angels manager Mike Scioscia gave Cahill his props, too, but he was a tad peeved about the blown opportunity in the first.

"Early on, he was having trouble getting in the zone. In that first inning, we let him off the hook," Scioscia said. "[But] he's got good action, a good sinker."

Asked if it was the best he's seen Cahill, Geren offered a qualified yes.

"After the first two hitters ... I thought something was wrong with him," said the skipper. "But if you took the first two hitters out, yeah."

Cahill, who has surrendered an Oakland-rookie record 25 home runs this year but hasn't allowed any in his past four starts, wasn't so sure about that.

"I think I've had better control," he said, "but this is the best my two-seam fastball has been. It's hard to compare outings for me."

Cahill only threw 98 pitches, and with the A's set to go to a six-man rotation next week, he'll have an extra day of rest before his next start. Geren, however, said lifting Cahill was a no-brainer; the rookie's back had tightened up earlier in the game.

"I almost took him out after the sixth," Geren said.

Wuertz picked up where Cahill left off, pitching a perfect eighth, and Bailey converted his 14th consecutive save opportunity by getting Guerrero on a bouncer to Ellis with Hunter on second base to end the game.

"It's always fun playing the best teams, and the Angels are the best team in the division right now," Cahill said. "Any win is good, but to win the first game here, it's even better."

Tomko to face another division leader

Oakland (56-71) at Los Angeles (75-51), 7:05 p.m. PT

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Signed to a Minor League deal on Aug. 3, A's right-hander Brett Tomko spent two weeks at Triple-A Sacramento before being called up to face the Yankees, who had released him a week before Oakland plucked him off the scrap heap.

Tomko responded to his promotion by firing five shutout innings to beat New York, the American League East leaders. Five days later, he gave up one run over six innings to beat the AL Central-leading Tigers.

"You can't do anything more than he's done," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "We can't ask for anything more."

Oh, but the A's are asking for more. On Friday, they'll be asking Tomko to try to complete a daunting division-leaders trifecta as he takes on the top dogs of the AL West in the second game of a four-game series at Angel Stadium.

A 36-year-old who has played for nine big league teams, Tomko doesn't exactly seem overwhelmed by the challenge. He's simply enjoying another opportunity to compete at the game's highest level after a less-than-harmonious parting with the Yankees, who used him exclusively in relief.

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

Geren said Tomko will basically be without the training wheels of a strict pitch count on Friday, but it's unlikely Tomko will throw more than 100-110 pitches.

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Brett Tomko (3-2, 3.69 ERA)

Tomko continued his strong stint with the A's by giving up just one run through six innings in his last start, against Detroit. He has won both of his starts since being selected by Oakland on Aug. 17 and has a 0.75 ERA in that span. Against the Tigers, he scattered just three hits while walking three and striking out eight.




LAA: RHP Trevor Bell (1-1, 9.49 ERA)

After handling himself capably in his first two starts, Bell was rocked by the Blue Jays on Sunday in Toronto, surrendering six earned runs on six hits and four walks in 1 2/3 innings, striking out two men. The three-run double lobbed over first base by Randy Ruiz that ended his day wasn't a bad pitch, down and in, but his command overall wasn't close to what it had been against the Rays and Indians. Bell, 22, has jumped from Double-A Arkansas to Triple-A Salt Lake to the big time this season, and that's a lot of ground to cover for a guy who hadn't pitched beyond Class A in his first four professional seasons.

Dribblers ...

Asked about hot prospect Chris Carter, who was promoted from Double-A Midland to Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday and went 3-for-5 with four RBIs in his first game with the River Cats, Geren said he gets daily reports on all of the organization's Minor Leaguers. He also poked a little hole in the notion that Carter, who isn't on the 40-man roster, won't be called up when rosters expand in September. "I don't think the 40-man is an issue the way a lot of people think it is," said the skipper. ... Bobby Crosby (left calf) did some running on Thursday for the first time since being placed on the disabled list. He's eligible for activation on Sept. 2, but he might head out for some Minor League action if he's cleared to play prior to that. Said strength and conditioning coach Bob Alejo of Crosby, "He's not that far away." ... Geren said to expect the first wave of callups in September to feature pitching, pitching and more pitching. "That's all we expect," he said. ... Sacramento outfielder Matt Carson homered on Thursday for the second consecutive night, giving him 23 for the season. Travis Buck also went deep for the 'Cats on Thursday.

Up next

- Saturday: Athletics (Vin Mazzaro, 4-9, 5.32) at Angels (Jered Weaver, 13-5, 4.03), 6:05 p.m. PT 
- Sunday: Athletics (Brett Anderson, 7-9, 4.35) at Angels (John Lackey, 8-7, 4.16), 12:35 p.m. PT 
- Monday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 4-5, 5.88) vs. Royals (Luke Hochevar, 6-7, 5.52), 7:05 p.m. PT 

Angels series a barometer for A's rookie trio

Cahill, Mazzaro, Anderson to test progress vs. West's best

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- For the three highly touted rookies in the A's starting rotation, the four-game series that opened on Thursday at Angel Stadium will double as something of a progress report.

Trevor Cahill, a 21-year-old right-hander, Brett Anderson, a 21-year-old lefty, and Vin Mazzaro, a 22-year-old righty, each have a start against the host Halos, and how they perform against the class of the American League West should provide something of a measuring stick.

How far have they come? Are Cahill and Anderson, who have been with the team all season, appreciably better than they were in April? Has Mazzaro, who lit it up in his first two starts after being recalled from Triple-A Sacramento but struggled in the aftermath of his splashy debut, righted himself?

The Angels might provide some answers. Oakland manager Bob Geren provided some of his own before the opener of the series.

Geren said all three of them have improved, although he hedged a touch when discussing Mazzaro, who won his first two starts without allowing a run but lost his next eight decisions and will take a 4-9 record with a 5.32 ERA into his Saturday start.

"That's a little harder measuring stick because his first two starts were so good," Geren said while chatting with the press in the dugout as his players stretched for batting practice in 100-plus heat. "He's made improvements in the last month, but it's hard to improve on his first two starts; he was so dominating."

Regarding Cahill, who was called for the opener on Thursday, and Anderson, who'll get the ball on Sunday, Geren was more specific.

"Trevor's gotten a lot more consistent with his arm slot, and his slider's really improved," said the skipper. "Brett's been pretty darned good all year, but he's definitely gotten better at getting left-handed hitters."

That said, Geren didn't see the Angels set as any more significant than some of the other series in which the youngsters have worked recently.

"They've also pitched against Detroit, the Yankees, Boston; they get tested all the time," he said. "Playing against the best team in the division, it's just another test."

Anderson, who is 7-6 with a 4.35 ERA, posted a 1.87 ERA in five starts in July but has a 4.41 ERA in five starts in August. Mazzaro is 2-4 with a 7.45 ERA in eight starts since the All-Star break.

"I do think, collectively, they've gotten better," Geren said. "They're better from sheer experience."

E. Gonzalez gets nod as A's sixth starter

Oakland plans to expand rotation for season's final month

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- The A's have long intended to go with a six-man rotation in the season's final month in an effort to save some of their young arms, and manager Bob Geren on Thursday said the extra man likely will be Edgar Gonzalez.

Gonzalez, Oakland's long reliever for most of the season, is expected to make his third start of the season on Tuesday against the Royals at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

"It depends on if and how we need to use him [in relief] here," Geren said before the opener of a four-game series at Angel Stadium. "But right now, that's the plan."

Gonzalez, who was brought to Spring Training to compete for a starting job but opened the season at Triple-A Sacramento, was called up May 19 and made two starts, going 0-1 with a 5.40 ERA.

His past 18 outings have come out of the bullpen, with an ERA of 5.20.

Geren said Gonzalez threw a 45-pitch side session in the bullpen at Seattle on Thursday and noted that an appearance in Anaheim wouldn't rule him out as Tuesday's starter.

A's blank division rival Angels

Associated Press 8/28/09

ANAHEIM -- Rookie Trevor Cahill and two relievers combined on a three-hitter, and Ryan Sweeney came within a double of hitting for the cycle, leading the A's to a 2-0 victory over the Los Angeles Angels on Thursday night.

The opener of this four-game series had been rescheduled from April 9, when Angels rookie Nick Adenhardt was killed along with two friends in an early-morning car crash caused by an alleged drunken driver just hours after he pitched six scoreless innings in a no-decision against the Athletics. Monday would have been Adenhardt's 23rd birthday.

Sweeney, who entered 4 for 9 lifetime against Angels starter Ervin Santana, homered, singled and tripled in his three at-bats against the right-hander to help the A's recover from a three-game sweep at Seattle.

Cahill (7-12) held the American League West leaders to a two-out single by Vladimir Guerrero in the fourth inning and a leadoff double by Jeff Mathis in the sixth. The Angels entered leading the majors with a .290 team batting average and a .305 mark with runners in scoring position.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Cats clinch eighth division title in 10 seasons

By Andrew Hazard, rivercats.com

WEST SACRAMENTO, Calif. - The Sacramento River Cats' dynasty continued as they won another Pacific Coast League South Division title, their eighth in 10 years.

Sacramento fell 6-3 to the visiting Fresno Grizzlies on Thursday night, but the Las Vegas 51s shut out the second-place Reno Aces 1-0 to secure Sacramento its third consecutive division title.

Shown: *Eric Patterson celebrates after the River Cats clinched the Pacific Coast League South Division title on Thursday night.*

"It's been a great season," said River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco after the game. "It's a great accomplishment for this team and these players to win another championship. No matter what happens in the postseason, nobody can take away what this team accomplished through a long grueling season. I look forward to seeing all the fans at Raley Field for the playoffs."

The atmosphere was electric at Raley Field as the River Cats had a chance to win the division against their Highway 99 rival Grizzlies. Sacramento was well on its way to victory as right fielder Travis Buck and center fielder Matt Carson hit leadoff home runs in the third and fourth innings.

Dana Eveland pitched great for Sacramento until the seventh inning when every Fresno batter came to the plate. The Grizzlies had five hits and scored four runs in the inning. Fresno added another run in the ninth.

The River Cats officially clinched the division with two outs in the bottom of the eighth inning when Las Vegas finished off the Aces.

"I am not going to cry," said River Cats MVP candidate Eric Patterson to his teammates in the clubhouse after the game. "I want to thank all the guys, every single one of them for everything. We are the champs."

The Grizzlies' bats came out of hibernation in the second. First baseman Jesus Guzman led off the inning with a grounder for an infield single after shortstop Gregorio Petit was not able to make a play on the ball. Guzman moved to third off of an error by first baseman Chris Carter; John Bowker hit a bullet right at Carter, who could only knock the ball down.

Second baseman Matt Downs demonstrated the concept that baseball is a team game when he grounded out to Wallace on third. Guzman looked as if he was on rollerblades downhill as he scored easily. Wallace's only option was to throw out Bowker on his way to second.

With a chance to clinch the division and subsequently a playoff spot, Sacramento seemed to be on edge. Eveland avoided a disaster as Juan Ciriaco and Ben Copeland both grounded out with runners on second and third to end the inning.

The Fresno fans in attendance would not be celebrating for long. Buck took advantage of a mistake pitch from Matt Kinney, a first-pitch blast to right to tie the game in the third.

Eveland was a man on a mission after the second inning. After setting down the side in order in the third, he struck the side in order in the fourth. The River Cats utilized the long ball again in the bottom of the inning. For the second consecutive inning, Sacramento led off the inning with a home run, only this time it was Carson who went yard to left field on a full count. The River Cats almost manufactured more runs with two outs as the Grizzlies began to panic. Carter reached first safely on an error from Guzman, catcher Eric Munson and Buck walked to load the bases for second baseman Adrian Cardenas. Cardenas almost went deep but Bowker made a great catch in left ending the threat and the inning. Sacramento led 2-1, and was 15 outs away from another division title.

The funny thing about sports is the momentum can go from one team to the other in a moment's notice. The River Cats were nine outs away from clinching yet another division title when the seventh inning came along. Designated hitter Joe Borchard led off the inning with a double to center, Ciriaco executed the perfect bunt to reach safely at first and then Copeland put the Grizzlies on the scoreboard with a single to left.

Torres also bunted, hoping to move the runners. Eveland made the quick decision to try to get out the lead runner going to third. Wallace and Ciriaco crashed into each other as everyone was safe on the play. Ciriaco was forced to leave the game with an injury. The streak of base runners continued as Frandsen singled to right and pinch runner Adam Witter scored.

Chris Schroder replaced Eveland and did not fair much better. Buster Posey singled to right, and after striking out Guzman, Schroder walked Bowker. The inning came to a close when Downs grounded into a 5-4-3 double play. By then, Sacramento's lead had evaporated and they trailed 5-2.

Take away the seventh inning and Eveland (8-6) had an otherwise flawless performance. He gave up nine hits, five earned runs, struck out nine and did not give up a walk in six-plus innings. He had three 1-2-3 innings. The River Cats did not get much out of the meat of their lineup. Their 3, 4 and 5 hitters were a combined 0 of 15 at the plate. Buck went 2-for-3 with a home run.

The River Cats (82-50) host the Grizzlies (69-64) again on Friday at 7:05 p.m.

River Cats lose but clinch division title

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee

As the champagne flowed freely through the clubhouse, River Cats MVP candidate Eric Patterson reminded his teammates how to behave.

"It's a celebration," he screamed. "Let's go!"

And so the party began.

Thanks to a helping hand in Las Vegas, the River Cats savored a championship Thursday night at Raley Field.

The Las Vegas 51s' 1-0 victory over Reno handed Sacramento its eighth Pacific Coast League Pacific South Division title in 10 years.

It didn't matter that the Fresno Grizzlies scored four runs in the seventh inning to beat the River Cats 6-3 in front of an announced crowd of 10,031.

What mattered was the A's Triple-A affiliate is headed to the postseason again.

"We're in, so we're happy," said River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco, whose team fell to 82-50, still the best record in the PCL, with 11 games remaining. "These guys had a heck of a year. We're very proud of them."

Sacramento infielder Gregorio Petit, who has been on three consecutive division title teams with the River Cats, raced to the clubhouse to join the celebration.

"Three in a row?" he said. "I'm used to it. I got used to it really quick."

The River Cats are scheduled to open the playoffs with two games at the PCL Pacific North Division winner on Sept. 9-10 before returning home for as many as three games at Raley Field on Sept. 11-13 in the best-of-five series.

If Sacramento reaches the PCL championship series, it will play two games on the road Sept. 15-16 before returning home to finish that best-of-five series Sept. 18-20.

The PCL winner is scheduled to face the International League champion in the Triple-A Championship Game on Sept. 22 in Oklahoma City.

Sacramento has won four PCL championships – in 2003, 2004, 2007 and 2008 – and also claimed Triple-A titles the past two seasons.

Look for more roster juggling as players come and go from Oakland.

"Our goal is to get them to the major leagues; that comes first," DeFrancesco said. "The guys that are here with the River Cats, they're going to give it everything they've got."

"The chemistry's been there all year. Whatever sport you play, that's the ultimate, to try to get into the postseason and give yourself a chance to go out and be a champion."

The River Cats tied the score 1-1 on Travis Buck's third-inning home run to right field, then went up 2-1 on Matt Carson's fourth-inning homer to left.

But Fresno's big seventh inning left the Cats looking to Las Vegas for help. And they got it.

Middleton Fires Complete Game Shutout

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Kyle Middleton set the Corpus Christi Hooks' single-season record with 23 saves in 2007. He needed NO help from his bullpen Thursday, blanking his former team, 10-0, for his first career complete game shutout.

"K-Mid," one of the most intriguing stories of the RockHounds' season, allowed just four hits, walking one and striking out seven in recording just the sixth complete game shutout in the Texas League this season.

Signed out of independent baseball in July (Kyle was pitching for his hometown club, the Pensacola Pelicans of the American Association), K-Mid now has six quality starts in seven appearances with the RockHounds. The former Kansas City farmhand (2000-2006) also spent two seasons in the Astros organization, pitching for the Hooks in Corpus Christi in all of 2007 and half of last season.

The turning point in Thursday night's game may have been the second inning when, in a scoreless tie, Jason Castro (Houston's top prospect) ripped a leadoff double. Josh Horton made a solid play on Jimmy Van Ostrand's bouncer, but his throw was wide, putting runners at second and third with no outs. Middleton induced a pop fly to left, sandwiched between a pair of strikeouts, and got three critical blocks from catcher Josh Donaldson to escape the jam. K-Mid retired 12 consecutive batters after the double and error.

Middleton got plenty of help, including a 4-run rally in the fourth inning, when the RockHounds broke a scoreless tie, capped by a 3-run home run from Jemile Weeks. Oakland's first round draft choice in 2008 (12th overall out of the University of Miami) ripped Tyler Lumsden's 3-1 pitch out of the ballpark with two on and two out for his second home run at the Double-A level. The home run came two pitches after a wild pitch broke the scoreless tie. Without the wild pitch, Jemile's home run would have been a grand slam.

Archie Gilbert added a solo shot down the left field line for a 6-0 lead in the sixth inning. Gilbert also made two "Web Gem" caliber diving catches in center and third baseman Alex Valdez robbed Castro of a double down the left field line, making a ridiculously good play at third, throwing across the diamond (and into the wind) from the chalk at the edge of the grass at third.

The run production was important for the 'Hounds far beyond the Thursday night scoreboard, as the strong performance came in the second game since the call-up of Chris Carter. While errors made all but three runs unearned, that stat is somewhat misleading, as the 'Hounds got contributions pretty much top-to-bottom in the order, with Weeks and Gilbert leading the way. Donaldson was also key, going 3-for-4 with a walk and his only out coming on a 395-drive to dead center.

Texas League South

The 'Hounds got some good news from the scoreboard, with San Antonio snapping Frisco's 5-game win streak, 8-3, in the Alamo City. The South is, for all intents and purposes, a two-team race with the RockHounds now leading Frisco by three games with 11 to go. Corpus Christi and San Antonio are nine back and on the verge of elimination, with San Antonio awaiting the second half winner in the playoffs.

Of the 11 games remaining, the 'Hounds play one more at Corpus Christi, then travel to Frisco for a 3-game showdown with the RoughRiders to conclude a 7-game road trip. The RockHounds play the final seven games of the regular season at home, hosting San Antonio (4) and Frisco (3) at Citibank Ballpark.

Popcorn, Peanuts, Fresh Cut Grass

The RockHounds return to Citibank Ballpark Tuesday to begin a critical, 7-game stand hosting San Antonio and Frisco (September 1-7).

Reminder: RockHounds Monday-Saturday home games in September 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 Whataburger Field in Corpus Christi Friday evening is 6:50.

Ports Blast Their Way Past Quakes 9-7

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, Calif. - For the second straight night, the Stockton Ports had a multi-home run inning early that gave them a comfortable lead. For the second straight night, the Boys of Banner Island let their opponent-this time the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes-get back into the ballgame. The difference between Thursday night's game with the Quakes and Wednesday's with the Blaze, however, was that on Thursday the Ports were able to receive clutch hits late in the game. Despite having a 6-0 lead erased, the Ports scored three late runs in the eighth inning to lift them to a 9-7 win over Rancho in the first game of the year the Ports have played at The Epicenter.

The Ports broke the ice in a big way in the top of the second. Grant Desme led off with his 19th home run of the year as a Port, his 30th overall including the 11 he hit in Kane County. Desme's 30th home run of the year gave Stockton a quick 1-0 lead. After a Frank Martinez infield single, Matt Smith went yard over the fence in left to make it 3-0. Gabriel Ortiz followed by working a walk, setting it up for Dusty Coleman who hit his first home run as a Port-a two-run blast to dead center to put Stockton up 5-0.

The long-ball troubles would continue for Quakes starter Ryan Brasier into the third. With one out, Desme came up and homered again to right-a solo blast to give Stockton a comfortable 6-0 advantage.

Brasier would end up with a no-decision, going five innings and allowing six runs on eight hits while striking out seven. Half of the eight hits allowed by Brasier went for home runs.

Down 6-0 in the bottom of the third, the Quakes began a stretch in which they'd score six unanswered runs. Ports starter Daniel Haigwood struggled in his outing when facing the eighth and ninth hitters. Haigwood issued back-to-back walks to Hector Estrella and Alberto Rosario to start the third, and then gave up an RBI single to Andrew Romine which put the Quakes on the board at 6-1. Carlos Colmenares followed with a sac-fly to right to make it 6-2.

The Quakes inched closer in the fourth. With one on and two out, Haigwood again walked the eight-place hitter Estrella, and then hit Rosario to load the bases. Romine again would come through, knocking a single to right that scored two runs. Rosario, running from first, would be thrown out trying to come around and score to end the inning.

Haigwood would leave the game with the chance to earn the win, but wound up with a no-decision after going five innings and allowing four runs on four hits while walking three and striking out four.

Ben Hornbeck (5-4) entered the game to start the sixth and retired the first four batters he faced taking him one out into the seventh. With one down, Hornbeck yielded a walk to Romine, then two batters later with two down, gave up the game-tying home run to Abel Nieves. It was just Nieves' third home run of the season and it knotted the game at six.

Stockton's offense, however, would pick Hornbeck up in the eighth. After two perfect innings of relief from Ismael Carmona, the ball was handed over to Kevin Nabors (0-1). Nabors hit Desme to start the inning, then two batters later gave up the go-ahead RBI single to Matt Smith to put the Ports back in front 7-6. Christian Vitters joined the home run party next by crushing a two-run blast to right to give the Ports a 9-6 edge.

Nabors would end up the losing pitcher after allowing three runs on two hits in his lone inning of work.

Hornbeck would be credited with the win despite allowing the two-run blast to Nieves-the only hit he allowed in his two innings of work.

The Quakes put a run back on the board in the eighth when Daniel Sattler came into the game and made his Ports debut after being signed out of the Independent Leagues. Sattler would give up a walk and a base hit, and would be taken from the game with runners at the corners and one out. Jason Ray (SV, 3) came on and got Rosario to fly to center, a sac-fly that scored Clay Fuller and made it 9-7. Ray, though, would get the final out of the eighth, then toss a scoreless ninth to finish the ballgame and earn his third save of the year.

Stockton and Rancho Cucamonga will play the second game of their four-game set on Friday night at The Epicenter. Left-hander Pedro Figueroa (2-4, 3.54 ERA) will head to the mound for the Ports, opposed by Quakes right-hander Matt Shoemaker (0-0, 1.50 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:35 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Drop Finale to Beloit

Kane County's win streak ends at four with rout

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars and Beloit Snappers battled through a rain-soaked evening Thursday at Elfstrom Stadium, and the Cougars suffered a 9-1 loss in the series finale to snap their winning streak at four. They still won three of four in the set and finished 9-6 against Beloit this season. The clubs played eight in a row against each other, and each team won four.

Kenny Smalley (9-8) suffered his fourth straight loss. The Cougars' starter gave up six runs -- five earned -- on a career-high 11 hits over four innings. He walked three and fanned four. Josue Selenis gave up three runs -- two earned -- in 1 2/3 innings, A.J. Huttenlocker retired all seven batters he faced and position player Dusty Napoleon worked a scoreless ninth in an effort to save the bullpen. Digby13

The Cougars were baffled again by Beloit starter Liam Hendriks (3-4), who combined for 13 innings of two-hit ball against them over two starts. The Cougars' only run came in the eighth with an unearned tally off Daniel Berlind, who posted his second save.

The Cougars (28-32, 69-61) continue their eight-game homestand Friday night at 6:30 CT with the start of a four-game set against the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (23-36, 57-72). Anivioris Ramirez (4-2, 3.74) will face Evan Frederickson (3-7, 5.15).

C's heat up against Eugene Emeralds

By Rob Fai / Vancouver Canadians

(Civic Stadium - Eugene, OR) - Just hours after finding out the Canadians had no player named to this year's Northwest league All-Star team, Vancouver decided to simply go out and take their second straight series on the road defeating the Eugene Emeralds 4-2 at Civic Stadium.

The C's got to the Emeralds in the top of the 3rd inning when **3B Marcos Luis** hit his 6th double of the season scoring **LF Rashun Dixon** who led the inning off with a walk off of Eugene RHP Jeffery Ibarra. Shortly after, **CF Tyreace House** singled home **2B Ryne Jernigan** to give the Canadians a 2-0 lead.

Vancouver would tack on two more runs in the top of the 5th inning when Eugene's defense got sloppy as **SS Michael Gilmartin** hit a ball to 2B Joey Railey who couldn't handle it allowing Ryne Jernigan to score. **RF Myrio Richard** would hit a sacrifice fly to right field scoring Tyreace House and Vancouver led 4-0.

The Emeralds scored a pair in the bottom of the 6th inning as OF Matt Vern lead off with a triple to right field off of **RHP Joselito Adames** and later scored on a single off the bat of OF Ty Wright. Wright would come around to score on a single from SS Dean Anna to cut the Canadians lead to 4-2.

The Canadians pitching was solid on Thursday as starter RHP Joselito Adames went 5.2 IP scattering seven hits, walking two and striking out two leaving with a 4-2 lead. Vancouver **RHP Bo Schultz** was outstanding in relief going 2.1IP giving up no hits and no runs before turning the ball over to **RHP Conner Hoehn** who went a scoreless 9th inning for his 4th save of the season.

For a complete box score from Thursday evening's 4-2 victory in Eugene, OR, please visit the link at the top of this story.

The Canadians (32-34) will wrap up this nine game road trip on Friday, August 28th at 7:05pm vs. the Eugene Emeralds (30-36) with **RHP Dan Straily** (3-3 4.56) getting the call for the Vancouver.

Vancouver returns to Nat Bailey Stadium on Saturday, August 29th at 7:05pm to open up a three-game series vs. Eugene Emeralds. Tickets are available by calling 604.872.5232 or by clicking on the link at the top of this story.

