

A's News Clips, Sunday, August 30, 2009

Sweeney starting to show some power at the plate

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Hairston's anticipation tags A's with a victory

ANAHEIM — Scott Hairston hasn't been in the American League very long, but he knows the Los Angeles Angels like to wreak havoc on the bases.

So Hairston, the A's left fielder, was expecting Chone Figgins to tag up in the bottom of the ninth Saturday and Oakland leading 4-3. Hairston caught Bobby Abreu's fly ball near the foul line and threw a one-hopper to second to nail Figgins to end the game.

"I was anticipating he was going to go," Hairston said. "I think you have to on that, because if you hesitate he's going to be safe."

Since Hairston came over from San Diego in a July 5 trade, he's had a couple of rough moments in the outfield but also some very nice plays. He's also earned praise from manager Bob Geren for playing through a quadriceps injury.

It's feeling better, but obviously playing every day, nothing drastic is going to happen (as far as improvement)," Hairston said. "I'm expecting it's going to hurt every day. We'll see how it is in a few weeks. Hopefully I'll get back to stealing bases and being myself."

≈ Ryan Sweeney drove an Ervin Santana fastball deep out of the park Thursday, showing a glimpse of his power.

Ask Sweeney, and he'll say it's not so much his mechanics but his mental approach that's the key to unlocking that power more consistently.

"It's just that sometimes I don't attack the ball," Sweeney said. "Being aggressive (is the key). Not thinking to hit a home run, but putting a harder swing on the ball and trying to drive the ball more."

Sweeney has six homers to go with a .279 average, and if there's a knock on his game, it's his modest power numbers.

A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen sees the foundation for Sweeney to develop more power. And he thinks if Sweeney played home games in a more "hitter-friendly park, he'd have 12 or 15 homers."

But Skaalen agrees that mindset is key for Sweeney.

"Ryan tends to be a little unaggressive at times," Skaalen said. "His timing is so good and his balance is so good that I want him ready to hit that first pitch, because he's going to let it go if it's not a good pitch."

≈ Kurt Suzuki's 62 RBI leads the A's, and he could become the first catcher in Oakland history to lead the team in that category over an entire season.

≈ Bobby Crosby ran the bases to test his strained left calf, and he looks on track to come off the disabled list Wednesday when he's eligible.

≈ Prospect watch: Single-A Stockton outfielder Grant Desme, 23, entered Saturday with 31 homers, tied for the most in the minors. He also was 40-for-45 on stolen base attempts combined between Stockton and Low-A Kane County.

A's bullpen has complete turnaround from Friday

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's were struggling offensively Saturday night until the Los Angeles Angels' bullpen arrived just in time.

After getting blanked for six innings by Jered Weaver, the A's broke through for four runs against relievers Jose Arredondo and Rafael Rodriguez to claim a 4-3 victory before 43,011 at Angel Stadium.

That turned the tables one night after Los Angeles victimized the A's bullpen for a season-high nine runs in a come-from-behind 11-7 victory for the home team.

The Angels' bullpen has been sorely overworked due to the rotation's ineffectiveness.

The A's relief corps can relate, having entered Saturday ranked second in the American League in innings pitched. They were pressed into heavy duty again because starter Vin Mazzaro only went five innings.

Jeff Gray, Brad Ziegler (2-4), Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey combined for four shutout innings.

"You're down by three, and you put a young guy in like Jeff Gray and he holds them down and gives you a chance to win," A's manager Bob Geren said.

The A's plan to go to a six-man rotation this week to ease the workload on their young starters. Geren said he'll also look to the bullpen early, and that the relievers' effectiveness gives him confidence to do so.

Bailey, a leading candidate for AL Rookie of the Year, converted his 15th straight save opportunity and pocketed No. 20 overall with a scoreless ninth.

He got a huge assist from left fielder Scott Hairston, who ended the game by throwing out Chone Figgins at second base after Figgins tagged up on Bobby Abreu's fly ball. Figgins had reached on an infield single with one out.

Bailey said it was good for the bullpen to come through after Friday's defeat.

"Our bullpen has been doing a great job all year," he said. "We did a good job putting (Friday) behind us."

The night began with a ceremony honoring Angels pitcher Nick Adenhardt and two friends who were all killed in an April 9 car accident. Jon Wilhite, the lone survivor of that crash and a good friend of A's catcher Kurt Suzuki, threw out the first pitch.

The A's erased a 3-0 deficit with three runs in the seventh. Rajai Davis (3-for-5) had the key hit, grounding a two-run single up the middle to tie it.

An inning later, the A's loaded the bases with one out and Daric Barton's grounder to first ricocheted off Kendry Morales. The Angels got Barton at first, but the go-ahead run scored.

Mazzaro allowed three runs on seven hits and wanted to come out for the sixth. But he ran up his pitch count — he finished with 99 — during a laborious fourth inning that included Maicer Izturis' two-run homer that made it 3-0.

Brett Anderson's start today will be the 94th by an A's rookie, setting a new Oakland record. Long reliever Edgar Gonzalez is the leading candidate to start Tuesday and enter the rotation as the sixth starter. Geren added that he might have veteran Brett Tomko pitch on his regular four days' rest periodically, which would allow the A's to push back another starter and provide even more rest.

Lurie: Yankees now lead MLB's power rankings

By Marty Lurie, Special to Oakland Tribune

As we head down the stretch, it's time to check the MLB power ratings as the club's play on the last Sunday in August.

Last month's rating follows the comments.

1. New York Yankees: The Bronx Bombers continue to win at home (44-20). Derek Jeter is now solidly in the MVP race. CC Sabathia had a solid month, vaulting the lefty near his second Cy Young award. There is some concern about Joba Chamberlain as he approaches his season inning limit. (2)

2. St. Louis Cardinals: The Cards starting threesome of Chris Carpenter, Adam Wainwright and Joel Piniero are ready for the playoffs. Matt Holliday has prospered hitting in between Albert Pujols and Ryan Ludwick. John Smoltz has new life in St. Louis. Closer Ryan Franklin leads the NL in saves. (12)

- 3. Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim:** First baseman Kendry Morales (29 home runs) is the best kept secret on the West Coast. Kevin Jepsen has grabbed the setup role for the Halos. Manager Mike Scioscia's team leads the majors in batting. Scott Kazmir pitches well against the Red Sox, a likely first-round opponent for the Halos. (1)
- 4. Philadelphia Phillies:** The Phils crush the ball from the left side of the plate led by Ryan Howard (37 home runs). Lefty Cliff Lee (5-1) is the 2008 version of CC Sabathia, dominating the NL after the trade from the Junior Circuit. Closer Brad Lidge is a concern, but Brett Myers might be on the way back from the DL. Pedro Martinez has helped the rotation too. (3)
- 5. Los Angeles Dodgers:** Manny Ramirez isn't hitting with his customary power, but Andre Ethier and Matt Kemp have stepped up, supplying key hits in August. Randy Wolf has been superb on the mound. George Sherrill has given Jonathan Broxton help in the 'pen. Vicente Padilla pitched well in his first game. But the jury is still out on this clubhouse pariah. (4)
- 6. Boston Red Sox:** Boston started hitting again as soon as the Yankees left town. David Ortiz has regained his power stroke. Victor Martinez is a professional hitter. Billy Wagner, if healthy, will give Hideki Okajima and Jonathan Papelbon a breather down the stretch. (5)
- 7. Colorado Rockies:** Jason Marquis, Ubaldo Jimenez and Jorge De LaRosa are solid starters. Rockies need Brad Hawpe to step-up in September. Closer Huston Street trails only the Cards' Franklin in saves. Colorado has a favorable home schedule over the next few weeks. (9)
- 8. San Francisco Giants:** Pablo Sandoval is the most exciting young hitter in the NL. Tim Lincecum's velocity might be down, but this kid wants the ball late in the game. Barry Zito is pitching as well as he has since his glory days with the A's. Brian Wilson is shaky at times, but gets the job done with a powerful fastball. Giants need to play better baseball on the road, a season-long issue. (12)
- 9. Texas Rangers:** The Rangers are not going away even though they face a tough road schedule in September. Josh Hamilton and Ian Kinsler are starting to heat up. Michael Young is in the MVP race. Scott Feldman (14-4, 10-1 on the road) cannot be overlooked when voting starts for the Cy Young award. Ron Washington is in the top three for AL manager of the year. (6)
- 10. Detroit Tigers:** The Tigers are tough to beat at home (41-21). Justin Verlander leads the AL in strikeouts (211). Miguel Cabrera is quietly hitting .340. Just when you think the Tigers are in trouble they come back to Detroit and right the ship. (10)
- 11. Tampa Bay Rays:** Did the Rays wave the white flag when they sent Kazmir to the Angels? Probably not because Andy Sonnanstine and Wade Davis should have better ERAs than the departed lefty's 5.92. Carlos Pena is a real power hitter (37 home runs). Everyone keeps waiting for the Rays' starting pitching to come around. Joe Maddon's team has one more month to get it right. (8)
- 12. Florida Marlins:** Florida's pitching has fallen off over the past two weeks. The Marlins hit the ball as well as anyone in baseball in August. Chris Coghlan could give Hanley Ramirez (.366) a run for his money for NL Player of the Month. Marlins are a feisty club that cannot be overlooked. (19)
- 13. Atlanta Braves:** Atlanta won't catch the Phillies, but with its pitching this club might stay in the wild-card race until the end. Righty Tim Hudson comes off the DL this week, starting against Florida. Javier Vazquez has had a super season (192 K's). Braves need a big bat in the middle of the order to complete their return to prominence. (18)
- 14. Chicago White Sox:** Alex Rios isn't hitting much better in Chicago than he did in Toronto. Pitchers Gavin Floyd and John Danks are solid. Lefty Mark Buehrle hasn't won since his perfect game. Jake Peavy, when will you be ready to pitch in a major league game? Sox defense is awful, sinking the club time and again. Club's road schedule (28-36) is a bear. (11)
- 15. Chicago Cubs:** Cubs have more off-field issues each day. Will Lou Piniella come back in 2010? Can the club run the same players (Milton Bradley, Alfonso Soriano, Aramis Ramirez) out there next season? If not, can these players be moved? Cubs still pitch and have one of the best coaching staffs in the game.(13)
- 16. Minnesota Twins:** Many experts feel Joe Mauer is the AL's MVP (.372). Twins are still in the race as they try to bolster their pitching staff (waiver claim on Rich Harden). Minnesota wins at home (36-29), giving their fans hope. Justin Morneau (96 RBI) had an inner ear problem in August, hurting his chances for MVP. (16)

- 17. Seattle Mariners:** Don Wakamatsu has done a tremendous job leading this club back to respectability. Seattle wins more games with less runs than anyone in baseball. Felix Hernandez leads a new staff of pitchers. Closer David Aardsma (31 saves) has finally found a home. (15)
- 18. Milwaukee Brewers:** What a one-two punch manager Ken Macha has in Prince Fielder (36 home runs) and Ryan Braun (28 home runs). Unfortunately, the Brewers pitching is awful (4.89 ERA, which is 15th in the NL). The 'pen is overworked. Tough season for the Brew Crew. (17)
- 19. Cleveland Indians:** Each year when the Tribe falls out of the race they start to play better baseball. Shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera (.314) is having a solid year. Aaron Laffey has joined the starting rotation to stay. Cleveland will be a spoiler down the stretch. (25)
- 20. Toronto Blue Jays:** If only the Jays could find a taker for outfielder Vernon Wells. Roy Halladay hasn't been the same pitcher since the trade fiasco in July. Aaron Hill (31 home runs) is the best second baseman in the American League. (21)
- 21. Houston Astros:** Roy Oswalt and Wandy Rodriguez are tough to beat in any series. Oswalt called the team out for lack of hustle this week. Closer Jose Valverde can help a contender. (14)
- 22. Oakland Athletics:** A's have one of the best 'pens in baseball, led by Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey. Offense is still missing with Jack Cust leading the team with 20 home runs while batting .241. Catcher Kurt Suzuki gets better each month (62 RBI). (20)
- 23. San Diego Padres:** Padres have hit the ball well on the road the past week. Will Venable, Kyle Banks and Adrian Gonzalez led the team through Atlanta and Florida. Young pitcher Mat Latos looks like the real deal. Will Trevor Hoffman return to San Diego next year, allowing the club to deal Heath Bell? (30)
- 24. Washington Nationals:** Pitchers John Lannan and Craig Stammen are giving interim manager Jim Riggleman good games. Adam Dunn (34 home runs) might be the best free agent signing last winter. Once Stephen Strasburg gets to the majors things will brighten up for this club. (29)
- 25. Arizona Diamondbacks:** Any team with Mark Reynolds (39 home runs), Justin Upton (.304) and shortstop Stephen Drew has hope for the future. Dan Haren seems to have run out of gas once again in the second half. (23)
- 26. Baltimore Orioles:** O's have young stars in catcher Matt Wieters and pitcher Brian Matusz. Cubs' castoff Felix Pie is realizing his potential with Baltimore. Outfielders Adam Jones and Nick Markakis are solid players. Dave Trembley deserves another year at the helm. (24)
- 27. Pittsburgh Pirates:** Pirates have developed some starting pitching. Once they get a reliable 'pen they will rise in the rankings. Center fielder Andrew McCutchen is a terrific young player. (26)
- 28. Cincinnati Reds:** Pitcher Homer Bailey is a bright spot for Dusty Baker's offensively challenged club. Wholesale change should take place this off-season. (26)
- 29. Kansas City Royals:** Zack Greinke quietly has regained the league lead in ERA 2.43. Billy Butler is a hitter (.296). Starting pitching thought to be a strength has been abysmal (37 wins). (27)
- 30. New York Mets:** Only Francisco Rodriguez has avoided the injury bug on this club. Nothing has gone right for the Mets, starting with owner Fred Wilpon losing \$700 million in the Bernie Madoff scandal right to the botched firing of Tony Bernazard. (22)

A's mount a comeback of their own

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland did diddly Saturday night against Angels starter Jered Weaver, but it was a different picture once he left.

A night after blowing a late four-run lead, the A's pieced together their own comeback against the Angels' bullpen and beat the AL West leaders 4-3.

Oakland closer Andrew Bailey earned his 15th save in his past 15 chances, giving him 20 for the season. He has a good chance to break Huston Street's Oakland rookie record of 23 set in 2005. Street was named Rookie of the Year that season.

Overall, Oakland's bullpen provided four scoreless innings after allowing nine runs Friday night. The Angels recorded two hits against the A's relievers.

"They did a great job," A's left fielder Scott Hairston said. "We've kind of come to expect that from them."

The game ended when Chone Figgins tagged at first and tried to advance on Bobby Abreu's flyball to left; Scott Hairston threw out Figgins at second.

"I was anticipating he was going to go," Hairston said. "I think you have to, because if you hesitate, he's going to be safe. I told myself to make sure I got behind the ball and make a strong accurate throw."

Jose Arredondo, once a projected closer for the Angels but just recently recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake, could not hold a 3-0 lead for Weaver. Mark Ellis opened the seventh inning with a base hit, Daric Barton walked and Cliff Pennington singled to load the bases.

After a wild pitch sent in Ellis, Rafael Rodriguez replaced Arredondo and Rajai Davis greeted him with a groundball single up the middle, sending home both runners to tie the game.

Oakland pocketed the go-ahead run against Rodriguez the next inning. Jack Cust walked, Hairston singled and Ryan Sweeney advanced the runners with a bunt. After an intentional walk to Ellis, Barton's hard grounder to first scored pinch-runner Eric Patterson.

"It wasn't the ideal way, but we fought back," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We do that a lot and sometimes come up short. ... That's a very good road win."

Vin Mazzaro started for Oakland and he again failed to go more than five innings; in five of his six starts this month, he has lasted five innings and in the other, he went 5¹/₃ innings. He was at 99 pitches when he departed and he said he thought he could have pitched the sixth.

Mazzaro allowed a run in the third on a sacrifice fly by Abreu; in the fourth, the Angels got a two-run homer to right by Maicer Izturis after Kendry Morales' one-out single. Geren said the homer, on a fastball up, was Mazzaro's only mistake and he credited Mazzaro and rookie reliever Jeff Gray for keeping the A's in the game.

Mazzaro's start Saturday was the 93rd this season by an A's rookie, tying the Oakland record. Brett Anderson's start today will establish a new mark and Gio Gonzalez will extend it Monday evening at the Coliseum against the Royals.

With two steals Saturday, the A's have 100 for the season for only the third time in the past 16 years.

Oakland still has a chance to finish August with a .500 record with wins today and Monday night; the team is 12-14 this month. The A's have been under .500 every other month this year, and only once in Oakland history, 1979, has the team had a losing record in every month.

Over his head? That's OK

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Brett Tomko hadn't started his delivery with his hands over his head for nearly 25 years. He thinks he was 12 when he last did it.

But after he was released by the Yankees in July, Tomko was tinkering with his delivery, he tried going over his head in front of a mirror, and it felt good.

That adjustment and a new three-quarter arm slot suggested by A's minor-league pitching instructor **Gil Patterson** have given Tomko a new lease on his career. He said he feels as if he's getting more movement on his pitches and he's more consistent.

"It feels more natural," Tomko said. "I don't feel like I'm fighting myself."

Using the new style, Tomko has made three starts against division leaders, pitched well in all three and allowed a total of three runs in 161/3 innings. Scouts are taking notice of the free-agent-to-be.

"I'm going to have to rewrite my report on him," one said after Tomko's two-run, 52/3-inning performance Friday night.

If the A's want to bring him back, they might have a leg up. Tomko, 36, enjoys the environment in Oakland, he likes the young pitchers to whom he's serving as an example, and he's an hour flight from his offseason home in San Diego. That's especially helpful in the next few weeks; Tomko's wife, **Julia**, is expecting twins in September.

"Things couldn't be better right now," he said.

Briefly: Bobby Crosby (calf) ran the bases before the game. He's expected to be ready to come off the DL when eligible Wednesday. ... It is still likely that **Edgar Gonzalez** will start Tuesday, manager **Bob Geren** said. The six-man rotation will start then, but Tomko might go every five days while some of the rookies get an extra day or even two days off. ... **Eric Patterson** is likely to play left and **Landon Powell** is likely to be the catcher today.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Penny pickup? Brad Penny, released by the Red Sox, is a target as Oakland looks for another experienced starter, but the A's believe Penny might be claimed on release waivers and he likely would accept because he is close to getting some bonuses.

Was Tejada tipping pitches?

David Waldstein, New York Times

The suspicions and resentment had built to such a degree that the manager was compelled to call a most unusual team meeting. It was the middle of July 2001 and the A's clubhouse was about to explode.

A series of events on the field led several players to believe that shortstop Miguel Tejada had been helping friends on opposing teams by tipping off pitches and by allowing balls they hit to get past him occasionally during games with lopsided scores.

No hard evidence has ever been produced, and to this day Tejada, now an All-Star with the Houston Astros, denies his teammates' accusations, which only recently have been uncovered.

Manager Art Howe, contrary to his laissez-faire reputation, was forced to address the issue. He spoke first on Tejada's behalf, trying to quell the outrage. Then Jason Giambi, the unequivocal leader of the team, laid out the players' concerns.

"It really shocked me to the point of disbelief," said Tim Hudson, then a young pitcher for the A's. "But I figured, if that's an issue where we need to clear the air a bit, then we need to clear the air a little bit."

Hudson called Tejada, a six-time All-Star, "a great teammate" and said he still finds it impossible to believe that Tejada would help the opposition.

A's rally late to top Angels

Mazzaro making progress during rookie season

By Glenn Rabney / Special to MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- For right-hander Vin Mazzaro, Saturday night's game was his season in a microcosm. He started strong, then struggled and finally regrouped, showing a little more of his potential.

Unfortunately, the total effort only lasted five innings, and Mazzaro left trailing by three runs. Fortunately for the A's, they were able to rally for three runs in the seventh and another in the eighth to defeat the Angels, 4-3, before 43,011 at Angel Stadium.

Mazzaro, who started off his Major League career with two straight wins that covered 13 2/3 scoreless innings, began Saturday night's outing in the same fashion, hitting the corners for strikes and retiring seven of the first eight batters.

In the third and fourth innings, Mazzaro seemed more like the pitcher who lost eight straight after his brilliant first two starts.

In the third, he gave up back-to-back singles and a Bobby Abreu sacrifice fly, giving the Angels a 1-0 lead. In the next inning, Mazzaro struggled even more, giving up a two-run homer to Maicer Izturis and then loading the bases with a wild pitch on a strikeout, a single and a walk before recording the third out.

The fifth inning represented where he is now, as he showed more of what the A's hope to see in the future. Mazzaro easily made it through the frame, giving up only one harmless single.

"I really wanted to come out for the sixth," Mazzaro said. "I was feeling pretty good and had had a short inning."

With 99 pitches in the book, including 66 strikes, and almost 150 innings for the season, Oakland manager Bob Geren decided Mazzaro had done enough.

"He pitched very well. All the young kids have pitched well," Geren said. "They're going to give us as many innings as they can, but we're going to be watching it."

As for the difficulties in the middle of Mazzaro's outing, Geren felt they were typical of those experienced by young pitchers.

"I thought he was just right off the zone, didn't miss by much," the skipper added. "When you go through the lineup a second time, third time, they've had a good look at you. It's a bit harder."

Mazzaro agreed with Geren's assessment.

"I was missing a little bit, probably trying to nibble too much," the 22-year-old right-hander said.

As for the total workload he's experiencing as he moves his way to the end of his first Major League season, Mazzaro doesn't expect any problems.

"I'm getting a little tired as the season goes on," he said. "I've pitched more than I have [previously], but I feel good."

Geren will continuously evaluate his young pitchers and how deep they should go into games.

"With the innings, there are going to be more games where we just ask for five innings from the starters," Geren said. "That's where the performance by Jeff Gray was important. When you put in a guy like Gray in the middle innings and he holds them, that's big."

For Mazzaro and the rest of the young pitching corps, it's all a learning experience. This year also has been a bonding experience for what might well be the next great Oakland staff.

On most staffs, a rookie can go to one of the veterans for advice, but on the A's, it's been communal learning.

"We go to each other; we learn from each other," Mazzaro explained. "We talk after each start about what we did wrong, mistakes ... and about changes that we need to make."

Mazzaro also credits A's coaches, including pitching coach Curt Young, who Mazzaro said teaches them all a lot.

On the other hand, most rookies have to withstand the comparison to the veteran stars on their staff, almost always a daunting task for the new kid on the block. With everyone being new, the comparisons are easier.

"It's probably easier going through this where we're all in the same boat," admitted Mazzaro. "You don't have to compare yourself to guys who have been doing it for years."

The only comparisons Mazzaro and his teammates are subject to is where they are now, compared to where they were in the spring.

As closer Andrew Bailey summed it up, "We've all come a long way."

Anderson on way to being A's ace

Oakland (57-72) at Los Angeles (76-52), 12:35 p.m. PT

By Glenn Rabney / Special to MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- When a Major League staff is comprised of four and sometimes five rookie starters, the grading scale tends to be a bit more forgiving, as you are judged against a peer group that is going through the same struggles.

At the same time, the chance to establish yourself as the ace of the staff is more easily obtainable. For 21-year-old rookie Brett Anderson, that title is within his reach if he can finish out the season pitching the way he has since the All-Star break.

Over his past 11 starts, Anderson is 4-2 with a 3.01 ERA, and the left-hander has given up more than three earned runs only twice. More importantly, he has pitched more than six innings in eight of those 11 starts while failing to complete at least five only once.

Without the ability to learn from an experienced veteran, the learning process for A's pitchers has become more of a shared experience -- a process that has bonded them as a group and has seemed to have served Anderson particularly well.

When asked what he was looking for from Anderson over the final month of the season, Oakland manager Bob Geren said: "Just continue what he's doing. We're going to watch all the kids with how many innings [they throw]."

With a 140 1/3 innings under his belt this season -- 20 more than he's pitched in any previous season -- Anderson is in uncharted territory, but it doesn't look like he is running out of gas. If anything, it seems as if he's getting stronger, hurling seven innings in each of his previous two starts and striking out 14. Anderson also sports a very impressive 117-40 strikeout-to-walk ratio for the season.

While his 7-9 record might not sound special, the way he's pitched in the second half of his first big league season and the improvement he's shown so quickly suggest that Anderson may very well be not only the ace of the staff, but the latest in a long line of very special A's pitchers.

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Brett Anderson (7-9, 4.35 ERA)

Anderson was brilliant during his seven-inning stint in Seattle on Tuesday, scattering six hits and a walk while striking out eight on the way to a no-decision. A late infield error cost him the victory. Anderson, who relied heavily on his fastball against the Mariners, has faced the Angels twice this season, both times in Oakland. On May 4, he gave up five runs on nine hits over 4 2/3 innings. On July 19, he gave up two hits over eight shutout innings.




LAA: RHP John Lackey (8-7, 4.16 ERA)

Lackey was denied career win No. 100 when he struggled against the Tigers on Tuesday at Angel Stadium. Lackey was effective early, but he lost it as the game went on, allowing two solo homers in the fifth and back-to-back triples in the seventh on his 116th and 117th pitches of the game. In all, Lackey allowed five runs on 11 hits over six-plus innings in the Angels' 5-3 loss. Lackey has dominated the A's, historically, going 15-4 with a 2.66 ERA in 27 career starts.

Tidbits

With Vin Mazzaro's start on Saturday night, the A's have had 93 games started by a rookie pitcher in 2009, tying the Oakland record set in 1983. Chris Codioli, Tim Conroy, Bill Krueger, Gorman Heimueller, Mike Warren, Ben Callahan, Curt Young and Mark Smith combined for that total in the '83 season. ... Andrew Bailey has converted each of his past 14 save opportunities dating back to June 17, and his 20 saves this season lead all Major League rookies. ... Bobby Crosby (left calf), who is eligible to come off the disabled list on Sept. 2, ran before the game. ... Since the All-Star break, the A's are batting .276, which is the sixth-best average in the AL. Before the break, they were ranked last in the league, batting only .246. ... Kurt Suzuki leads the AL with 106 games started at catcher and a .996 fielding percentage. He has committed only three errors this year. An Oakland catcher has lead the AL in games started in five of the previous eight seasons.

Up next

- Monday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 4-5, 5.88) vs. Royals (Luke Hochevar, 6-7, 5.52), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Tuesday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-1, 5.24) vs. Royals (Kyle Davies, 5-9, 5.94), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Wednesday: Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 7-12, 4.64) vs. Royals (Brian Bannister, 7-11, 4.60), 12:35 p.m. PT 

After one year, video replay finds its place in baseball

By Seth Livingstone, USA TODAY

Nearly a year ago, Alex Rodriguez sent a ninth-inning fly ball sailing high over the left-field foul pole and ricocheting off a catwalk above the playing surface at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla.

When umpiring crew chief Charlie Reliford heeded Tampa Bay Rays manager Joe Maddon's request to review the play Sept. 3, it marked the first time video replay was employed to influence a ruling in the major leagues.

After reviewing the play for 2 minutes, 15 seconds, umpires concluded they had made the correct call on the field. Rodriguez's ball was fair. His home run stood.

There was no squawking from Maddon, who thinks the system is useful and fair. "It has not been intrusive," he says. "It's only (about) getting it right."

Major League Baseball, traditionally slow to adopt change, made a landmark decision when it decided to integrate video replay on a limited basis into its umpiring process beginning Aug. 28 last year.

It became the last major team sport to use video replay as a tool in officiating.

"I'm old-fashioned," Commissioner Bud Selig acknowledged. "But the time has come for this."

Selig said improvements in technology made the time right for baseball to move into the video age.

But the commissioner remains adamant about limiting replay's use. "My opposition to unlimited instant replay is still very much in play," he says.

By all accounts, the use of replay, which has been restricted to the review of home run calls, has been a success.

"I like it," Florida Marlins outfielder Cody Ross says. "If it's a big home run, whether it's for you or against you, the right call needs to be made."

Since the use of replay went into effect, 47 calls have been reviewed through Aug. 23, with 15 reversals, according to David Vincent of Retrosheet.org. Under the rule, calls are reviewed at the discretion of the crew chief. Calls may be reviewed to determine whether a ball was fair or foul, cleared the fence or was interfered with by a fan.

"To be totally honest, it's gone much better than we thought it would," says Jimmie Lee Solomon, MLB executive vice president. "The process has been seamlessly integrated into the game, and the umpires have been tremendous in their acceptance and utilization of it."

"For me, the true test was whether or not it would become a distraction or take away from the game. It has not. I think it's actually enhanced the game. Umpires are very comfortable that a play can be reviewed and the right call can be made, and the fans are very happy with that."

Universally, those involved with the game seem to see replay's merits.

"I think it's already paid some dividends," Los Angeles Angels manager Mike Scioscia says. "Some things happen a long way away from where an umpire is on the field. To get a clean look on a fair or foul call on a home run — which is arguably one of the most important calls an umpire can make in terms of taking runs off the board or putting them back on — I think that's important."

Raising red flags

Don't tell Michael Cuddyer and the Minnesota Twins the system can't be improved.

Cuddyer was called out on a game-ending play, attempting to score the tying run from second base on a wild pitch by the Oakland Athletics' Michael Wuertz on July 20.

Cuddyer slammed his helmet in frustration. Replays confirmed he'd beaten Wuertz's tag. But because replays are not employed for safe or out calls on the bases, Oakland, which had rallied from a 10-0 deficit, walked away with a 14-13 win.

"I've said it all along, I want a red flag," Minnesota manager Ron Gardenhire said the next day, referring to NFL coaches' ability to challenge rulings on the field. "Last night would have been a great red flag game. Football has a red flag. Why can't we?"

Six days later, the Cincinnati Reds and Chicago Cubs had a similar situation. Replays indicated Edwin Encarnacion beat the tag of Cubs catcher Koyie Hill but was called out by Laz Diaz, who might not have had the perfect angle. Cameras saw what Diaz could not.

Such situations raise the question: If replay is good for determining home runs, why wouldn't it be good for other calls such as close plays on the basepaths?

Traditionalists caution that the game should not be tampered with.

"The beauty of the sport is it does have a human component," Solomon says. "If you go far enough, then why not play with groups of robots or a computer game — take the human out all together?"

MLB vice president of umpiring Mike Port says calls on the bases could create a practical problem.

"As opposed to football, which has a stoppage at the end of each play, our plays continue," he says. "There could be a problem placing runners. That would create a situation requiring more umpire's judgment."

The game has long been leery of opening a Pandora's box. Umpires' ball-and-strike judgment has been subject to review based on the QuesTec system, designed to enhance consistency by reviewing calls. Not surprisingly, the umpires balked at the intrusion.

"By expanding it, I think you're opening up too many avenues," Pittsburgh Pirates manager John Russell says. "But replays on the homers I think are good. The ballparks are so different now. People can hang over (outfield fences). You have nooks and crannies. With replay you can't really argue it."

But what about a system similar to that employed by the NFL — one that might give managers one or two challenge opportunities a game?

The NBA uses replay to review situations in which the clock comes into play or a player's foot might be on the three-point line.

The NHL uses it to determine whether a puck is in the net or a goal is illegally deflected.

The NFL's challenge system not only allows for a multitude of reviews but also adds an element of strategy.

In baseball, if a team was granted one challenge a game, would the manager use it in the second inning or elect to save his challenge for a late-inning play that could dictate the outcome?

"Just because an element is interesting does not mean it's necessarily good for the game," Solomon says.

Some think it at least merits consideration.

"Some days you think, 'Wow, I really wish we could have challenged that play,' " Ross says. "It really could have turned the ballgame, right there.

"It's a huge deal in the NFL, and I'm a big fan of it in football. I'm screaming, 'Throw the flag!' So I can understand where you could get excited about it in baseball, too."

But Chicago White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen isn't buying red flag replays.

"I think we have to respect the umpire's call," he says. "That (red flag challenge) will change the game. That will change the respect of the umpires, the trust. ... I don't think we've got to go so much for gadgets."

Overtured calls

Tropicana Field also became the site of the first overturned call Sept. 19. This time Maddon won but Gardenhire's team still got the short end of the stick.

Tampa Bay's Carlos Pena hit a fly ball to right against Minnesota's Boof Bonser that was touched by a fan. First-base umpire Mike DiMuro originally ruled interference and awarded Pena second base. But after a 4-minute, 10-second review, the umpiring crew, headed by Gerry Davis, reversed the call to a home run in an 11-1 Rays win.

Gardenhire couldn't quarrel.

"The whole thing is getting it right," he said.

Replay was used twice May 13. In the Pirates-St. Louis Cardinals game, Adam LaRoche settled for a ground-rule double after it was determined his ball — initially ruled a two-run homer — failed to clear a protective screen above the fence.

It was the first home run taken away by replay, but not the last.

Later that day, Marlins pinch-hitter Ross Gload also lost a two-run homer when his drive down the right-field line was reviewed and determined to be foul.

That call made a difference. Gload eventually struck out, and his team lost to the Milwaukee Brewers 8-6.

Brewers first baseman Prince Fielder was the first to protest the call.

"If it helps the umpires get it perfect, then (replay) is fine with me," Fielder says. But the Milwaukee slugger isn't convinced replay should be extended beyond home run calls.

"We've got to respect the umpires," he says. "Is everything going to be replayed?"

Port notes there have been a couple of what he calls "half reversals" — situations in which umpires, knowing they had replay at their disposal, did not immediately call home runs but let plays continue.

"An umpire might be inclined to let a play run out rather than to call a home run immediately and have everyone stop," Port says.

'Human-error factor'

Pirates rookie Andrew McCutchen suggests replay could be useful when determining whether fly balls are caught or trapped.

Ross knows that's the case.

"I've caught a ball that I trapped and got away with it," he admits. "The (opposing) manager came out and argued, but the umpire said, 'No, he caught it.' ... Sometimes you've just got to be able to sell it."

Even at the expense of getting every call right, Pirates general manager Neal Huntington is afraid more challenges could have an adverse effect.

"I think the limited role it has is appropriate," he says. "On a game-changing play or a home run call, I think it has its application there, but beyond that I'm not sure I'd be in favor."

"For one thing, it would slow the game down, and we have pace issues anyway. And to remove the human element — I think it's just part of the game. Calls are sometimes going to go against us."

Length of games is a concern.

"Some fans have been critical that the games last too long," Solomon says. "We're working very hard on pace-of-game protocols to make sure games are more quickly paced."

"I don't think we want to start involving technology or anything else that further slows it down."

Cardinals manager Tony La Russa likes things just the way they are.

"It seems to be working the way they've got it," he says. "The idea is to get the play right."

But as far as expanding it?

"Let the umpires do their job," La Russa says. "I've gotten used to them making the calls. You give it your best shot, and once in a while you're human. You have one go against us, (but) the next one could go for you."

And that, White Sox reliever Matt Thornton says, is a part of the game's tradition.

"You take away a little bit from the history of baseball, the human-error factor," he says. "That's been part of the game, the human-error factor. You can have a little bit (of replay) in there, but I don't think it needs to be in there too much more."

Mark DeRosa of the Cardinals says he's "on the fence" about expanding replay.

"I don't know that it would be such a bad thing, just not to the point where we're replaying 10 calls a game." he says.

"I feel like on a critical call, to end the game, maybe it could be used," he says. "(But) ticky-tack stuff throughout the course of a game, I don't know.

"I don't know how umpires would feel about having it over their shoulders — whether they would embrace it, knowing they wouldn't be getting the play wrong or feel like sometimes it was hanging over their heads."

Joe West, president of the World Umpires' Association, and several other MLB umpires declined to comment for this story.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Early runs lift River Cats

By Nick Hunte, rivercats.com

During a night of tributes, the Sacramento River Cats defeated the Fresno Grizzlies 9-5 before 12,736 fans at Raley Field.

In honor of the 20th anniversary of the Bay Bridge World Series, the River Cats paid tribute to the 1989 World Champion Oakland Athletics, who defeated the Giants in a sweep. World Series MVP Dave Stewart, Dave "Hendu" Henderson and Tony Phillips were on hand for a pre-game ceremony.

Sacramento took a commanding early lead by scoring two runs in the first inning and seven in the second. Although Fresno scored three runs after the River Cats' big rally, the Grizzlies could never fully recover.

Sacramento third baseman Brett Wallace (3-for-5, two RBIs) and second baseman Adrian Cardenas (2-for-5, two RBIs) led the offensive attack. Designated hitter Tommy Everidge also contributed a two-run single to right field that gave the River Cats a 4-2 lead as part of the seven-run second. Eric Munson smacked a two-run double later in the inning.

The River Cats defense also came up big throughout the night, as right fielder Travis Buck threw out Grizzlies second baseman Matt Downs at second base, and Matt Carson threw out Adam Witter from center field to home plate.

Right-hander Clayton Mortensen (9-8, 4.39 ERA) started the game for Sacramento and picked up the win for the River Cats. He pitched 7.0 innings, threw three strikeouts and gave up five runs (three earned) and 11 hits. Right-hander Scott Patterson (1-3, 4.01 ERA) picked up the save for the River Cats, throwing one inning with two strikeouts.

Right-hander Kevin Pucetas (10-5, 4.66 ERA) lasted 1.2 innings and gave up nine runs and eight hits.

The River Cats will play their final home game of the regular season Sunday against the Grizzlies during Fan Appreciation Day.

Stockton's Offense Silent In 3-1 Loss To Quakes

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, Calif. - One year after winning their 11th Cal-League title, the Stockton Ports suffered a loss on Saturday night that will leave them on the outside looking in at the playoffs in 2009. The Boys of Banner Island received minimal offense in a 3-1 loss to the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes, and with the defeat have now been eliminated from the playoff race in the North Division.

Stockton got off to a quick start in the top of the first, but probably should've come away with more runs than they did. With runners at the corners and one out, Shane Keough scored from third on a wild pitch uncorked by Quakes starter Jayson Miller (6-9) to give the Ports a 1-0 lead. After Miller yielded back-to-back walks to Grant Desme and Christian Vitters to load the bases with one out, Matt Smith bounced into an inning-ending double play to cut the rally short.

Miller settled right down after the rocky first inning. The Quakes starter never put more than one baserunner on at a time after the first, and the run he allowed would end up being the only one he'd allow his entire outing. Miller would earn the win, going six strong innings and allowing a run on five hits while striking out five.

Ports starter Scott Hodsdon (6-10), pitching in his hometown, retired the first four batters he faced to start the game, including back-to-back strikeouts of his first two hitters. Rancho Cucamonga's first hit came with one down in the second—a solo home run from Jay Brossman to tie the score at one.

In the third, with a runner at second and one out, Andrew Romine singled up the middle to score Alberto Rosario and put the Quakes up for good 2-1. Hodsdon would allow another hit in the third, putting two on with one out, but escaped the jam by retiring the next two hitters.

The Quakes tacked on another run in the fifth. With Rosario at third and two down, Effren Navaro knocked a two-out single to right to make it 3-1.

Hodsdon would control the damage throughout his outing but still end up with the loss, going six innings and allowing three runs on nine hits while walking one and striking out six.

The Ports offense would continue to struggle while facing the Quakes bullpen, though they did have their chances. After back-to-back strikeouts were recorded by Robert Fish to start the seventh, Gabriel Ortiz drew a walk, and then Michael Richard singled to right to put two aboard. Fish, however, got Jermaine Mitchell to fly to left to end the inning.

Keough led off the top of the eighth against Ismael Carmona by hitting a ball over the head of right-fielder Clay Fuller. Fuller, however, would start a relay that would end up cutting Keough down at third as he tried to stretch his double to a triple. Steve Kleen followed with a single to right, then went to second on a passed ball. Carmona, however, would get Todd Johnson (who came in for Desme to play left in the seventh) to fly to left. Quakes closer Michael Kohn (SV, 3) was then summoned from the bullpen and struck out Christian Vitters to end the inning and the final Ports threat.

Kohn went on to strike out the side in the ninth to polish off the ballgame for the Quakes.

Derrick Gordon pitched two scoreless frames for the Ports after Hodsdon's six innings.

Desme was taken out of the game when the Ports came out on defense in the top of the seventh for precautionary reasons. He felt a slight tweak in his hamstring after his double in the sixth.

The Ports and Quakes will play the final game of their four-game set on Sunday at The Epicenter. Newcomer Julio Ramos (0-0, 0.00 ERA) will make his Ports debut after he was added from Vancouver. He'll be opposed by Quakes left-hander Manuel Flores (1-2, 3.70 ERA). First pitch is set for 5:05 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Keep Rolling on Homestand

Leblanc-Poirier leads Kane County to 5-1 mark so far on Elfstrom stretch

GENEVA, III. – Mathieu Leblanc-Poirier tossed six solid innings in a quality start, and Conner Crumbliss doubled, tripled and scored three times Saturday night as the Kane County Cougars cruised to a 5-1 victory over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers in front of 10,062 fans at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars are now 5-1 on their eight-game homestand and have won eight consecutive games against the Timber Rattlers.

Leblanc-Poirier (4-7) gave up an unearned run in the first inning, and that became Wisconsin's only run. The right-hander yielded one hit, walked two and fanned five over six innings for the victory. Scott Deal logged two scoreless innings before Jose Guzman pitched the ninth in a non-save situation to close it out.

Crumbliss tripled and scored on a wild pitch from Cody Scarpetta (4-11) in the first to make it 1-1, and Petey Paramore doubled home Jeremy Barfield in the fourth to give the Cougars a lead they never gave away. Crumbliss came in again in the seventh on a bases-loaded walk to Barfield, and Leonardo Gil and Steve Parker collected RBIs in the eighth to make it 5-1.

The Cougars (30-32, 71-61) and Timber Rattlers (23-38, 57-74) play Game 3 of the four-game set Sunday afternoon at 2 CT. Shawn Haviland (6-10, 4.43) will face R.J. Seidel (1-3, 7.16).

Eugene uses force in 8th to take 12-4 victory

By Rob Fai / Vancouver Canadians

(Nat Bailey Stadium - Vancouver, BC) - Any hopes of a late inning, come from behind victory were dashed when Eugene SS Dean Anna crushed a grand slam over the center field wall helping the Emeralds to a 12-4 victory over the Vancouver Canadians on Saturday night.

Vancouver and the Emeralds were tied at 3-3 heading into the top of the 8th inning when the Eugene got to Canadians **RHP Juston Street** who gave up a solo home run to C Jason Hagerty (6). Hagerty was the first of thirteen batters to take their swings in the frame.

Eugene SS C Dean Anna greeted **RHP Nathan Long** who replaced Street with a grand slam in the 8th inning to put the final touches on a seven-run inning that buried the Canadians.

The Emeralds would snap a four-game losing skid vs. Vancouver with the victory. The Canadians became the second team eliminated from post-season contention in the Northwest League West Division as Salem-Keizer defeated Everett 4-3 to move ten games up on Vancouver with just eight games remaining.

For a complete box score from Saturday night's 12-4 loss to Eugene, please visit the link at the top of this story.

The Canadians (33-35) will play game two of this three-game series on Sunday, August 30th out at Nat Bailey Stadium against the Eugene Emeralds (31-37). **RHP Ronny Morla** (1-4) will get the start against the Emeralds with first pitch set for 1:05pm.

With only five home dates remaining, tickets to Vancouver Canadians baseball are available by calling 604.872.5232 or by visiting the link at the top of this story.