



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

September 3, 2009



Originally published Wednesday, September 2, 2009 at 6:24 PM

Felix Hernandez outduels Scott Kazmir in Mariners' 3-0 victory over Angels

Mariners ace continues to make his Cy Young bid with eight strong innings.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

Some late-season help for the Mariners isn't hurting Felix Hernandez's chances at a Cy Young Award.

Hernandez found himself in awfully familiar territory on Wednesday, dominating an opponent yet still uncertain of earning a decision as the seventh-inning stretch began. But that's when Bill Hall, acquired just two weeks ago from Milwaukee, took over this eventual 3-0 win over the Los Angeles Angels with both his bat and his feet.

Hall doubled home the game's first run off Angels starter Scott Kazmir, then stole third base and scored when the throw there bounced into left field. It all added up to a crucial 14th victory for Hernandez, who kept pace with other Cy Young contenders while lowering his earned-run average with eight shutout innings in the process.

"With the way FiFi was throwing the ball today, Felix, he was unbelievable," Hall said of Hernandez. "You just know that if you score a couple for him, you're going to win the ballgame."

A crowd of 22,130 at Safeco Field had waited most of the day to see the Mariners score even one run for their ace. They'd watched the Mariners load the bases with nobody out in the first inning, only to see Kazmir, making his Angels debut after a trade from Tampa Bay last week, strike out the side - topping it off by fanning Hall.

Kazmir went on to retire 18 in a row, striking out eight, and didn't allow another hit until Hall launched a double to left center that soared beyond two outfielders and allowed Mike Sweeney to score from first. The versatile Hall had already distinguished himself in the field, making his first start at second base and turning in several fine plays to keep things scoreless.

And then, after the first run finally scored, Kazmir was replaced by reliever Kevin Jepsen, who fell behind 2-0 to Jack Wilson, then had Hall take off toward third base.

"Usually, when those pitchers are behind in the count, especially 2-0, 3-0, they don't really want to look back there at you," Hall said. "They want to concentrate on that [catcher's] mitt and get that strike across. Those are situations I try to take advantage of, because you can get a nice little running lead and take off on him if they don't look at you.

"I was kind of hoping he would do that, anticipated it and was ready for it and took off."

When catcher Mike Napoli's throw was offline and skipped into the outfield, the Mariners had a lead Hernandez would not relinquish. Hernandez pitched a perfect eighth, running his pitch count up to 114, then let closer David Aardsma come on to notch his 33rd save.

"I was in the bullpen and I felt like 'I've got to be Felix today,'" Hernandez said. "Because they've got a good team."

Hernandez lowered his earned-run average from 2.77 to 2.65, narrowing the gap with the 2.32 by league leader Zack Greinke in the Cy Young race.

Hernandez is now 14-5, one victory ahead of Greinke and one behind league leaders Justin Verlander and C.C. Sabathia - though he enjoys a hefty ERA lead on both.

"My sinker today was unbelievable," said Hernandez, who struck out six in the late-afternoon shadows. "I didn't throw too many breaking balls."

One of the strikeout victims was Torii Hunter with the bases loaded in the third after back-to-back walks.

"Hernandez was filthy," Hunter said. "He had the shadows. We had no chance. When he throws 96 with sink, it's pretty tough."

And when the bats did make contact, the gloves were there. Hernandez fielded three comebackers himself and heaped praise on Hall and the others behind him.

Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said Hall "plays with a lot of passion and energy" and has added to a revitalized infield doing better defensively than at the start of the season.

Wakamatsu added Hernandez to the list of defensive improvements he's seen, noting how the pitcher's quick delivery helped catcher Rob Johnson throw out speedy Chone Figgins on a base-stealing attempt in the first.

Earlier this year, Wakamatsu called Hernandez out publicly for letting the Angels run wild on him. Hernandez has been a different pitcher ever since - good enough to be mentioned in any Cy Young discussion.

"We've got some tough games ahead of us," Wakamatsu said. "If he pitches like he did today, I think he's got an awfully strong chance at it."

Especially with a little help around him.

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Read his daily blog at www.seattletimes.com/Mariners <<http://www.seattletimes.com/Mariners>>

Angel dust

The Mariners have won four of five series against the AL West-leading Angels this season with one remaining.

Dates	M's W-L	Where
April 14-16	2-1	Seattle
April 24-26	2-1	Anaheim
May 18-21	1-3	Seattle
May 29-31	2-1	Anaheim
Aug. 31-Sept. 2	2-1	Seattle

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Originally published Wednesday, September 2, 2009 at 8:35 PM

Ken Griffey Jr. could return to Mariners lineup Thursday

Ken Griffey Jr. took batting practice Wednesday and had an MRI done on his swollen knee earlier this week.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

Ken Griffey Jr. could return to the Mariners lineup today.

Griffey took batting practice Wednesday and had an MRI done on his swollen knee earlier this week. He hasn't played in nearly a week, but his knee is feeling better. He is expected back in the lineup during the series in Oakland.

Wednesday, Griffey and some other Mariners players got a look at a new batting helmet that's been manufactured and approved for use. The Rawlings S110 is designed to cushion the blow of a fastball, supposedly up to 100 mph. But it also makes the helmet heavier, something some major-leaguers have expressed reservations about.

Griffey wasn't impressed. "It looks like a motorcycle helmet," he quipped. Manager Don Wakamatsu called it the "Gazoo" helmet - a reference to a "Flintstones" TV character who wears a huge green helmet.

Notes

- **Jose Lopez** played at first base Wednesday against the Angels. Wakamatsu wanted the most right-handed lineup possible.
- **Brandon Morrow** is having some issues with forearm tightness down at Class AAA Tacoma. He's due to start on Sunday, but the plan is first to have him throw a bullpen session before Friday. If all goes well, he'll be on the mound Sunday.
- Wakamatsu said **Carlos Silva** felt very good during his 23-pitch outing for Class A Everett Tuesday night. Silva struck out the side, but also allowed two runs, one earned, on three hits. The team will try to get him in a game for an inning or two for Tacoma today.

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September 2, 2009 at 7:45 PM

Bill Hall helps Felix Hernandez earn win No. 14

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Looked for a long time today like Felix Hernandez would fail to earn that important 14th victory as he tries to build some separation from Zack Greinke (and keep pace with others) in the Cy Young Award race. But Bill Hall delivered a one-out double in the seventh off Scott Kazmir to bring home Mike Sweeney from first with the opening run of the ballgame. See the run scoring in the photo above.

Hall later broke for third on a steal attempt, made it, then scored when the throw wound up in left field. He also played a great game at second base.

The Mariners added a run in the eighth on a bases-loaded walk by Adrian Beltre.

"You look at the way we manufactured some runs today," Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said. "You have to do that against a club like this."

Wakamatsu also raved about the defense, which was on top of its game and enabled Hernandez to gain some important Cy Young ground.

Hernandez went eight shutout innings to lower his ERA from 2.77 to 2.65. That's quite a day. He still trails the 2.32 of league leader Zack Greinke. But let's see how much closer Hernandez can narrow that ERA gap. There is still a month to go.

Hall was asked how Hernandez fares with other top pitchers he's played with. He listed him as right up there with C.C. Sabathia and Ben Sheets when they were at the top of their games.

"These guys, it's amazing what happens on days they pitch," he said. "These guys are just relaxed, hanging out on days they don't pitch. But when it's gametime, these guys are locked in at the end of the dugout, making pitches and trying to compete."

Hall added: "All of these guys have great will to win. They feel like they can't get beat by anybody and they're upset when they do."

As for his own play, Hall feels he has a shot to show the Mariners what he can do and that he should be considered for a full-time role.

"Nobody ever wants to be labeled as a utility player, because utility players don't play every day," he said. "I feel like I can move around, but I do want to be in the lineup every day. I don't mind where I play. I just feel like I'm a ballplayer. Bill Hall the ballplayer. Nothing else. Just put me out there and I'll try to do something to help the team, whether it's defensively or offensively or both.

"I don't really come to the field saying 'I'm this position' or 'that position'. I just want to be out there on that field giving this team a chance to win."

Hernandez gave his team a chance to win.

Here's what Torii Hunter -- who struck out twice against Seattle's ace -- had to say.

"Hernandez was filthy," Hunter said. "He had the shadows. We had no chance. When he throws 96 with sink, it's pretty tough."

Hunter was asked what it's like to try to hit a sinker like the one Hernandez was throwing today when the late-afternoon shadows are closing in.

"Put a helmet on and see for yourself," he said. "It's scary. The ball is moving in and out of the sun and darkness. You have no chance. It's filthy."

Hernandez's sinker was working so well that he didn't throw many breaking balls. Didn't need to.

When he's getting that kind of movement on pitches that fast, just let them fly and see what happens. Nothing happened for the Angels today.

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September 2, 2009 at 5:09 PM

Los Angeles Angels at Seattle Mariners: 09/02 game thread

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

I'm sure the Mariners are regretting the fact they left the bases loaded in the first inning, despite having none out when they were filled. That's because Scott Kazmir has now retired 15 batters in a row. Yes, you heard that part correctly. He's struck out eight guys during that time and we're only through five innings. He's throwing a perfect game if you discount the first three guys in the order. We won't see 27 up, 27 down because of his pitch count, which was at 28 after the first inning. He's now at 88. But he is getting the job done.

So is Felix Hernandez, who has also allowed only two hits through five innings just like Kazmir. We saw this act once before, about a month ago when Hernandez and Mark Buehrle of the White Sox were engaged in a scoreless duel. That game took 14 innings to play. How long will this go before a run is scored?

:27 p.m.: Not sure what happened to Felix Hernandez in that third inning. We're still scoreless, but Hernandez sure pitched himself into a jam before striking out Torii Hunter for the second time today. Hernandez already had two strikeouts in the inning and a runner on first when he all of a sudden could not throw strikes. He walked Chone Figgins and then Bobby Abreu before fanning Hunter.

4:08 p.m.: Looks like the Mariners are going to try to do this the hard way. They loaded the bases with nobody out against Scott Kazmir in the first inning, but then Mike Sweeney, Adrian Beltre and Bill Hall went down swinging. Actually, Sweeney went down looking, but same result. Situational hitting. Simply not there. Been a

problem all year. And on this team, it's a bigger problem than even the anemic M's offensive numbers represent on a daily basis.

3:38 p.m.: Felix Hernandez makes another pitch at Cy Young Award candidacy this afternoon, though the way Zack Greinke looks, it's going to be tough. I'm starting to think Greinke might win the award even if the 13 victories he has now are all he's going to finish with. We'll see. Hernandez has to stay close to him in ERA and pile on the wins.

September 2, 2009 at 1:11 PM

Jose Lopez playing first base today for Mariners

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Here's an interesting look for the Mariners as they get set to take on newly-acquired lefty Scott Kazmir and the Angels. Jose Lopez will be playing at first base. Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu says he wants the most righthanded lineup possible against southpaw Kazmir, who got knocked around by the M's while still with Tampa Bay.

So, that means lefty Mike Carp is out of there and Lopez in at first. Bill Hall moves over to second base.

Ken Griffey Jr. is back today. He's out there right now taking batting practice. Have an interesting story about him for you.

Earlier today, someone showed up with a new, Rawlings S110 reinforced batting helmet that's been manufactured and approved for use. Griffey was shown the new one, alongside the traditional model.

He wasn't all that impressed.

"It looks like a motorcycle helmet," he quipped.

Griffey rapped on the exterior several times and proclaimed that the exterior was no harder than the previous one. Inside, there is some styrofoam type, polypropelene padding (see photo below) that does cushion the blow of a fastball -- supposedly up to 100 mph. But it also makes the helmet heavier, something some major leaguers have already expressed reservations about. The helmet has little air vents in it that give it an aerodynamic look. But the reason they're there is so that the air can

By 2010, the S110 will be mandatory in 16 minor leagues and for 185 minor league teams. It will also be used in the Arizona Fall League starting next month.

In other words, it's going to be common in the big leagues before long, resistance from current players aside.

Wakamatsu called it the "Gazoo" helmet. Those who've watched the Flintstones know what he's talking about. "I'm not knocking it by any means," he said. "But it just looks a little bit big."

Griffey's knee is feeling better, now that he hasn't played in nearly a week, and he is expected back in the lineup during the series in Oakland that starts tomorrow. As we mentioned this morning, his issue is one of long term wear and tear. No miracle fixes other than rest every now and then.

Brandon Morrow is having some issues with forearm tightness down at Class AAA Tacoma. He's due to start on Sunday, but the plan is first to have him throw a bullpen session either today or tomorrow. If all goes well, he'll be on the mound Sunday.

Wakamatsu told us that Carlos Silva felt very good during his 23-pitch outing for Class A Everett last night. Silva struck out the side, but also allowed two runs -- one earned -- on three hits. The team will try to get him in a game for an inning or two for Tacoma on Thursday.

September 2, 2009 at 10:10 AM

Look for September to be Ken Griffey Jr.'s final bow

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Can't go anywhere these days without getting asked the question. No, not whether the Mariners can still win the wild-card. That one seems to have stopped. Now, as the Mariners head into their final 4 1/2 weeks, the question has become whether Ken Griffey Jr. is playing his last month as a major leaguer.

It was asked of me again this morning by KJR AM 950 host Mitch Levy on our weekly Talkin' Baseball segment and, as usual, I had no choice but to answer with honesty. Yes, I think this is Griffey's final month. I think the team hopes so and I do think he is coming to realize it as well, even though, I'm sure, he's going to miss the day-to-day reality of life in the big leagues.

Well, he'll miss some of it, anyway.

He won't miss what he went through yesterday, having an MRI done on a swollen knee. Having been through six knee operations, including one last December on New Year's Eve (party on), I can tell you knees don't get better. At best, you can hope to contain the damage for a while. But it isn't like ligament transplant surgery on your elbow where guys claim they can throw harder than they used to afterwards. You don't run faster after knee surgery. Or change direction better. Or feel better in the morning. I'm one year older than Griffey and in half-decent shape. But it's a good thing I don't have to play pro ball. Or even weekend warrior ball. I see Griffey hobbling around the clubhouse and know exactly why he can't limp out for even DH appearances on a daily basis anymore. Hard to do that when it feels like somebody is jabbing a knife into the back and sides of your kneecap.

Sometimes, it's almost better to have a ligament problem that can be fixed. But when the problem is long-term wear and tear, where the cartilage is eaten away and the fluid inside your knee becomes a permanent resident, there's nothing to fix. As colleague Steve Kelley points out this morning in an excellent column on Griffey, the slugger is only at 373 plate appearances when most had hoped he'd reach 500.

Griffey is still on pace to finish within a dozen PA's of that mark. But not the way he's been going lately, having started just three of the past 13 games.

That's what happens when you get older. Nobody is trying to push Griffey out the door by stating these facts. It just is what it is.

For me, it's not the home run total. Griffey has hit about as many home runs as I thought he might when he signed with the club. I think we had the over/under pegged at around 15.

I did think his on-base-plus-slugging percentage would be a lot closer to .800 than the .728 it currently sits at. Also, that he'd be doing much better against righthanded pitchers.

That he isn't, is another sign it's time to step away.

Some of you might say I'm merely stating the obvious. Thing is, it isn't obvious to all fans, judging by the comments underneath Kelley's column and our paper's online poll in which readers -- by a 60-40 margin -- say Griffey should not retire after this season.

Funny thing is, though, I'd bet if you ask those same readers whether they'd rather the Mariners make the playoffs in 2010, or wait another year until 2011, the vast majority will go with 2010. And that's where the logic fades in the face of emotion. Because what this year's team showed is that even with some of the best defense in all of baseball and three starters -- until Erik Bedard got hurt -- pitching with a top-10 ERA, this club is going to struggle to finish even .500 because of a lack of offense.

And one of the most obvious areas where this club can improve the offense is at Griffey's DH spot.

Of the 11 guys at DH with as many plate appearances or better than Griffey, he has the worst batting average and second-worst OPS (Mike Jacobs of the Royals has a worse OPS). Griffey's .399 slugging percentage is also the worst of that group and this Mariners team really doesn't have a whole bunch of sluggers to step in and fill the void.

Some fans had envisioned Griffey playing the field this year. Well, they were wrong. As the Mariners found out very early, playing Griffey in the field was a recipe for health disaster because his knees couldn't take it. Now, he's struggling to even fill the DH role on a daily basis.

It's time.

And when all is said and done, I have no doubt Griffey will come to that decision on his own. He isn't going to be influenced by what I write, or Kelley, or anybody else. Just look to how he handled the whole free-agency thing last March, keeping everybody hanging until the last minute as he made up his own mind about whether to choose Seattle or Atlanta.

I think he made the right decision. And so does he, by the way.

The job he has done off the field this year has brought value to the club that can't be measured in stats alone. He has helped, along with Mike Sweeney and the coaching staff, to make this ballclub into a professional-acting group again. He's shown the younger players what it is to be and act like a major leaguer. And that's been a full-time job for Griffey. He's worked hard at it. It isn't just a matter of him clowning around in the clubhouse. It's taking active steps to make guys feel included. To help ensure the clubhouse is not dominated by cliques. That players hold themselves accountable for what they do both on and off the field. Accountable to themselves and to their teammates. Ever wonder why this team never seems to stop playing hard? Accountability is the key ingredient to that. And Griffey accomplished all that in his first year back with a club where he barely knew anybody, while at the same time trying to maintain a pro baseball career while dealing with the nagging hurts of a guy who's 39.

And he still provided the fans with some flashback moments.

All told, I think the decision to bring him back this year was a success when you look at the entire package.

But the glow of that success will fade if it's allowed to continue beyond this year. This team needed to be turned around and it was. But this was never going to be a multi-year project. Good teams have "role players" yes, but usually, they do have to bring a certain level of on-field production relative to their job. Even utility infielders offering intangibles aren't kept around if their hitting falls to the bottom of the pack relative to other utility guys.

And for this team to take the next step, it has to bolster the DH position beyond what Griffey brings to the table. This season was about nostalgia and Griffey and company made a surprising run all the way to late-July despite a roster that -- at least in the runs-scored/runs against column -- probably should be well below .500 by now.

There really is no way to sugarcoat this for sensitive fans. I know that no matter how many layers of niceness I pile on to this post, there will be fans outraged that I'm even bringing this topic up. You'll consider it an insult to Griffey that anyone should have an opinion on what he does next. Well, that's OK. You feel what you feel. But this team will not be winning its first World Series or AL pennant with Griffey still playing for it. The sooner some folks shed that notion -- nice and warm as it is -- the easier it will be to come to terms with what has to happen.

Many of you have written in to this space the last three seasons complaining about a lack of playoff berths and championships for the M's relative to other franchises. Believe me, I pay attention to what you say and understand the angst. Well, the first thing winning franchises will tell you is that you have to separate the business end from the emotional side. No franchise is as steeped in tradition and does the whole emotion and nostalgia thing better than the New York Yankees. But that's also a club not afraid to cut ties with its past when a player stops producing. You build nostalgia and tradition by winning. Not the other way around. You don't win by falling back on nostalgia.

Griffey deserves as warm a sendoff as fans can muster this month. And he deserves a chance to arrive at that decision on his own, without having his hand forced. From what I've seen so far, nobody is forcing his hand. They don't have to. Griffey is a smart guy and I'd be shocked if he ever let it come to that.

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Last updated September 2, 2009 7:48 p.m. PT

Hernandez's solid start spoils Kazmir's debut

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE -- Felix Hernandez knew he had to be at his best against a potent Los Angeles lineup.

Hernandez pitched eight scoreless innings to spoil the Los Angeles debut of left-hander Scott Kazmir and the Mariners beat the Angels 3-0 on Wednesday night.

"I was in the bullpen and felt like, 'I got to be Felix today because they got a pretty good team,'" said the Seattle Mariners ace.

Hernandez (14-5) gave up four hits, walked three and struck out six to lower his ERA to 2.65 - second best in the American League behind Kansas City's Zack Greinke (2.32).

Kazmir, who was acquired on Friday by the Angels from Tampa Bay, gave up one run and three hits in 6 1-3 innings. He walked one and struck out eight.

"I knew it was going to a pretty good game," said Hernandez, who beat the Angels for the first time since April 11, 2008. "Kazmir threw outstanding. For me, the key was getting ahead of the hitters. They are great hitters."

After a shaky start to the first inning, Kazmir retired 18 straight before Mike Sweeney opened the seventh with a walk. Bill Hall followed with a double to make it 1-0.

With a 2-0 count on Jack Wilson, Hall then stole third and came home when catcher Mike Napoli's throw bounced past Chone Figgins.

"Usually when pitchers are behind 2-0, 3-0, they really don't want to look back there, they want to concentrate on the mitt," Hall said. "You can get a nice little running lead if they don't look at you."

Seattle added a run in the eighth when Kevin Jepsen issued a bases-loaded walk to Adrian Beltre.

David Aardsma pitched the ninth for his 33rd save in 37 chances.

Hernandez had just one challenging inning. In the third, Mike Napoli had a one-out single then Figgins and Abreu drew two-out walks to load the bases. He then struck out Torii Hunter to escape the threat.

"When we had a chance to score but he would bear down and throw 96 with sink. That's pretty tough," Hunter said. "With our ball club, I felt like we could get runs with anybody but Felix Hernandez. Wow. He's pretty filthy."

The Angels now go to Kansas City next and will face Greinke Saturday. But Hunter said Greinke "is not as tough" as Hernandez.

"Hernandez is definitely nasty, with sink," Hunter said. "Greinke doesn't have that sink. Greinke is just explosive."

The Angels won the opening game of this series, 10-0, but the second-highest scoring team in baseball was held without a run over the past two games.

"For the most part, they did a good job on the mound against us," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "We are going to have to find that offensive continuity and start doing some of the things we know we can do."

Kazmir (8-8) ran into trouble in the first inning when Ichiro Suzuki led off with an infield single. Franklin Gutierrez singled to center with Suzuki sweeping to third. Kazmir then hit Jose Lopez to load the bases.

But Kazmir, who has a career .138 opponents batting average with the bases loaded, then struck out Sweeney, Beltre, and Hall.

"Felix pitched great out there, a quality game," Kazmir said. "I wish I could have been a little more economical in the first inning.

"I felt like there was one pitch I really wanted back - the pitch to Bill Hall. I wanted to throw a fastball in but it got a lot more of the plate than I wanted to."

NOTES: DH Ken Griffey, Jr., who has been unavailable for the past six games because of sore left knee, is expected to start Thursday. "The MRI came back looked real good, so he'll be ready to go," Wakamatsu said. ... Abreu is on a 4-for-31 slide but Scioscia is not concerned. "He's in a little funk now but he says he feels as strong as ever," he said. "We really feel he's going to finish strong so this is just a little bump in the road." ... Napoli's second-inning single broke an 0-for-16 skid.

Things I never thought I'd see at Safeco ...

Posted by Greg Johns at September 2, 2009 11:48 a.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

Went to the Mariners game last night against the Los Angeles Angels just to sit in the stands for a change and saw a few things I'd never have expected even a month ago:

Adrian Beltre stepping to the plate with the "Nutcracker" music playing over the loudspeakers. Ken Griffey Jr. strikes again ...

Mike Sweeney ripping line drives all over the place. Here I thought the guy was done, but he's 16 for 35 over the past 10 games and has raised his batting average from .228 to .269.

A lanky dude named Doug Fister shutting down the hot-hitting Angels and looking like a legitimate contender for next year's starting rotation. Suddenly the Mariners have some interesting options there with Fister, Snell, Ryan Rowland-Smith, Brandon Morrow and Luke French.

Still think they might want to spend a little money and bring in one more established starter to supplement Felix Hernandez, but definitely the rotation pool is getting deeper despite the subtraction of Jarrod Washburn ... who continues getting shelled in Detroit.

Ichiro looking like he's not very fast -- at least for one night -- as he appeared to be running cautiously as he returned from a calf injury. Yeah, he was hitting like always, but he didn't even think about going to second on a ball in the right-center gap and failed to get over to the corner quickly on two balls hit by the Angels.

Michael Saunders struggling offensively. I really thought the kid from Canada was going to provide a little pop in the lineup and still remember his first game when he crushed a drive to deep right that wound up being robbed at the wall.

I figured he'd be a lefty who could rake at Safeco Field, but instead he's hitting .180 in 20 games at home (with a .197 slugging percentage) and sits at .213 with no home runs and four RBIs after 30 games overall.

Good looking athlete who has played some excellent defense, but at some point the bat has to starting coming around.

Jack Wilson hitting .203 with one home run and five RBIs in 74 at-bats for the Mariners, while Josh Wilson is batting .286 with three HRs and eight RBIs in 56 at-bats.

I still like the acquisition of Jack, but guessing the Mariners would like to see a bit more production offensively in the final month before they have to decide whether to exercise his \$8.4 million option for next year.

Bottom line, there's still plenty of things happening out at the ballyard even as the season winds down. One more game at 3:40 p.m. today with the Angels before heading out on the road.

Let me know what you're seeing that you like and dislike now that the calendar has turned to September.

He's not Cy Young, but he's hard to beat

MARINERS: Felix Hernandez continues to impress, silencing the Angels in 3-0 win

RYAN DIVISH; The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/03/09 1:38 am

Against the same team in the same park three months ago, Felix Hernandez didn't look like one of the best pitchers in the American League.

The words "Cy Young" weren't mentioned because nothing about his performance suggested such an honor could be in his immediate future.

On that night, the Los Angeles Angels made the Seattle Mariners ace look ordinary, ripping 11 hits for six runs in 6²/₃ innings. Worse, they stole five bases.

Fast forward to Wednesday afternoon at Safeco Field, and Hernandez looked like an entirely different pitcher. He looked, well, like a Cy Young candidate, pitching eight shutout innings leading the Mariners to a 3-0 win over those same Angels.

On that cold May 30 day, Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu openly criticized Hernandez's focus and preparation following the game, and then later did the same thing in a private meeting with the pitcher.

"That feels like a long time ago," a smiling Hernandez said Wednesday.

Indeed, it feels like two seasons ago. In that short time, Hernandez has steadily grown into the pitcher everyone expected him to be. It's one thing to have a good run of four or five starts, but following that disappointing effort, Hernandez is 12-4 in his last 16 starts with a 2.37 ERA.

Overall he's 14-5 with a 2.65 ERA for the Mariners (70-64).

"This was different game today," he said.

More importantly, Hernandez is a different pitcher - specifically one worthy of some Cy Young consideration.

His latest performance was something to add to his résumé. Hernandez gave up just four hits while striking out eight and walking three against an Angels line-up that came in hitting a league-leading .289 and ranked second in the league in runs scored.

“I thought it was a dominating performance,” Wakamatsu said. “It was probably one of the tougher games he’s pitched, where I’ve seen him battle.”

Indeed, there’s a big difference from carving up the San Diego Padres or the Chicago White Sox. Shutting down the Angels isn’t an easy task.

“This is a tough, tough ballclub to pitch against,” Wakamatsu said. “They’re very, very patient. But when they added (Bobby) Abreu that whole offense took on a different demeanor. They battle and battle. It’s a tough lineup and Felix did a phenomenal job.”

The Angels (78-53) had a few opportunities. Hernandez gave up back-to-back two-out walks in the third inning to load the bases for the ultra-tough Torii Hunter. But Hernandez wouldn’t give in, striking out Hunter on four straight fastballs.

“It seems like he’s always tough,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. “When he needed to make pitches he did, and when we had guys in scoring position he made pitches.”

Hernandez didn’t allow a runner past first base after the third, but all of his work didn’t put him in line for a win for seven innings.

Angels starter Scott Kazmir was equally tough. The lefty loaded the bases in the first inning with no outs and then struck out the side. From there, he just got stronger. He didn’t allow a runner or a hit until the seventh.

But in the seventh, he walked Mike Sweeney to start the inning and gave up a one-out RBI double to left-center to Bill Hall. Scioscia went to the bullpen and reliever Kevin Jepsen.

In the midst of trying to get out of the minor jam, Jepsen kind of lost track of Hall, who surprised everyone by getting a huge jump on an attempted steal of third. Angels catcher Mike Napoli made a late effort to throw out Hall, but his ball bounced in the dirt past third baseman Chone Figgins. Hall scampered home to push the lead to 2-0.

“Usually when those pitchers are behind in the count, they don’t want to look back at you,” Hall said. “I try to take advantage of them because I can get a nice running lead.”

Stealing third can be a dicey proposition since a runner is already in scoring position, but Wakamatsu was pleased with the effort.

“We talked about pressurizing situations,” Wakamatsu said. “I’d like some guys to steal more bases. But he steals that bag pretty easy. I like aggressive baseball. You look at how we manufactured runs and you need to do that against a ballclub like this.”

Despite having thrown 102 pitches, Hernandez pitched a relatively flawless eighth, and his teammates tacked on a run with a bases-loaded walk to Adrian Beltre. Up 3-0, David Aardsma pitched a perfect ninth for his 33rd save.

As for pairing Hernandez with Cy Young, Wakamatsu offered up a nomination.

“We got some tough games ahead of us,” Wakamatsu said. “But if he pitches like he did today, he’s going to be an awfully strong candidate.”

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Rainiers roll, remain in contention

11-2 win: Tacoma jumps to a 4-0 lead in the first inning and beats Salt Lake to stay two games behind Colorado Springs

GRANT CLARK; For The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/03/09 12:05 am

A day after scraping together a lackluster two hits and registering a season-high four errors, the Tacoma Rainiers wasted little time returning to form Wednesday night.

Tacoma jumped on visiting Salt Lake in the first inning, scoring four runs, and matched a season-high with six doubles en route to a key 11-2 victory in Pacific League Coast play at Cheney Stadium.

Despite the win, the Rainiers (71-68) remained two games behind PCL North Division leader Colorado Springs in the standings after they Sky Sox posted a 12-9 win over Portland.

Tacoma has five games left in the regular season - tonight's game against the Bees before closing it out with a four-game home stand against Colorado Springs.

The Rainiers pounded out 16 hits, highlighted by Prentice Redman's 21st home run in the eighth to cap the scoring for Tacoma.

"After yesterday's game where we didn't swing the bats very well, I thought it was nice to see us come out and do what we did in the first tonight," Tacoma manager Daren Brown said. "This was a big ball game for us. This gives us a chance with four games at home against Colorado Springs."

Bryan LaHair and Redman each drove in three runs, while teammate Jerry Owens went 4-for-5.

Gaby Hernandez (9-9) won for the fourth consecutive game, pitching a five-hit complete game with three strikeouts and two walks. It was the third complete game by a Tacoma pitcher this season and the first for Hernandez since July 30, 2007 when he pitched for Double-A Carolina of the Southern League.

The right-handed Hernandez has not lost since July 28 and has been almost untouchable in August - going 6-0 in seven starts with a 3.50 ERA.

In Tuesday's 10-1 loss to Salt Lake, the Rainiers had more errors than hits in a game for the first time this season.

A four-hit first inning on Wednesday, which produced four runs for Tacoma, showed that wouldn't be the case again.

LaHair highlighted the inning by driving in two runs with the first of his two doubles in the game.

Tacoma got an RBI double from Oswaldo Navarro in the second, three runs in the third and a run in the fourth to grab a 9-0 lead.

Salt Lake, which has won three consecutive Pacific North division titles, was eliminated from playoff contention with the defeat as the Bees dropped to 68-70.

On tap

Tacoma closes out the series today at 7 p.m. **Andy Baldwin** (6-10, 4.50 ERA) starts for the Rainiers against **Tommy Mendoza** (0-1, 7.00). Tacoma will conclude the regular season with a four-game home stand against Colorado Springs. The Sky Sox are 7-5 against the Rainiers this season and have won two straight in the series, but have dropped three of four games in Tacoma.

Just call him Bill the ballplayer

MARINERS: Bill Hall doesn't mind being versatile, just so long as he plays every day

RYAN DIVISH; The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/03/09 12:05 am

Bill Hall knows his reputation has been tarnished.

He makes no excuses, and admits it's somewhat deserved after his struggles the past two seasons with the Milwaukee Brewers.

"I feel like I got a lot to prove this year, especially the way things ended in my last couple years in Milwaukee," he said. "I don't want to be forgotten about."

If Hall has proven one thing since joining the Seattle Mariners on Aug. 20 in a trade with the Brewers, it's his versatility.

On Wednesday, he started at second base and played a clean game. At the plate, he drove in one run and scored another in Seattle's 3-0 win over the Los Angeles Angels.

"I really liked the way he played second base and what he did offensively," Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said.

Hall hadn't played second base since June 14, 2008 with the Brewers. But Wakamatsu wanted to get an additional right-handed bat into the lineup against lefty Scott Kazmir, so he moved regular second baseman Jose Lopez to first base and Hall to second.

"I'm trying find out as much as we can with all of our players," Wakamatsu said.

Hall wasn't caught off guard Wednesday.

"Wak does a great job of letting us know early; he told me a few days ago that he wanted me to play second," Hall said. "It's been a while. I took some ground balls to get comfortable."

His best play came on his first play in the first inning, when he went deep up the middle to backhand a ball and threw out Bobby Abreu at first from the seat of his pants.

"Whenever I come from the outfield to the infield, that first ground ball always makes me nervous," he said. "It's always good when it's a tough play and I don't have to think about it."

So far this year, Hall has played third base, left field, right field and now second.

"He's turning into kind of that super-utility guy," Wakamatsu said.

Although it's a nice compliment, Hall doesn't like hearing the words "utility player."

"Nobody ever wants to be labeled a utility player because utility players don't play every day," he said. "I feel like I can move around, but I want to be in the lineup every day."

And it doesn't matter where - third, second or the outfield - he just wants to start.

"I just want to find a way to be in the lineup every day," he said. "I don't mind where I play. I just feel like I'm a ballplayer - Bill Hall, the ballplayer. Just put me in the lineup, and I'll try to do something, defensively or offensively or both, to help this team win."

Just like he did Wednesday.

Short hops

Ken Griffey Jr.'s MRI on his sore knee revealed some inflammation. But Griffey has been feeling better, and Wakamatsu said he'll be in the line-up today. ... **Carlos Silva** threw a rehab outing with Class A Everett, giving up three hits and allowing two runs but striking out the side. Wakamatsu said Silva's velocity wasn't as high as they hoped, but is positive. Silva will throw perhaps an inning or two with the Triple-A Tacoma on Thursday. ... With two hits on Wednesday, **Ichiro Suzuki** is 12 hits away from 200. If he reaches that plateau, it would be his ninth straight season.

On tap

The Mariners leave for 10-game trip starting today in Oakland at 7:07 p.m. on FSN and 710-AM. Probably starting pitchers: **Ian Snell** (3-1, 5.10 ERA) and **Brett Tomko** (3-2, 3.62).

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Seattle Mariners (70-64) at Oakland Athletics (59-74), 10:05 p.m.

By Sports Network; The Sports Network

Published: 09/03/09 7:49 am | Updated: 09/03/09 7:49 am

The Seattle Mariners try to beat the Oakland Athletics for the fifth straight time this evening when the American League West rivals open a four-game series at the Coliseum.

After losing 10 of their 19 matchups with the A's last season, the Mariners have won nine of 12 this year, including four of six in Oakland. Since the start of the 2007 season, Seattle is 32-18 against Oakland with wins in 15 of the 24 games as the visitor.

Hoping to continue that trend tonight will be righty Ian Snell, who has won his last three starts. Snell improved to 3-1 since being acquired from Pittsburgh on Saturday against Kansas City, as he held the Royals to two runs and three hits in five innings.

Over his last three outings -- spanning 16 2/3 innings -- Snell has surrendered just four runs to lower his earned run average with Seattle to a still lofty 5.10. In 21 combined starts this season, Snell is 5-9 with a 5.29 ERA.

Snell beat the A's two starts ago in his only other meeting against them, surrendering a run and four hits in six innings.

Seattle can only hope for the same kind of effort from Snell that it received from Felix Hernandez on Wednesday. Hernandez turned in yet another stellar performance on the mound and Bill Hall's RBI double in the seventh inning proved to be the difference, as Seattle edged Los Angeles, 3-0, to spoil Scott Kazmir's debut in an Angels uniform.

Hernandez (14-5) gave up just four hits while fanning six and walking three batters over eight innings to get the win. The righty has not given up more than three earned runs in 18 of his last 19 starts.

"Felix was unbelievable," said Hall. "He kept us in the game. You just know you need a couple (runs) and you got a shot of winning this ballgame."

Adrian Beltre drove in the other run for the Mariners, who won the final two games of this three-game set and have taken four of six overall. Ichiro Suzuki and Franklin Gutierrez both had two hits -- four of Seattle's five total hits.

Suzuki, who has a 13-game hitting streak against the A's dating back to last season, is 12 hits away from becoming the first player in major league history to have nine consecutive seasons with at least 200.

Oakland, meanwhile, took two of three from the Kansas City Royals, including a 10-4 victory in Wednesday's rubber match. Landon Powell hit his first career grand slam, while Ryan Sweeney and Rajai Davis both had two hits and two RBI for the A's, who have alternated wins and losses over the past eight games. Mark Ellis also drove in a run in the win. Trevor Cahill (8-12) got the win after going five innings and giving up three runs on six hits.

Getting the call for the A's tonight will be righty Brett Tomko, who is 3-2 with a 3.62 ERA. Tomko did not get a decision against the Angels on Friday, despite allowing just two runs and four hits in 5 2/3 innings.

In three starts with the A's Tomko is 2-0 with a 1.62 ERA, as he has allowed just three runs in 16 2/3 innings. Tomko had appeared in 15 games in relief for the Yankees before being released.

Mariners 3, Angels 0 - Bill Hall and Felix Hernandez bail out the Mariners

Posted By Ryan Divish on September 2, 2009 at 10:00 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Obviously, a great outing from Felix Hernandez. But was it a Cy Young type of outing?

"We got some tough games ahead of us," Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said. "But if he pitches like he did today, he's going to be an awfully strong candidate."

Hernandez pitched eight shut-out innings allowing just four hits with eight strikeouts and three walks against an Angels team that came into the game leading the American League West in hitting and second in runs scored.

“I thought it was a dominating performance,” Wakamatsu said. “It was probably one of the tougher games he’s pitched, where I’ve seen him battle.”

It was a far cry from the last time Hernandez faced the Angels in Safeco on May 19th. On that night, he gave up 11 hits and six runs in 6 1/3 innings and having the Angels steal five bases on him. After that game Wakamatsu called him out saying: ” Felix wasn’t sharp. Sometimes you ask guys to step up, and I don’t think he stepped up today.”

But that wasn’t case on the Wednesday. Hernandez stepped up in a big way.

“That feels like a long time ago,” Hernandez said. “This was a different game today.”

It’s different in large part because Felix is a different pitcher. He’s just better, more focused, more polished, more like the pitcher he’s expected to be.

A big key to Hernandez getting the win was Bill Hall, who made a start at second base - the first time he’s played there since June of 2008. And he was solid. His first play in the first inning, he gloved a ball up the middle from Bobby Abreu and then threw him out from the seat of his pants. I am pretty confident in saying Jose Lopez doesn’t make that play. He simply doesn’t have the speed or athleticism or range that Hall does.

I thought Hall looked pretty comfortable defensively and he isn’t known for being the greatest glove.. Offensively, Hall had the RBI double to score Mike Sweeney in the seventh. And he later swiped third off of reliever Kevin Jepsen. On the attempt, Mike Napoli spiked his throw into the ground and Hall scampered home.

“Usually when those pitchers are behind in the count, they don’t want to look back at you,” Hall said. “I try to take advantage of them because I can get a nice running lead.”

Stealing third can be a dicey proposition since a runner is already in scoring position, but Wakamatsu was pleased with the effort.

“We talked about pressurizing situations,” Wakamatsu said. “I’d like some guys to steal more bases. But he steals that bag pretty easy. I like aggressive baseball. You look at how we manufactured runs and you need to do that against a ball club like this.”

Before the game, Wak said that Hall is turning into that “super-utility guy” for the Mariners. Which is a nice compliment but not exactly what Hall wants to hear.

“Nobody ever wants to be labeled a utility player, because utility players don’t play every day,” he said. “I feel like I can move around, but I want to be in the line-up every day.”

Basically this month will be his chance to show the Mariners or another team he is capable of that. He knows people have their doubts.

“I feel like I got a lot to prove this year especially the way things ended in my last couple years in Milwaukee,” he said. “I don’t want to be forgotten about.”

He’s know it’s up to him.

“I just want to find a way to be in the lineup every day,” he said. “I don’t mind where I play. I just feel like I’m a ball player - Bill Hall, the ballplayer. Just put me in the lineup, and I’ll try to do something, defensively or offensively or both, to help this team win.”

Kind of like he did on Wednesday.

Pregame notes: Junior to start tomorrow, a new lineup look.

Posted By Ryan Divish on September 2, 2009 at 1:50 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

A few quick things if you look at the lineup (below), it’s quite a bit different that we’ve seen. Starting with Jose Lopez playing first base and Bill Hall at second base. There’s a few reasons for it.

“With (Scott) Kazmir pitching, I wanted to get in as many right-handed lineup as I could,” Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said. “I wanted to give a little bit look.”

Another thing Wakamatsu wanted to see was Bill Hall play some second base. Hall has played second base in 97 games in his career.

“He’s turning into kind of that super-utility guy,” Wakamatsu said. “I’m trying find out as much as we can with all of our players.”

As for Lopez, this isn’t a permanent thing.

“It’s just a chance to put Bill there and get another right-handed bat in the line-up,” Wakamatsu said. “We’re going to face several lefties coming up, especially with Oakland, and probably with half of them, we’ll put out a right-handed line-up.”

Wak hasn’t always been stringent about putting together line-ups based on the pitching. But he said he will try and do that more during the Oakland series where the Mariners will face. He noted that the AL West is getting very left-handed starter heavy noting Derek Holland in Texas, Brett Anderson in Oakland and Joe Saunders and now Kazmir with the Angels.

First of all Junior rolled in wearing a brand new Seattle Seahawks’ Edgerrin James jersey and said he plans to sport a full Seahawks uniform, including pads and helmet for his upcoming fantasy football draft. He said it was either Edge or a T.J. Houshmandzadeh. Well, it could be worse, he could have went Shaun Alexander. It was kind of a wardrobe day for Junior, he then put on a Montana State football T-shirt that he got from strength coach Allen Wirtala (an MSU grad) to irritate me. And it worked.

After that he opened a box filled with his now infamous white ties, these ones were Ichiro themed. The first tie had this picture of Ichiro (cropped just be a mug shot)

The second one was a pitcher of Ichiro’s dog ... Ikqu ... or Ikky as he calls him. The dog is an akita and looks like this.

Ichiro promptly tied the dog tie and wore it around the clubhouse.

Oh yeah, Junior’s knee is doing “much, much better” according to Wak and he will be in tomorrow’s line-up against Oakland.

As for Ichiro and his calf, it's doing fine. Wakamatsu isn't going to give him any limitations, but won't specifically call a steal for him. Ichiro still has the green light to go when he wants. The biggest issue for Ichiro and the calf is that first explosive step coming out of the batters' box, that's where it could bother him the most. Wak considered giving him a few added days off, but Ichiro has maintained that he doesn't need them.

Other notes ...

Brandon Morrow is scheduled to start on Saturday for the Rainiers and everything is on schedule for him to start at this point. ... Carlos Silva threw 23 pitches last night for Everett. Wak said the reports were good, though his velocity was a little lower than they expected. The plan is for Silva to go Tacoma on Thursday and throw an inning or possibly two.

Published: Thursday, September 3, 2009

Mariners' Hernandez dominates

Seattle's ace pitches one of his best games of the season as the M's beat the AL West-leading Angels 3-0

By Kirby Arnold
Everett Herald Writer

SEATTLE - Three days ago, when winning two of three games from the Los Angeles Angels seemed like the farthest of possibilities for the Seattle Mariners after a 10-run loss, manager Don Wakamatsu sat in his office and stayed positive.

"We can play these guys tough," he said. "But to do it, our starting pitchers need to keep the games tight. If we can do that and get to the late innings, I like our chances."

The Mariners followed Monday's thrashing with two days of baseball just as he described, including a 3-0 victory Wednesday when Felix Hernandez and an eighth-inning burst by the offense were the combo for a second straight victory.

In both games, the Mariners found ways to break a tie score in the seventh, then used their biggest strength - the bullpen - to lock down the Angels at the end.

"I am awfully proud of these guys, especially when you look back a couple of days ago and we got beat pretty bad by those guys," Wakamatsu said.

In the milestone department, it was the Mariners' 70th victory this season to put them six games above .500. They're 9-7 against the Angels, whose lead over Texas in the American League West dropped to 3½ games.

The Mariners, who beat newly acquired Angels starter Scott Kazmir for the second time in less than a month, remain in third place, nine games out.

"They are well-managed, well-coached and are very athletic, versatile club," Wakamatsu said. "When you can beat a pitcher like Kazmir, when they are right in the hunt of everything and playing motivated baseball, to be able to do that on our home turf is very nice."

The Mariners' secret was no secret.

Hernandez, like rookie Doug Fister the night before, pitched one of his strongest games of the season, holding

the Angels to four hits in eight shutout innings.

He pitched into and out of trouble a few times but escaped, especially in the third inning when the Angels loaded the bases with two outs. Hernandez struck out Torii Hunter to end that threat. He also dealt with runners in scoring position two other times but pitched out of trouble.

“When he needed to make pitches, he did,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. “And when we had guys in scoring position, he made pitches.”

Since Hernandez’s last start against the Angels on May 30, he has gone 12-4 with a 2.37 earned run average. Wednesday, he struck out six, including Hunter twice, and held Vladimir Guerrero hitless the three times he faced him.

“When I was in the bullpen, I said, ‘I’ve got to be Felix today. They’re a pretty good team,’” Hernandez said. “They are great hitters and I just tried to get ahead with all my pitches. My sinker was unbelievable. I was able to throw my sinker for strikes.”

The game also was a much-needed boost to Hernandez’s hopes for a Cy Young award, especially after Zack Greinke of the Royals thrust himself to the top of that list by dominating the Mariners on Sunday. The victory gave Hernandez a 14-5 record and a 2.65 ERA. Greinke is 13-8, 2.32.

“If he pitches like he did today, he will be an awfully strong candidate,” Wakamatsu said of Hernandez. “He’ll get these guys again, plus Toronto and the Yankees.”

The Mariners blew a bases-loaded, nobody-out moment in the first inning when Kazmir struck out Mike Sweeney, Adrian Beltre and Bill Hall.

That was the start of 18 straight retired by Kazmir.

Sweeney started the bottom of the seventh with a walk and the Mariners, who’d scored two runs in their previous 33 innings, badly needed someone, anyone to deliver a big hit.

Hall, essentially auditioning for a role in the 2010 team after the Mariners acquired him from the Brewers on Aug. 19, came through.

He doubled to left-center field to score Sweeney for a 1-0 Mariners lead, then used his legs to score the second run. With one out and Jack Wilson batting, Hall stole third and drew a bad throw from Angels catcher Mike Napoli. As the ball rolled into left field, Hall ran home for a 2-0 Mariners lead.

The M’s added another run in the eighth off Angels closer Brian Fuentes, who walked Beltre to force home a run.

That was more than enough cushion for Mariners closer David Aardsma, who faced the middle of the Angels’ lineup for the second straight game.

He got them all - Guerrero on a grounder to shortstop, Kendry Morales with a strikeout and Maicer Izturis on another grounder to short - for his 33rd save.

Read Kirby Arnold’s blog on the Mariners at www.heraldnet.com/marinersblog

Published: Thursday, September 3, 2009

Mariners notebook

By Kirby Arnold
Everett Herald Writer

NEXT SERIES

Opponent: Oakland A's

When: 7:07 p.m. today and Friday; 6:07 p.m. Saturday; 1:07 p.m. Sunday.

TV: FSN, all four games

Radio: 770 AM and 100.7 FM today; ESPN 710 AM on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Probable starting pitchers:

Today - Seattle right-hander Ian Snell (3-1, 5.10 earned run average) vs. right-hander Brett Tomko (3-2, 3.62).

Friday - Left-hander Ryan Rowland-Smith (2-2, 3.95) vs. right-hander Vin Mazzaro (4-9, 5.32).

Saturday - Left-hander Luke French (4-4, 4.62) vs. left-hander Brett Anderson (7-10, 4.42).

Sunday - Right-hander Doug Fister (2-1, 2.94) vs. left-hander Gio Gonzalez (0-1, 4.91).

A month to get some answers

If nothing else, this season has been a learning process for the Seattle Mariners. Young players have learned about big-league life and, most of all, the M's braintrust has learned just who can play at this level and who can't.

The final month of the season will be no different, and Wednesday's lineup was the first of what may be several to see how well Bill Hall can play second base.

Manager Don Wakamatsu is hoping to learn if Hall, who also has played third base, left field and right field since coming to the Mariners on Aug. 19 from the Brewers, can play what he calls a "super utility" role.

Wakamatsu, who prefers to rotate his lineup, would like to use Hall next year much the way former manager Lou Piniella used Mark McLemore from 2000-2003. McLemore allowed Piniella to rest his regulars on a frequent basis.

For Hall to seize that role, he must hit.

He's batting only .206 with 15 strikeouts in 39 at-bats with the Mariners, although he played a huge role in the Mariners' eighth-inning rally to break a scoreless tie. He hit an RBI double to score the Mariners' first run, then stole third and scored himself on catcher Mike Napoli's throwing error.

"I don't mind where I play, I just feel like Bill Hall the ballplayer," he said. "Just put me out there and I feel like I'll do something to help the team defensively, offensively or both."

Jose Lopez started at first base for the second time this season, although Wakamatsu did it more to get another right-handed bat in the lineup against left-handed starter Scott Kazmir than to see more of Lopez at first. Wakamatsu said he also may play Josh Wilson some at second with Lopez at first against lefties.

Getting healthy

In tonight's game at Oakland, Wakamatsu may have the closest thing he'll get to a roster of fully healthy players since mid-August,

Ken Griffey Jr., laid up since last Thursday because of a sore left knee, probably will start tonight, Wakamatsu said. A magnetic resonance imaging exam Tuesday showed nothing more than inflammation.

"He's feeling a lot better," Wakamatsu said. "I foresee that he'll be in the lineup tomorrow, no problems."

Since mid-August, Wakamatsu has needed to get creative with his lineup because of injuries to third baseman Adrian Beltre (bruised testicle), Griffey and right fielder Ichiro Suzuki (tight left calf) and first baseman Russell Branyan (herniated disc). Branyan remains on the 15-day disabled list and may not play again this season.

Suzuki played his second game Wednesday since missing a week, and Wakamatsu said he came through it fine. On Tuesday, Wakamatsu and the trainers checked on Suzuki after every at bat - or at least until Suzuki grew tired of it.

"He kind of said, 'Stop asking,'" Wakamatsu said.

Still, the Mariners will be careful with Suzuki and he'll probably get a day off soon to make sure he doesn't suffer a relapse, Wakamatsu said.

Around the horn

Rehabbing pitcher Carlos Silva will get one or two innings tonight with the Tacoma Rainiers against Salt Lake. He gave up three hits and one earned run, and struck out the final three hitters he faced, in one inning Tuesday night for the Everett AquaSox against Vancouver. ... Brandon Morrow, pulled from his start Saturday after five innings because of forearm tightness, will throw a bullpen today or Thursday and is scheduled to start for Tacoma on Sunday. ... Tonight's game will be carried on 770 AM and 100.7 FM because of the Seahawks' preseason game that will air on the Mariners' main station, ESPN 710 AM.

Kirby Arnold, Herald writer

Published: Thursday, September 3, 2009

Sox fall 12-6 to Vancouver

Everett Herald Staff

EVERETT - Vancouver scored 10 unanswered runs against the Everett AquaSox en route to a 12-6 Northwest League victory Wednesday night at Everett Memorial Stadium.

The Canadians (34-38) had 12 hits and hit three solo home runs, including two in the second inning. Vancouver sent 10 batters to the plate in a six-run fourth inning.

Everett (37-35) hit the ball well (13 hits), but were hindered by four errors, leading to five unearned runs for Vancouver.

Everett third baseman Mario Martinez (1-for-4) hit a home run and catcher Trevor Coleman batted 3-for-4 with two RBI.

Second baseman Kevin Mailloux (0-for-2) made his first appearance for the AquaSox. Mailloux, a native of

Windsor, Ontario, was selected in the 45th round of June's draft.

Felix baffles Angels, outduels Kazmir

Hernandez throws eight shutout innings in series-ending 'W'

By Jim Street / MLB.com

09/02/09 10:57 PM ET

SEATTLE -- It's still a little early to handicap the American League Cy Young Award race, but Mariners right-hander Felix Hernandez has put himself on a short list of potential candidates.

The 23-year-old put on another dazzling display at Safeco Field on Wednesday afternoon, blanking the American League West-leading Angels over eight innings in the Mariners' 3-0 victory before 22,130.

Hernandez (14-5) lowered his ERA to 2.65 and increased his quality starts to a league-leading 23. His primary competition could come from Yankees left-hander CC Sabathia, Royals right-hander Zack Greinke and Tigers right-hander Justin Verlander.

"[Hernandez] has some tough games ahead, including these guys again, Toronto and the Yankees," manager Don Wakamatsu said. "But if he pitches like he did today ..."

If that happens, Hernandez could become the second pitcher in Seattle history to win a Cy Young Award. Randy Johnson currently stands alone with one -- in 1995.

A mid-afternoon game played under a cloudless sky made for classic pitching duel in the series finale.

Hernandez held the Angels -- the best-hitting team in the AL -- to four hits.

Left-hander Scott Kazmir, making his Angels debut five days after being acquired from the Rays, had retired 18 consecutive batters before issuing a four-pitch leadoff walk to Mike Sweeney in the seventh inning.

After Adrian Beltre sent center fielder Torii Hunter to the warning track in right-center for an out, Bill Hall drilled a double to left-center, scoring Sweeney.

Following a pitching change, Hall promptly stole third and scored when catcher Mike Napoli's throw went into left field.

"We have talked about pressuring the defense, and I'd like to see more guys try to steal bases," Wakamatsu said. "He steals that base pretty easy and forces some action. Napoli comes up, spikes the ball [throws it into the dirt] and we get a run out of it. I like aggressive baseball. It's hard when you're not getting anyone on base, but we manufactured some runs today."

Seattle's final run of the game came in the eighth inning when Beltre coaxed a bases-loaded walk from left-hander Brian Fuentes to score Ichiro Suzuki.

Wakamatsu turned the final three outs over to closer David Aardsma, who zipped through a 1-2-3 inning for his 33rd save of the season and second in this three-game series.

The Mariners won their 70th game of the season and seventh in the 10-game homestand.

"That was a nice homestand," Wakamatsu said. "I am awfully proud of these guys, especially when you look back a couple of days ago, when we got beat pretty bad by these guys."

The Angels won the series opener, 10-0, but the Mariners held the offensive juggernaut to one run over the final 20 innings of the series.

"I don't know how many times we have relied on Felix this year to pitch the critical, deciding game in a series," Wakamatsu said. "I thought it was a dominating performance and a heck of a ballgame."

Seattle loaded the bases with nobody out in the first inning, forcing Kazmir to throw 28 pitches in the inning.

But just when it looked like the Mariners would pick up where they left off the last time they faced Kazmir -- scoring seven runs off him on Aug. 9 at Safeco Field when he was with Tampa Bay -- the next three batters struck out.

Before the budding rally fizzled, Ichiro moved another hit closer to a pair of milestones in the first inning. He reached on an infield single -- although it initially was ruled an error -- his 1,992nd career hit in the Major Leagues, and 187th of the season.

Franklin Gutierrez dumped a single into shallow center field, putting runners on the corners, and Jose Lopez was hit behind his right knee, loading the bases.

Sweeney, batting .457 in his past 10 games, missed by a few inches of hitting the chalk line in left field and eventually was called out on strikes with the count full. Beltre whiffed on four pitches and Hall also went down swinging, ending what looked to be a productive inning.

Hernandez ran into his own bases-loaded predicament, filling the bases in the third inning on a one-out single to Napoli and back-to-back two-out walks to Chone Figgins and Bobby Abreu.

Hernandez escaped by striking out Torii Hunter.

"I knew it was going to be a pretty good game," Hernandez said. "It was a great game. Kazmir threw outstanding and for me, it was about getting ahead of the hitters. They are great hitters, and I was just trying to get ahead and just throw my pitches. My sinker today was unbelievable. I didn't throw too many breaking balls."

He and catcher Rob Johnson were on the same page the entire game.

"His sinker was the best it's been all year," Johnson said. "He was attacking big-time with his sinker. They weren't getting good swings off of it. Righties were getting blown up. Lefties were hitting it off the end of the bat. Then he had a 92-mph changeup that the bottom was dropping out of it.

"It's such an honor to catch a guy like him. He's going to play for a lot of years and he's going to break a lot of records, probably, here with the Mariners. A guy that has that good of year, if you get the opportunity to catch him, it's definitely humbling."

Johnson said the stuff Hernandez had on Wednesday "was as good as it's been all year."

There was no argument from the other side of the diamond.

"It seems like he's always tough," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "I think after the first couple of innings, we did a little better job of making him work, but when he needed to make pitches, he did, and when we had guys in scoring position, he made pitches."

The Angels were 0-for-4 with runners in scoring position.

Seattle (70-64) embarks on a 10-game road trip, beginning on Thursday night in Oakland.

[Jim Street <mailto:jim.street@mlb.com>](mailto:jim.street@mlb.com) is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Batista nominated for Clemente Award

Mariners pitcher recognized for history of charity work

By Jim Street / MLB.com

09/02/09 12:00 PM ET

SEATTLE --- Mariners right-hander Miguel Batista has put a lot of smiles on a lot of faces in a lot of places the past several years, and he says there are few things as satisfying as seeing a young child surrounded by poverty wearing an eye-to-ear grin.

"I have been to so many countries and seen the reactions of so many kids when you do something for them," he said. "I think it's the most gratifying thing we can do."

Batista has used his offseasons for community service by traveling throughout the United States and Latin America to deliver baseball equipment, medical supplies, and speak to kids of all ages to stress the importance of education and determination.

The charitable work performed by the 38-year-old pitcher is being recognized in a big way this year. Batista is the Mariners nominee for the prestigious Roberto Clemente Award, which will be presented during the World Series.

The award recognizes the player who best exemplifies the game of baseball, sportsmanship, community involvement and the individual's contribution to his team. It is named in honor of the former Pirates outfielder, whose spirit and goodwill will always be remembered. Clemente died in a plane crash while attempting to transport relief supplies to earthquake-stricken Nicaragua on Dec. 31, 1972.

Fans can participate in the selection process of the overall winner of the award now through Oct. 4. The fan ballot winner will be tallied as one vote among those cast by a special selection panel of baseball dignitaries and media members. The panel includes MLB Commissioner Bud Selig and Vera Clemente, widow of the Pirates' Hall of Fame right fielder.

Voting fans also will be automatically registered for a chance to win a trip to the 2009 World Series, where the national winner of the Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevy will be announced.

Batista has been active in the communities he has played in and in his native country, the Dominican Republic. In 2003, he was named the No. 1 Good Guy in Major League Baseball by The Sporting News for his contributions off the field.

He said just being nominated for the Roberto Clemente Award "is a great honor" and to actually win it would be one of the best things that ever happened to him.

"It would be a great honor for anything," he said, "but especially satisfying for a Latino player. I remember talking to [Albert] Pujols about it. He won it last year and we agreed that it probably means more to us than other people because of who Roberto Clemente was.

"There have been a lot of great Latin players, but no one did what he did."

In 2007, Batista's first season with the Mariners, he partnered with the Page Ahead Children's Literacy Program, a non-profit organization that puts new books in the hands of at-risk children throughout Washington State, to promote the Mariners Care Book Drives at Safeco Field. He also filmed a public service announcement to help encourage fans to bring new books to the ballpark. With Batista's help, \$36,750 in books and cash donations was collected for Page Ahead.

He partnered with the Washington State Library last year to help promote reading for all Washington residents through the "Washington Reads" program. As part of the program, Batista was featured in a series of celebrity posters that were distributed to various venues across the state including schools, libraries, stores, and Washington State parks, ferries, and driver's licensing offices.

He is also involved with Mariners Care, the Seattle Mariners' non-profit foundation, and its programs including the Mariners D.R.E.A.M. Team school assembly program -- an elementary school assembly program that stresses the importance of education to help achieve your dreams.

[Jim Street <mailto:jim.street@mlb.com>](mailto:jim.street@mlb.com) is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Mariners shuffle infield down the stretch

Seattle (70-64) at Oakland (59-74), 7:05 p.m. PT

By Christian Caple / MLB.com

09/02/09 10:00 PM ET

SEATTLE -- Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu continues to explore all of his options for filling Russell Branyan's spot at first base while Branyan recovers from a herniated disk in his back.

On Wednesday against the Angels, Wakamatsu didn't have to turn much further than the guy who plays just to Branyan's right, second baseman Jose Lopez.

Lopez had been mentioned as a possible replacement for Branyan at first base, as he's worked out some at the position before and is a little more experienced than some of the Mariners' other infielders.

That, and Wakamatsu wanted to give the versatile Bill Hall a chance to play a little more infield.

"Jose's played there before, and being able to move him over there gives us a chance to put Billy there and get another right-handed bat in the lineup," Wakamatsu said.

And Wednesday likely wasn't the last time Lopez will play first base. Branyan is on the 15-day disabled list until at least Sept. 13, and it's possible that he might not return this season.

So that means Wakamatsu, who has already used backup third baseman Jack Hannahan at first base a couple of times in Branyan's absence, is going to have to juggle some things around.

The manager is also aided by callup Mike Carp, a left-handed rookie whose natural position is first base.

The Mariners face back-to-back left-handers on Friday and Saturday, though.

"We're going to have several lefties here, especially against Oakland, and probably half of those we'll end up using what I call a right-handed lineup," Wakamatsu said. "You might see Josh Wilson over there at second base and Lopey over there [at first], so we'll have a couple different looks at it going forward."

Facing this many southpaws will also allow Wakamatsu to get a better feel for what Hall is capable of. Hall made a couple of nice plays at second base on Wednesday, and didn't seem to miss a beat after playing primarily right field while Ichiro Suzuki was sidelined for eight games with a tight left calf muscle.

"He's turned into kind of a super-utility guy for us, and to be able to look at him there, I know he's played in the past and he's done a nice job over there," Wakamatsu said. "And then trying to find out as much as we can going forward with all our players."

That effort continues on Thursday as the Mariners begin a three-game set against Oakland.

Pitching matchup

SEA: RHP Ian Snell (5-9, 5.29 ERA)

Snell gave up three hits and two runs in five innings against the Royals in his last outing, but he left after five innings because of swelling in his right forearm after taking a line drive off the arm in the fifth. He finished the frame, and his day was done after just 68 pitches. X-rays were negative, and Snell should be ready to go vs. the A's. Despite the early exit, Snell still found his way to the win column for the third consecutive start, and he has now allowed just four earned runs in his past three outings. Snell gave up 13 runs in his first three starts with Seattle. His only appearance against the A's this season was during the Mariners' last homestand, when he held Oakland to one run on four hits over six innings.

OAK: RHP Brett Tomko (3-2, 3.62 ERA)

In Tomko's first start, he beat the team that had recently released him, the American League East-leading Yankees. His next time out, he beat the AL Central-leading Tigers. In his most recent outing, he held the AL West-leading Angels to four hits and a walk while striking out five over 5 2/3 innings and left the game with a 6-1 lead, but the Halos stormed back to win and stick Tomko with a no-decision.

Sea Scrolls

Ken Griffey Jr. underwent an MRI exam on Tuesday on his surgically repaired left knee, and Wakamatsu said everything looked fine. Griffey is expected to return to the lineup on Thursday. ... Wakamatsu said Ichiro felt fine after playing on Tuesday for the first time since missing eight games. ... Carlos Silva threw one inning for

Class A Everett on Tuesday, allowing three hits and two runs (one earned). He'll pitch in Triple-A Tacoma on Thursday. ... The Mariners won their club-record 20th game when scoring three or fewer runs on Wednesday.

Tickets

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Up next

- Friday: Mariners (Ryan Rowland-Smith, 2-2, 3.95) at Athletics (Vin Mazzaro, 4-9, 5.32), 7:05 p.m. PT
- Saturday: Mariners (Luke French, 4-4, 4.62) at Athletics (Brett Anderson, 7-10, 4.42), 6:05 p.m. PT
- Sunday: Mariners (Doug Fister, 2-1, 2.94) at Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 4-5, 6.07), 1:05 p.m. PT

Christian Caple is an associate reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

High Desert locks up second-half title

Mavs complete first California League sweep since '93

By Brittany Ghiroli / Special to MLB.com

09/03/09 2:16 AM ET

It's been there all season long, the two-column chart the Mavericks shade in following each game, with each column designated for a win or a loss.

And while Jim Horner's squad is still two wins shy of reaching its second-half goal of 40, coloring in Wednesday's square carried special significance.

High Desert clinched the California League Southern Division second-half title Wednesday night with a 7-0 triumph over the Lancaster JetHawks. The win, coupled with Lake Elsinore's loss to Modesto, solidified the season-long dominance of the Mavericks (38-27).

It's only the second time in franchise history -- and the first since 1993 -- the team has claimed titles in both halves of the season.

"It's a good group of guys," said Horner, the Mavs' second-year manager. "They like each other and they help each other out. It honestly makes my job easy.

"When you have players that take care of things, I get to write up the lineup, but that's about it. They don't whine, they don't complain. They come here, they do early work and they work hard because they want to get better."

Horner is in his fifth season in the Mariners organization and fourth as skipper. He managed the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers from 2006-07. Prior to becoming a coach, Horner spent nine years in the system as a catcher.

The Mavericks are led offensively by Cal League MVP Alex Liddi, who is batting .348 with a league-leading 101 RBIs, and James McOwen, whose 45-game hitting streak shattered the league mark earlier this season.

Steven Hensley struck out seven and allowed three hits over six innings to pick up his ninth win in Wednesday's clincher.

Since the first-half title secured the Mavericks' first playoff berth since 2006, Horner's squad was decidedly more tempered on Wednesday.

"It was a little bit subdued this time," Horner admitted. "There's some unfinished business."

And unfilled squares.

Brittany Ghioli is a contributor to MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Inbox: Aumont better suited for relief?

Beat reporter Jim Street fields questions from Mariners fans

Jim Street / MLB.com

09/02/09 6:59 PM ET

We have reached the final full month of the regular season and the Mariners have their divided attention on finishing with a winning record and planning ahead to next season. Questions abound inside and outside the front office, and we're here to answer your queries. If you have a question, send it in.

Why did the Mariners decide to convert Phillippe Aumont into a reliever? He's still young and has enough time to build up his arm into a quality starter.

-- Tom K., Portland, Ore.

As any playoff contender will tell you, the final nine outs in a game are the toughest ones to get, and Aumont has such a powerful right arm that can dominate hitters, the organization decided both he and the team would be better off in the long run to make him an end-of-the-game pitcher instead of a beginning-of-the-game pitcher.

Only time will tell if this turns out to be a good decision, but Aumont has the potential to be one of the best setup men/closers in the Major Leagues if he stays healthy -- and keeps his temper. His season ended prematurely this week when he blew a save opportunity and was so angry that he slammed his glove -- with his hand still in it -- and broke his hand.

But, according to the story in the Everett Herald, Aumont is expected to play in the Arizona Fall League.

Do you think that Greg Halman and Dustin Ackley will make their debuts with Seattle this year since they're on the 40-man roster? Also, I really like Carlos Truinfel. Does he have a shot at making the 25-man roster next season?

-- Joe M., Seattle

I doubt that either Halman or Ackley will make their big league debuts with the Mariners this season and perhaps not even next season. Halman seems to have taken a step backward in 2009. As of Sept. 1, he had 25 home runs and 70 RBIs for Double-A West Tennessee, but he also had struck out 172 times, walked just 27 times, and was batting .214 in 435 at-bats.

As for Ackley, he's on his way to Peoria, Ariz., to begin his professional career. He'll start out at the Arizona Instructional League, play for the Peoria Javelinas in the Arizona Fall League through mid-November and report to Spring Training next February, but I wouldn't expect him to reach the Majors until late next season at the earliest and possibly in 2011.

I agree with you regarding Truinfel, but he suffered a severe knee injury during the second game of the season at West Tennessee and was recently activated. He also will play in the AFL. My guess is that he does not have much of a chance to earn a spot on the 25-man roster next season.

If I'm not mistaken, basketball underclassmen can enter the Draft, but will lose their NCAA eligibility if they hire an agent. Why are the rules different for baseball?

-- Rich A., Wilsonville, Ore.

Well, semantics being what they are, college baseball players select "advisors" and do not actually "hire" agents during the Draft process. Although Ackley had agent Scott Boras represent him during negotiations with the Mariners, Boras would not have received any money unless the two sides reached agreement on a contract.

How is Jack Wilson's hamstring injury coming along. I am a Pirates fan that loved to watch his almost daily "Web Gem" plays at shortstop, and I hope Mariners fans like him as much as Pirates fans have. Thanks!

-- Don A., Mount Clare, W. Va.

The left hamstring that has bothered Wilson for much of the season remains less than 100 percent, but he's trying to contribute as much playing time as possible for his new team. He still gets treatment on the hamstring daily, but Mariners fans have yet to see the same dazzling defensive player that Pirates fans like yourself watched on a daily basis.

Speaking of Bucs fans, the Mariners broadcast team has received e-mails from Pittsburgh backers contending that "Jack" Wilson is being called "Josh" Wilson on the broadcasts. As Mariners fans know, there are two Wilsons on the team -- Jack and Josh -- and both are infielders.

They are the fifth and sixth Wilsons to play for the Mariners, joining Dan, Glenn, Jim and Mike.

Do you know how many games Ichiro Suzuki reached base in the first inning this season and scored?

-- Richard C., Winter Springs, Fla.

Through Sept. 2, he reached base in the first inning 41 times and scored 24 runs.

[Jim Street <mailto:jim.street@mlb.com>](mailto:jim.street@mlb.com) is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Silva makes first rehab appearance

Righty allows two runs in one inning, but shoulder holds up

By Christian Caple / MLB.com

09/02/09 5:59 PM ET

SEATTLE -- Carlos Silva did something on Tuesday he hadn't done since May: pitch in a professional baseball game.

Silva, on the disabled list since May 7 with right shoulder inflammation, made his first rehab appearance by pitching one inning for the Class A Everett AquaSox.

The results were mixed. He threw 23 pitches, allowing three hits, two runs, one of them earned, while striking out the side.

Despite the somewhat rough inning, manager Don Wakamatsu said Silva was pleased with the effort and came through it with no physical side effects.

"Velocity wasn't quite where we wanted it," Wakamatsu said, "but he was pretty happy with the way he threw and the way his arm felt, so that's a good sign."

Silva will head to Triple-A Tacoma on Thursday, where he will pitch another inning or two, Wakamatsu said.

The right-hander was 1-3 with an 8.48 ERA in six starts this season before going on the DL.

Christian Caple is an associate reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

posted 09/02/09 07:45 PM | updated 09/02/09 09:57 PM

Hernandez pushes Cy Young candidacy with 3-0 win over Angels

By John Hickey

PostGlobe Mariners reporter

For a team that can't score, the Seattle Mariners surely do play some games that are the very definition of compelling.

Consider that the Mariners came into Wednesday's homestand finale with the Angels having scored just two runs in their previous three games.

Then they had the bases loaded twice Wednesday and never even made contact with the ball. Five at-bats with the bases loaded resulted in five strikeouts, and, to be fair, a walk that accounted for the final run in a 3-0 victory.

Seattle starter Felix Hernandez turned in a dazzling performance as king of the hill, throwing a four-hit shutout for eight innings.

"I knew it was going to be a pretty good game today," Hernandez said. "I felt I had to be Felix today."

He was Felix in every way imaginable. After loading the bases in the third inning with two out, he struck out the Angels' No. 3 hitter, Torii Hunter, on four pitches. He allowed the Angels only three at-bats with runners in scoring position, and the results were predictable - a strikeout, a pop fly and a grounder.

And that doesn't even take into account his defense. The Angels slashed four balls up the middle that he speared and turned into routine outs.

"Felix was all over the place," second baseman Bill Hall said. "I never saw so many comeback grounders. But pitching and defense are how you win ballgames."

The Angels, the American League West leaders, were debuting left-hander Scott Kazmir, their prize pickup from Tampa Bay. And the left-hander was up to the task, striking out the side in the first after two hits and a hit batsman loaded the bases for Seattle. After that, all Kazmir did was retire 18 men in a row.

The 19th man, Mike Sweeney, walked to open the seventh, and that was the opening the Mariners needed. Hall doubled to left-center with one out to score Sweeney and end Kazmir's day. As reliever Kevin Jepsen was just getting settled in, Hall up and stole third, then scored when catcher Mike Napoli's throw went into left field.

Hall jump up and slapped his hands together after scoring the run that made it 2-0.

"You have to show enthusiasm, especially with the way Fifi (Hernandez) was throwing," Hall said. "You know when he's like that, you just need a couple of runs to have a real good chance to win."

Hall was one of the three first-inning strikeouts when Seattle failed to jump on Kazmir early. The RBI double in the seventh was redemption, and the steal and second run were icing.

"We didn't capitalize early," Hall said. "But Felix gave us every chance to win."

This is the same Hernandez who was taken to task by manager Don Wakamatsu after he had let the Angels try eight steals May 19. He gave up 11 hits and six runs in 5 2/3 innings in that start to fall to 4-3 with a 4.13 ERA. Since then he has gone 10-2 with a 2.04 ERA, pitched a perfect inning in the All-Star Game and brought his overall ERA down to 2.65, second-best in the league.

The Angels tried just one steal Wednesday. Leadoff man Chone Figgins singled and tried to run on Hernandez in the first. Catcher Rob Johnson gunned him down.

"When a guy who has 39 steals like that gets thrown out," Wakamatsu said, "it tends to alter the way you think about running. Felix did a nice job against the base runners, and Rob made a great throw against Figgins."

With 14 wins and the second-best ERA in the AL, Hernandez has rekindled talk about how strongly he should be considered for the Cy Young award.

As Angel manager Mike Scioscia said the other day concerning awards, it's tough on West Coast players when it comes to awards. "Word travels west to east a little slower," he said.

But as David Aardsma, who threw a 1-2-3 ninth for his 33rd save, said, "what is there to say about Felix? He was outstanding again.

"He pitched his game," Aardsma said, "and he challenged (the Angels) to make the adjustments to his game. And they couldn't."

Wakamatsu said the last month of the season will be telling for Hernandez's chances to bring in postseason honors.

"We have a lot of big series in the last month, and he's going to face some quality teams," the manager said. "If he continues to pitch like this, he'll be a strong candidate."

There is considerable evidence that he's a strong candidate right now.

Originally Published: September 2, 2009

Flying high with Seattle's Pilots

By Jim Caple

Page 2

ESPN.com

The Seattle Pilots, as Jim Bouton says, are baseball's version of Brigadoon, the mythical Scottish village from the old musical that appears for one day every 100 years and then disappears back into the mists. Only instead of pretty lasses and young lads singing about how it's almost like being in love, the expansion Pilots offered one summer of old has-beens and young never-wills pounding Budweiser and showing Seattle fans how it was almost like being in the majors.

In the musical, the residents of Brigadoon must never leave or the village will cease to exist. It's similar for the men who played for the Pilots. They may have had careers elsewhere -- Tommy Davis won the 1962 and 1963 batting titles with the Dodgers and Mike Marshall won the 1974 Cy Young with Los Angeles -- but they can never really leave those scrambled egg-plastered Pilots uniforms, the plumbing-challenged confines of Sicks Stadium or the pages of "Ball Four."

"I think over time, there was a certain magic about this team [because] it only existed for one year," Bouton said over the weekend at the team's 40-year reunion. "The more time that went by, the more they became an isolated pocket from way back. Now it's been 40 years for this team, and that they existed only for that one year is part of the magic. It's like a storybook thing where the town comes alive."

Indeed. Bouton wrote about his time with Houston in "Ball Four" -- but does anyone ever talk about the 1969 Astros? No. The Astros lived to tell other, more interesting stories, some of which did not involve their amazing rainbow jerseys. The Pilots, however, were around only for that one season.

"In the work I've done, nobody has made any mention of the Astros," said Steve Cox, who is filming a documentary about the Pilots. "It's more than the interest that 'Ball Four' drums up on the Pilots. It's the uniqueness of the team. Baseball celebrates uniqueness, that's why it endures.

"If Bouton had written about the 1969 Angels, the book still would have been popular, but I don't know whether that Angels team would have been popular. That this team was here and gone is what makes the Pilots that much more interesting."

It's like another touchstone from 1969: Woodstock. The fleeting nature is what made the event special.

(By the way, during Woodstock, the Pilots lost the first four games of what would become a 10-game losing streak. They were that sort of team. The day Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, the Pilots lost both ends of a doubleheader, with the losses going to John Gelnar, whom Seattle acquired in spring training in exchange for Lou Piniella, who went on to become that season's rookie of the year.)

Dick Bates pitched in one game his entire big league career and gave up five runs in 1 2/3 innings. If he pitched for anyone else, no one would remember him. Because he pitched those 1 2/3 innings for the Pilots, more than 100 people paid \$20 to hear his stories and get his autograph (and his old teammates') at the reunion over the weekend.

How powerful is the Pilots' allure? I saw two people at the reunion wearing a complete Pilots uniform, including pants and stirrup socks. One was 9 years old and the other was near 60. And I bet everyone staring at them was thinking the same thing, "Wow, I wonder if I could get one of those in my size?"

"I only went to three games. Think about it. Only three games. I was 9. Dad took us to a couple and we went to one on our own," Pilots fan Frank Pennylegion said. He paused, contemplating how a team he saw play three times could still mean so much to him four decades later. "It becomes a myth. One and done. We think it's bigger than it is. Those stories they tell. Were they really the funniest team of all time?"

Probably not. Although there are fewer punch lines in baseball that make me smile more than Pilots manager Joe Schultz's favorite two-word expression. If you don't know which one I mean, then you never read "Ball Four." And in that case, you need to order the book as soon as you finish this column.

And if you have read "Ball Four," you'll probably want to check out Cox's documentary, "The Seattle Pilots: Short Flight Into History," when it goes on sale sometime this fall. (To see a clip of the documentary, [check out his Web site <http://seattlepilotsfilm.wordpress.com/>](http://seattlepilotsfilm.wordpress.com/).)

The Pilots have an obvious connection for people in Seattle, but Cox says the fan base is nationwide. "The Internet forum I have has gotten responses from people in Michigan, Vermont, Alabama, all over. A guy in Chicago sent me a check for \$20. He said, 'I know this won't solve your budget problems, but I want to see this get made.' People really are anxious to see this. 'Ball Four' talks a lot about the Pilots, but Jim got traded to the Astros and 'Ball Four' never says what happened to the team."

What happened to the Pilots is they moved to Milwaukee a few days before Opening Day 1970 (unsure of where the team would spend the 1970 season, the driver of the equipment bus was told to drive from spring training to Las Vegas and call for directions) and eventually wound up in a magical spot in fans' hearts. "Ball Four" ends with the classic line, "You see, you spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time." The same arrangement holds true for the Pilots and their fans.

Former Pilot Greg Goossen, who went on to become actor Gene Hackman's regular stand-in, told the crowd at the reunion that he loved playing in Seattle and that he would gladly have played there his entire career. Tommy Davis, seated next to him, immediately responded, "You did."

Davis meant it as a joke -- Goossen's career didn't extend that much beyond the Pilots -- but given how Pilots fans regard that team's players, it also is pretty much true.

BOX SCORE LINE OF THE WEEK

Zack Greinke may not win the Cy Young award, but he is this award's first back-to-back winner. In his first start after striking out a team-record 15 batters, Zack Greinke pitched a one-hitter Sunday against the Mariners - - and it easily could have been a no-hitter. The one hit he allowed in the second inning was Kenji Johjima's soft fly that center fielder Mitch Maier got a bad jump on. Greinke's line:

9 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 1 BB, 5 K

Greinke is 13-8 with a league-leading 2.32 ERA, is second in strikeouts (202) and second in innings (190 1/3), but the Royals are so bad they have a losing record in his 27 starts (13-14).

TELL YOUR STATISTICS TO SHUT UP

- September is here, but we're still five full weeks from the playoffs. Because Opening Day was almost a week later than normal, this year's postseason doesn't start until Oct. 7 (and not until Oct. 8 for two teams). That's not the latest start to a postseason -- even without any playoffs, the 1910 World Series, for instance, did not begin

until Oct. 17 -- but it's late enough that 14 previous postseasons were finished on or by Oct. 7. The real issue, as I've complained about in the past, is that with all the extra off days in the postseason schedule, the World Series won't start until Oct. 28 and may not end until Nov. 5. If it does go seven games, it will beat the record for the latest date of a World Series -- the 2001 World Series, backed up due to 9/11, ended Nov. 4.

- Seattle third baseman Adrian Beltre returned to the lineup Tuesday for the first time since going on the disabled list when he was hit in the Galapagos Islands by a ground ball. The team played the "Nutcracker Suite" before his first at-bat.

- For those who enjoyed last week's Name That Curmudgeon, editor Dave Schoenfield has another great excerpt. Who said this?

"A few pills -- I take all kinds -- and the pain's gone," says [deleted] of the Detroit Tigers. [Deleted] also takes shots, or at least took a shot of cortisone and Xylocaine (anti-inflammatory and painkiller) in his throwing shoulder prior to the [deleted] game of the [deleted] World Series -- the only game he won in three tries. In the same Series, which at times seemed to be a matchup between Detroit and St. Louis druggists, Cardinal [deleted] was gobbling muscle-relaxing pills, trying chemically to keep his arm loose... "We occasionally use Dexamyl and Dexedrine [amphetamines]. ... We also use barbiturates, Seconal, Tuinal, Nembutal. ... We also use some anti-depressants, Triavil, Tofranil, Valium. ... But I don't think the use of drugs is as prevalent in the Midwest as it is on the East and West coasts," said Dr. I. C. Middleman, who, until his death last September, was team surgeon for the St. Louis baseball Cardinals.

Answer below.

- Nice to see that a federal court ruled the government was out of line when it demanded the union hand over the list of player names who tested positive in 2003. Of course, it would have been nicer to have such a ruling before their privacy was invaded.

- Gotta love this quote from Milton Bradley about the controversy swirling around his comments about racial hate at Wrigley Field: "I'm here to play ball. I came here to win a championship. Ain't nothing I'd rather do. If I could do anything, one, I might cure the lupus my aunt has; two, another aunt got both legs cut off because of diabetes; I might give her legs back. But No. 3 on the list would be win a championship in this city so that people can have what they deserve. The good people. The bad people can jump on the bandwagon when the time comes. But everything in my heart is to win a championship here. And I ain't done yet."

Answer: That's from a Sports Illustrated story that ran in 1969. The pitcher quoted was Denny McLain and the reference was to the 1968 World Series. The Cardinals pitcher was Bob Gibson. Nah, guys in the good old days never took anything questionable in a desire to perform better.

Jim Caple is a senior writer for ESPN.com.

Last updated September 3, 2009 3:45 a.m. PT

Rays avoid collapse, beat Red Sox 8-5

By FRED GOODALL
AP SPORTS WRITER

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Pat Burrell snapped an eighth-inning tie with a RBI single and Evan Longoria followed with a two-run homer Wednesday night to help Tampa Bay avoid falling farther back in the AL playoff race with an 8-5 victory over Boston.

A night after playing poorly in the opener of a series crucial to their hopes of returning to the postseason, the defending AL champions rebounded with a solid effort to nudge back within five games of the wild card-leading Red Sox.

J.P. Howell (7-4) pitched one inning to earn the victory, despite allowing Boston to tie the game 5-all in the eighth on his wild pitch with the bases loaded. Dan Wheeler got the final two outs for his second save.

Carlos Pena led off the bottom of the eighth with a double off Ramon Ramirez (7-4), then scored on Burrell's single to right-center. Longoria hit his 26th homer - eighth against Boston this season - on reliever Manny Delcarmen's first pitch.

Burrell and Carl Crawford hit solo homers off Red Sox ace Josh Beckett, who gave up five runs and seven hits while striking out nine in six innings. The Rays led 5-1 before the Red Sox scored twice in the fourth and once in the seventh to get back in the game.

Jason Bay, David Ortiz, J.D. Drew and Victor Martinez drove in runs off Rays starter Matt Garza, who allowed four runs and six hits in 6 2-3 innings but was unable to get his first win since July 24 - a stretch of seven starts.

Boston pulled even in the eighth, loading the bases on three walks before scoring on Howell's wild pitch. The Red Sox were unable to get the others home, though, and finished 3-for-16 with runners in scoring position.

Beckett has not pitched well the past month, allowing 14 homers over his last five starts after giving up 10 in his first 22 starts of the season. During that stretch he's 1-1 and yielded 27 runs overall in 31 1-3 innings.

Crawford homered in the first and Burrell went deep in the second, when Tampa Bay also scored on Akinori Iwamura's RBI single and B.J. Upton's sacrifice bunt, which first baseman Victor Martinez fielded and threw to the plate too late to keep Gregg Zaun from scoring from third.

Zaun's RBI double made it 5-1 in the third.

Boston scored on Bay's RBI triple in the second, then added two more in the fourth on Drew's run-scoring single and Ortiz's RBI grounder. The Red Sox trimmed their deficit to 5-4 when Martinez singled with two outs in the seventh to finish Garza.

NOTES: Ortiz has 100 career RBI's against the Rays. ... The Rays promoted RHP Wade Davis from Triple-A Durham to make his major league debut against Detroit on Sunday. ... Closer Jonathan Papelbon and newly-acquired reliever Billy Wagner were not available out of Boston's bullpen. Papelbon had the first six-out save of his career in the series opener. Wagner, coming back from elbow ligament surgery, pitched one perfect inning Tuesday and is not being used on consecutive days. ... Rays senior advisor Don Zimmer had successful surgery for decompression of a nerve in his lower back. He is expected to be released from the hospital later this week and Dr. Tom Tolli expects a full recovery in six to eight weeks... The Red Sox said LHP Jon Lester was fine one day after being taken out after six innings Tuesday due to groin tightness.

Last updated September 3, 2009 3:45 a.m. PT

Marlins' Ramirez, Uggla squabble over injury

By ANTONIO GONZALEZ
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MIAMI -- The Florida Marlins' two star sluggers exchanged heated words in a verbal confrontation in the clubhouse Wednesday, forcing a closed-door meeting as the team faded from the playoff picture.

A frustrated and injured Hanley Ramirez said Wednesday that he "got some people upset" for leaving the game early the night before with an injury, then teammate Dan Uggla openly argued with the NL batting leader in the clubhouse.

Uggla accused Ramirez of a lack of desire and effort to win. He also said Ramirez wasn't caring because he's already secured a \$70 million, six-year contract.

Ramirez left the Marlins' 4-3 loss to the Atlanta Braves with a tight left hamstring. He was taken out of the lineup Wednesday about an hour before the game.

Earlier, Ramirez said that he would keep playing despite being injured, repeatedly saying he was only "10 percent" healthy. But with Florida losing two straight games and falling out of the playoff picture, Ramirez said he "had to keep playing."

The Marlins remain five games behind Colorado for the NL wild card and moved a game behind the Braves for second in the division with an 8-7 win over Atlanta on Wednesday night.

"You don't get the same respect from teammates when you're not playing," he said. "I got people upset when I got out of the game last night. I try to do the best I can. Whatever."

Ramirez repeated some of the same comments later about teammates, and Uggla overheard at his locker about 10 feet away and said: "I was one of them."

The two exchanged words. And at one point, Uggla said: "Yeah, you got your \$70 million" and went on to use an expletive while asking him why he had to come out of the game, a recording of the argument by the South Florida Sun-Sentinel showed.

Manager Fredi Gonzalez then politely asked reporters to leave the clubhouse so he could conduct a team meeting.

Gonzalez had originally said Ramirez would be in the lineup Wednesday, but when it came out, the slugger was replaced at shortstop by Emilio Bonifacio. Just after the team meeting, Gonzalez said outside the clubhouse that the matter would be handled internally.

"It's stuff that happens in the course of the season between teammates," Gonzalez said.

"That's between us girls," he joked.

Uggla downplayed the issue after game.

"Whether it fueled any emotion for tonight, who knows?" he said. "I don't want to spend a lot of time on that. It happened. We're a family. I love him like a brother and we got past it and moved on."

Ramirez, in the midst of an 0 for 14 slump, was replaced in the top of the fifth Tuesday night. The hamstring has bothered him for most of the season, and he also was sidelined for a few games in July with a hip flexor.

Ramirez has a league-leading .355 batting average with 19 home runs and 85 RBIs. He is perhaps the biggest reason Florida has a winning record with a lineup full of deficiencies and a rotation that has been a disappointment.

The 25-year-old slugger also has by far the richest contract on baseball's thriftiest team.

While Ramirez was relaying what Uggla had told him after Tuesday night's game - which was delayed nearly three hours at the start by rain - other teammates publicly supported Ramirez.

"I know he went through some stuff," catcher John Baker said. "He's been hit by some pitches. He's been in the lineup every single day, and he's been battling for us through successes and struggles. I don't question any of his toughness, and I think maybe what you heard is more frustration about how we've been playing lately than anything."

Last updated September 3, 2009 3:40 a.m. PT

No cheap debut: Penny shines in Giants' 4-0 win

By DAN GELSTON
AP SPORTS WRITER

PHILADELPHIA -- Brad Penny moved from the wild-card race in the AL to the one in the NL. He hopes he can make the difference in San Francisco that he failed to make in Boston.

Penny pitched five-hit ball over eight shutout innings in his first start with the Giants, leading the NL wild-card contenders to a 4-0 win over Philadelphia on Wednesday night.

"This is what you put a uniform on for, to get into the playoffs and play in the World Series," Penny said.

Penny (1-0) was back in his old All-Star form in his first outing since he was released last week by Boston. Penny went 7-8 with a 5.61 ERA this season for Boston - including 1-6 in his last 11 starts.

"He gave us more than we thought," Giants manager Bruce Bochy.

Penny's lone jam came in the fifth inning when the first two batters reached base. He got All-Star Raul Ibanez to fly out, and escaped without any further damage.

No one in the World Series champion Phillies' lineup did much of anything.

The Red Sox might be nipping at the Yankees' heels in the AL East if the righty pitched like this the last two months. It was Penny's longest outing in 28 starts this season and he nearly tossed his first complete game in three years.

Penny was clocked at 97 mph in the first inning and his fastball remained in the mid-90s over 102 pitches for his first win since July 24.

Juan Uribe and Aaron Rowand homered for the Giants, who reached 73 victories to match their 2008 total. The Giants trail Colorado by a game in the wild-card race.

J.A. Happ (10-4) lost his second straight start for the Phillies.

Tim Lincecum and Matt Cain give the Giants perhaps the best 1-2 starters in baseball, and having Penny return to the form that saw him twice win 16 games with the Dodgers would bolster their playoff chances.

"The reason I came here is, you get in a five-game series, with the pitching these guys here ... I mean, you've got a good chance to win," Penny said. "This team is going to be real dangerous and people aren't going to want to play them if they're in the playoffs."

Diamondbacks 4, Dodgers 1

At Los Angeles, Brandon Allen's two-run homer highlighted a four-run fifth inning for Arizona.

Max Scherzer (9-8) allowed a run and seven hits in 7 2-3 innings, and Juan Gutierrez pitched the ninth for his third save. Chad Billingsley (12-9) was the loser.

Cardinals 10, Brewers 3

At St. Louis, Chris Carpenter (15-3) won his 10th straight decision for the Cardinals, and Skip Schumaker was 4 for 4 with two RBIs.

Yadier Molina had a pair of RBI doubles and finished with three hits for the NL Central leaders, whose 10 1/2-game cushion is the best division lead in baseball. Troy Glaus, activated from the 60-day disabled list from a shoulder injury Monday, struck out as a pinch hitter to end the sixth in his first at-bat of the season.

Dave Bush (3-6) took the loss.

Rockies 5, Mets 2

At Denver, Jason Giambi's pinch-hit two-run single off Brian Stokes (2-4) broke an eighth-inning tie for Colorado.

Giambi, jettisoned by Oakland, signed with Colorado last week and was called up from the minor leagues Tuesday. Ubaldo Jimenez (13-10) was the winner, and Franklin Morales pitched a perfect ninth for his first save in the majors.

Cubs 2, Astros 0

At Chicago, Ted Lilly pitched eight shutout innings to reach the 10-win mark for the seventh consecutive season, and Derrek Lee hit a two-run homer for the Cubs.

Houston's Aaron Boone was back in a major league game five months after open-heart surgery. He played first base and was hitless in three at-bats.

Lilly (10-8) allowed only four hits in joining Mark Buehrle, CC Sabathia and Johan Santana as the only active left-handers with 10 or more wins in seven straight years.

Carlos Marmol pitched the ninth inning for his eighth save.

Felipe Paulino (2-7) was the loser.

Reds 5, Pirates 3

At Cincinnati, Brandon Phillips and Drew Stubbs homered to help the Reds sweep the four-game series and hand Pittsburgh its seventh straight loss.

Homer Bailey (5-4) set a career high in strikeouts for the second straight start, fanning eight in 6 1-3 innings. Francisco Cordero pitched the ninth for his 30th save.

Pirates starter Zach Duke (10-3) failed to hold a 3-2 sixth-inning lead.

Marlins 8, Braves 7

At Miami, Wes Helms hit a game-winning homer for Florida, and Dan Uggla had a two-run shot after challenging teammate Hanley Ramirez's effort.

Helms hit a 3-2 pitch off Mike Gonzalez (3-4) well over the left-field scoreboard.

Brett Carroll hit a bases-clearing double, and Ross Gload finished a home run shy of the cycle for Florida. Yunel Escobar homered in the top of the ninth off Leo Nunez (4-4) to tie it.

Padres 7, Nationals 0

At San Diego, Kevin Correia (10-10) limited Washington to three hits in 7 2-3 innings, and Adrian Gonzalez and Chase Headley hit two-run doubles for the Padres.

Edward Mujica worked the final 1 1-3 inning to finish the three-hitter and the Padres' fourth shutout. John Lannan (8-10) took the loss.

Last updated September 3, 2009 3:40 a.m. PT

Rangers beat Jays to gain ground in wild-card race

By STEPHEN HAWKINS

AP SPORTS WRITER

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Elvis left the yard after Josh Hamilton left the game. Hours after the playoff-chasing Rangers learned injured third baseman Michael Young will be out at least two weeks, and an inning after slugger Hamilton came out because of a sore lower back, rookie Elvis Andrus hit a go-ahead two-run homer that pushed Texas to a 6-4 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays on Wednesday night.

"It was the biggest hit of the night," manager Ron Washington said.

After losing two All-Star players, the victory on the field got Texas within 3 1/2 games of the AL West-leading Los Angeles Angels and 2 1/2 games of wild-card leader Boston after both lost. It is the closest the Rangers have been in the division since Aug. 9.

"We have got to keep going," said Marlon Byrd, whose scheduled night off got cut short when he replaced Hamilton in center field to start the fifth. "We've got to keep winning games."

Even without Young and maybe Hamilton.

Young strained his left hamstring running out a grounder Tuesday night in the second game of a doubleheader sweep, the same game Hamilton hit two homers to break a span of 99 at-bats over 23 games without going deep.

But Hamilton, whose back has bothered him since playing on the turf in Minnesota last weekend, left after he had a leadoff double in the fourth, sliding headfirst into second and then scoring on a single by Nelson Cruz to get Texas within 3-2.

When Hamilton got to the dugout after scoring, Washington asked if he was OK.

"I told him I was," Hamilton said. "I went to run out to center field and just couldn't really do it."

Texas has a day off before playing in Baltimore on Friday night. Hamilton said he was hopeful that with treatment he will be ready to play.

Andrus, the 21-year-old shortstop moved from ninth to second in the order with Young out, hit his sixth homer to make it 4-3 in the fifth. Andrus flipped his bat away as soon as he hit the ball, and fellow rookie Julio Borbon looked back laughing while trotting around the bases.

"I started jogging and smiled," Borbon said. "It was a good feeling, especially that time of the game."

Yankees 10, Orioles 2

At Baltimore, CC Sabathia allowed one run in seven innings to earn his AL-leading 16th victory, Alex Rodriguez got his 2,500th hit and drove in four runs, and the Yankees completed a three-game sweep.

Eric Hinske homered and Johnny Damon had four hits for the Yankees, who scored seven runs in the ninth inning. New York has won six straight and is 34-11 since the All-Star break.

Sabathia (16-7) struck out nine, gave up seven hits and walked one.

Rays 8, Red Sox 5

At St. Petersburg, Fla., Pat Burrell snapped an eighth-inning tie with a RBI single and Evan Longoria followed with a two-run homer to help Tampa Bay keep pace in the playoff race.

J.P. Howell (7-4) pitched an inning to earn the victory, and Dan Wheeler got the final two outs for his second save for the Rays, who moved within five games of wild card-leading Boston.

White Sox 4, Twins 2

At Minneapolis, Gordon Beckham and Paul Konerko hit consecutive home runs off Joe Nathan with two outs in the ninth inning to lead Chicago.

Nathan (2-2) has his fifth blown save this season in 40 chances ruined rookie Brian Duensing's seven shutout innings. In their final game at the Metrodome, the White Sox rallied for just their second victory in 10 games on their current road trip.

D.J. Carrasco (5-1) got the last out of the eighth and Bobby Jenks picked up his 28th save with a scoreless ninth inning.

Tigers 4, Indians 2

At Detroit, Magglio Ordonez had three hits, and the Tigers took advantage of five Cleveland errors to open a 4 1/2-game lead over Minnesota in the AL Central.

Rookie Rick Porcello (12-8) got the win, giving up two runs on five hits in seven-plus innings. The 20-year-old rookie has won more games than any Tigers pitcher before the age of 21.

Fernando Rodney pitched the ninth for his 31st save in 32 tries.

Mariners 3, Angels 0

At Seattle, Felix Hernandez pitched eight scoreless innings to spoil Scott Kazmir's Angels debut.

Hernandez (14-5) gave up four hits, walked three and struck out six to lower his ERA to 2.65 - second best in the AL.

Kazmir (8-8), acquired Friday from Tampa Bay, gave up one run and three hits in 6 1-3 innings. He walked one and struck out eight. He retired 18 straight before Mike Sweeney opened the seventh with a walk.

David Aardsma pitched the ninth for his 33rd save in 37 chances.

Athletics 10, Royals 4

At Oakland, Calif., Landon Powell hit his first career grand slam and Trevor Cahill (8-12) won consecutive starts for the first time in more than two months.

Powell homered off Yasuhiko Yabuta, pitching in relief after Kansas City starter Brian Bannister (7-12) left because of shoulder fatigue in the second.

Mike Jacobs homered for the Royals, who lost two of three against Oakland without manager Trey Hillman. Hillman left the team on Monday to be with his family following the death of his father-in-law.

Last updated September 2, 2009 7:09 p.m. PT

Federal judge orders MLB drug evidence preserved

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO -- A federal appellate judge has ordered the preservation of all evidence that allegedly shows 104 Major League Baseball players tested positive for steroids in 2003.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last month ruled that federal agents wrongly seized the material from drug testing labs when they were authorized to take only evidence related to 10 players listed in their search warrant.

If the ruling stands, the baseball players' association will be free to order the destruction of all the test results and related material, except for the 10 players listed in the warrant - and that's what federal prosecutors fear.

Prosecutors on Monday urged Chief Judge Alex Kozinski to freeze the legal proceedings until they decide whether to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to review the case. They said it appeared the 9th Circuit's decision conflicts with prior high court rulings dealing with proper search and seizures of property.

Federal agents raided the offices of baseball's drug-testing companies in April 2004, seized a spreadsheet containing the drug-testing records of all baseball players, mixed in on a computer with those from other sports and businesses, then obtained additional search warrants.

Prosecutors argued they had a "plain-view" right to the records of all baseball players who they said tested positive.

The appeals court set new rules for searches of digital evidence, saying the "plain-view" doctrine shouldn't apply.

On Wednesday, Kozinski - who wrote the ruling chastising the government - delayed implementing the ruling until the government decides whether to appeal to the Supreme Court. Prosecutors have until Nov. 24 to petition the Supreme Court for review.

(This version CORRECTS Corrects to Monday in 4th graf.)

Last updated September 2, 2009 1:26 p.m. PT

Orioles All-Star CF Jones could be out for season

By DAVID GINSBURG
AP SPORTS WRITER

BALTIMORE - Adam Jones' breakthrough season with the Baltimore Orioles could be over.

A fluke injury has left the All-Star center fielder on crutches with a severe left ankle sprain. The initial prognosis is that Jones will miss at least two to three weeks, although both he and Orioles manager Dave Trembley acknowledged there's a good chance he will not return in 2009.

"I just wanted to have a strong finish and this, I wouldn't say eliminates that, but it hurts my chances for me coming back for the rest of the year," Jones said.

"I couldn't tell you when or if he'll come back," Trembley said.

Jones was hurt in the sixth inning of Tuesday night's game against the New York Yankees. He ran past first on an infield grounder, then scrambled back and twisted his leg on the base.

"I just hit the edge of the bag with my front cleat and my foot just rolled," he said. "It just turned out to be a freakish play."

Jones was batting .303 with 12 homers and 47 RBIs on July 12. Playing in the All-Star game for the first time, he had the game-winning RBI for the American League.

His batting average has dipped to .277, and he's been limited to seven home runs and 23 RBIs since the break. But the 24-year-old has still had a solid season compared to last year, when he batted .270 with nine homers and 57 RBIs.

"It's not a pleasant feeling to lose a guy the caliber of Jones. There's no one who has made as much improvement from one year to the next as Jones. I think everybody can attest to that," Trembley said. "When you lose a guy like that in the middle of the lineup, the middle of the diamond, the middle of your clubhouse, that's a major blow."

Jones played in 73 games over two seasons with Seattle before coming to Baltimore in the February 2008 trade that sent Erik Bedard to the Mariners. The Orioles immediately made him a regular in the lineup, and this season he's exceeded expectations in spite of his lackluster second half.

"It was a good season for me, it was a success, although it's not ending the way I would hope," Jones said. e won't return unless he's entirely healthy.

"It wouldn't be smart. We've got five weeks left, of course I want to be there on the field with my teammates. There's nothing I'd rather do," Jones said. "But at the same time, you've got to be smart. Is it smart to come back for the last couple of weeks, or is it smart to just let it heal all the way and come back next year?"

Trembley said, "I know Jones wants to play. (But) a guy like Jones who's so important to us, there's no way he'd go out there and play if he's not 100 percent."

Felix Pie will get most of the playing time in center field while Jones is out.

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Originally published Wednesday, September 2, 2009 at 9:30 PM

Senator Schilling? Pitcher ponders run

BOSTON - Curt Schilling, the former major-league pitcher who won the allegiance of Bostonians by leading the Red Sox to the 2004 World Series, said Wednesday that he has "some interest" in running for the seat held for nearly 50 years by Democratic Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Schilling, a registered independent and longtime Republican supporter, wrote on his blog that while his family and video game company, 38 Studios, are high priorities, "I do have some interest in the possibility."

"That being said, to get to there, from where I am today, many, many things would have to align themselves for that to truly happen," he added.

Any other comment "would be speculation on top of speculation," Schilling said, adding, "My hope is that whatever happens, and whomever it happens to, this state makes the decision and chooses the best person - regardless of sex, race, religion or political affiliation - to help get this state back to the place it deserves to be."

Schilling told New England Cable News that he has been contacted "by people whose opinion I give credence to," but he did not elaborate and did not return messages left by The Associated Press.

Notes

- The Florida Marlins' two star sluggers exchanged heated words in a verbal confrontation in the clubhouse, forcing a closed-door meeting as the team faded from the playoff picture.

A frustrated and injured **Hanley Ramirez** said that he "got some people upset" for leaving the game early the night before with an injury, then teammate **Dan Uggla** openly argued with the NL batting leader in the clubhouse.

Uggla accused Ramirez of a lack of desire and effort to win. He also said Ramirez wasn't caring because he's already secured a \$70 million, six-year contract.

- Former Mariner **Adam Jones'** breakthrough season with the Baltimore Orioles could be over.

A fluke injury has left the All-Star center fielder on crutches with a severe left ankle sprain. The initial prognosis is that Jones will miss at least two to three weeks, although both he and Orioles manager **Dave Trembley** acknowledged there's a good chance he will not return in 2009.

- A federal appellate judge has ordered the preservation of all evidence that allegedly shows 104 Major League Baseball players tested positive for steroids in 2003.

New York Yankees closer **Mariano Rivera** has soreness in his left groin, an injury that could sideline him into the weekend.

- Texas third baseman **Michael Young** (hamstring) will be out at least two weeks.

All-Star center fielder **Josh Hamilton** left the Rangers' game against Toronto because of lower back pain and is day to day.

Also, Rangers catcher **Jarrod Saltalamacchia** was activated from the disabled list, a bit of a surprise after there was talk earlier this week about possible season-ending surgery.

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