

Pennington's bat comes alive in A's 9-5 win over Mariners

By Curtis Pashelka, OAKLAND TRIBUNE

Cliff Pennington hasn't had many problems on defense since the A's recalled him from Triple-A Sacramento on July 31. And maybe the offensive side of his game just needed some time to catch up.

Pennington's two-run home run in the third inning started a four-run rally as the A's went on to snap a two-game losing streak with a 9-5 win over the Seattle Mariners on Saturday at the Oakland Coliseum.

Pennington finished the game 3-for-3 with a walk and two RBI as the A's, with the help of three scoreless innings from their bullpen before the ninth, beat the Mariners for just the fourth time in 15 tries this season.

"I've been scuffling a little bit at the plate the last 10 days, but I actually felt really good throughout that stretch," Pennington said. "It was just a matter of getting good pitches to hit and putting good swings on them."

The A's made Pennington their everyday shortstop when they traded Orlando Cabrera to Minnesota at the end of July. Pennington responded by playing error-free defense for all of August before he was charged with an error in the ninth inning of Friday's game.

Pennington also initially swung the bat well as he hit .320 in his first 14 games. Since then, though, Pennington has batted .161 (10-for-62) and came into Saturday on a 0-for-11 streak before his third homer of the year cut Seattle's lead to 3-2.

"He doesn't have enough at-bats to say he was hot and then cooled off," A's manager Bob Geren said of Pennington. "When you have that few at-bats, your average can go up and down so quick. He's still got the whole month left, and he'll play every day unless he needs a day off."

Third baseman Adam Kennedy later scored on a Kurt Suzuki sacrifice fly to center field in the third to tie the game, but Rajai Davis scored the go-ahead almost by himself. Davis advanced from first to second on Suzuki's sacrifice, stole third and scored on Scott Hairston's ground out to second base.

Davis now has 27 runs scored and 20 stolen bases since the All-Star break and is hitting .315 (52-for-162).

Starting pitcher Brett Anderson, who was pitching on five days' rest, allowed four hits in the second inning, including a solo homer to designated hitter Mike Sweeney and a two-RBI single to catcher Rob Johnson.

Anderson regrouped to three more scoreless innings as he picked up his first win since Aug. 9 when Oakland beat Kansas City 6-3.

"It was a grind out there today," Anderson said. "(Seattle) was grinding out at-bats and fouling pitches off and building up (my) pitch count. I was fortunate enough to get through five and get a win out of it. It's always good when your team scores runs, especially since I put them in a hole early."

Michael Wuertz helped to preserve the win by throwing 12/3 scoreless innings. In the seventh with no outs and runners on first and second, Wuertz got Jose Lopez to ground into a fielder's choice, struck out Sweeney and got Adrian Beltre to ground out.

Ken Griffey Jr. pinch-hit for Johnson with two outs and a runner on first in the eighth inning. And in what may have been one of his last at-bats at the Coliseum, Griffey grounded out to second base to end the inning. Griffey, who turns 40 in November, has not decided whether he will play again next season.

A's closer Andrew Bailey had his 12-inning scoreless streak end in the ninth with Jose Lopez's two-run homer to deep left. Bailey had not allowed a home run to a right-handed hitter in 136 at-bats.

Green day at Coliseum as A's top pick shows his stuff

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Green day at Coliseum as top pick shows his stuff

Shortstop Grant Green said he had a relaxing summer. Well, relaxing up to a point.

Green, the A's first-round pick out of USC in June's draft, suffered from insomnia in the days leading up to the Aug. 17 deadline to sign drafted players. He and the A's reached agreement with roughly 10 minutes to spare, with Green receiving a \$2.75 million bonus.

Green took batting practice at the Oakland Coliseum on Saturday and fielded some grounders at shortstop in front of his parents and agent, Scott Boras. He'll return to Stockton today for the Single-A Ports' final two games, head home for a week, then go to Arizona for the instructional league.

"Right when it got down toward the very end, it was extremely stressful. I don't think I fell asleep for at least four nights before the deadline," said Green, who added about 10 pounds to his 6-foot-3, 190-pound frame this summer. "I was just stressing out. My family was stressing out. The whole family was."

"You try to let (draft picks like Green) know in advance what's coming so they're aware," Boras said.

In three games with the Ports as their designated hitter, Green was 4-for-11 with three RBI.

"First game, the ball looked like a pea when I was up there," Green said. "I can definitely tell it's a different game. The first pitch I see in three months is a slider."

Green will be with the A's during next year's spring training in Phoenix, as per the terms of his contract. A's manager Bob Geren said players drafted out of college usually need a year or more of minor league baseball before being ready for the major leagues but wouldn't rule out Green joining the A's at some point in 2010.

"It's good for players to experience the different levels, but, that being said, we never hold anybody back if they're ready," Geren said. "They could progress through, but you don't see that very often."

It's tough to envision a scenario in which starter Dallas Braden pitches again this season. At this point, Braden said he needs to rest a bothersome nerve in his left foot. "That's kind of what it's looking like," Braden said when asked if he was shutting it down for the season. "The timetable just isn't there to get back and be at a competitive level that I would want to be at to try to get outs for our team."

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney entered Saturday's game as a defensive replacement after being scratched from the lineup with a sore left knee. ... The A's raised \$75,690 for their Breast Cancer Awareness Day on Saturday. In 11 years, the team has helped raise \$1.075 million for breast cancer awareness and research. ... The Winning for the Community Poker Challenge, hosted by A's radio announcer Ken Korach, raised \$2,740 for local high school baseball programs.

Fans may not pack new San Jose ballpark for long

By John Woolfolk, San Jose Mercury News

Since the San Francisco Giants moved into their \$290 million stadium in 2000, average game attendance at AT&T Park over the last five seasons has been 50 percent higher than it was during their last year in old, frigid Candlestick Park.

The Houston Astros also moved into a new stadium in 2000, but average attendance at \$299 million Minute Maid Park over the last five seasons is just 10 percent above their final year at the Astrodome — and dropping at a pace one local sports columnist called "embarrassing."

The varied experiences of those two Major League Baseball teams are a cautionary tale for San Jose as the city ponders a possible new \$489 million stadium to lure the A's from Oakland.

A consultant's economic analysis suggests a new San Jose ballpark would be a \$2.9 billion boost to the city's economy over 30 years. It assumes A's attendance jumps 20 percent the first year and gradually slips back to current levels.

Experts who study stadium deals around the country said that while they haven't reviewed the San Jose analysis, other cities have seen attendance fall short of expectations.

"You can only be in awe of the new facility for so long," said Dennis Coates, an economics professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who has studied and written extensively about ballpark economics.

Coates said the first of the modern ballparks built in the 1990s enjoyed a sustained "novelty effect" that boosted attendance for years. But those built after 2000 did not see similar results, in part because fans have come to expect what was once state-of-the-art for design, concessions and technology.

Ballpark comparisons analyzed for San Jose by consultants Conventions, Sports and Leisure International seem to bear that out. Five years after Oriole Park at Camden Yards opened in 1992, attendance was up 41 percent, about the same as it was in the stadium's first season, according to their report. The San Diego Padres saw a 49 percent jump in attendance when Petco Park opened in 2004, but that boost had shrunk to 20 percent by last season.

Team performance is another key driver in attendance, experts say.

"Teams have to be successful on the field in order to sustain fan interest," said Robert A. Baade, economics professor at Chicago's Lake Forest College. "It used to be that you could count on a fairly long novelty period if a team was new to a community. But even a new team wears off if it's not successful."

Baade added that multimillion dollar player salaries, free agency and steroid scandals have eroded fans' loyalty to teams, making it harder to draw them out to the ballpark during a sustained losing streak.

That may explain the Astros' woes. Houston Chronicle sports writer Richard Justice in a column last month summed up the team's attendance troubles as a "top-10 payroll and a bottom-10 record," though the team's owner blames the economy.

San Jose still has many hurdles to clear before city leaders need worry about A's attendance. Baseball officials would first have to make the Giants relinquish their territorial claims to Santa Clara County before the A's could make such a move. And because the stadium would be built on land near the Diridon train station purchased with city redevelopment dollars, San Jose voters would have to approve any deal that gave the team use of the land at a discounted cost or spent city dollars to improve surrounding roads.

City officials said the consultant's findings are based on conservative assumptions. The A's currently draw some of baseball's smallest crowds — an average of 24,291 per game over the last five seasons, well below Major League Baseball's 31,688 average. To guard against accusations of an overly rosy forecast, the consultant's analysis assumes first-year average attendance in San Jose would peak at just 29,250 per game before dropping back to current levels. The Giants' average attendance over the last five seasons is 38,653.

City officials also note that unlike most ballparks, where taxpayers on average pay two-thirds of the cost, the proposed deal would make the A's build and run their new ballpark, with the city providing only the land under what likely would be a low-cost, long-term lease. The only costs to the city's general fund, the analysis noted, would be those associated with providing city services for nongame events; the consultants said three such events would cost \$46,000 annually, though they also said it's likely more events would be held each year.

Paul Krutko, San Jose's chief development officer, said it would be hard to imagine poor attendance burdening the city coffers under such an arrangement.

"You would have to have almost nobody going to the games," Krutko said.

Lurie: Will Giants make playoffs? How will A's fare in '10? Answers within

By Marty Lurie, Special to the Oakland Tribune

Baseball is known as a talking sport. There is no better way to start a discussion about the game than to ask a question.

Here are some questions that have come up in the press box over the past week:

Q: What roster addition will make the biggest impact on his team through the playoffs?

A: Philadelphia solidified its pitching rotation with the addition of lefty Cliff Lee from Cleveland. Lee throws with a nice, easy motion so he should have plenty left in the tank for a deep run into October.

The Cards had a struggling offense until Matt Holliday arrived from Oakland. The NL slugger has hit 11 home runs in 38 games after hitting 11 in 93 games for the A's. Albert Pujols, Holliday and Ryan Ludwick form a terrific middle of the order combination for the Cardinals.

Reliever George Sherrill took the pressure off the overworked Dodgers' bullpen as soon as he arrived from Baltimore. The lefty also gives manager Joe Torre an alternative to closer Jonathan Broxton, if the big righty falters closing games in the October.

If the Giants can get Freddy Sanchez back on the field, the second baseman will lift the S.F. batting order should the Giants make the playoffs. Pitcher Brad Penny won't be needed in the starting rotation during a five-game playoff series, but he will certainly help the club coming out of the 'pen, if necessary.

The Angels' Scott Kazmir has playoff experience. The lefty will not wilt under the pressure if the Angels face Boston or New York in the playoffs. Kazmir spent his whole career in the tough AL East, where every start against the Sox and Yanks was a hair-raising experience.

The Rangers promoted rookie pitcher Neftali Feliz at the right time. This kid throws two innings at a time, usually hitting 98 mph on the radar gun without difficulty. If Texas slips into the playoffs, Feliz will be an outstanding late-inning weapon for Ron Washington.

Boston solidified its offense with the addition of catcher Victor Martinez from Cleveland. Reliever Billy Wagner adds a veteran's touch to the Sox 'pen at just the right time.

Q: Should the Cubs or Rays give their season-ticket holders refunds?

A: No. Both teams were locked and loaded heading into the 2009 season.

The Rays added Pat Burrell and Gabe Kapler to bolster the lineup from the right side. The moves didn't work out.

Tampa's pitching really has been the team's undoing as the starters never lived up to their 2008 performance.

Injuries to Alfonso Soriano (knee) and Aramis Ramirez (shoulder) took the heart out of the Cubs attack for much of the summer. Milton Bradley brought too many personal issues to Wrigley Field to succeed. Bradley counted on to hit from the left side never did much that way in 2009.

Closer Kevin Gregg couldn't hold the closers job while his understudy Carlos Marmol simply walked too many batters to be effective.

Both organizations spent money in the off-season; the moves simply didn't pan out.

Q: Which managers are on thin ice for 2010?

A: Washington will need a new skipper in 2010. Interim manager Jim Riggleman did his best to turn the team around after Manny Acta was fired at the All-Star break. The club needs a new look for next season and it will start in the manager's office.

Cleveland has played better during the second half once again after falling out of the race in June. Eric Wedge should be replaced next season.

You can't have the kind of season that the Mets had in New York without someone paying the price. This usually means the manager will be dismissed. This time Jerry Manuel will take the hit for this dysfunctional organization.

Seems that Toronto icon Cito Gaston will follow general manager J.P. Ricciardi out the door once the season ends giving the Jays a totally new look in 2010.

With veterans speaking out about the lack of hustle in Houston, manager Cecil Cooper might be looking for a new job this off season.

Q: Do the A's have the makings of a good team next year?

A: First the A's have to determine what the plan is for 2010?

Do they enter the free-agent market and sign 28- to 32-year-olds who can still play baseball without a daunting prior history of injuries?

Do they promote young hitters Brett Wallace, Chris Carter, Sean Doolittle, Adrian Cardenas and Jemile Weeks and let them play in the majors?

The young pitchers held their own in 2009. Will the A's take the same chance with the young hitting prospects?

The A's need help at the infield corners, DH and right field.

It sure would be nice to have Andre Ethier, Carlos Pena, Ryan Ludwick or Nelson Cruz back in the A's organization (all talented players who blossomed after leaving Oakland).

Q: Can the Giants make it to the postseason? If they do, can their hitting take them past the first round of the playoffs?

A: The Giants can make the playoffs. San Francisco's pitching looks stronger than ever with the addition of Penny and the solid performances turned in by Jonathan Sanchez.

Getting Sanchez and Bengie Molina on the field is the key for the offense. Rookie Buster Posey should not be expected to catch this pitching staff down the stretch. Can you imagine Posey calling a game or catching the pitches for Barry Zito or Tim Lincecum?

Posey should be used as often as possible as a bat late in the game. The longer he sits around without playing the tougher it will be for him to deliver when asked down the stretch.

With their pitching, the Giants are every team's nightmare as a first-round opponent.

Q: Do the Dodgers have enough pitching to thrive in the postseason?

A: Pitching isn't the problem with Los Angeles. The hitters are disappearing more often than not for the club. Pitchers Clayton Kershaw, Randy Wolf, Chad Billingsley, Vicente Padilla and Jon Garland are capable of six good innings. The Dodgers will go to the 'pen as they have all season for the last three innings.

Q: Who is the front runner for the AL's Cy Young award?

Kansas City's Zack Greinke is considered the best starter in the AL. No one wants to give him the award because of his paltry win total for the last-place Royals. If Greinke wins 16 games he just might win the Cy Young.

Mariano Rivera is the latest entry for this coveted award. Rivera, currently sidelined with a groin strain, has converted 34 straight save opportunities, not giving up a run since June 12. Rivera has never won the award. Closers Dennis Eckersley, Bruce Sutter, Eric Gagne, Sparky Lyle and Mark Davis have all been Cy Young award winners in the past. Doesn't seem right that the greatest closer of all-time Rivera is not on that list.

Joining Rivera as a late entry is Texas righty Scott Feldman of Burlingame. No question Feldman (15-4) has been Texas' best pitcher during the season.

CC Sabathia, Felix Hernandez and Justin Verlander still are in the running. Right now, the Cy Young is Sabathia's if he wins 20 games or more.

Q: How strong are the Angels?

A: The Angels have struggled all year crafting a reliable bullpen.

The Halos are a much better team with Kevin Jepsen in the setup role. Jepsen has never been down the stretch before so how he will fare under the bright, late-season lights remains to be seen.

Los Angeles hits the ball even though it has slumped with the bats this week. Kendry Morales is in the top five for the AL MVP award.

With John Lackey, Scott Kazmir and Jered Weaver heading the rotation, this club has to be considered a threat in the playoffs.

Q: Who would rather have coming off the bench late in the game Jim Thome or Jason Giambi?

A: Both sluggers work the count trying to get a good pitch to hit. I'd take Giambi because he plays with more enthusiasm than Thome. Both are feared more for what they have accomplished in the past than for who they are now. If you need a home run, Thome's power is still there while Giambi's power has clearly waned.

Q: Will the injuries to Michael Young and Josh Hamilton sink the Rangers playoff chances?

Q: Young's hamstring injury and Hamilton's back woes certainly will hurt the club. Nelson Cruz has picked up the slack, but he is a streaky hitter. Ian Kinsler has not had a consistently good season. Losing Young for the next three weeks will clearly put a crimp in the Texas offense. If Hamilton comes back this week there is still hope for the club. Without these two playing for an extended period whatever chances the Rangers had to make the playoffs will go out of the window.

Q: Can the Phillies repeat with Brad Lidge as closer?

Q: This doesn't seem likely since Lidge hasn't pitched well for any extended periods during the entire season. Lidge just doesn't have command of his pitches. Watching him work the ninth inning is painful. Either Ryan Madson steps into the role or Brett Myers returns from the DL to take the job, or the Phillies will not repeat as World Champions no matter how well they hit the ball in their cozy little ballpark.

Q: Should the Yankees be concerned about their pitching rotation for the playoffs?

A: The Yankees might be looking for a new third starter unless Joba Chamberlain turns his awful second half around. Chamberlain's innings are being monitored very closely (Joba's Rules) by the club. Even when he takes the mound for three- to four-inning stints Chamberlain has been ineffective.

Sabathia and A.J. Burnett are ready to go, but Burnett's erratic performances have to give manager Joe Girardi some concern.

The Yanks starting pitching just might be their most glaring weakness going into the playoffs.

Questions from longtime baseball man and former minor league manager Ray Malgradi, who just celebrated his 87th birthday:

Why don't today's pitchers work from the windup with a man on third base, thus giving them a better chance to throw a quality pitch? Years ago, no one stole home with any regularity when a pitcher wound up in his delivery instead of being in the set position.

Why do batters stare at the third base coach for a sign with the count 3-1 and 3-2 with two outs? The batter's only job is to hit the ball.

Why doesn't the on-deck hitter remove the bat when there is a play at the plate?

Why all the hand-slapping when a batter accidentally moves a runner or runners up on the bases?

As I said, baseball is a talking sport full of questions.

I'm glad Ray Malgradi is still asking the questions.

A's 9, Mariners 5

Teammates help Anderson bounce back

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's main goal the rest of the way is to ensure the health of their young starters, so a little stumble by Brett Anderson on the first play of the game brought manager Bob Geren running to the mound with a trainer.

Though his right knee buckled slightly when he tried to field a tapper by Ichiro Suzuki, Anderson was fine, and though he gave up three runs the next inning, his teammates charged back to take the lead in the third and the A's beat Seattle 9-5, ending a six-game losing streak to the Mariners.

"You're always antsy when Ichiro is up, the way he hits," Anderson said, adding, "Any time I'm fielding the ball, it's probably not good."

In 17 of his 26 starts, Anderson has allowed no more than three runs. His support has been lacking; in each of his last three starts, Anderson had received two runs or fewer from the A's hitters. With three runs or more of backing, the rookie left-hander is 8-1.

Cliff Pennington got Oakland on the board with a two-run shot off Luke French, then Adam Kennedy doubled, Rajai Davis singled and Kurt Suzuki sent Kennedy in with a sacrifice fly.

Davis dashed to second on that fly ball to center, stole third and scored on Scott Hairston's groundout. In the fourth, Daric Barton walked, Pennington dunked a hit to center and Kennedy provided a run-scoring single. Mark Ellis added a two-run double in the eighth, as did Barton.

Michael Wuertz gave Anderson a helping hand, too. He took over from Brad Ziegler with two on and nobody out in the seventh and got Jose Lopez to ground into a force, struck out Mike Sweeney and induced an inning-ending grounder from Adrian Beltre.

Andrew Bailey came in to get the final out of the eighth. He stayed in for the ninth and recorded his 22nd save, but his scoreless streak ended at 12 innings when he gave up a two-run homer to Lopez.

"In general, I'm trying to limit him to one inning whenever possible," Geren said, noting that Bailey threw only two pitches to retire Ken Griffey Jr. in the eighth.

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney did not start because of knee soreness, but he entered the game in right in the seventh and doubled in the eighth.

Jack Cust began the game in right and didn't quite get to a couple of shallow flyballs, including a soft liner by Jack Wilson in the second that knocked off Cust's knee when he tried to slide for it. Wilson later scored on Rob Johnson's two-run single to center. Seattle's other run that inning came on Mike Sweeney's solo homer. Sweeney had four hits.

"That's kind of been my MO," Anderson said of the one-inning blip. "I kind of lost a little bit of command, threw too many fastballs. It was a grind-it-out kind of night."

Pennington was batting .161 over his previous 19 games but finished a triple short of the cycle and also walked.

Ichiro had three hits and is one shy of 2,000 for his career.

Briefly: First-round pick Grant Green, a shortstop from USC, took batting practice with the A's. He will return to Class A Stockton for the final two games, then go to the Arizona instructional league. ... The A's raised \$75,690 on Breast Cancer Awareness Day.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Winning hand: Assistant general manager David Forst won broadcaster Ken Korach's charity poker tournament after five hours Saturday and declined the grand prize, a stay at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. The event raised \$2,740 for Oakland Athletic League high school baseball programs.

ON BASEBALL

NL: New Country for Old Men

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Once upon a time, older National League hitters moved to the American League to prolong their careers as designated hitters. **Orlando Cepeda's** time was winding down until the DH rule came into effect in 1973, the year he joined the Red Sox for a final hurrah and drove in 86 runs.

Other examples included **Billy Williams**, **Tommy Davis**, **Rico Carty**, **Deron Johnson**, **Greg Luzinski**, **Chili Davis**, **Dave Kingman** and **Dave Parker**. More recently, **Ellis Burks** and **Sammy Sosa**.

So what gives now?

Two examples suggest a reverse trend, strangely enough. **Jim Thome** accepted a trade from the White Sox to the Dodgers so he could go from DH to pinch-hitter, knowing he'll play a lot less, and **Jason Giambi**, after being released by the A's, joined the Rockies, where he's already had three key pinch-hit appearances.

One swing of the bat by **Matt Stairs** changed everything.

Stairs' monstrous pinch homer in the eighth inning of Game 4 in last year's NLCS boosted the Phillies and drowned the Dodgers, and now the Dodgers want some of that action. General manager **Ned Colletti** acknowledged Stairs' homer was part of the inspiration for the acquisition of Thome, 39 (who had a pinch single Friday in his Dodgers debut).

The Rockies, seeking a left-handed threat off the bench, signed Giambi, 38, to a minor-league contract and promoted him when rosters expanded Tuesday. He'd be eligible for the postseason because he was in the organization on Aug. 31 and, as the loophole allows, could replace someone on the disabled list.

Not only could Thome and Giambi pinch hit through September and the first two rounds of the playoffs, but, remember, the DH is used in World Series games played at AL parks. Because the AL won the All-Star Game again, that's four

possible DH assignments. The Dodgers and Rockies didn't want to get caught short like the 2002 Giants, whose pick for DH in Game 1 of that year's World Series was **Tsuyoshi Shinjo**.

The Giambi-to-Rockies move was a no-brainer. When you're jobless and lack offers, you jump at what's available, no matter the league. But Thome is an odd case. He hadn't played the field since June 13, 2007, and had a horrible history of pinch-hitting - 1-for-18 the past two seasons and .215 in his career.

Plus, there's the legacy thing. He's 36 homers shy of 600, and getting limited at-bats won't help his pursuit. But he said it's more important to get a chance to win his first championship and thinks the Dodgers are his ticket, which explains why he waived his no-trade clause.

"To come off the bench and get a big hit late in the game or in the middle of the game, it's a once-in-a-lifetime situation," Thome told L.A. reporters. "I would never have been able to live it down if these guys celebrate in October and I couldn't."

Thome's 1995 and 1997 Cleveland teams lost in the World Series. He was **Manny Ramirez's** teammate then, but Manny went on to win two titles in Boston. They're together again, and these days there's nothing like playing in the NL if you came from the AL.

Brad Penny and **John Smoltz** were a combined 9-13 with a 6.51 ERA in 32 starts for the Red Sox, then returned to the NL and are in their heyday again (2-1, 1.80 ERA, four starts). Even **Cliff Lee**, the AL's top pitcher last season, has been great with Philly (5-2, 2.81 ERA, seven starts) after leaving Cleveland (7-9, 3.14, 22 starts).

In a related story, **Matt Holliday** went from Oakland (.286, 11 homers, 54 RBIs, 93 games) to St. Louis (.386, 11 homers, 38 RBIs, 38 games).

Perhaps this is all good news for Thome and Giambi, two newcomers to the land of opportunity, a.k.a. the National League.

SHEA HEY

Ramirez at center of Marlins brouhaha

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

If the Marlins are to stick in the wild-card race, **Hanley Ramirez** must lead the charge.

Wednesday's verbal skirmish between the shortstop and his double-play partner, **Dan Uggla**, shows Ramirez's peers aren't in full support of him sitting out with a hamstring injury, among other things.

Earlier in the season, veteran **Wes Helms** openly mentioned to Ramirez that he was late for pregame stretching, and it led to heated words and nearly to blows.

By far, Ramirez is the most talented and expensive player on the Marlins, and he's 25, perhaps with some learning to do. Still, it's highly unusual for anyone to question a teammate's effort in front of reporters, but Uggla couldn't hold back.

Maybe it was a message, a challenge.

Ramirez, in a 0-for-14 funk, said he left Tuesday's game because of the hamstring, adding teammates threw their arms up in protest. Wednesday, Uggla suggested the exit was because Ramirez was sitting on his league-leading .355 average. Ramirez said he already had a multiyear contract and didn't need to maintain his numbers just for a new deal.

In a rant to Ramirez (we've deleted the expletives), Uggla said, "Yeah, you got your \$70 million, so ... win. What... (do you) come out of the game for? You're going to complain to the media and say your feelings are... hurt. Are you ... serious?"

Ramirez (shouting): "Yes, I am. I don't show nobody up on the field. You showed me up on the field. I never do that to nobody."

Manager **Fredi Gonzalez** had Ramirez in Wednesday's lineup. After the argument, Ramirez was scratched after Gonzalez learned his shortstop still was hurting. The Marlins won the game. They won again Thursday, thanks in part to a pinch RBI single by Ramirez.

Stay tuned.

THE BULL PEN

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- **Jon Garland** has pitched in the majors for 10 years, but that's news to the Dodgers, who put a nameplate above his locker reading: "John Garland."

-- If you were stunned the Cubs gave **Milton Bradley** a three-year, \$30 million contract, then you shouldn't be stunned they're hoping another team takes him off their hands, even if it means they must eat a large portion of the remaining money.

-- **Matt Holliday**, who has prospered since joining **Albert Pujols** in the Cardinals' lineup, said of his new teammate: "I think he's the best player of all time. If you look at his first nine seasons, it would be hard to argue."

-- Can anyone figure out the White Sox, who acquired **Jake Peavy**, **Alex Rios**, **Tony Pena** and **Mark Kotsay** to help deliver a playoff berth? Manager **Ozzie Guillen** said the Sox had a World Series team. Then they lost seven of eight, raised the white flag and traded **Jim Thome** and **Jose Contreras**.

-- Nice to see **David Wright**, in his first at-bat after returning from the Matt Cain beaming, swing at the first pitch - 95 mph from Colorado's **Jorge De La Rosa** - and smack it into left-center for a single.

-- How elated were the Tigers that the White Sox dealt Thome to the Dodgers? "I paid for his flight out there," Tigers manager **Jim Leyland** said.

-- Wright was wearing an oversized, protective helmet (Rawlings S100) that's being proposed for future use, and many players believe it lacks style. "He looked like the Great Gazoo on the Flintstones," said **Ken Griffey Jr.**, who saw Wright on TV. Wright switched back after two games.

Numbers game

24

Times the Rangers have used the disabled list this year, most in the majors. Mets have used it 22 times. Giants? Just 10.

2,715

Career hits for Derek Jeter, who's closing in on Lou Gehrig's Yankees record of 2,721.

Rookies star in A's win over Mariners

Pennington homers; Anderson regroups to earn victory

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Before Saturday night's game against the Mariners, A's manager Bob Geren raved about rookie shortstop Cliff Pennington's strong throwing arm and stellar defense.

Then the game began, and Pennington, the A's No. 9 hitter, showed Geren that he can hit a little, too.

Pennington launched a two-run homer in third inning, igniting a four-run rally and sending the A's on their way to a 9-5 victory over the Mariners at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

Pennington singled in the fourth, doubled in the sixth and walked in the ninth. He was tagged out after oversliding third in the sixth, trying to advance on a ground ball to first. Chalk that up to youthful exuberance.

"I've been scuffling a little the last 10 days, but I've actually felt really good through that whole stretch," said Pennington, who hit his third home run of the season. "It was just a matter of getting good pitches to hit and putting good swings on them."

Pennington hit a fastball off Mariners starter Luke French and took off running.

"I never know it's out when I hit it," Pennington said. "I don't hit [home runs] enough to ever know. I knew I got it pretty good and I started running. When I saw the flight, I thought it had a chance, but I definitely didn't know off the bat or anything."

Pennington's double in the sixth nearly went out. It hit off the base of the right-field wall.

"That would have been cool," he said. "I've never had two in one game -- at any level."

Pennington's blast helped starter Brett Anderson, another A's rookie, win for the first time since Aug. 9 at Kansas City. Anderson improved to 8-10.

The game got off to a rough start for Anderson. When leadoff hitter Ichiro Suzuki hit a first-inning dribbler in front of home plate, Anderson's right knee buckled as he tried to get off the mound. The trainers visited Anderson, but he stayed in the game and got out of the first unscathed. But in the second inning, the Mariners scored three times.

Mike Sweeney led off the second with a loud home run to left. Anderson went on to give up a walk and three singles, including No. 9 hitter Rob Johnson's two-run single. He got out of the inning with a double play.

"It didn't really hurt," Anderson said of his knee. "It just felt funny."

Anderson went just five innings and 99 pitches before Geren turned to reliever Brad Ziegler to open the sixth. Anderson gave up seven hits, walked two and struck out six. He escaped a two-on, two-out jam in the fifth, getting Adrian Beltre to ground out to Daric Barton at first.

"It was a grind out there today," Anderson said. "They kind of grinded out at-bats and fouled pitches off. That's what builds up pitch counts. I was just fortunate to get through five and get a win out of it.

"It's always good when your team scores runs. I put them in a hole early, 3-0. It's good for us to battle back and get those runs, the support, and the bullpen. Then obviously broke it up in the ninth. Probably one of the better wins that we've had in a while."

In 13 of his previous 25 starts, Anderson had two or fewer runs of support. That included his previous three starts.

This time, the A's hitters pounded out 13 hits, including two doubles by Mark Ellis, in their nine-run barrage. They scored four times in the third inning and again in the eighth.

In the third, Pennington hit his two-run shot after Barton's lead-off walk. Adam Kennedy stroked an opposite-field double to left, moved to third on Rajai Davis' single to right and scored on Kurt Suzuki's sacrifice fly to center. Davis tagged up and took second, barely beating Franklin Gutierrez's throw. He stole third and scored on Scott Hairston's hard groundout.

French, who came to the Mariners from Detroit in a July 31 trade, lasted only 3 2/3 innings. He gave up seven hits and five earned runs.

"Coming in, you definitely want to do good and make a good impression," French said. "Sometimes you don't really realize it during the game, but after, you think maybe you could have thrown some more offspeed pitches and a few more changeups here and there, keep them off balance a little more."

The Mariners didn't go quietly. In the seventh, Ichiro singled to center and advanced to second on Franklin Gutierrez's walk. That was it for Ziegler. Enter Michael Wuertz.

Wuertz got Jose Lopez on a fielder's choice, with Ichiro advancing to third. That set up a huge confrontation with Sweeney, who was 3-for-3 with a homer to that point. Sweeney worked the count full, but Wuertz struck him out swinging on a hard breaking ball. Then he got Beltre on a grounder back to the mound, fielding the ball with his bare hand and throwing him out to end the inning.

Wuertz got two quick outs in the eighth but gave way to closer Andrew Bailey after walking Josh Wilson. Bailey got pinch-hitter Ken Griffey Jr. on a groundout to second baseman Ellis.

Bailey's 12 1/3-inning scoreless streak ended in the ninth when Lopez crushed a two-run homer. Sweeney then singled, but Bailey got the next two outs and his 22nd save, leaving him one shy of Huston Street's team rookie record, set in 2005.

"A save's a save," Bailey said. "Whatever it takes."

Future is bright for A's speedster Davis

Oakland (60-76) vs. Seattle (72-65), 1:05 p.m. PT

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Throughout his career with the Pirates, Giants and A's, center fielder Rajai Davis has always gone to Spring Training just fighting to win a spot on the 25-man roster. That doesn't mean he can't dream about what he'd accomplish if he ever gets the chance to be a regular starter for an entire season.

"I would accomplish something that very few are doing," Davis said before Saturday night's game against the Mariners. "I'd be able to do some special things. I believe that wholeheartedly. I know my day's coming.

"Just being able to put together hitting, baserunning, basestealing, defensive play," Davis said. "Just helping a team win more games based on speed alone, getting on base and causing havoc and causing pitchers to change their game plans because of one person on the bases."

That's bold talk from a player who was traded by the Pirates to the Giants in 2007 and waived by the Giants in April 2008. But consider what he's done this season, especially since becoming the regular center fielder after Matt Holliday was traded to St. Louis and Scott Hairston moved to left.

Davis is hitting .295 with 46 runs scored, 34 RBIs and a career-high 31 steals. He became the first A's player to steal at least 30 bases since Rickey Henderson stole 66 in 1998. In 44 games since the All-Star break, Davis was hitting .325 with 26 runs, 13 doubles, three triples, one homer, 28 RBIs and 19 steals.

Consider what he did in the third inning against Seattle on Saturday. He singled to right, tagged up and advanced to second on a fly to center field, stole third, then scored on a groundout.

Davis stole 57 bases in 2004 in the Minor Leagues. Given a full season in the starting lineup, he believes he could do similar basestealing damage in the big leagues.

"I was able to steal 57 bases in five months," Davis said. "And then I really didn't have any idea of how to get jumps, how to get better jumps. I was just stealing. I'm learning in that area. I'm looking to get better."

You can't question Davis' desire or toughness. He missed just one game after fracturing the tip of his right thumb on Aug. 24.

Davis has no guarantees that he'll report to A's Spring Training next year as the presumed starter in center field or that he'll even be with the team. But he thinks he's opened "some eyes" throughout the Major Leagues.

"I'm just satisfied where I am right now and where I'm going," Davis said. "I'm expecting great things."

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Gio Gonzalez (4-5, 6.07 ERA)

Gonzalez got off to a shaky start against the Royals on Monday, allowing three first-inning runs. He settled down some after that as he held Kansas City to two runs over his final 4 1/3 innings. He gave up six hits, walked four and struck out eight, throwing 103 pitches. The rookie is 0-3 with a 7.29 ERA in 21 innings over his past four starts. He's faced Seattle twice this year, allowing seven runs on 12 hits over 10 innings.



SEA: RHP Doug Fister (2-1, 2.94 ERA)

Fister gets the award for best turnaround in back-to-back starts. Five days after surrendering three home runs to the Royals, resulting in his first big league loss, the unheralded right-handed held the hot-hitting Angels to five hits and one run over 7 1/3 innings. Fister pitched ahead in the count most of the game and though he had just two strikeouts, the rookie zeroed in on the strike zone. Seventy of his season-high 107 pitches were strikes. His start against the Athletics will be like a home game. Fister grew up in Merced, Calif., and attended Fresno State.

Tidbits

Right fielder Ryan Sweeney was a late scratch from the starting lineup on Saturday. Manager Bob Geren said he has been battling sore knees and needed a day off. Jack Cust took his place, but Sweeney entered the game for Cust in the top of the seventh as a defensive replacement. ... Starter Vin Mazzaro had an MRI on his ailing right shoulder, and the results were good, Geren said. "He's fine. He just has tendinitis. Everything else looks good. That's what we expected." Mazzaro won't throw at all until the team begins its road trip Tuesday in Chicago. ... Shortstop Grant Green, the A's first-round Draft pick out of the University of Southern California, took batting practice with the team before Saturday night's game. He's currently playing for Class A Stockton. "Get a little feel of what it's like here and start his road up here, which he already has," Geren said. "When you come out of program like USC's at his age, you progress quickly." ... The A's raised \$75,690 at their annual Breast Cancer Awareness Day game. Proceeds benefit the American Cancer Society, Northern California Cancer Center and Susan G. Komen for the Cure. ... A's radio play-by-play announcer Ken Korach's second-annual Winning for the Community Poker Challenge raised \$2,740 for Oakland Athletic League baseball programs. A's assistant GM David Forst won the Texas Hold-'Em tournament Saturday.

Up next

- Monday: Off-day
- Tuesday: Athletics (Brett Tomko, 3-3, 4.40) at White Sox (Carlos Torres, 1-0, 3.86), 5:11 p.m. PT 
- Wednesday: Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 8-12, 4.66) at White Sox (Freddy Garcia, 1-2, 4.76), 5:11 p.m. PT 

Pennington's home run helps A's beat Mariners

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Cliff Pennington overshadowed Ichiro's three-hit night with one big blast of his own.

Pennington hit a two-run homer to help the Oakland Athletics beat the Seattle Mariners 9-5 Saturday night as Suzuki got within one hit of 2,000.

Mark Ellis had three hits and drove in two runs for the A's and Daric Barton added a two-run double.

"Cliff has a little power but that's not exactly his game," Ellis said of his double play partner. "He's getting a lot better and he'll continue to get better. He's slowed himself down. When he first came up it seemed like he was in a hurry."

Mike Sweeney homered and had four hits for the Mariners, who had their four-game winning streak end. Jose Lopez also homered and Rob Johnson added a two-run single.

"It was little things in the game that cost us, but it's always going to be about starting pitching and how deep you can get in there," Mariners' manager Don Wakamatsu said. "We've proven that over and over and we really didn't set the tone with the starting pitching."

Brett Anderson (8-10) pitched five innings, giving up three runs on seven innings. He walked two and struck out six. Andrew Bailey recorded the final four outs for his 22nd save in 26 chances.

"I lost it a little with my command and it became a grind out there," Anderson said. "I was fortunate enough to get through five innings and get a win out of it."

Luke French (4-5) allowed five runs on seven hits over 3 2-3 innings. He walked three and did not strike out a batter.

Suzuki had three hits and needs just one more for 2,000. Six more will give him 200 on the season and continue his own major-league record for consecutive seasons (9) with at least that many.

"I'm always antsy when Ichiro is up there," Anderson said. "I hate facing that guy the way he hits. It's not a good matchup for me. He's one of the toughest guys to face because he always finds a way to get the bat on the ball."

Sweeney homered to lead off the second, sparking a three-run rally. Adrian Beltre walked, Jack Wilson singled and Josh Wilson walked ahead of Johnson's two-run single.

"Offensively, I thought we had a good approach," Wakamatsu said. "Anderson has a chance to have a real bright future, and I thought we had a decent approach with the three runs early in the ballgame. If we can tack on another run there, a different ballgame, but I thought their bullpen did a nice job overall."

The A's answered with a four-run third. After Pennington's home run, Adam Kennedy doubled and Rajai Davis singled before Suzuki hit a sacrifice fly and Scott Hairston followed with an RBI groundout.

"Pennington set the tone with a big home run early," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He won't be a big home run guy but he can play little ball, bunt, run and plays solid defense. That's a pretty good player."

Kennedy's single in the fourth made it 5-3.

"Things aren't going real well the last couple starts, but that's just the way it is sometimes," French said. "I'm learning. This whole thing is still new to me, so you learn as you go. I know I need to be aggressive and attack hitters."

Bailey came on to get the final out of the eighth, before the A's scored four runs in their half.

Ellis and Barton each hit a two-run double to make 9-3 before hit a two-run homer in the ninth.

Gordon vows A's to stay in Phoenix for spring training

by Peter Corbett, The Arizona Republic

Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon is digging in to protect the city's turf after an apparent overture to lure the Oakland Athletics from Phoenix to the Salt River Reservation east of Scottsdale.

The mayor said Friday that the city plans to discuss a new or refurbished spring-training stadium for the A's to keep them in Phoenix when their contract ends in 2011.

That comes after developer Marty DeRito sent a letter to A's owner Lew Wolff trying to lure the team to the Salt River Reservation, according to Gordon.

Phoenix-based DeRito Partners Inc. owns the Scottsdale Pavilions shopping center adjacent to the site of the spring-training complex the tribe is planning for the Arizona Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies.

DeRito and Wolff did not return calls seeking comment.

Tribal spokesman Levi Long said the community has not approached the A's.

"Right now, we've got our hands full with the Diamondbacks and Rockies," he said.

Salt River officials were unaware of DeRito's letter to the A's owner, Long said.

Gordon, who considers Wolff a personal friend, said the A's owner assured him that the team is committed to Phoenix and declined DeRito's offer to move to the Salt River Reservation.

"The Oakland A's aren't moving," Gordon said. "Mr. Wolff is a man of his word, and he isn't going to be playing city against city or nation against city."

This dustup is the latest turf battle involving Arizona's Cactus League and Florida's Grapefruit League as cities and now Indian communities try to retain or attract teams to cash in on baseball fans. Spring baseball has grown into a lucrative enterprise worth millions of dollars in tourism revenue.

The Diamondbacks and Rockies will move from Tucson to the Salt River Reservation in 2011. Meanwhile, Mesa and the Chicago Cubs are talking about new facilities after a long, successful spring-training marriage.

Cactus League President Robert Brinton said all the teams and cities are exploring their options, and it's nothing to get alarmed about.

"This is just part of baseball, just like watching players get traded," he said.

If there are any serious discussions going on, then "you're not going to read about it in the press," Brinton said.

Gordon said Phoenix economic-development officials will meet with A's executives to discuss the stadium, whether it can be modernized or if a new facility is needed.

Phoenix Municipal Stadium, built in 1964, is the Cactus League's oldest stadium. Phoenix completed a \$6 million stadium upgrade in 2004 with funding from the Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority.

The authority's funds for spring-training facilities are tapped out.

Salt River stepped up this summer with an offer to build the Diamondbacks and Rockies a complex that is likely to cost more than \$100 million.

Gordon said the A's will invest in a stadium for the team.

Wolff "is not looking for a gold-plated deal," the mayor said.

The Milwaukee Brewers also have approached Phoenix about improving their stadium and facilities in Maryvale, Gordon said.

He insisted that the Cactus League teams are going to stay put because Arizona and Florida cities don't have funding available to build expensive new facilities.

Brinton, who has been involved in the Cactus League for 20 years, said he expects at least one more team will relocate.

The Cincinnati Reds will move to Goodyear next year, creating a split of 15 teams in Arizona and 15 in Florida. That makes it harder to schedule and will lead to more split-squad games.

Eventually, one more team will move west to Arizona or head east to the Grapefruit League, Brinton said.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento falls on walk-off homer

rivercats.com

Ryan Budde hit a game-winning two-run home run in the bottom of the ninth inning Saturday night to give the Salt Lake Bees a 5-4 victory over the Sacramento River Cats.

Brett Wallace put Sacramento ahead 4-3 in the top of the ninth, and it looked as if the River Cats were going to snap a four-game losing streak. But Freddy Sandoval hit a one-out single and Budde followed with a two-out homer to left field, handing Sacramento its fifth loss in a row.

It's the team's longest losing streak since May 5-10, when it lost six in a row (three at home to Reno, three at Las Vegas). The River Cats finish the regular season with two more games at Salt Lake before opening the first round of the playoffs Thursday.

That first-round opponent will be determined over the next two days in Tacoma, where Colorado Springs and Tacoma are tied for first place in the Pacific Coast League North Division with two games remaining in their series. Tacoma, because it owns the tie-breaker over Colorado Springs, needs only a split over the final two games of the series to secure the division title.

Sacramento clinched its South Division title nine days ago, but on this final road trip has looked very little like the team has amassed the best record in Triple-A baseball.

On Saturday, starter Chad Reineke put Sacramento in position to win, allowing three runs over 5.0 innings. The bullpen held sturdy until the ninth, when Demel allowed the game-deciding blast. Sacramento's record in one-run games drops to 25-13, still one of the more impressive stats in a championship season.

Sacramento rallied from a 3-0 deficit with three runs in the sixth, highlighted by Jeff Baisley's RBI double and Adrian Cardenas' two-run single. Wallace's solo blast in the top of the ninth was his 14th of the season.

Right-hander James Simmons will look to stop Sacramento's losing streak Sunday afternoon, when he faces right-hander Brad Salmon at 1 p.m.

RockHounds clinch 2nd half title on Sulentic's homer

By Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter Telegram

As Matt Sulentic came to the plate with two outs in the ninth inning, the Midland RockHounds bullpen began flapping their arms like a scene from "Angels in the Outfield."

Sulentic must have had an angel with him as he tucked a 2-0 pitch from Clayton Hamilton just into the RockHounds bullpen. His game-winning home run against the RoughRiders clinched the game, 4-3, and a playoff berth for the RockHounds at Citibank Ballpark on Saturday.

"I didn't notice that, but it must have had something to do with it," said Sulentic of the bullpen support.

The RockHounds entered Saturday a game ahead of the RoughRiders in the South Division standings, but with the tiebreakers in effect Midland needed one victory head-to-head with the RoughRiders to guarantee a playoff spot. Now, regardless of what happens the final two games of the regular season, the RockHounds will play the San Antonio Missions on Tuesday and Wednesday in San Antonio to open the playoffs before returning to Midland on Friday. The series will be a best-of-five format with the fourth and fifth games also in Midland, if necessary.

Yet, as simple as that sounded, of course it didn't work out that way. From the fourth inning until Sulentic's home run, the RockHounds were either playing from behind or tied. But in the end the RockHounds were able to erase the possibility of losing the South Division lead in the second half as they did in the first.

"It's a relief," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said, "but we still want to win these last two games. We want to play the right way, play good baseball."

While the 'Hounds will continue to focus on playing fundamental baseball, they will do so with an eye toward the playoffs. Bush said he would try to set up his rotation for the playoffs these last two games and also rest some players who badly need it, namely catcher Josh Donaldson.

It was Donaldson, who has quietly contributed from the sixth spot in the order this season, who produced in a loud fashion Saturday, filling the No. 3 hole once occupied by Chris Carter.

His single in the first inning brought home Corey Wimberly for the RockHounds' first run of the game. Then in the sixth inning, with the 'Hounds trailing 3-2, he led off the inning with his ninth home run of the season to tie the game. Now, weeks since his last off day, he'll get some well-earned rest.

"He needs days off," Bush said. "He told me he didn't want any days off. So, if a guy's not hurt and tells me he wants to play, I'll let him. But now I can give him some rest."

Donaldson's home run got RockHounds starter Travis Banwart off the hook for the loss. However, Banwart's start was an encouraging sign as the RockHounds prepare for a postseason run.

Banwart went six innings, allowing three runs on six hits and striking out six. Saturday was his fifth solid outing in his last seven starts. His Achilles' heel was giving up the home run ball, a two-run shot in the fourth and a solo home run in the fifth.

But the RockHounds also benefited from the long ball, receiving a home run from Shane Spencer to lead off the fourth inning and tie the game, 2-2. The only extra base hits of the game for either team were home runs.

But no home runs were as dramatic as Sulentic's.

"It's unbelievable," Sulentic said. "I had three at bats before that one and it seemed like they were getting worse as the day went on."

He came into the at bat 0 for 3 with two strikeouts, but his luck turned when he popped up Hamilton's (1-4) offering toward the right field bullpen. RoughRiders right fielder Steve Murphy crept under the ball in an attempt to send the game to extra innings, but it sailed just far enough to the right to sneak into the bullpen.

"I was like, 'Get in that bullpen,'" Sulentic said.

No sooner than it landed beside the RockHounds relievers, they were piling onto the field to meet Sulentic at the plate.

'HOUNDS BITES: With Shane Peterson's home run in the fourth inning, he reached base for the 33rd time in his last 36 games. ... Peterson was one of many 'Hounds who entered Saturday's game swinging a hot bat. Corey Brown entered Saturday hitting .367 with seven runs his last nine games. Archie Gilbert came in with seven hits in his last four games. Matt Spencer had posted a .326 average with 32 runs and 35 RBI his previous 44 games. Matt Sulentic entered the game with seven hits his last seven games. Jemile Weeks, who got his Double-A career off to a rough start, posted a .324 average with eight RBI and three stolen bases his last 10 games entering Saturday. Finally, Corey Wimberly came in with a .330 average, 12 runs and 10 RBI his previous 20 games.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: Right-hander Kyle Middleton (5-1, 2.60) takes the mound today for the RockHounds. He'll be in search of his third straight victory and fifth victory in his last six starts. RoughRiders starter Michael Ballard (6-

6, 3.86) will also be going for his third straight win. In his last two starts, a win against Northwest Arkansas and Midland, Ballard has 12 strikeouts to no walks and just one earned run and nine hits allowed in 15 1/3 innings.

Ports lose lead late, fall 5-4 to Visalia

Two-run home run in ninth dooms Stockton

STOCKTON, Calif.— The Stockton Ports (60-78) took a 4-3 lead into the top of the ninth, and walked away at the end of the game with a 5-4 loss to the Visalia Rawhide (63-75). Ryne White knocked a two-run, pinch-hit home run off right-handed pitcher Jason Ray to lift Visalia to victory.

Julio Ramos made his Banner Island Ballpark debut for the Ports, and had a terrific outing. He allowed two runs on five hits and fanned nine in 7.0 innings. Derrick Gordon allowed an unearned run in an inning of work. Ray picked up his second loss of the season.

The Ports totaled 10 hits in the contest, as Michael Richard, Steve Kleen and Frank Martinez each had a pair of hits. But despite out-hitting the Rawhide 10-7, the Ports couldn't find the timely hitting they needed in the last frame.

The Ports took a quick 2-0 lead in the first inning. With one out, shortstop Richard singled to left field, but tried to stretch the hit into a double. Richard was put out at second on an outfield assist by left fielder Brendan Duffy. First baseman Kleen doubled through the hole at shortstop. Kleen came home to score the first Stockton run as right fielder Todd Johnson reached on an error by second baseman James Skelton. Second baseman Martinez singled to center field to bring home Johnson and put the Ports ahead.

Visalia was held scoreless until the fifth inning, as the Ports turned a double play in each of the second, third and fourth innings to shutdown the Rawhide. With one out, Rawhide designated hitter Nelson Gomez singled. Duffy struck out and then catcher Jorge Corniel singled to put runners on the corners. With two out and two on, shortstop David Cooper stepped up to the plate. He slammed a triple down the right field line to clear the bases. Center fielder Ollie Linton lined out to Richard to end the inning, but the game was tied.

In the top of the eighth, Visalia took a 3-2 lead with Gordon on the hill for Stockton. After Cooper grounded out, Linton reached second base on an error by left fielder Shane Keough. Linton stole third while Skelton was at bat, and he came around to score on a sacrifice fly by Skelton.

The Ports responded by adding two runs in the eighth. Mitchell led off, and reached on a fielding error by first baseman Ed Easley. Richard knocked a bunt single toward third, and Greene bobbled the throw, allowing Mitchell to reach third and Richard to reach first safely. Kleen then popped out to Copper. With Johnson batting, Richard stole second. Then Corniel let a ball get past him, allowing Mitchell to score and Richard to go to third standing up while Johnson was still in his at-bat. Johnson singled up the middle for the ninth Stockton hit of the game, and Richard came trotting home. Martinez grounded into a double play to end the frame.

The Ports then called upon Ray to pitch to the Rawhide. Ray struck out Easley to start the frame. Gomez then singled, and was replaced by pinch-runner Greg Thomson. Thomson stole second while Duffy was at the plate, and Duffy struck out. With two out and a runner on second in the top of the ninth, Ryne White came on to pinch hit for Corniel. White slammed his sixth home run of the year to right field on the first pitch he saw, making it 5-4 Visalia. It was the first home run Ray has allowed this season.

In the bottom of the frame, the Ports led off with a single by Ortiz. Ortiz tried to stretch the hit to a double, and was put out 7-6-4 at second. Keough then struck out. Vitters collected his first hit of the game in the bottom of the ninth with two out, representing the tying run on the basepaths. Designated hitter Matt Smith then popped out to Easley in foul territory to end the game.

The Ports will look to regain the series lead in a 6:05 p.m. contest with Visalia on Sunday at Banner Island Ballpark. LHP Daniel Haigwood (2-1, 3.68) will start for the Ports, while RHP Bryan Henry (5-4, 3.07) will take the mound for the Rawhide.

Cougars Drop Opener to River Bandits

Kane County returns home but falls to Quad Cities

GENEVA, III. – After taking two out of three in Peoria, the Kane County Cougars returned home Saturday night but fell to the Quad Cities River Bandits, 7-3, in front of 7,866 fans at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars rallied to load the bases in the ninth inning but could not tie it.

The Cougars scored first in the opening inning when Jeremy Barfield singled home Steve Parker, but the River Bandits took over from there against Shawn Haviland (6-11). Haviland gave up two in the second, one in the third and four in the fourth before leaving. He yielded seven runs on 10 hits over 4 2/3 innings in the loss.

Josue Selenis pitched 2 1/3 scoreless innings, and A.J. Huttenlocker posted two perfect frames, but the Cougars never got closer than four runs. Mike Spina came home in the sixth and again in the eighth for unearned runs to cut it to 7-3. Kevin Thomas (7-7) got the win, and Dave Carpenter notched his 12th save by getting out of the bases-loaded jam in the ninth.

The Cougars (33-35, 73-64) and River Bandits (31-36, 61-76) play the middle game of their three-game set Sunday night at 6 CT. Mathieu Leblanc-Poirier (4-7, 4.38) is scheduled to face Jorge Rondon (1-4, 4.44).