



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

September 6, 2009



Originally published Saturday, September 5, 2009 at 9:57 PM

French's struggles sink Mariners in loss to Oakland A's

The starting rotation had played key roles in the Mariners reeling off wins in four straight and nine of 12 heading into their latest clash with Oakland. But all of that came crashing to a halt Saturday when left-hander Luke French couldn't hold a three-run lead.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. - Life in the fast lane isn't working out too well for Luke French.

The Mariners pulled their young starter from some fiery wreckage for a second straight outing and had some advice for him if he plans on making next year's rotation: Slow things down. Too many of French's pitches were coming in at similar speeds in a 9-5 loss to the Oakland Athletics on Saturday night, and the Mariners want him to mix it up a little.

French agreed that a few more changeups probably wouldn't hurt an earned-run average now at 6.38 since his arrival in Seattle after the Jarrod Washburn trade.

"I think I just need to mix it up, maybe a little more," French said. "I think I only threw three changeups tonight. Maybe try that route."

One reason the Mariners entered play Saturday a season-high eight games over .500 was that their starting rotation had held its own following the losses of Washburn and Erik Bedard. The starters had played key roles in the Mariners reeling off wins in four straight and nine of 12 heading into their latest clash with Oakland. But all of that came crashing to a halt when French couldn't hold a three-run lead.

A crowd of 16,495 fans at the Coliseum likely thought the Mariners were about to win a third straight game here. Seattle scored three runs off A's lefty Brett Anderson in the second inning, beginning with a Mike Sweeney home run and continuing with a two-run single by Rob Johnson.

Ichiro had one of his three hits in that inning and needs only one more to reach 2,000 for his career and just six to notch a ninth straight 200-hit campaign.

But despite the early advantage, the Mariners failed to score again until a two-run homer in the ninth by Jose Lopez with the game well beyond reach.

Seattle's starters had been 4-0 with a 1.91 ERA this month, and 14-7 with a 4.07 ERA since the Washburn deal on July 31.

Contrast that with their 37-33 mark and 3.96 ERA before the trade, and the Mariners don't appear to have lost all that much. That is, until French's performance here, where he yielded a leadoff walk to Daric Barton in the third and then a long home run to left by Cliff Pennington.

The inning worsened from there when Adam Kennedy doubled to left, then took third on a single to right by Rajai Davis. An ensuing sacrifice fly to center by Kurt Suzuki tied the score at 3.

The speedy Davis took off for second on the play and beat the throw by center fielder Franklin Gutierrez. Davis then stole third base and wound up scoring on a ground out to the right side by Scott Hairston.

"If you start throwing way too many pitches to a hitter, or to an offense ... they start to get a feel for what you're doing," Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said. "But most lefties have the luxury to go softer. I think it can buy some velocity. You look at his changeup, I thought he left his changeup up tonight, and a lot of them were

right around 81 mph. If he can subtract a little off of that and keep it down in the zone, then his fastball will look a little better."

French's problems continued in the fourth, when he walked Barton with two out, gave up a bloop single to Pennington, then saw Kennedy line a run-scoring single to end his night on his 73rd pitch. Jason Vargas came on and tossed 2-1/3 scoreless innings to keep the Mariners close, but Miguel Batista got torched for four runs in the eighth.

The Mariners envision French battling for a fifth starter's job or long-relief role next spring. But he's got plenty of competition and has now walked 17 batters in 36-2/3 innings while striking out just 22.

French said he sometimes thinks of throwing more hangeups in the heat of the moment, but often not until after an inning is done and he's in the dugout.

"It's a process, I'm learning," he said. "This whole thing is new to me too. So, just learn as you go."

And you ease off the gas.

Notes

- **Ken Griffey Jr.** was again bumped from the lineup by a sore knee, but did make a pinch-hit appearance in the eighth, grounding out to end the inning. Wakamatsu was somewhat mystified by Griffey's lingering knee problems. "All of the reports were that nothing was serious in there, that the inflammation would go down and he'd be fine," Wakamatsu said before the game. "I think we were all kind of shocked yesterday that it stiffened up on him a little bit. ... Whether it's something that's going to require something in the offseason, or not. But right now, we feel that if we can get the inflammation out of there, he'll be able to play the rest of the year."
- **Mike Sweeney** started at DH and had hits his first three trips to the plate.
- A rare 4-6-3 RBI was credited to A's hitter **Kurt Suzuki** in the third when his hard smash deflected off 2B **Josh Wilson's** glove. But the ball went straight to SS **Jack Wilson**, who threw Suzuki out as the run scored.

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Originally published Saturday, September 5, 2009 at 2:49 PM

Worldwide scouting web nets Mariners a top prospect

Pitcher Erasmo Ramirez is a rising Mariners' star, one who will arrive in Arizona later this month to participate in the instructional league.

Larry Stone

Seattle Times baseball reporter

The 2009 statistics of Mariners' pitching prospect Erasmo Ramirez leap off the page: 11-1 record, 0.51 earned-run-average, .174 opponents batting average.

And especially this: 80 strikeouts, and just five walks, in 88 innings. Yes, five walks.

"Pretty remarkable," chuckled Bob Engle, the Mariners' vice president of international operations. "It looks like what they called in my day a typo."

True, Ramirez put up those stats pitching this year in the Venezuelan Summer League, one of the lowest rungs of professional baseball.

But those numbers at any level are guaranteed to open eyes - including mine. There's no doubt Ramirez is a rising star in the Mariners' system, one who will arrive in Arizona later this month to participate in the instructional league. It's a first taste of baseball in the states that's being greatly anticipated within the organization.

I decided to call up Engle to find out the story behind Ramirez, about whom all I knew was the basics contained in the Mariners' media guide: 19 years old, born in Rivas, Nicaragua, right-handed, 5 feet 11, 180 pounds, signed on Sept. 1, 2007, by Engle and Mariners scout Ubaldo Heredia.

Nicaragua is not known for producing baseball talent. The most famous, by far, is Dennis Martinez, El Presidente, who won 245 games in the majors, one of them during a brief, ill-fated 1997 stint with the Mariners. Pitcher Vicente Padilla of the Dodgers and Everth Cabrera of the Padres, a shortstop, are the only active players I know from Nicaragua.

I had a hunch Ramirez had an interesting story. I was right. Turns out that as a youngster, at age 12, he left Nicaragua and went off to school in San Salvador, El Salvador - a country even less noted for its baseball.

But a remarkable man named Jorge Bahaia had started an academy in San Salvador called FESA - Fundacion Educando A Un Salvadoreno (translated on its website as Foundation Educating to a Salvadorean). The goal is to give elite athletes in both baseball and soccer concentrated training in their sports, but also an education that might not have been otherwise possible.

"We give them academic support, training in health and nutrition, and we work on values," said Bahaia, whom I reached in San Salvador with help from Engle.

Bahaia, who played baseball at Gulliver Prep in Miami in 1983 and graduated from the University of Miami with a degree in business and finance, returned after college to El Salvador, where his family is in the textile business.

"I said I needed to give something back to the community, because I had been so blessed by God," he said.

"With a group of friends, we started this program. It's very, very satisfying to see how we can change lives by investing in education and sports."

About six years ago, Bahaia said, he received a call from a friend regarding Ramirez, who was just turning 13.

"He told me Erasmo was a good kid from Nicaragua who wanted to study, play, learn and succeed. He wanted to apply for a scholarship to our program."

Ramirez was accepted and thrived immediately, both in the classroom and on the ballfield.

"He had a good arm, an average arm," Bahaia said. "Credit the kid - he has been working very hard. Our coaches tried as much as possible to give him all the tools to help his mechanics. We sent him to several baseball camps so he could improve his skills."

Over his years in Latin America, Engle had developed a friendship with Bahaia, and checks in every so often to see if he has any prospects. Bahaia told him about Ramirez, whom the Mariners signed after watching him excel at a tournament in St. Martin.

"He's a very dedicated young man," Engle said.

In 2008, pitching as an 18-year-old in Venezuela, Ramirez was 4-1 with a 2.86 ERA. And then this year, with little advance warning, he exploded, earning the Most Valuable Player Award in the Venezuelan Summer League.

"First, he has very good command of all his pitches," Engle said. "His fastball is average to slightly above, with good movement, and he keeps it down. His breaking stuff has to improve as he moves up the ladder. He's the type of kid, you can see he has a goal, or objective, in his mind. He's a very serious kid."

And, according to Pedro Grifol, the Mariners' director of minor-league operations, he has made a very serious impression on the organization.

"No question, any time you put together a year like he has, you're a top prospect, regardless of the repertoire he has or doesn't have," Grifol said. "He has good stuff; I'm not saying that. But putting all physical ability aside, any time you go out and perform like he has, you're going to be one of our top kids."

Grifol acknowledged that Ramirez was not prominent on the Mariners' radar heading into this summer.

"He's got good stuff, and it all came together at once," Grifol said. "He's got great aptitude, and the ability to apply instruction immediately. He fields his position, he does everything right on the mound. He's a strike-throwing machine with deception."

Grifol likens Ramirez to Doug Fister, which might disappoint those Mariner fans who were hoping for a comparison to, say, Felix Hernandez. But as Engle alluded, he doesn't possess overpowering stuff.

"He throws about average," Grifol said. "Everything he's got is average, nothing above or below. But here's a guy with average stuff and above-average command. We all know if you have that, you'll pitch in the big leagues a long time."

"The bottom line is, pitching is disrupting timing, and deception. This kid disrupts timing and he's very deceptive. You can't see the ball. There's a lot there. We're anxious to see him come here to the states in instructional league with the kids here, and against other clubs, to see if he can continue to do the same thing. Which we have no doubt he can."

Erasmus Ramirez. Remember the name.

"He's a very nice kid, a quiet kid," said Bahaia. "But inside, he's very concentrated. He knows what he wants."

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Originally published Sunday, September 6, 2009 at 12:16 AM

Larry Stone's MLB power rankings

Last week's ranking in parentheses

Team

- 1 Yankees (1) I can't remember - is Jeter supposed to be overrated or underrated this year?
- 2 St. Louis (4) I can't remember - is Pujols supposed to be Aaron or Mays this year?
- 3 Angels (2) Torii becoming more popular than Torre in SoCal
- 4 Philadelphia (3) The word in Philadelphia is that Chase Utley can be another Dustin Ackley
- 5 Boston (5) Schilling's Senate campaign slogan: "A bloody sock in every pot!"
- 6 Dodgers (6) Check out the new reality show "Jim Thome: Stretch-drive pinch-hitter"
- 7 Texas (8) Josh Hamilton scratched after bad reaction to shot; funny, so was LeGarrette Blount
- 8 Detroit (9) Shocking new expose: Tigers coerced players into taking too much early BP
- 9 Colorado (7) Rockies not making any moves to help staff? Oh, Contreras
- 10 San Francisco (11) Buster Posey called up. Buster Olney approves. Busta Rhymes oblivious
- 11 Tampa Bay (10) Unsettling to see AL champion and wild-card contender make salary dump
- 12 Atlanta (12) Bobby Cox, thrown out 150 times, will never suffer from ejection dysfunction
- 13 Florida (13) Marlins management hereby decrees that in any feud, Hanley Ramirez is right
- 14 Seattle (14) Adrian Beltre is an optimist, so he says his cup is half full
- 15 Minnesota (17) One more blown Joe Nathan save, and this team might have a schism
- 16 Cubs (16) Good news: New owner hasn't figured out what "GB" means yet
- 17 White Sox (15) Ozzie Guillen now tweeting his lineup changes to the umpire
- 18 Milwaukee (20) Fielder not only hitting his weight, he's driving in his cholesterol level
- 19 Houston (18) A couple more seasons like this, and they could end up in Nashville
- 20 Cincinnati (21) The only indictment of National League you need: Wladimir Balentien, .284
- 21 San Diego (25) It took a long time, but Padres are going to have Tony Gwynn hit under .300
- 22 Arizona (27) Where's Erubiel Durazo when you really need him?
- 23 Toronto (19) Only fitting that Cito's team playing like they belong in Gastonia
- 24 Oakland (23) Out of respect for Ichiro, Suzuki will now go simply by "Kurt"
- 25 Mets (26) David Wright's helmet endorsed by Beldar and Prymaat Conehead

26 Cleveland (22) Indians shut down Sizemore for season; rest of team shut down long ago
27 Baltimore (28) Orioles fall 32 games behind, but good news is they're just 24 ½ back in wild card
28 Pittsburgh (24) The only other indictment of National League you need: Ronny Cedeno, .286
29 Kansas City (29) Royals could lose 100 for fifth time in eight years, unless Greinke pitches every day
30 Washington (30) Nats schedule Fan Appreciation Day ... and boy, is their fan excited

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September 5, 2009 at 10:07 PM

Athletics 9, Mariners 5: Seattle fails to build on, or hold, early three-run lead

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Time Blog

This game sure didn't finish the way it began for the Mariners. But that's what lousy pitching and an anemic offense will do to you and the M's had both tonight after the second inning.

Luke French now has a 6.38 ERA since joining the Mariners from Detroit at the July 31 trade deadline.

He's now walked 17 batters against only 22 strikeouts. Not a good sign. Control problems plagued him tonight. He either missed the zone or grooved balls down the middle. Either way, it's a recipe for the disaster that followed.

Also, his speeds weren't differing enough and the A's seemed to get a feel for what was coming.

"I think I just need to mix it up, maybe a little more," French said afterwards. "I think I only threw three changeups tonight. Maybe try that route."

Manager Don Wakamatsu agrees.

"It always goes down to location and command and changing speeds," Mariners manager Wakamatsu said. "But I think, if you go back and replay this, most of those at-bats, if you start throwing way too many pitches to a hitter, or to an offense..they start to get a feel for what you're doing.

"But most lefties have the luxury to go softer. I think it can buy some velocity. You look at his changeup, I thought he left his changeup up tonight and a lot of them were right around 81 mph. If he can subtract a little off of that and keep it down in the zone, then his fastball will look a little better."

The Mariners scored three in the second off Brett Anderson, then failed to do any more damage until a two-run homer by Jose Lopez in the ninth. Could have used that blast a bit earlier, I'm afraid.

Wakamatsu felt the Mariners could have done more in the second inning, when the bases were loaded with one out. But Franklin Gutierrez grounded into a double-play.

"If we could tack on one more run there, different ballgame," Wakamatsu said.

We saw plenty of bizarre plays tonight.

How often do you get a 4-6-3 with an RBI credited to the hitter? (Hint: it was not a double-play ball, only one groundout).

And how about that 3-5 fielder's choice groundout turned by "first baseman" Lopez? Not sure what he was thinking, but it helped to have the baserunner overslide at third.

Then, we had the back-to-back doubles by Mark Ellis and Ryan Sweeney in which the second two-bagger failed to score a run. Don't see that everyday. But the double was a blooper down the line that left fielder Bill Hall nearly caught, so the runner had to hold up between bases and then stop at third.

Three more hits for Ichiro, now one away from 2,000. That and the continued last hurrah for Mike Sweeney these past five weeks was about all the good that came out of this for Seattle. Sweeney had four hits, matching his season high.

Bill Hall, on the other end of the scale, had five strikeouts.

like I said, a night to forget.

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September 5, 2009 at 8:49 PM

Seattle Mariners at Oakland Athletics: 09/05 game thread

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

And that's our ballgame as Miguel Batista gets rocked for four more runs...and counting here in the eighth. He's given up three doubles and three singles and Oakland leads 9-3. Tell you what, though, the Mariners have yet to score since that three-run outburst in the second inning.

We've seen that in all three games of this series thus far, where an early flurry is followed by several innings of goose eggs. It finally caught up to the M's because they were in this game until this half-inning.

7:31 p.m.: Wow, did Luke French ever come off the rails. French is done after 3 2/3 innings, having yielded a fifth run to trail 5-3. Remember, the Mariners were ahead 3-0 heading into the bottom of the third.

It's now the top of the fifth. Jason Vargas came on and got the final out of the fourth.

But for French, a big step back tonight. He gave up a one-out single in the fourth that was erased with a caught stealing. Then, with two out and none on, he walked Daric Barton, gave up a bloop single to Cliff Pennington that put runners at the corners, then another single to Adam Kennedy that brought the run home.

French just could not finish what he started. He was not hitting his spots, as evidenced by the earlier Pennington homer that came on a pitch that could not have been more down the middle of the plate. French walked three and had no strikeouts. He did have a wild-pitch. All told, a 73-pitch stinker against a pretty bad team. You can't sugarcoat this one.

7:07 p.m.: Luke French sure came undone in a hurry, giving up a four-spot in the third inning to fall behind 4-3. French walked Daric Barton, then left a 2-1 pitch right up in the wheelhouse of Cliff Pennington that was drilled -- and I mean, drilled -- over the left field wall for a two-run homer.

Adam Kennedy then doubled to left field, Rajai Davis singled to right to put runners at the corners and then Kurt Suzuki hit a ball to the warning track in center. Kennedy tagged up and scored easily to tie it. But Davis also managed to advance to second on the throw by Franklin Gutierrez. I thought Josh Wilson was a little slow to apply the tag, but Davis is a quick one.

Davis then stole third base and wound up scoring when a hard smash by Scott Hairston deflected off a drawn-in Josh Wilson. Jack Wilson picked it up and threw to first for the out. But it was still scored as a rare 4-6-3 RBI groundout, putting Oakland ahead.

6:38 p.m.: Oakland starter Brett Anderson turned his ankle on a play in the first inning and looked really shaky in the second, yielding a leadoff homer to Mike Sweeney, then walking Adrian Beltre and giving up a one-out single to Jack Wilson. Beltre and Wilson then pulled off a double steal. Josh Wilson walked and Rob Johnson delivered a two-run single to center that makes it 3-0.

Seattle could have added more after an infield hit by Ichiro loaded the bases with one out. But Franklin Gutierrez grounded into a double play. Ichiro is now three hits away from 2,000 for his career.

8:08 p.m.: Seattle is already a season-high eight games over .500 and tries to make it nine tonight. But this is the biggest pitching test they'll face this series. Brett Anderson looks like the real deal.

Speaking of guys with knee problems, a theme with Ken Griffey Jr. all week, Jose Guillen is being shut down for the season in Kansas City because of his injury.

September 5, 2009 at 4:50 PM

Ken Griffey Jr. still out of lineup with stiff, swollen knee

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Getting the regular Mariners DH into the lineup is becoming a challenge these final weeks of the 2009 season. Ken Griffey Jr. was proclaimed healthy and ready to go after an MRI earlier this week. But after one game here in the series opener, his knee has now been too swollen to go the last two days...and counting. Remember, he missed a week of action prior to that.

I asked manager Don Wakamatsu whether there was any problem that could be "fixed" in Griffey's knee.

"All of the reports were that nothing was serious in there, that the inflammation would go down and he'd be fine," Wakamatsu said. "I think we were all kind of shocked yesterday that it stiffened up on him a little bit. Again, I don't have all the medical (reports). Whether it's something that's going to require something in the off-season, or not. But right now, we feel that if we can get the inflammation out of there, he'll be able to play the rest of the year."

But again, that's the important distinction to make. Both for Griffey and the team. To determine whether there is anything in the knee -- bone chips, torn meniscus, damaged ligaments etc. -- that can be repaired surgically. Usually, an MRI will pick up on those things. Or is this play-one, sit-two thing just the reality he'll have to live with the rest of his career and life? Where long term wear and tear means his knees will stiffen up after prolonged physical exertion. It happens. And if Griffey or the team truly has any designs on him returning as a DH next year, they'll have to know he can do it more than once or twice a week. And not just for three or four months. For all six months of the season.

Again, not trying to sound like an expert here. But I can tell you from the firsthand experience of having had six operations on two knees that once you hit your late 30s, all of the repairwork done starts to add up and swelling and stiffness just becomes a fact of life even from climbing too many stairs too often, or too fast. So, something to monitor with Griffey as we move ahead.

The team will have it's lineup stacked with righthanded bats once again tonight against lefthander Brett Anderson. That means Jose Lopez moves over to first base once again and we'll see Josh "Hack" Wilson, a.k.a.

The Paperboy, in there at second base. It's all-Wilson all-the-time tonight as Jack Wilson starts at shortstop. Bill Hall will be in left field.

Speaking of Jack Wilson, maybe the Mariners want to audition him for a late-inning bullpen role? Wilson was bringing some heat before batting practice today. I know the Mariners will rest Mark Lowe tonight and still have Sean White trying to come back from shoulder soreness. The M's are being very careful with these guys and closer David Aardsma, since all are well beyond their career highs for innings and appearances.

Just kidding about Wilson by the way.

But hey, who's that he's pitching to? Wow. The team had better hope Wilson has decent command. Last thing you need is one coming up and in.

By the way, Wilson has worked in positions other than shortstop before. You might know him from hosting "The Loveline" in which he uses his Adam Carolla alias.

He also puts his fine athletic skills on display by calling himself Steve-O and going on the Jackass television show and movies.

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Last updated September 5, 2009 10:08 p.m. PT

Pennington leads A's to 9-5 win

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND, Calif. -- 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.

NOTES: French has allowed 12 runs over his last 8 2-3 innings after allowing 14 through his first 28 with the Mariners. ... Over 500 breast cancer survivors were honored before the game, and pink was the dominant color among the announced crowd of 16,495. ... Suzuki moved past Hall of Famer Jimmy Collins for 259th on the career hit list with 1,999. ... Mike Sweeney has a hit in 11 of his last 13 games, including seven multi-hit games. ... Anderson won his first game in Oakland since June 29, a span of six home starts. ... Bailey had a 12-inning scoreless streak snapped.

Carp happy to be in first-base crowd

Mariners notes: Rookie tries to show what he can despite limited times at bat

LARRY LARUE; The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/06/09 3:03 am

OAKLAND - Mike Carp arrived in spring training last February delighted to be with a new organization, then realized the Seattle Mariners had cornered the market on first basemen.

"We had Russell (Branyan) who was guaranteed a job, and lot of other guys in camp," Carp said. "I treated it as an audition, the chance to show them what I could do."

When he reported to Tacoma, the glut of first basemen followed him. On the Rainiers roster with Carp were Bryan LaHair and Chris Shelton. And then the Mariners asked Jeff Clement to try first base on for size.

"We made it work in Tacoma. I played DH, first base, left field. Half our roster was first basemen," Carp said.

Two weeks before his 23rd birthday, Carp made his major league debut as a pinch hitter, and walked. A day later, he singled in his second at-bat.

"I knew I was only up for a short time, so I tried to make the most of it," Carp said. "I didn't play much, but I tried to do the job and I hit pretty well in like eight at-bats."

Back to the Rainiers for most of the summer and then, after Branyan was diagnosed with a herniated disk, Carp returned to the Mariners. He's gone 3-for-7 with a double since, including a perfectly executed hit-and-run single.

"I was happy they thought a rookie could be trusted to get that job done," Carp said. "I'd studied the scouting report on the pitcher, and knew he liked throwing his slider more than his fastball. When I got the sign, I looked slider and got it."

He's batting .316 in limited time with Seattle, where he's struck out twice and walked four times. Sabermetric types have already decided that, based on his minor league track record, the problem long-term is his lack of power.

"I'm 23 and I've got 19 at-bats," Carp said. "I can hit the ball a long way, and I've done it. It's a matter of what you want, 15 home runs and a .300 average, or a .230 hitter with 25 home runs. I'm still finding myself."

With Branyan down, the Mariners are trying Carp at first base against right-handed pitchers, Jose Lopez there against lefties and - when they're ahead - subbing Jack Hannahan in for defense late in the game.

"I'm still auditioning, hoping to show what I can do for the team by doing it for them this month," Carp said. "This team still has things it wants to do, and I'm hoping to help them do them."

Short hops

Reliever **Mark Lowe**, who's had two holds and a save in the last three games, was declared off limits by manager **Don Wakamatsu** on Saturday. "It's not just three games in a row, we've got guys who have pitched in six of eight games, and that's just too much to ask," Wakamatsu said. ... **Ken Griffey Jr.** took batting practice and felt better than a day earlier. His inflamed left knee was doing well until he hyper-extended it running to first base on Thursday.

On tap

Seattle completes its series in Oakland with a 1:07 p.m. game today that will be televised on FSN. Probable starting pitchers: **Doug Fister** (2-1, 2.94 ERA) vs. **Gio Gonzales** (0-1, 4.91).

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Mariners farm system reaping season honors

MIKE CURTO; For The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/06/09 12:05 am

The Class A High Desert Mavericks have been the Seattle Mariners' most successful affiliate in 2009, posting an 82-55 record through Friday while gearing up for the California League playoffs.

Late last week, the awards started to flow in.

Mavericks third baseman Alex Liddi, batting .344 with 23 home runs and 101 RBI entering Saturday, was named Most Valuable Player of the California League.

Liddi, 21, is battling teammate Tyson Gillies for the league batting crown, and he ranks in the top five in home runs, RBI, on-base percentage, slugging percentage, hits and runs scored.

It's been a season of honors for Liddi, who was unable to hit .250 in two seasons in the Midwest League before his breakout 2009 season.

He played for Italy in the World Baseball Classic, was named to the California League midseason All-Star team, and played in the MLB Futures Game as a part of the All-Star festivities in St. Louis.

Also honored Wednesday was High Desert manager Jim Horner, who won the Cal League Manager of the Year award.

Horner, a Washington State University graduate, was a catcher in the Mariners' system before retiring in 2004 after three seasons with the Rainiers.

"You just do what you can to win baseball games, and we have good players here to go along with a good staff," Horner told the Victorville (Calif.) Daily Press.

Horner is the first High Desert manager to win the award since current Mariners skipped Don Wakamatsu won it in 1998.

High Desert first baseman Joe Dunigan and starting pitcher Donnie Hume were named to the league's postseason all-star team.

Dunigan, a first baseman, has 29 home runs and 101 runs batted in.

Hume, a left-handed pitcher, is tied with Adam Wainwright of the St. Louis Cardinals for the lead in all of professional baseball with 17 wins.

High Desert has clinched a playoff spot.

Other Mariners farm clubs are hoping for the same:

- Triple-A Tacoma entered the final weekend with a chance to win its division. Tacoma needed to beat Colorado Springs three times over four days to claim its first playoff spot since 2005.
- Class AA West Tennessee is in a similar spot. The Diamond Jaxx closed the season with a five-game series against Tennessee. West Tenn began the series trailing Tennessee by one game in the second-half standings; the two teams split the first two games of the series entering Saturday night.
- The Mariners' Arizona Rookie League team won the league championship with a 3-2 victory over the Giants' affiliate on Monday. The AZL-Mariners finished with a 33-22 record.

Winning not MVP prerequisite

Las Vegas first baseman Randy Ruiz was named MVP of the Pacific Coast League on Friday, beating out Colorado Springs second baseman Eric Young Jr. for the trophy.

Ruiz continues to lead the PCL in runs batted in despite having been promoted to the Toronto Blue Jays in August 10.

Ruiz hit .320 with 25 homers and 106 RBI for a last-place Las Vegas team.

At age 31 Ruiz may be a little old to be considered a prospect, but he has continued to hit after his promotion. In his first 18 games for Toronto he has batted .292 with five homers.

Still, Ruiz is going to have difficulty following in the footsteps of recent PCL MVPs who have made an impact in the majors.

Iowa catcher Geovany Soto won the award in 2007 and then took home the National League Rookie of the Year award for his work with the Chicago Cubs in 2008.

Oklahoma's 2008 award winner Nelson Cruz has hit 31 home runs for the Texas Rangers this year, and he was one of the participants in the home run derby at this year's All-Star Game.

Mike Curto is the broadcaster for the Tacoma Rainiers.

Pitching foils M's fast start

Mariners: Offense stakes team to 3-0 lead, but French, Batista give it up in 9-5 loss to Oakland

LARRY LARUE; The News Tribune

Published: 09/06/09 3:03 am

OAKLAND - On the verge of gaining ground on every team ahead of them in the American League wild-card race, the Seattle Mariners were reminded why that particular dream is so hard to make real.

To win consistently - even against the Oaklands of the league - a team needs five starting pitchers who can take a lead and run with it, and the Mariners just now have four, at best.

Ian Snell is good for five innings. And rookie Luke French is a pitch-to-contact pitcher who's allowed 12 runs in the last 82/3 innings of two starts, losing to the Angels and, on Saturday, to the Athletics, 9-5.

"It's a process, and it's all new to me," French said.

Don Wakamatsu, as patient as any manager the Mariners have had in a decade or so, wasn't happy with French - and was even less pleased with reliever Miguel Batista.

"We talk about momentum, and we'd won the first two games, then taken a 3-0 lead tonight," Wakamatsu said. "The turning point was the third inning. Luke walked the first man he faced, gave up four runs and we could never catch up."

It was 5-3 Oakland into the eighth inning, when the veteran Batista gave up six hits and four runs that made it a 9-3 deficit, which made Jose Lopez's two-run home run in the ninth a moot point.

"Miguel made way too many mistakes," Wakamatsu said. "He threw a seven-pitch first inning, so we sent him back out there, and he left his pitches up."

It was a night when the Mariners could glance at the scoreboard in left field and see that Boston, Texas and Tampa Bay - the three teams ahead of them in the wild-card derby - had each lost.

Had Seattle won, it would have awakened this morning tied with the Rays six games behind the Red Sox and four behind the Rangers.

Like that Lopez home run, moot point.

If you had to put money on which of Seattle's five starters would take a seat starting next week if Brandon Morrow slides into the rotation, you'd lay it all on French.

A rookie left-hander without great velocity, his earned run average with the Mariners was 5.73 when the night began and 6.39 after he was yanked in the fourth inning. No, this wasn't a quality start.

Scheduled to start today for Tacoma, don't be surprised if Morrow's game is cut short - not by hitters, but by Seattle, which would likely start him next week in French's spot.

What bothered Wakamatsu and his staff more than the seven hits French allowed were the walks he gave up while trying to protect a lead that was 3-0 after two innings. Opening the third inning, French walked the No. 8 hitter in the Oakland lineup, Daric Barton, who was batting .205.

An inning later, he did it again - both times Barton scored.

"He just threw way too many pitches, and the hitters figured him out," Wakamatsu said. "Like a lot of lefties, he has the option of going softer, throwing his change-up slower than he's been throwing it."

French agreed, in a rookie kind of way.

"I only threw three change-ups tonight, and looking back I see situations I could have used it to set up other things," French said. "I didn't think that at the time, but after the game you look at things a little differently."

In all, French gave up five runs while getting 11 outs.

That's not a ratio the Mariners can live with. Pitching to contact is one thing. Putting men on base without making them put a ball in play?

That dog won't hunt.

If Morrow is going to start the rest of September, it will be in place of French.

As they had in the first two games of the series, both wins, the Mariners took the lead early - this time with a three-run second inning that could have blown the game open but didn't.

Mike Sweeney, hitting over .400 in his last 13 games, homered to start the rally, his sixth of the season.

Adrian Beltre walked and with one out, Jack Wilson singled and Josh Wilson walked to load the bases.

Catcher Rob Johnson fell behind in the count 0-2, but kept fouling pitches off, then singled up the middle for two runs.

Ichiro legged out an infield single, the 1,997th hit of his Seattle career, to reload the bases with one out. By game's end, he was sitting on 1,999 big-league hits.

Franklin Gutierrez grounded into a double play.

“We had a chance to really make a different game of it there, but we didn’t,” Wakamatsu said. “Still, we got three hits from Ichiro, four from Mike Sweeney, another home run for Lopez. The offense was fine.

“The pitching just wasn’t there tonight.”

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Recap: Oakland vs. Seattle

By Sports Network; The Sports Network

Published: 09/05/09 11:28 pm | Updated: 09/05/09 11:29 pm

Cliff Pennington was 3-for-3 with a two-run homer to help Oakland snap a seven-game losing streak to Seattle with a 9-5 win.

Mark Ellis doubled twice and knocked in two while Daric Barton had a two-run double and walked twice in the win.

Brett Anderson (8-10), winless in his last four starts, lasted five innings and yielded three runs on seven hits and two walks with six strikeouts. Andrew Bailey recorded his 22nd save of the season.

"I was just fortunate enough to get through five and get a win out of it," said Anderson. "It's always good when your team scores runs, especially to put them in a hole early."

Oakland had lost the first two games in this four-game set and three of four overall.

Mike Sweeney was 4-for-5 with a solo home run and Ichiro Suzuki collected three hits, upping his career major-league total to 1,999. He needs six to reach 200 on the season and become the first player in major league history to have nine consecutive seasons with at least 200.

Jose Lopez hit a two-run homer in the ninth to make things interesting and Rob Johnson had a two-run single in the early going.

Seattle starter Luke French (4-5) was tagged for seven hits and five runs in 3 2/3 innings. The Mariners had won four in a row overall.

The A's pushed across four runs in the third to take a one-run lead, 4-3.

Barton walked to start the frame and Pennington connected for a two-run shot. Adam Kennedy then doubled and Rajai Davis singled before Kurt Suzuki lofted a sac fly to center. Davis swiped third and came home on a Scott Hairston groundout.

Kennedy added a two-out RBI single in the fourth and a second four-run frame helped solidify the win.

With runners at the corners and one down in the eighth, Ellis doubled home two off Miguel Batista and Ryan Sweeney followed with a double of his own. Barton then clubbed yet another double to score both runners for a 9-3 advantage.

Lopez's two-run shot off Bailey in the ninth only altered the final margin.

Seattle took the early lead when Sweeney led off the second with a home run and Johnson stroked a bases-loaded single to center, scoring two. Ichiro's infield hit juiced the bags again with one down but Franklin Gutierrez grounded into a double play.

"I thought we had a decent approach with the three runs early in the ball game," said Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu. "If we could've tacked on a couple of runs there, it would have been a different ball game."

Rainiers close on division crown

a win away: After 6-4 win over Colorado Springs, Tacoma needs only split of final two games to win title

GRANT CLARK; For The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/06/09 12:05 am

Suddenly, all the pressure is on the Colorado Springs Sky Sox.

Bryan LaHair hit a home run and drove in three to help Tacoma inch closer to its first division title since 2005 with a 6-4 victory over Colorado Springs on Saturday before a crowd of 7,098 at Cheney Stadium.

Now all the Rainiers need to do is win one of their final two regular season-games to claim the Pacific Coast League Pacific Division championship.

Approximately two weeks ago, this scenario seemed very unlikely, as Tacoma (73-69) trailed the division-leading Sky Sox by a seemingly insurmountable 7 1/2 games.

A season-high nine-game winning streak by Tacoma combined with a disastrous stretch by Colorado Springs - in which the team dropped seven of eight contests - catapulted the Rainiers right back into contention.

So much so that a victory either today or Monday sends Tacoma into the playoffs, where it would play a best-of-five opening round series against PCL Pacific South winner Sacramento.

"It was a nice win, but at this time of the year they are all nice," Tacoma manager Daren Brown said. "This is pretty much the way we've been playing for the last three weeks or so. We're going to try and close it out tomorrow."

LaHair, Prentice Redman and Adam Moore all had two hits for Tacoma.

With one out and the game tied at 4 in the bottom of the seventh, Colorado Springs second baseman Mark Bellhorn bobbled a LaHair ground ball before committing a throwing error to first which sent LaHair to second and Matt Tuiasosopo to third.

The miscue led to two Tacoma runs as Chris Shelton broke up the tie with a sacrifice fly before a Redman double drove in LaHair, giving the Rainiers a 6-4 lead.

The Sky Sox struck for two runs in the first inning and it would have been more if not for two solid defensive plays from Mike Wilson and LaHair.

LaHair's success wasn't limited to the field, however, as the first baseman tied the game in the bottom of the first with a two-run shot to right field, pushing his team-high home run total to 25 and ending a his personal 19-game drought.

The Rainiers grabbed a 3-2 lead in the second after Wilson scored on an Adam Eaton wild pitch, but Colorado Springs had two more runners cross the plate in the third to reclaim the one-run advantage.

LaHair answered again in the fifth, smacking his 33rd double, which sent Tuiasosopo home, tying the game at 4-4.

On tap

Tacoma and Colorado Springs go at it against today at 1:30 p.m. **Brandon Morrow** (5-2, 3.71) starts for the Rainiers.

Morrow has been one of the top pitchers in the PCL since the start of August, winning four consecutive starts and five of his last six.

The right-handed Morrow has not lost since July 29, posting a 5-0 record with a 1.93 ERA. He has yet to face Colorado Springs this season.

Esmil Rogers (2-5, 7.95) takes the mound for the Sky Sox. Rogers is 1-4 in his last seven starts with a 9.56 ERA.

Game #137: Ichiro goes for 2,000

Posted By Larry LaRue on September 5, 2009 at 5:59 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Ichiro Suzuki is nine hits shy of reaching 200 for the ninth consecutive season, and just four short of his 2,000th in the majors.

As you can imagine, the Japanese media is represented by a gaggle of reporters and television crews.

When he reaches 2,000, he'll almost certainly do it in the second fewest games in baseball history, trailing only Al Simmons, who got his in his 1,390th game. Ichiro is playing his 1,401st tonight. The current second fastest? George Sisler, who need 1,414 games.

Ichiro will face lefty Brett Anderson, against whom he's 3-for-3 in his career. Ichiro's also batting .366 vs. left-handers this year.

It's Luke French vs. Anderson.

Sweeney stays en fuego

Mike Sweeney came in batting .395 in his last 12 games, then hit his sixth home run of the season on a 1-1 pitch from Anderson.

Adrian Beltre walked and, with one out, Jack Wilson singled. With the runners going, Josh-not-Jack Wilson walked to load 'em up.

Rob Johnson fell behind in the count, 0-2, fouled off four pitches, then singled home two runs. Ichiro tapped to first base, but when no one covered, he was credited with an infield single that reloaded the bases.

Franklin Gutierrez grounded into a double play.

In the second inning: Mariners 3, Athletics 0

As the wild card turns

Quick update on the wild card derby. Boston and Texas have both lost their games today and Tampa Bay is in a rain-delayed tie in Detroit.

That means a Mariners win gets them within six games of the Red Sox and four games of the Rangers.

Oakland comes back

French did the one thing you can't do with a lead - he walked the first man he faced, then gave up a home run to the second, who was No. 9 hitter Cliff Pennington.

What should have been an easy inning, facing the bottom of the order, has given Oakland momentum and, in the third, Jason Vargas is up.

Good thing.

Adam Kennedy doubled. Rajai Davis singled him to third base, still with no one out. Kurt Suzuki flied out to center, getting the tying run home and Davis to second base.

Davis stole third. Scott Hairston grounded out, getting Davis home.

After three: Athletics 4, Mariners 3

Adieu, Mr. French

French did it again - walked the No. 8 hitter with two outs, then gave up a bloop single to Pennington. When Kennedy singled home a run, manager Don Wakamatsu yanked his starter and went to Vargas.

After four: Athletics 5, Mariners 3

Mariners fail again

Ichiro singled, his second hit of the night and 1,998th of his Seattle career. Gutierrez walked, and Lopez forced him at second base.

With one out and runners at the corners, Sweeney - who was 3-for-3 - struck out. Beltre grounded out.

In the seventh: Athletics 5, Mariners 3

Junior takes a shot

Two outs into the eighth inning, Josh-not-Jake Wilson walked.

Seeing a chance, Wakamatsu sent Ken Griffey Jr. up to pinch-hit for Johnson, and the Athletics countered with left-handed pitcher Andrew Bailey.

Junior took a strike, then hit a hard ground ball to second base.

In the eighth: Athletics 5, Mariners 3

That should do it

Suzuki singled and with one out, Garicaparra singled.

Against Miguel Batista, Mark Ellis doubled home both runners. Ryan Sweeney's pop fly fell for a double, with Ellis taking third base.

Barton, now batting .203, doubled home two more runs. Pennington, still the No. 9 hitter, walked. Wakamatsu yanked Batista in favor of Randy Messenger.

Kennedy flied out. Davis struck out.

After eight: Athletics 9, Mariners 3

And in the end

Ichiro singled, the 1,999th hit of his major league career.

Gutierrez flied out. Lopez homered, his 22nd of the year, producing his 82nd and 83rd RBI.

Sweeney singled - his fourth hit of the night. Beltre popped out. Hall struck out for the fifth time.

It's a final: Athletics 9, Mariners 5

Jack Wilson: Mostly a Mariner now

Posted By Larry LaRue on September 5, 2009 at 2:02 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

A few months ago, the Pittsburgh Pirates offered Jack Wilson a contract extension that he deemed low, given his career there.

As time went on, he called the team and asked if they could discuss his contract once again - and was told it was too late, he'd just been traded to Seattle.

For a man who's big-league roots were in Pittsburgh, that was a blow he still hasn't quite gotten past.

In Seattle, everything he tried was less successful than it had been in the National League, where he knew the pitchers, knew how to position himself for hitters. At the plate, he floundered, hitting .200 in his first 23 games.

Wilson strained a hamstring and watched his backup hit over .300 with three home runs in a week. When he returned, he made an error and still didn't hit.

On Friday, with two outs and the bases loaded in a scoreless game, Wilson did what he'd worked all afternoon with batting coach Alan Cockrell trying.

He hit the ball up the middle, the first two-run single of his Seattle career. It led to the team's 72nd victory.

"I got a call from my agent a couple of days ago. He asked if I was on a suicide watch yet," Wilson said.

"I knew the transition would be tough - new ball parks, all new pitchers, new everything," Wilson said. "I'd be lying if I said I hadn't been struggling. I've been trying to pull everything.

"It was refreshing to have a little success."

Finally, he is beginning to feel like a Mariner, if not as much as a Pirate, then more than he was the day of the trade. He is dealing with the same thing Adrian Beltre dealt with when he signed here as a free agent - a longing for things familiar, for teammates he'd come up with, coaches he knew and who knew him.

Beltre never totally stopped missing the Dodgers. Wilson may never stop wishing things had been different with the Pirates. But both are Mariners, trying to help this franchise complete one of the largest one-year turnarounds in franchise history.

It's a start.

Ichiro one hit shy of 2,000 for MLB career

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

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

09/06/09 12:36 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Ichiro Suzuki is experiencing a season unlike any other.

The Mariners outfielder has missed 16 games -- the same number he tallied in his previous eight seasons combined with Seattle.

Not exactly numbers the nine-year veteran wants to see.

By season's end, though, 2009 will more than likely be one for the books.

With 25 games remaining in the regular season, Ichiro is on pace to become the second-fastest player in Major League history to reach the 2,000-hit plateau. Al Simmons did it in 1,390 games while Ichiro has played in 1,401. George Sisler (1,414) is currently second on the list.

"We have a lot of games left to play, a lot of more baseball left in the season," Ichiro said Friday. "If there were only four or five games, then I would be naturally conscious about it, but as of now, I'm not."

Others certainly are, though.

He enters Sunday's series finale against Oakland one hit shy of 2,000. Furthermore, the 35-year-old Ichiro needs just six more hits to have 200 or more in nine straight seasons, which would break the consecutive-season mark he holds with Willie Keeler (1894-1901).

Although the club continues to keep an eye on Ichiro's left calf tightness, which forced him to miss eight consecutive games at the end of August, manager Don Wakamatsu has no doubt the Japanese phenom will have already reached both historic marks when the final out of the season is made.

"It's amazing, the amount of weapons he has to get that," the first-year skipper said. "He has such a feel for the ball and what he can do with his body and motion never ceases to amaze us. I watched him for a number of years, and I'm glad I'm going to be a part of that."

Pitching matchup

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-hander 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.

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 Scrolls

Ken Griffey Jr. was held out of the lineup for the second straight day with soreness in his surgically repaired left knee. The 39-year-old designated hitter, who grounded out as a pinch-hitter in the eighth inning, took batting practice Saturday and is expected to return to the lineup in a couple of days, Wakamatsu said. ... Reliever Mark Lowe, who has appeared in a career-high 62 games this season, got the night off Saturday after seeing action four out of the previous five contests. He notched his second save of the season on Friday. ... Catcher Rob Johnson made his first start of the series -- 68th of the season -- on Saturday. Kenji Johjima, who started the first two games against Oakland, is on pace for about 200 fewer at-bats than he had in 2007 when he was the team's undisputed starting catcher. He broke a toe in Oakland on May 25 and has seen less playing team since. ... Designated hitter Mike Sweeney has recorded a hit in 11 of his past 13 games, including seven multihit games.

Tickets

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Up next

- Monday: Off-day
- Tuesday: Mariners (Felix Hernandez, 14-5, 2.65) at Angels (Scott Kazmir, 8-8, 5.68), 7:05 p.m. PT
- Wednesday: Mariners (Ian Snell, 6-9, 5.21) at Angels (Jered Weaver, 14-5, 3.79), 7:05 p.m. PT

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

French roughed up in Mariners loss

Ichiro picks up three hits, giving him 1,999 in MLB career

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

09/06/09 1:24 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Luke French is quite familiar with the boys from the Bay.

In fact, the rookie southpaw has faced the A's more times than any other team in his short career, which began with the Tigers on May 15 against -- you guessed it -- Oakland.

On that day, French reeled in a perfect ninth inning to seal a win.

Fast-forward almost four months later. French is wearing a different uniform, and the surreal feelings exuding from his big league debut have worn off.

Welcome to The Show, kid.

On Saturday, while Ichiro Suzuki moved within a hit of 2,000 for his illustrious Major League career, the 23-year-old left-hander was dealt a healthy dose of reality in a 9-5 loss that ended the Mariners' six-game winning streak vs. the A's.

French, making his seventh start with Seattle since being traded July 31, lasted just 3 2/3 innings, surrendering five runs, seven hits and three walks.

"Coming in, you definitely want to do well and make a good impression," he said of adjusting to a new ballclub.

Easier said than done, as he is finding out the hard way.

French's less-than-stellar outing followed a forgetful start against Los Angeles on Monday, when he was knocked around for seven runs through five frames. And although he can't quite pinpoint what's been the cause for the struggles, he may be close to a solution.

"I felt good all game," French said. "Things aren't going real well the last couple starts, but that's just the way it is sometimes.

"Maybe I need to switch it up a little more. 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."

After walking Adam Kennedy to lead off the game, he eased through the first two innings, the only hit coming on a double from Mark Ellis. French's cruise-control status was turned off in the third, though, when he faced seven batters and gave up four runs to blow a 3-0 lead handed to him in the second.

"It was just a matter of getting things to go our way," said the A's Cliff Pennington, who enjoyed a 3-for-3 night with a home run. "Fortunately, that inning they did. It got us on the board and got us back in the game and took the lead, and we just kept going from there."

Said Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu: "We talk about momentum in this game, and to win the first two games of the series and then take a 3-0 lead, I think the critical point in this game was the third inning with Mr. French. It let them back in the ballgame, and the momentum shifted at that point."

Boy, did it ever. But not before the Mariners got on the board with a solo shot by Mike Sweeney to open the second frame. Rob Johnson then notched a two-run single five batters later against A's starter Brett Anderson (8-10), who got the win after five innings.

With the A's up, 4-3, heading into the fourth, French (4-5) gave up his final run courtesy an RBI single to Kennedy before being replaced by Jason Vargas with two outs.

The left-handed Vargas walked away with a much better report card against the A's, blanking them for 2 1/3 innings. What followed, though, was an unusual scenario in which a member of the Mariners' bullpen -- which entered the game with the AL's third-best ERA -- completely fell apart.

After Vargas' brilliant effort to keep his team within close range, Miguel Batista proceeded to give up four runs in 1 1/3 innings, leaving the Mariners behind, 9-3, entering the ninth inning.

"Vargas came in and did a nice job, but Miguel just made too many mistakes," Wakamatsu said. "It's a situation where you got three guys down in your bullpen and you need a little length there so you don't blow up your bullpen."

Mission unaccomplished.

Seattle didn't leave quietly, though. Ichiro led off the ninth with his third hit of the night. The speedy slap hitter is now one hit shy of 2,000 and is also just six hits short of a ninth straight 200-hit season.

Jose Lopez rewarded Ichiro's efforts by bringing him home with his 22nd homer of the year to close Oakland's gap to four in the ninth. But that's all the Mariners could muster off A's closer Andrew Bailey, who picked up his 22nd save of the season.

Seattle's pitching staff wasn't the only party guilty of a bad night. Bill Hall, who entered the game with nine hits in 13 games with the Mariners since being acquired on Aug. 20, struck out five times.

When all was said and done, though, Wakamatsu was pleased with his offense, which also got four hits from Sweeney.

"Offensively, I thought we had a good approach," the first-year manager said. "I thought we had a decent approach with the three runs early in the game. If we can tack on another run there, a different ballgame.

"I was pleased with the offense tonight, but it comes down to limiting damage."

And that, Wakamatsu says, falls in the hands of his pitching staff.

"It's always going to be about starting pitching and how deep you can get in there," he said. "We've proven that over and over, and we really didn't set the tone with the starting pitching."

French knows that. At the same time, he also keeps in mind that "it's a process."

"I'm learning," he said. "This whole thing is still new to me, so you learn as you go."

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

Published: Sunday, September 6, 2009

AquaSox win

Everett Herald Staff

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Everett left fielder Juan Rivero launched two home runs and starting pitcher Taylor Stanton tossed seven strong innings to lead the AquaSox to an 11-4 Northwest League win over the Vancouver Canadians in the penultimate game of the season in front of 4,348 fans at Nat Bailey Stadium.

The AquaSox (38-36) scored eight unanswered runs before Vancouver (35-39) scored a run in the bottom of the fifth inning. Rivero's first home run, a solo shot, was hit in the fourth inning off Canadians' relief pitcher Jonathan Joseph.

Vancouver's starting pitcher, Ian Krol, a late-season call-up, pitched just 1 1/3 innings and surrendered three runs (one earned).

Stanton (5-3) recorded four strikeouts and gave up four runs (three earned) on five hits over seven innings. Brad Reid pitched the final two innings for Everett giving up just one hit.

Consistently one of the best hitting teams in the Northwest League, Everett didn't let up with 13 hits against Vancouver.

Along with Rivero, Gerardo Avila batted 2-for-4 with two RBI, Trevor Coleman hit an RBI triple in the second inning and shortstop Nick Franklin batted 2-for-3 with an RBI.

Everett batted 7-for-15 with runners in scoring position.

The final game of the Northwest League season is today at 1:05 p.m. against the Canadians in Vancouver.

Originally published Saturday, September 5, 2009 at 2:49 PM

Cleveland Indians' tough season gets even worse

It has been a long, frustrating year for the Indians. One more example: On Wednesday, they named third baseman Jhonny Peralta as their nominee for the Roberto Clemente Award.

That night, Peralta committed three errors, then hit into a game-ending double play with the tying runs on base in the ninth to cinch a 4-2 loss to the Tigers.

Oh, and Carlos Carrasco, the key acquisition from Philadelphia in the Cliff Lee trade, made his first start Tuesday. The first six Detroit batters he faced reached base: double, home run, home run, single, walk, single.

All told, Carrasco gave up nine hits (including three homers and two doubles) and six runs in three innings, throwing 74 pitches.

Thanks for playing

The Washington Nationals and Baltimore Orioles were the first two teams officially eliminated from division title contention. That occurred for both on Tuesday (Sept. 1). Last year, the Mariners were the first team eliminated, and it happened on Aug. 27.

Hot and cold

Cole Hamels of the Phillies, who has had an inconsistent followup to last year's breakout season, is coming around at the right time. He has thrown 19 consecutive scoreless innings. On the other hand, they've been primarily against the offensively challenged Giants and the Class AAA Pirates.

On the other hand, another recent World Series hero, Josh Beckett, is struggling. He has failed in four straight attempts to win his 15th game, running up an 8.88 ERA in those games. Before that, Beckett had been in a 12-2, 2.17 stretch. Most alarming is that Beckett has given up 14 homers in his last five games.

Notes and quotes

- With **Curt Schilling** contemplating a run for the U.S. Senate seat opened up by the death of **Ted Kennedy**, **Nick Cafardo** of the Boston Globe made an interesting comparison between Schilling and **Jim Bunning**, another former pitcher and current Kentucky senator.

Bunning, who became a Hall of Famer in 1996, was 224-184 with a 3.27 earned-run average. Schilling finished 216-146 with a 3.46 ERA.

Asked by the Globe what Schilling would bring to the Senate, Dustin Pedroia quipped, "A big appetite."

- Here's what Nationals interim manager **Jim Riggleman** said as the Nats were swept by St. Louis and San Diego last week to fall 42 games under .500 (or maybe it's just an old quote from last September with the Mariners ... nah):

"At some point you've got to say, 'We're not going to get beat. You've just got to will yourself to a win and not accept it. I know sometimes we think of down the road and 'we've got a lot of good pieces for the future' and all that. But when you're playing tonight, people come to watch that ballgame, your competitive juices have got to be flowing. You've got to win tonight."

- The feel-good story of the year might well be **Aaron Boone**'s return to action this past week after undergoing open-heart surgery in March. Doctors at Stanford Medical Center corrected a congenital defect in his aortic valve that could have led to a heart attack or stroke.

"People want to talk to me about how amazing it is that I'm back; I'm not the amazing part," Boone told the New York Post. "The science behind it and the team of people that performed the surgery cared for me and are looking after me, that's the awesome part."

- **Brad Penny** will face one of his former teams, the Dodgers, on Sept. 13 if San Francisco stays in rotation.

When reminded there will be 42,000 at the ballpark in San Francisco who hate the Dodgers, Penny smiled and said, "42,001."

- Here's Tampa Bay catcher **Gregg Zaun**, a 15-year veteran, on Tigers 20-year-old rookie **Rick Porcello**, in the Detroit Free Press:

"He has got everything you need to be an upper echelon starter in this league. I don't say that very often. ... That kid is light years ahead of his birthday."

The comments came after Porcello limited the Rays to one run in 5-2/3 innings. He is now 12-8.

"I've been watching him all year, because when someone who's 20 is in the big leagues, you take notice," Zaun said. "The last time I saw stuff like that [from a pitcher so young] was **Doc Gooden** at 19."

- **Jose Guillen** missed 37 games recovering from a sprained knee. He returned to action for the Royals on Wednesday - and lasted just two at-bats before re-injuring himself.

Guillen had to leave the game with soreness in his hamstring, which he blamed on a tightly wrapped brace on his knee.

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Originally published Saturday, September 5, 2009 at 11:21 PM

Rest of Roger Clemens' suit dismissed

The former pitcher and his ex-trainer, Brian McNamee, will take their legal battle to federal court in New York

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - The remainder of Roger Clemens' defamation suit against Brian McNamee in Texas has been dismissed, leaving the pair to fight their legal battle in New York.

U.S. District Judge Keith P. Ellison, who threw out most of Clemens' case in February, dismissed the remainder of the suit on Aug. 28. Clemens initially had sued his former personal trainer in Texas state court in January 2008, a month after McNamee's accusations against the seven-time Cy Young Award winner were published in the Mitchell Report. The suit was moved a month later from Harris County District Court to federal court in Houston.

The sides will carry on now in federal court in Brooklyn, where McNamee sued Clemens for defamation on July 31.

"I think it's our game now. He's on defense. He's going to have to backpedal," McNamee's lawyer, Richard Emery, said Saturday.

McNamee claimed in the Mitchell Report that he injected Clemens with steroids and human growth hormone at least 16 times in 1998, 2000 and 2001. Clemens responded that McNamee's claims were "untrue and defamatory."

Guillen's season over

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - Royals outfielder Jose Guillen will miss the rest of the season because of a right knee injury.

Guillen sat out 37 games with a ligament tear in his knee, but was activated from the disabled list Tuesday.

The 33-year-old former Mariner is in the second season of a \$36 million, three-year contract, making him the highest-paid position player in Royals history.

Notes

- All-Star OF **Josh Hamilton** rejoined the Texas Rangers, uncertain when his back injury will enable him to return to the lineup.
- Yankees closer **Mariano Rivera** threw "almost 20 pitches" in a bullpen session and reported no pain in his sore left groin, meaning he might be able to return to the mound today.
- Former Red Sox pitcher **Curt Schilling**, who has expressed interest in the U.S. Senate seat held by Democrat **Edward M. Kennedy** for almost 50 years before he died last month, said there is a slim chance he will run.

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Last updated September 5, 2009 7:50 p.m. PT

Wells wins first game in more than 16 months

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA -- Joey Votto hit a two-run homer and Kip Wells pitched six innings of one-hit ball to win his first game in more than 16 months and the Cincinnati Reds beat the Atlanta Braves 3-1 Saturday night for their season-high sixth straight win.

The fading Braves, who fell six games behind Colorado in the NL wild-card race, have lost four straight.

Wells (1-3), who had not won since April 17, 2008, when he was with Colorado, allowed only a single to Garret Anderson in the second inning. The right-hander walked four, struck out four and hit a batter.

Votto hit a two-run homer off Jair Jurrjens (10-10) in the sixth inning to put the Reds up 2-0. Brandon Phillips followed with a double to left and scored on an RBI single by Scott Rolen.

Jurrjens allowed three runs on four hits and three walks in seven innings.

Nate McLouth hit a run-scoring single off Nick Masset in the seventh.

Francisco Cordero pitched the ninth for his 32nd save in 34 attempts.

NOTES: Jurrjens threw all eight of his first inning pitches for strikes and 15 of 16 through the second, retiring all six Cincinnati hitters. ... Atlanta SS Yunel Escobar, who suffered a right ankle sprain in Friday night's 3-1 loss to the Reds, said the ankle felt better but indicated he would not play until Tuesday. ... The Reds have won a season-high six straight on the road. ... Cincinnati rookie Drew Sutton, who has played second and third base, started in left field. Reds manager Dusty Baker said he thinks it helps if a utility player can play the infield and outfield.

Last updated September 5, 2009 7:45 p.m. PT

Aybar leads Angels past Royals, 2-1, in 11 innings

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Erick Aybar had three hits, including a tiebreaking RBI single in the 11th inning, as the Los Angeles Angels beat the Kansas City Royals 2-1 Saturday night.

Aybar's single off Yasuhiko Yabuta (0-1) scored Torii Hunter, who led off the 11th with a single and moved to second on a wild pitch. After Juan Rivera walked with one out, Aybar stroked a run-scoring single to right.

Kevin Jepsen (5-3) worked a perfect 10th, striking out two, to pick up the victory. Brian Fuentes worked around David DeJesus' double with one out in the 11th to get his 39th save in 44 opportunities.

Starters Zack Greinke of the Royals and John Lackey of the Angels matched up in a pitcher's duel.

Greinke, who threw a one-hitter at Seattle in his last start and struck out a club-record 15 in his previous outing against Cleveland on Aug. 25, allowed one unearned run on eight hits in eight innings. He left after a career high 125 pitches and lowered his ERA to a major league-best 2.22. In his last three starts, he has allowed two earned runs and 14 hits, while striking 28 in 25 innings.

Greinke struck out eight against Angels, increasing his season total to 210, the second-highest in Royals history. Dennis Leonard holds the franchise record with 244 strikeouts in 1977.

The Angels tied the score with two out in the eighth off Greinke. Chone Figgins reached on Willie Bloomquist's fielding error to open the inning. He moved to third on Macier Izturis' single to right with none out.

It appeared Greinke might pitch out of the trouble, striking out Bobby Abreu and getting Vladimir Guerrero on a foul pop up to catcher Miguel Olivo. Hunter, however, singled to center to score Figgins with the tying run.

Lackey retired 17 in a row after giving up a run-producing single to Billy Butler in the first. Butler's hit scored Bloomquist, who had an infield single and stole second.

The Royals did not get another hit until Butler led off the seventh with a single.

Lackey allowed one run and six hits in nine innings, striking out four and walking none.

DeJesus, who had not made an error in 129 games this season, caught Figgins' foul ball in the fifth and threw out Aybar at the plate to end the inning.

Notes: Royals 2B Alberto Callaspo did not play because of a sore right ankle after fouling a pitch off it Friday. ... The Angels are 8-0 against the Royals this season. ... The Royals promoted RHPs Victor Marte and Carlos Rosa and LHP Dusty Hughes from their Triple-A Omaha club. Marte pitched the past three years in Japan after being on major league baseball's disqualified list from 2002-05.

Last updated September 5, 2009 4:06 p.m. PT

Mora, Matusz lead Orioles past Rangers 5-4

By DAVID GINSBURG
AP SPORTS WRITER

BALTIMORE -- Melvin Mora homered and drove in three runs, rookie Brian Matusz earned his third straight win and the Baltimore Orioles beat the Texas Rangers 5-4 Saturday.

Mora hit a solo homer in the second inning, a two-out RBI single in the third and snapped a 4-all tie with a two-out single in the fifth. Besides his sparkling performance at the plate, the third baseman also made an outstanding catch of a foul bunt by Ian Kinsler in the eighth inning.

David Murphy homered for the Rangers, denied their first five-game winning streak since July 19-24. Texas did not get a hit after the third inning and remained two games behind Boston for the AL wild card.

Keven Millwood (10-9) gave up five runs, seven hits and four walks in five innings. He has won only two of his last 11 starts.

Making his seventh big league start, Matusz (4-2) allowed four runs and six hits in seven innings. The left-hander faced the minimum 12 batters over his final four innings; the lone batter to reach, Elvin Andrus on a walk, was thrown out trying to steal.

The 22-year-old Matusz struck out four and walked one. He's 3-0 over his last four starts.

Danys Baez worked the eighth and Jim Johnson got three outs for his eighth save.

The Orioles donned replica uniforms of the 1949 Baltimore Elite Giants, who won the Negro League championship 60 years ago. To keep with the spirit of the occasion, the players and coaches wore stirrups.

Matusz and Mora were more of a factor than the clothes they wore, but the Orioles nevertheless broke a four-game losing streak and improved to 15-33 since the All-Star break.

Baltimore took a 5-4 lead in the fifth when Nick Markakis got an infield hit, went to second on a hit-and-run groundout and scored on Mora's two-out single up the middle.

It turned out to be the final and decisive run in a game that featured plenty of early offense.

A run-scoring double by Marlon Byrd and a two-run homer by Murphy gave Texas a 3-0 first-inning lead. Markakis hit a sacrifice fly in the bottom half, and Mora's seventh homer got Baltimore within a run in the second.

Texas made it 4-2 in the third. Andrus was credited with a triple when his liner to right was lost in the sun by Markakis, and Byrd followed with a sacrifice fly. Matusz avoided further damage by retiring Ivan Rodriguez with runners on second and third and two outs.

Baltimore tied it in the bottom half. After Nolan Reimold hit a solo homer, Millwood loaded the bases with three walks and Mora singled off the glove of third baseman Esteban German.

NOTES: Millwood has allowed five runs in three of his last four starts. ... Texas OF Josh Hamilton rejoined the team but missed a second straight game with a back injury. ... Batting third for the second straight game, Baltimore's Brian Roberts went 0 for 3 and is 7 for 46 (.152) since Aug. 23.

Last updated September 5, 2009 1:26 p.m. PT

Hamilton returns to Rangers, but not in lineup

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE -- All-Star outfielder Josh Hamilton rejoined the Texas Rangers on Saturday, uncertain when his back injury will enable him to return to the lineup.

Hamilton left Wednesday's game against Toronto with a pinched nerve. He received an epidural Thursday, and because the shot did not take effect by Friday morning, he did not accompany the Rangers on their flight to Baltimore.

He arrived Saturday, but appeared to have difficulty walking.

On Friday, he got an epidural from the team doctor in an effort to calm down the injury.

"There is no difference," Hamilton said. "I've got a toothache in my leg."

With the Rangers in contention for both the AL West title and the wild-card spot, manager Ron Washington will have to exercise patience before inserting Hamilton into the lineup.

"When he says he's ready, he's back out there," Washington said before Saturday's game against the Orioles. "It's not going to be, 'I'm close,' and then I'm tempted to put him in there."

Hamilton has had two stints on the disabled list this season and has played in only 87 games. He started his second All-Star game, and after hitting .342 in August, appeared ready to help his team's push for the playoffs.

"All I can do is come in and get treatment and see if the shot takes effect," Hamilton said. "The good thing is there is no DL this time of year."