

A's News Clips, Saturday, September 12, 2009

A's play long ball, pummel Twins

By Adam Czech, Special to the Oakland Tribune

The A's lineup hasn't struck fear into many teams this season. But on Friday, A's hitters flexed their muscles and put a pretty good scare into the Twins.

The A's totaled 17 hits and cranked a season-high five home runs during a 12-5 victory at the Metrodome.

Jack Cust, Cliff Pennington and Mark Ellis homered off Twins starter Nick Blackburn, providing plenty of offense to get rookie Clayton Mortensen his first major league win.

Daric Barton added a three-run homer in the fifth, and Kurt Suzuki launched a 417-foot shot in the sixth to give the A's their most homers in one game since they hit six on June 17, 2008, against Arizona.

"I don't think we've had one of these games for a while," Cust said. "It was just one of those things where guys are hitting the ball hard and it's getting up in the air and flying out."

The A's are now tied with the Royals after Friday's power surge for fewest home runs in the American League. Oakland has homered in eight of its last nine games and now has 123.

Cust led off the second inning with a 442-foot shot that clanked off the scoreboard in right-center field. Pennington led off the third with a homer, and Ellis capped the five-run frame with a three-run blast to left field that landed 10 rows deep into the Metrodome's blue seats.

"Cust hit one of the farthest balls I've seen hit, a pretty impressive blast by him," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Mortensen (1-2) allowed a leadoff home run to Denard Span but was sharp once given the lead in his third major league start. The right-hander went six innings and allowed one run on six hits.

"Every time he's thrown he's been impressive, but he's had one very bad inning," Geren said. "Tonight he didn't have that bad inning. It could've been that way early, after that homer. But he got us back in without any more runs."

Span, the only Twins hitter to drive a ball against Mortensen, said the youngster was deceptive.

"His changeup and his sinker looked the same. His arm slot, the delivery, the way it came out of his hand was real deceiving," Span said.

The A's used eight pitchers during Wednesday's loss to the White Sox but forced the Twins to burn through six pitchers on Friday. Every A's starter had a hit by the sixth inning.

The A's have won four of five and are 10-9 over their last 19 games.

The victory further diminished Minnesota's fading playoff hopes and marked the third time this season that the A's scored 12 or more runs against the Twins.

"Just totally a coincidence," Geren said. "There's no rhyme or reason to it. They've got a really good team here and for some reason we've been able to have a couple big nights against them."

Notes: The A's called up Eric Munson from Triple-A Sacramento to use as a third catcher the remainder of the season. To make room on the roster, injured pitcher Dallas Braden (foot) was transferred to the 60-day DL, ending his season. ... Vin Mazzaro, who has missed one start with shoulder soreness, threw a side session on Friday. Geren said everything went well and Mazzaro will throw the same session today. If all goes well, the right-hander will throw a bullpen session Monday. The soonest he could return would be Thursday against the Indians. ... Brett Wallace, Chris Carter and Matt Carson homered as the A's Triple-A team, the Sacramento River Cats, beat the visiting Tacoma Rainiers 13-2 Friday to take a 2-1 lead in their best-of-five Pacific Coast League playoff series. Jerome Williams pitched seven strong innings for the win. Game 4 is tonight in Sacramento. ... This weekend's series is the last at the Metrodome for the A's before the Twins move to an outdoor ballpark next season. ... Cust scored a season-high four runs.

A little more on Michael Ynoa, other A's prospects

By Joe Stiglich

If you haven't seen it, click [here](#) for the story I did today on some of the A's top hitting prospects. Here's some updates on a few other players in the farm system. Some names you might be familiar with, others not so much:

RHP Michael Ynoa: The prize of the 2008 international amateur signing class has been slowed by injuries. The A's shut Ynoa down over the summer as he had elbow soreness, and he's recently battled tendinitis in one of his knees. But his elbow is doing better and he's been on a throwing program for the past month, according to Keith Lieppman, the A's director of player development. Ynoa, who turns 18 in two weeks, has been back home in the Dominican Republic, but he'll return to Phoenix and participate in the fall instructional league, which starts in about a week. Considering his age, and the \$4.25 million bonus he was signed to, the A's will treat him carefully.

RHP Tyson Ross: There's nothing flashy about the stats for [Ross](#), the Cal product the A's took in the second round in 2008. But Lieppman is enthusiastic about Ross' development in his first full professional season. He began 2009 with Single-A Stockton and received a promotion to Double-A Midland, going a combined 10-10 with a 4.09 ERA to this point. He's likely to start next season with Midland.

1B Sean Doolittle: Doolittle was limited to 28 games with Triple-A Sacramento because of a torn patella tendon in his left knee. But his recovery is coming along well, according to A's GM Billy Beane, and the team is hoping to find a place for him to play winter ball. Doolittle made a nice impression with the club during spring training and should figure prominently in the future mix at first base if he rebounds from his knee injury.

OF Matt Spencer: He was one of three players the A's received from Philadelphia in the Joe Blanton trade, along with pitcher Josh Outman and infielder Adrian Cardenas. [Spencer](#), who hits and throws left-handed, began the year with Stockton and turned heads after his promotion to Midland, hitting .294 with nine homers and 62 RBI in 93 games with the RockHounds.

RHP Fautino De Los Santos: After the long recovery from last season's Tommy John elbow surgery, De Los Santos threw a little bit for the A's rookie league team this summer and will continue rounding into form during instructional league. He was acquired along with Ryan Sweeney and Gio Gonzalez from the White Sox in the Nick Swisher deal.

RHP Andrew Carignan: The reliever was deep in the organization's thoughts when spring training began, but a right shoulder injury sabotaged his season. He didn't require surgery, but spent the whole season rehabilitating. Carignan will begin throwing again Oct. 1 during instructional league, Lieppman said.

RHP Mickey Storey: [Storey](#) was "nowhere on the radar" when the season began, according to Lieppman, but this reliever is climbing rapidly through the system. He began the season as a closer with low Single-A Kane County but is now in Double-A. His combined season stats: A 1.22 ERA with 71 strikeouts and eight walks. Keep an eye on this guy.

Athletics hit five home runs to beat Twins 12-5

Friday, September 11, 2009

With each Oakland drive that soared over the outfield wall at the Metrodome on Friday, Clayton Mortensen felt a little more comfortable.

That comfort translated into the first major league victory for one of the Athletics' top pitching prospects.

Mortensen, acquired in the trade that sent Matt Holliday to St. Louis, limited the Minnesota Twins to one run on five hits over six innings as the Athletics rolled to a 12-5 victory.

Jack Cust, Mark Ellis, Cliff Pennington, Daric Barton and Kurt Suzuki all homered for an Oakland team that entered the game last in the American League in home runs.

When the game was over, however, no Oakland player had a bigger smile on his face than Mortensen. The 24-year-old, who saved the official lineup card and the red cap that teams wore in honor of the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terror attacks, finally felt like he was able to throw his fastball, curveball and changeup well in the same game.

"Once I can get that perfected, the confidence just goes up," said Mortensen, who was making only his third start and fourth major league appearance. "Being able to see that I can get a win against a team like this, a really potent hitting team, definitely helps out."

And unlike in his first two starts, Mortensen (1-2) avoided giving up the big inning. While Minnesota's Denard Span hit a leadoff homer, Mortensen allowed only one more Minnesota player past second base.

"The other two games, he has been impressive and had one very bad inning," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "Tonight was an example of him not having that bad inning. It could have been early with the leadoff homer, but he rebounded and got out of that inning."

Once he did, the Oakland offense took care of the rest. The five home runs was the most in a single game since hitting six homers at Arizona last June.

Cust hit the first of Oakland's homers — a massive shot to right-center that was estimated at 442 feet — to tie the game at 1 in the top of the second. The Athletics then broke the game open in the third off of Minnesota starter Nick Blackburn (9-11). Pennington led off with a solo home run before Rajai Davis doubled. Suzuki doubled in Davis and, after a Cust walk, Ellis hit a three-run homer to left to give Oakland a 6-1 lead.

That early deficit helped deal a blow to Minnesota's hopes of catching Detroit in the American League Central. Minnesota, which lost for the sixth time in nine games, could have pulled within 4 1/2 games after the Tigers lost at Toronto.

"Not a good night pitching-wise, I think we all saw we got hammered," said Minnesota manager Ron Gardenhire, whose team again fell below .500. "They put balls in the seats. Blacky just couldn't make a pitch. I don't know how many homers he gave up. I don't know how many walks we had. I quit counting. Too many walks and too many hits. We get behind like that and it just got ugly."

Blackburn is now 1-7 with a 7.36 ERA since the All-Star break. While he struggled, Minnesota relievers Bobby Keppel, Ron Mahay and Armando Gabino didn't fare much better.

Barton homered in the fifth and Suzuki homered in the sixth as Oakland opened a 12-1 lead. Ten of Oakland's 17 hits went for extra bases.

Francisco Liriano made his first appearance for the Twins since coming off of the disabled list, pitching two innings of scoreless relief while striking out four. Liriano, who was on the 2006 American League All-Star team, hadn't pitched since Aug. 17 because of left arm fatigue. It was Liriano's first appearance out of the bullpen since May 13, 2006. His previous 53 appearances had all been starts.

The Twins scored four runs on four in the bottom of the ninth.

NOTES: Oakland RHP Vin Mazzaro, who has tendinitis in his shoulder, threw from 140 feet before the game Friday. Athletics manager Bob Geren said the earliest Mazzaro could return to the mound is Thursday against Cleveland. ... Twins RH reliever Pat Neshek, who hasn't pitched since May 2008, has recovered from Tommy John ligament replacement surgery on his elbow and is throwing daily. He joined the team this week for a medical checkup and should be at full strength by spring training. ... The Twins will host St. Louis in a pair of exhibition games next April 2-3 to open the new Target Field. They are tentatively scheduled to host Boston in the first regular-season game on April 12, 2010.

A's leading off

Chronicle staff report

Reconstruction: Mark Ellis is the only player on Oakland's active roster who played against the Twins in the 2006 Division Series (A's won, 3-0). Minnesota still has nine: Jesse Crain, Matt Guerrier, Joe Nathan, Joe Mauer, Mike Redmond, Justin Morneau, Nick Punto, Michael Cuddyer and Jason Kubel.

A's blast five homers to beat Minnesota

Rookie Mortensen earns his first career victory

By Tyler Mason / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- Oakland entered Friday's game having hit fewer home runs than any other American League team, with just 118 on the season.

So where exactly did Friday's power surge of five homers and 17 hits in a 12-5 win over Minnesota come from?

"It was just one of those days," said designated hitter Jack Cust, who tallied one of Oakland's five homers. "We got ahead early there and we were able to tack on runs and just pile it up."

"It was quite a night for us offensively," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Cust, Mark Ellis, Cliff Pennington, Daric Barton and Kurt Suzuki all homered for Oakland, helping rookie pitcher Clayton Mortensen earn his first big league win in just his third career start. The five homers were the most for the A's since June 17, 2008, when they hit six at Arizona.

"It's one of those things where guys were hitting the ball hard," Cust said. "We were getting some balls up in the air, and they were leaving. It was definitely a fun night offensively."

Mortensen's lone mistake came on the first batter he faced, as Twins outfielder Denard Span led off the bottom of the first with a shot to right to put the A's in an early 1-0 hole.

"I wasn't expecting a leadoff home run," Mortensen said. "When you leave the ball out over the middle of the plate, it can go a long ways."

It would be all Oakland after that, though, as the A's chased Minnesota starter Nick Blackburn from the game after three home runs in three innings.

Cust picked up Mortensen in the second, as his leadoff homer off Blackburn knotted things at 1. He crushed a first-pitch fastball from Blackburn 442 feet to deep right-center for his team-leading 22nd homer of the season.

"Cust hit one of the farthest balls I've seen hit," Geren said. "Pretty impressive blast by him."

"I hit that pretty good," Cust said. "They had the lead there and I figured he'd probably try and throw a fastball, get ahead. I just didn't want to miss it, and I didn't."

Pennington also tallied a leadoff blast, as his third-inning home run gave the A's a 2-1 lead. A double by Suzuki later in the inning scored Rajai Davis from second, and Ellis drove in Suzuki and Cust two batters later with a three-run homer to push Oakland's lead to 6-1.

"It's amazing. It's very impressive," Mortensen said of the home run display. "I was seeing balls flying out of the stadium left and right, not really cheap home runs, just smashed. It's awesome."

While the A's bats were red-hot, Mortensen (1-2) pitched with ice in his veins. The right-hander limited Minnesota to just one run on five hits through six innings of work. He also lowered his ERA from 9.82 to 6.75 in his fourth game at the big league level.

The win for Mortensen provided a bit of relief after a rather tumultuous season. Mortensen began the year at Triple-A Memphis in St. Louis' farm system. He was called up in late June and made one appearance for the Cardinals before getting sent back down.

He was then traded to Oakland in the deal that sent Matt Holliday to St. Louis. His start Friday was just his third appearance -- and third start -- in an A's uniform.

"It's been a whirlwind. A lot of different emotions, a lot of different situations," Mortensen said. "It's just been really crazy the past couple months."

With the roller-coaster season the young right-hander has had, Friday's victory was a sigh of relief.

"It's nice to finally get that one out of the way," Mortensen said. "Just to know that I can get a win up here and I can compete with these guys, it's definitely helped out the confidence level."

Already holding a 6-1 lead, Oakland tacked on three runs apiece in both the fifth and sixth innings. Barton blasted a three-run shot to right in the fifth, while Suzuki's two-run blast to left put the A's up, 11-1. Cust would score later in the inning -- his fourth run of the night -- on a bases-loaded walk to Pennington.

Suzuki came a triple shy of the cycle, as he doubled off the baggie in right in the third, singled in the fifth and homered in the sixth.

"He has been very consistent all year, both offensively and defensively," Geren said. "He's a real gamer."

Eric Patterson also collected three hits, including a double in the fourth.

Trailing 12-1, Minnesota put together a four-run ninth inning to cut the deficit to 12-5. Reliever Santiago Casilla was hit with all four runs, including a two-run single by Minnesota's Matt Tolbert.

The win marked the third time this season the A's have scored 12 or more runs against the Twins, with the other two times coming in 14-13 and 16-1 victories in the same July series in Oakland.

"Just total coincidence that we've had good games vs. this team," Geren said. "No rhyme or reason to it."

A's get set to say goodbye to Metrodome

Oakland (63-77) at Minnesota (70-71), 10:10 a.m. PT

By Tyler Mason / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- After Friday's series opener against the Twins, Oakland infielder Adam Kennedy has now played 30 career games in the Metrodome, second most on the A's behind Eric Chavez's 41. After Sunday's finale, Kennedy and his teammates will bid farewell to the Dome, as Minnesota is set to play in brand-new Target Field next season.

It's tough to say Kennedy will miss the Metrodome.

"It's a unique place," he said. "Sometimes you get locked in this Dome for a weekend and you don't get fresh air or anything. Getting outside and getting that air, although there will be some colder days, it's nice to play outside."

That's not to say Kennedy's Dome experience hasn't been enjoyable. He was a member of the 2002 Angels team that beat the Twins in the American League Championship Series, winning one of two games in the Metrodome before clinching the series back in Anaheim.

"I've played a lot of good games here," Kennedy said. "It's always fun playing the Twins, their style of baseball."

A's manager Bob Geren played a handful of games in the Dome while with the Yankees, recalling memories of Kirby Puckett and Kent Hrbek. He also experienced the playoffs in the Dome as Oakland's bench coach in 2006, when the A's swept the Twins and took both games in Minnesota.

"We ended up winning here and going home and winning the series," Geren said. "That was a very exciting time for us."

For Oakland's rookies, this weekend's series marks the first and only time they will play in the Metrodome. Geren said he and his staff worked with the younger players to familiarize them with the Dome's quirks.

"You have to not necessarily warn them but school them, tell them what to look for," Geren said. "I've seen numerous balls lost in the roof. It's always a challenge."

After Sunday, Oakland's next trip to Minnesota for baseball will mean playing outdoors at a brand-new ballpark, something A's coaches and players alike are excited for.

"You see a lot of the new stadiums built across the country, they're all pretty amazing," said A's shortstop Nomar Garciaparra. "I'm sure this one is going to be equally as amazing as well. I think the question on a lot of people's minds is, 'How come they don't cover it?'"

"I'm looking forward to seeing the new park just because I enjoy seeing the architecture and the design of how these new parks are," Geren said. "That part is always something I look forward to going to a new place. I also have good memories here."

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Brett Anderson (8-10, 4.45 ERA)

Anderson pitched just five innings last Saturday, but that was enough to beat the Mariners and notch his first win since Aug. 9 at Kansas City. He gave up three runs to the Mariners in the second inning, one on a long homer by Mike Sweeney, but settled down after that. Anderson struck out six, walked just two and allowed seven hits in the win. And for a change, he got plenty of run support in the 9-5 victory. In 13 of his 26 starts this season, he has received two or fewer runs of support. He's 0-1 with a 7.94 ERA against the Twins.




MIN: RHP Jeff Manship (0-0, 4.41 ERA)

In just his second Major League start, Manship saw his pitch count rise a little too early in his outing against the Blue Jays. He tossed 4 1/3 innings, allowing three runs on seven hits while throwing a total of 104 pitches. The right-hander said that he was trying to be a little too precise with his pitches in the outing, and without his changeup to rely on, it made it difficult for him to change speeds against a tough Blue Jays lineup. Manship will see if he can deliver a longer outing when he faces the A's for the first time in his career.

Tidbits

Geren said pitcher Vin Mazzaro threw long toss Friday from 140 feet and added that it went a little better than it did last time. He said if all goes according to plan, Mazzaro will throw a bullpen session on Sunday. ... A's pitcher Craig Breslow made his return to the Metrodome for the first time since the Twins placed him on waivers in May of this season. When asked about Breslow's impact this season, Geren said, "I think every team he's been on in the past has certainly appreciated what he does. We certainly are very happy for him." Breslow did not appear in Oakland's 12-5 victory over Minnesota on Friday. ... Until a four-run ninth inning on Friday, the A's bullpen had allowed just one run over its past 17 innings. That changed when Santiago Casilla was charged with four runs in the ninth.

Up next

- Sunday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 5-5, 5.76) at Twins (Brian Duensing, 2-1, 3.94), 11:10 a.m. PT 
- Monday: Athletics (Brett Tomko, 4-3, 4.47) at Rangers (Scott Feldman, 16-4, 3.46), 5:05 p.m. PT 
- Tuesday: Athletics (TBD) at Rangers (Brandon McCarthy, 7-2, 4.81), 5:05 p.m. PT 

A's call up Munson from Triple-A

Catcher takes spot of Braden, who is moved to 60-day DL

By Tyler Mason / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- The A's added depth to their bench on Friday by recalling catcher Eric Munson from Triple-A Sacramento.

Munson spent the entire year with the River Cats, hitting .265 with 13 home runs in 99 regular-season games. He hasn't played in the Major Leagues since 2007, when he was with the Houston Astros.

Oakland manager Bob Geren said Munson will be the team's third catcher behind Kurt Suzuki and Landon Powell.

"I can pinch-hit a catcher here or there. If we get way up or way down, I can take Suzuki out of the game a little easier," Geren said. "September's a good time to add an extra catcher. He's an experienced guy. It gives us some more options in a lot of ways."

Munson has played a total of eight seasons in the Majors, hitting .214 with 49 home runs and 147 RBIs in 360 career games.

To make room for Munson on the 40-man roster, Oakland moved left-handed pitcher Dallas Braden to the 60-day disabled list. Braden was originally put on the DL on Aug. 8 with a rash and infection on his foot. Geren said it's unlikely Braden will pitch again this season.

PCL Playoffs: Williams dominant in Game 3 rout

rivercats.com

WEST SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Jerome Williams picked the right time for his most dominating start of the season.

The River Cats right-hander allowed only one run over 7.0 innings to lift Sacramento to a 13-2 pounding of the Tacoma Rainiers in Game 3 of the PCL Pacific Conference Championship Series. The former San Francisco Giant struck out eight and allowed only seven hits Friday night before 11,894 fans at Raley Field.

Shown: *If Chris Carter wants to stay dry, he better stop hitting homers. The River Cats slugger hit his third of the series Friday night and lifted Sacramento to a resounding Game 3 victory.*

The River Cats now have two chances to close out the series at home (Saturday, 7:05 p.m.; Sunday, 1:05 p.m., if necessary). The winner of this series will advance to play the Memphis RedBirds, who finished off a three-game sweep of the Albuquerque Isotopes on Friday night in the American Conference Championship Series.

"Tonight was a great win," River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco said. "The Raley Field crowd was electric and that gave us a huge lift. Hopefully fans will come out again on Saturday."

Williams had an up and down regular season for Sacramento, posting a 5-6 record and 5.58 ERA. He won four of his last six decisions to close out the season, but never displayed a performance like this. His only run allowed Friday came on a fielder's choice in the fourth.

Meanwhile, Sacramento's offense gave Williams more than enough support.

Chris Carter smacked his third homer of the season in the third inning, a towering blast that barely cleared the left-field wall to give Sacramento a 6-0 lead. Matt Carson added a two-run homer in the seventh and Brett Wallace smacked a three-run shot in the eighth. Carter has now homered in each of the three games in this series.

The River Cats' first three batters (Chris Denorfia, Adrian Cardenas and Wallace) combined to go 8-for 15, score six runs and drive in nine. Every Sacramento starter besides catcher Anthony Recker recorded a hit, and he even walked twice and scored twice. The River Cats finished with 15 hits, six for extra bases.

Right-hander Shawn Chacon (8-4, 6.29) will get the start for Sacramento on Saturday night, as the River Cats continue their quest for a third consecutive Pacific Coast League championship. Chacon will face right-hander Gaby Hernandez (10-9, 5.23).

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Cats' bats deliver in crucial Game 3

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee

The hits kept coming Friday night at Raley Field, moving the River Cats one step away from a shot at a third consecutive Pacific Coast League Championship.

And the Cats have two chances to get there.

On a warm evening near the Sacramento River, the River Cats rode a 15-hit outburst to a 13-2 victory over the Tacoma Rainiers to take a 2-1 lead in their best-of-five first-round playoff series.

Sacramento can wrap up the series tonight with a victory in Game 4, set for 7:05 p.m. at Raley Field. Game 5, if necessary, would be played Sunday at 1:05 p.m.

"We have enough power right now, if they make a mistake, these guys are going to hit it," River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco said. "We got some big hits from all our guys today."

An announced crowd of 11,894 watched the River Cats give starter Jerome Williams an early cushion, scoring a run in the first inning and four in the second off Tacoma starter Andy Baldwin to take a 5-0 lead.

Tommy Everidge's RBI single put the Cats on the board in the first before the home team flexed its offensive muscle in the second.

With two outs, Anthony Recker and Gregorio Petit walked, Chris Denorfia brought them home with a double into the left-field corner, Adrian Cardenas contributed an RBI double and Brett Wallace a run-scoring single.

Chris Carter added a solo home run in the third inning, Matt Carson delivered a two-run homer in the seventh to stretch the lead to 8-1 and Wallace crushed a three-run home run in the eighth to push the margin to 13-2.

Williams worked seven innings, allowing seven hits but just one run and striking out eight, to earn the victory.

"You saw how Jerome responded," Denorfia said. "He pitched awesome today."

The Sacramento-Tacoma winner will advance to the PCL Championship series against Memphis, which completed a three-game sweep of Albuquerque with a 1-0 victory Friday night.

The River Cats, who have won eight division titles in their 10 seasons at Raley Field, seek their fifth PCL crown and a third consecutive Triple-A championship.

Sacramento plans to send veteran right-hander Shawn Chacon (8-4, 6.29) to the mound tonight to face Tacoma right-hander Gaby Hernandez (10-9, 5.23).

DeFrancesco said he had confidence in the 31-year-old Chacon, a 2003 National League All-Star with Colorado who posted a 45-61 record and a 4.99 ERA in eight seasons in the major leagues.

Chacon went on the disabled list for 10 days before returning Sept. 6 against Salt Lake, allowing five hits and six runs in 3 2/3 innings.

"He threw the ball well, had his pitch count up," DeFrancesco said. "He's ready to go."

Hounds Survive Scare To Take 2-1 Series Lead

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The RockHounds are one win away from the Texas League South Division Championship. If recent history is any indication, getting that win won't be easy. In Wednesday night's opener, the 'Hounds defeated San Antonio, 1-0, in 11 innings. Thursday, the Missions erased a 2-0 deficit to even the series with a 4-2 win at San Antonio.

Josh Donaldson and Matt Spencer hit back-to-back home runs in the third inning and "Spence" added a second homer in the seventh inning. That second, solo home run would prove to be the difference, as San Antonio narrowed a 6-1 deficit to 6-5, scoring four times with one out in the ninth.

Cedric Hunter continued to have a monster series for San Antonio, ripping a bases-loaded double in the ninth, drawing the Missions to within 6-5, with Hunter in scoring position and one out. Jon Hunton came out of the bullpen, getting back-to-back ground outs, including the league's # 3 hitter, Craig Cooper, to end the game.

In the series, Hunter (the 21-year-old outfielder is rated San Diego Padres' # 6 prospect) is now 6-for-12, with a home run, three doubles and four RBI.

Donaldson and Spencer have been equally productive for the RockHounds.

Donaldson is 3-for-12 in the series, but his hits have been the game-winning double in game one ... a solo home run in game two and the biggest swing of the bat, the 3-run shot in game three.

Spencer, who hit over .400 in a 5-week stretch in the second half, have busted out of a late-season slump. He is 6-for-13 in the series, including his two solo home runs Friday night.

Kyle Middleton was, again, huge for the RockHounds. Signed by Oakland as a free agent in mid-July, the 29-year-old right-hander went 5-2, 2.60 in nine regular season appearances for the 'Hounds. He carried that level of excellence into the post-season, throwing 6.0 innings and allowing just one, unearned, run.

While not as sensational as hitting a home run, Josh Horton's first trip to the plate was also a game-changer. With the bases loaded and one out in a scoreless tie, Horton fell behind, 0-2. He worked the count full, fouling off a pair of 2-strike pitches, then drew a walk, forcing in the game's first run. Donaldson and Spencer drove in the next five on their three, big swings.

Archie Gilbert made the defensive play of the night, a full-tilt, diving catch of a sinking line drive off the bat of Mitch Canham, with one on, ending the sixth inning.

The RockHounds lead the South Division Championship Series, 2-1, needing one win to advance to the Texas League Championship Series to face Northwest Arkansas. The Naturals swept the Springfield Cardinals, 3-0, in the North Division title series.

Everidge back at Sac, joins Wallace in PCL playoffs

By Steven Serafini, Sonoma News

After being called up by the Oakland A's from their Triple-A Sacramento River Cats on July 28, Glen Ellen's Tommy Everidge got his Major League career off to an impressive start as their starting first-baseman, and sustained it for a few weeks.

But the 2001 Sonoma Valley High School graduate cooled off at the plate and found his playing time diminished.

So he could get his hitting stroke back, the A's sent Everidge back to Sacramento on Saturday, Aug. 29, and the former star prep player for the Dragons and collegiate All-American at Sonoma State University, picked up where he left off with his first stint with the River Cats - as one of the top hitters in the Pacific Coast League.

Back playing first-base for Sacramento, Everidge was batting .371 as of presstime, with 12 home runs and 41 RBIs. Unfortunately, the Sonoman has the best average in the league, but he will fall short of the at-bats needed to qualify for the PCL batting title. Heading into the Labor Day weekend he had played in only 49 Triple-A games with less than 200 at-bats.

While the local excitement of Everidge's call-up to the A's and an upbeat start to his Major League career might have been tempered by his return to Triple-A Sacramento, the move isn't a demotion - it's a way of life in professional baseball and a ballplayer just has to get himself ready to return to the Major Leagues.

With an opportunity to work out any hitting flaws and to get back into sync by playing everyday for Sacramento after recently sitting with Oakland, Everidge remains his usually upbeat self, and instantly started producing offensively and defensively for the the River Cats.

What Everidge did with the A's was prove he is a Major Leaguer, remaining on Oakland's 40-man roster and determined to be back in the "Bigs" next year.

The timing of Everidge's return to Sacramento also happens to coincide with the end of the Triple-A regular season, which was yesterday, and the beginning of the PCL playoffs tomorrow, Wednesday, Sept. 9.

With Everidge and fellow Sonoman, Brett Wallace, Sacramento's third-baseman, manning the corner infield positions, the River Cats will be strong in their attempt to win the PCL title.

Sonoma's Wallace, who was traded by the St. Louis Cardinals to the Oakland A's for former all-star Matt Holliday at the end of July, has continued his impressive Minor League play with the River Cats after quickly rising through Single- and Double-A ball to St. Louis' AAA Memphis.

As of presstime, Wallace - a Valley youth standout, all-state star for Justin-Siena High School in Napa and, as a two-time All-American and repeat conference player of the year, helped lead the Arizona State University Sun Devils to back-to-

back Pac 10 baseball titles - was batting .299, with 13 home runs and 45 RBIs for the River Cats.

Ciao!