

A's News Clips, Saturday, September 19, 2009

A's Brett Anderson dominates Indians

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's are watching Brett Anderson's pitch count carefully, so he's not likely to pitch deep in a game even if he's dialed in.

The rookie left-hander made the most of his mound time Friday night, cramming a career-high 10 strikeouts into six innings and leaving the Cleveland Indians befuddled in a 2-1 A's victory before 22,893 fans on fireworks night at the Oakland Coliseum.

The A's extended their winning streak to five games and have allowed just four runs in those victories.

Anderson generally has impressed in his first season, but Friday marked one of his more dominating efforts.

He scattered four hits in six innings, walked just one and didn't allow multiple base runners until the sixth.

"Anytime you have clean innings — three up, three down — you feel strong," Anderson said. "My slider was probably the best it's been all year."

The 10 strikeouts bested his previous career high of nine, achieved during his two-hit shutout of Boston in early July. That was the high point of his season.

But with the A's monitoring his innings with care, Anderson (10-10) is putting together a nice finish to 2009 as well. He's won his past three starts and combined for 20 strikeouts and three walks over that span.

He leads major league rookies with 139 strikeouts and is just three shy of setting a new single-season strikeout record for Oakland rookies.

Anderson used an effective arching curve to set up hitters early in the count, then went to his slider for his putaway pitch.

"I was kind of using (the curve) as the change-up factor," he said. "I feel more comfortable spinning stuff than throwing change-ups."

Once he left the game, Oakland got more fine work from its bullpen.

Jeff Gray struck out the side in the seventh and Craig Breslow delivered a 1-2-3 eighth.

Matt LaPorta's RBI double off Brad Ziegler with two outs in the ninth spoiled the shutout. But Ziegler stranded the tying run at second, getting Kelly Shoppach looking on a game-ending strikeout.

LaPorta's double snapped a string of 15 straight scoreless innings by the A's bullpen.

A's manager Bob Geren stacked his lineup with eight right-handed hitters against Cleveland lefty David Huff, giving rare starts to Bobby Crosby (third base) and Nomar Garciaparra (designated hitter).

With Adam Kennedy resting, Rajai Davis assumed the leadoff role, a spot that could be suited for him in 2010 should the A's stick with him in center.

Davis set the table nicely.

He walked to lead off the first, and after moving to second on Kurt Suzuki's single, executed a delayed steal of third. As Indians catcher Lou Marson prepared to throw the ball back to Huff, Davis broke for third and reached the base before Marson or Huff were aware of what happened.

Geren also was unaware of what Davis had cooking on the bases.

"I was looking down at something else, then I heard a weird running sound," Geren said, tapping his desk with his fingers. "I looked up and he was 30 feet from the bag."

The A's didn't score that inning, despite putting runners on the corners with no outs.

But Davis started a two-run rally in the third. He led off with a bloop single to right, moved to second on Suzuki's walk and scored on Garciaparra's double to right-center. Ellis brought Suzuki home with a single to left for a 2-0 Oakland lead.

A's Matt Carson finally gets called up to the major leagues

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Carson gets the call he feared he wouldn't get

Matt Carson was honest with himself.

At age 28, he knew that no matter how well he played for Triple-A Sacramento this season, his opportunity to crack the majors might have passed.

On Friday, the A's rewarded him with his first big league call-up. Carson started in right field and batted eighth against the Cleveland Indians.

"I'm not as young as some of these guys," Carson said before the game. "I thought maybe I missed my opportunity. I had fun (in Sacramento). But it's nice to be here."

After starring at BYU, Carson was drafted in the fifth round by the New York Yankees in 2002. He labored in their farm system for seven seasons before signing with the A's in November.

Carson hit .364 with Oakland during the spring, then led the River Cats with 25 homers and 77 RBI while playing a solid center field.

"I tell you, he deserved it," said A's reliever Jeff Gray, a teammate in Sacramento. "He had a great year. He can hit the ball a long way, and he throws it really hard. He's an athlete." The River Cats put Carson's arm to use. He pitched in six games when Sacramento's bullpen was tapped out, posting a 10.50 ERA over six innings.

"All I had was a fastball," said Carson, who throws and hits right-handed. "It doesn't matter how hard you throw, if they know a fastball is coming, they're gonna hit it." Carson was promoted partly because outfielder Ryan Sweeney is battling soreness in his knees, though manager Bob Geren said Sweeney's condition isn't serious.

Geren estimated the odds of right-hander Brett Tomko returning this season from an elbow injury at "probably less than 50-50." Tomko wasn't with the team Friday. His wife, Julie, gave birth to twin boys, Jack and Ty.

Left-hander Dallas Braden, out for the season with a damaged nerve in his foot, was given the Dave Stewart Community Service Award, which he shared with catcher Kurt Suzuki.

Braden is confident he'll be ready to pitch by spring training. But doctors have told him the timetable for his recovery is fuzzy.

"There's about a 90 percent chance of (a full recovery)," he said. "It could be a month, it could be six months. It could never be the same, or I could bounce back like nothing ever happened."

The A's are offering a 40 percent ticket discount for Sunday's game to recognize Andrew Bailey's push for AL Rookie of the Year.

Bailey wears No. 40.

Tickets can be purchased at oaklandathletics.com, using the coupon code "Bailey." Bailey T-shirts and cheer cards will be given to the first 10,000 fans Sunday, and Bailey will sign autographs inside Gate D.

Anderson helps pitch A's to 5th straight

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Andrew Bailey might well be the American League Rookie of the Year with the terrific season he's had as Oakland's closer, but Oakland's best pitcher just might be another rookie, left-hander Brett Anderson.

Anderson, who has drawn raves from opponents and from scouts much of the season, threw six scoreless innings Friday in the A's 2-1 victory over the Indians, and he recorded a career-high 10 strikeouts. Oakland has won five in a row and 10 of its past 12 games - and over the past five games, the A's have given up just three runs.

"It's been phenomenal," Anderson said. "The young guys are all kind of in competition to throw up zeros."

Using his slider to get many of his strikeouts and his curveball more as a changeup early in the count, Anderson allowed four hits and a walk. He threw 89 pitches. As the season winds down, the A's are trying to limit the rookie starters' workloads, and Anderson said he believes the extra rest has been beneficial.

He has won his past three starts, and is now 10-10 overall. Anderson is the third pitcher in Oakland history under the age of 22 to record 10 wins in a season, joining Vida Blue (1971) and John Henry Johnson (1978).

"Winning 10 games in the big leagues is tough," Anderson said. "It puts in perspective when you get 10."

His 139 strikeouts are the second most by an A's rookie behind Rick Langford's 141 in 1977.

When Anderson left, Jeff Gray came in and struck out all three men he faced swinging. Oakland's bullpen has not allowed a run in the past 18 innings.

Rajai Davis recorded his 40th steal in the first inning - taking third on a throw back to the pitcher. He is the ninth player in Oakland history to record 40 steals in a season.

"I didn't even see it," A's manager Bob Geren said. "I had my head down and heard something weird, like footsteps, looked up and he was 30 feet from the bag."

Davis, who is batting .405 over the past 20 games, singled to open the third, went to second on Kurt Suzuki's base hit and scored on a double by Nomar Garciaparra. Mark Ellis added an RBI single but, figuring that Garciaparra would try to score, was thrown out trying to advance to second when Garciaparra stayed at third.

The A's called up outfielder Matt Carson and the 28-year-old made his major-league debut, playing right and batting eighth. Geren said that Ryan Sweeney is coping with ongoing knee soreness, plus the team wanted plenty of right-handed hitters against Cleveland left-hander David Huff. Carson probably will play today, Geren said.

Carson's family, including his wife, Lisa, and daughter, Mackenzie, were at the Coliseum. He went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts.

"I'm just here with a big smile on my face," Carson said.

The A's decided on Carson rather than another right-handed hitting outfielder, 23-year-old Aaron Cunningham, who has had several stints with the big-league club. Cunningham batted .359 in August but .174 in six games in September.

Carson led Triple-A Sacramento with 25 homers and 77 RBIs, including .354 with 11 homers and 29 RBIs over the final 28 games.

"He's 'The Ninja,' the quietest guy ever; you never know what he's thinking," A's pitcher Dana Eveland said. "But he hits bombs and he can pitch, too. He throws 94 mph." Carson had a 10.50 ERA in six outings, all blowouts.

Sacramento's Carter may still get call-up

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's had suggested that neither of the club's top two position prospects, first baseman/outfielder **Chris Carter** or third baseman **Brett Wallace**, would be called up when Triple-A Sacramento's season is over.

Carter, however, is now a possibility for promotion in the final weeks of the season, a team source told The Chronicle on Friday.

"We haven't made a decision one way or the other," the source said. Triple-A Sacramento was swept in the Pacific Coast League championship series Friday night, losing to Memphis 6-0 at Raley Field.

Wallace definitely will not be coming up, because the A's do not need to put him on the 40-man roster to protect him this winter. They can protect someone else from being claimed in the Rule 5 draft.

Carter, however, needs to be protected - so if the team has to put him on the 40-man, anyway, why not bring him up now? The only issue would be starting Carter's major-league service clock, but if the team believes he'll spend most or all of next year at the big-league level - which is a possibility - there's no real reason not to. The team would have to wait until at least late May or early June in order to prevent an extra year of arbitration.

Carter led the minors with 179 hits and was second with 115 RBIs.

Briefly: Left-handed reliever **Jay Marshall** has been unavailable because of shoulder soreness. ... Catcher **Kurt Suzuki** and left-hander **Dallas Braden** were named co-recipients of the **Dave Stewart** community service award for their charitable efforts. ... Braden said the rash on his left foot that led to eventual season-ending nerve damage has returned. His lower leg was wrapped in plastic wrap Friday. ... Double-A Midland beat Northwest Arkansas 9-7 to take a 2-1 lead in the Texas League championship series. ... Sacramento first baseman **Sean Doolittle** is hoping to play in Puerto Rico this winter. Doolittle has recovered from knee injuries that kept him out nearly all season.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Tomkos times two: Brett Tomko's wife, Julia, delivered twins Jack Douglas (6 pounds, 15 ounces) and Ty Jerry (5 pounds, 11 ounces) Friday morning in San Diego.

Anderson's gem gives A's fifth straight win

Oakland lefty records 10 strikeouts over six shutout frames

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Less than a week after watching veteran teammate Brett Tomko reach a milestone with his best start of the season, A's rookie Brett Anderson just about matched that feat.

Tomko's numbers were bigger: 100 career wins with nine shutout innings. But Anderson's six shutout innings on the way to his 10th victory were nearly as impressive.

He also struck out a career-high 10.

"It feels great," Anderson said after a 2-1 victory over the visiting Indians in the second game of a four-game series at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. "Winning 10 games in the big leagues is tough."

A 21-year-old southpaw, Anderson scattered four hits and a walk, using a slow curveball to neutralize left-handed hitters and a paintball heater on the outside black to stymie right-handers while moving past Tim Hudson and into second place on Oakland's list of rookie strikeout leaders -- just two shy of tying Rick Langford's record 141 in 1977.

"He really has no weaknesses as a pitcher right now," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He can do anything he wants to do with the baseball."

Similarly high praise came out of the visiting manager's office.

"He's a good, young pitcher," offered Cleveland's Eric Wedge. "He has a good arm, a clean delivery. He did a real good job with his fastball, but he also did a good job with his secondary stuff. I was really impressed with him."

As impressive as was Anderson's pure stuff, veteran A's infielder Nomar Garciaparra took special note of the youngster's presence.

"What I like about him is just the way he carries himself, on the field and in the clubhouse," said Garciaparra, who drove in the first run of the game with a double in the third and later singled and stole second base. "Like all of our young guys, he has a lot of respect for the game, and he has a confidence about him that's hard to describe. He doesn't let hits affect him. He just gets the ball and say, 'OK, that's over. Let's get a double play.'"

"You don't see that in a lot of young guys. They get rattled by hits. And that our guys -- not just Brett -- for the most part don't, that says a lot about not just them but also the catcher."

That would be Kurt Suzuki, who scored what turned out to be the winning run on a third-inning single by Mark Ellis. That was shortly after Garciaparra's RBI double and that was about it for Oakland's offense.

The A's extended their winning streak to five games -- the club's second-longest of the year -- and won for the 10th time in 12 games despite a relatively quiet night at the plate.

Ranked third in the American League in runs since the All-Star break heading into the game, they leaned on Anderson and their bullpen to improve to 11-5 in September, which is tied with Boston for the best record in the league this month.

"[Anderson] threw the ball well, and their bullpen did a good job," Wedge said.

Taken out of the game with a modest pitch count of 89, Anderson said he could have gone deeper, but he's well aware that the A's, who went to a six-man rotation on Sept. 1, are minimizing the workload of their prized young pitchers.

And he's all for the idea.

"I think the extra rest has been beneficial," he said.

Aside from the scoring hits by Garciaparra and Ellis, the offensive highlight of the game was provided by -- who else? -- Rajai Davis on a play ripped right out of Williamsport, Pa.

Dancing off second base in the first inning, Davis, who went 2-for-3 with a walk and a run scored, took off for third as soon as Cleveland catcher Lou Marson, a rookie, lobbed the ball back to Tribe starter David Huff.

Davis, who is batting .478 over his past six games and .405 over his past 20, made it without a throw.

"I didn't even see it!" Geren said. "I kind of heard footsteps."

"That was awesome," Garciaparra said. "Definitely something we all did in Little League, and that's what's so great. That's the way Rajai is playing right now. He's having fun. We all are. And that's a big part of why we're winning."

Future is now for prospect Carson

Oakland (69-78) vs. Cleveland (61-86), 1:05 p.m. PT

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's promoted outfielder Matt Carson from Triple-A Sacramento on Friday to take the roster spot of right-hander Vin Mazzaro, who was placed on the 60-day disabled list with shoulder tendinitis. Manager Bob Geren didn't waste any time getting the new guy in the lineup.

It's one of Geren's philosophies that goes over particularly well with players: Rather than have a youngster sit and watch for a day or two after being called up, he wants them in the thick of things immediately whenever possible.

Less time to freak out about being in The Show.

"I love it," said Carson, who made his big league debut as Oakland's right fielder on Friday. "You're used to playing every day anyway, so it makes sense to just get on the field and keep doing what you've been doing.

"Otherwise you're sitting there going, 'Oh man, I'm in the big leagues.'" Carson went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts in Friday's 2-1 win over the Indians.

It helped Carson's cause that the Tribe sent out a left-handed starter on Friday. They're scheduled to do so again Saturday, so Carson, a right-handed hitter who ripped 25 homers for the River Cats in 118 regular-season games this year, is expected to start in the third game of the four-game series.

"It's pretty exciting," Carson, who is wearing No. 25, said during batting practice. "I didn't expect to play right away, but I'm glad I am."

A fifth-round pick of the Yankees in the 2002 First-Year Player Draft who spent seven seasons in the New York organization before signing with Oakland as a Minor League free agent last November, Carson batted .264 with 29 doubles, three triples and drove in 77 runs during the regular season with Sacramento. He was particularly hot down the stretch.

Carson, 28, batted .354 with 11 home runs and 29 RBIs over his final 28 regular-season games and was 7-for-27 with a home run and three RBIs in six playoff games.

"He's had an exceptional year," Geren said. "He's played very well defensively, too; he plays all three [outfield] positions. ... He's been very consistent. Probably the best, most consistent outfielder [at Sacramento]."

He also does a little pitching -- but he might want to hang onto that day job. In addition to appearing in 81 games for Sacramento in center field, 18 in right and seven in left, Carson posted a 10.50 ERA in six outings on the mound.

A former All-Mountain West Conference selection while starring at BYU, Carson, listed at 6-foot-2 and 200 pounds, played in 18 games during Spring Training, mostly as a late-game substitution. He went 8-for-22 (.364) with a triple, a home run, four RBIs and a .464 on-base percentage in Cactus League action.

"He had a great spring," Geren said. "The first time you saw him, you're like, 'What a good-looking baseball body.'"

Mazzaro, 22, was 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA in 17 starts before he was scratched from a scheduled start on Sept. 3. He went 2-0 with a 0.00 ERA over the first two starts of his career, 0-8 with a 7.22 ERA over his next 10 starts, and was 2-1 with a 4.26 ERA over his last five starts.

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Gio Gonzalez (5-6, 6.31 ERA)

Gonzalez gave up seven runs on eight hits in a losing effort Sunday against the Twins. Prior to that, his only other outing against Minnesota yielded an 11-run, 10-hit night, although he didn't factor into the decision. The loss Sunday for Gonzalez was his first since Aug. 26 against Seattle. He's 1-0 this season against the Indians, earning a win early July when he pitched six innings and struck out eight.




CLE: LHP Jeremy Sowers (6-9, 4.49 ERA)

Facing the Twins on Sept. 14, Sowers worked seven scoreless innings. It was another strong step forward for Sowers, who has produced quality starts in six of his past nine outings after developing a reputation as a guy who falls apart the second or third time through an opponent's lineup. He gave up just six hits with two walks and two strikeouts to the Twins, stranding a pair of runners in the first, third and seventh innings.

Dribblers ...

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney, whose legs are often packed in ice after games, sat Friday and likely will sit again Saturday, although his injuries aren't considered serious. Geren said Sweeney, a left-handed hitter, has "achy knees." ... Third baseman Adam Kennedy, a left-handed hitter, got the night off and was replaced by righty swinger Bobby Crosby, leaving the leadoff spot in the batting order to be filled by center fielder Rajai Davis -- who has been batting second. "He's batted leadoff his whole career," Geren said of Davis. "You could easily switch the order and [Kennedy and Davis] would be fine in the reverse order, too." ... Righty Brett Tomko, sidelined with a pinched nerve in his shoulder that causes problems throughout his arm, has not been with the team for three days, but he's had an awfully strong excuse. His wife, Julia, gave birth to twin boys, Jack and Ty, in San Diego on Friday morning. ... Asked what the chances are of Tomko pitching again this season, Geren said, "Probably less than 50-50." ... Sacramento trails Memphis 2-0 in the five-game Pacific Coast League Championship Series, which continues Saturday with a 7:05 p.m. start at the River Cats' Raley Field. Righty Jerome Williams, who is 1-0 with a 1.29 ERA in the playoffs, is Sacramento's scheduled starter.

Up next

- Sunday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 1-3, 7.26) vs. Indians (Fausto Carmona, 3-11, 6.58), 1:05 p.m. PT 
- Monday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 1-3, 7.26) vs. Rangers (Kevin Millwood, 10-10, 3.94), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Tuesday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-2, 4.74) vs. Rangers (Brandon McCarthy, 7-3, 4.97), 7:05 p.m. PT 

Anderson aids A's 5th win in row

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Brett Anderson felt his slider was dominant Friday night against but it was the Oakland right-hander's slow curve that did most of the damage against Cleveland.

Anderson pitched six shutout innings and had a career-high 10 strikeouts, moving him within three of the most-ever by an Athletics rookie, as Oakland stayed hot with a 2-1 win over the slumping Indians.

"Brett just keeps getting better in the second half," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Now he really has no real weakness as a pitcher. He can do whatever he wants with a baseball. Brett's been very consistent the last month or two."

Anderson (10-10) allowed only two singles and a pair of doubles and didn't allow a runner past second base while winning his third straight start. The right-hander only ran into trouble once, in the sixth when he gave up a one-out double Michael Brantley and walked Shin-Soo Choo with two outs but Anderson got Jhonny Peralta to strike out looking to end the threat.

That was his 10th strikeout, surpassing his previous career-high of nine set on July 6 at Boston.

"Getting comfortable and sticking to one side of the rubber and telling myself I'm going to at least show that I'm going to throw to both sides of the plate, that's probably been the biggest thing," Anderson said. "Just showing that I'm going to throw fastballs away and changeups, just change their eyesights a little bit. That's been the biggest factor lately."

Brantley and Kelly Shoppach had two hits apiece for Cleveland, which fell to 0-5 on its current seven-game road trip and has lost six straight and 15 of 18 overall.

"Obviously we're struggling offensively right now, so that comes into play," Indians manager Eric Wedge said. "I don't want to take anything away from Anderson. He threw the ball well and their bullpen did a good job. Offensively we struggled. We need to take advantage of whenever we do create opportunities."

Anderson recorded eight of his 10 strikeouts with his slider and now has 139 on the season, second-most ever by an A's rookie. He needs just three more to pass Rick Langford's record of 141 set in 1977.

With at least two more starts, that shouldn't be a problem for Anderson, especially if his curveball is working as well as it was against the Indians.

"I was kind of using it as a change-up factor early in the count," Anderson said. "I got some outs on it and I think it helped set up my slider and fastballs. Anytime I feel like I can flip it in there early in the count, and tonight was one of those nights."

Nomar Garciaparra added two hits and an RBI and Rajai Davis added a pair of singles and reached 40 steals for Oakland, which won its fifth straight and 10th in the last 12.

Jeff Gray and Craig Breslow pitched one scoreless inning apiece and Brad Ziegler worked the ninth to complete the six-hitter and record his seventh save in 10 chances.

Anderson's outing extended a solid stretch by Oakland's starting pitchers, who are now 8-1 with a 3.03 ERA over the last 11 games. They needed the strong start because after scoring 24 runs in the previous four games, the A's managed just two off Indians starter David Huff, both coming in the third.

Davis singled and Kurt Suzuki walked against Huff (10-8). One out later, Garciaparra doubled to right-center to drive in Davis and Mark Ellis added an RBI single to score Suzuki.

Anderson and the A's bullpen made it stand up.

A'S NOTES

The A's placed pitcher Vin Mazzaro on the 60-day disabled list Friday due to shoulder tendinitis, officially ending the right-hander's season.

Mazzaro was 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA in 17 starts this season but was scratched from his last scheduled start on Sept. 3. The move is retroactive to Sept. 8.

Outfielder Matt Carson was recalled from the River Cats to take Mazzaro's place on Oakland's 40-man roster.

A's Win Big Over Indians

By [Malaiika Bobino](#), Oakland Post, September 18, 2009

Oakland, CA - The Oakland A's returned home from their road trip and continue to win big! Looking better than ever toward the end of an arduous season, the A's beat the Cleveland Indians 5-2. This will be the A's fourth straight win, the longest streak of the season. Coming off a 6-2 road trip against playoff contending teams in the American League, the A's look poised and confident. This young ball club understands making the playoffs are not in their cards this year but seem to be very hopeful for next season while enjoying themselves at the same time.

"We're playing great baseball and we are having a good time," said Rajai Davis. He stole his 39th base tonight, which is an ongoing career high and fourth most in the American League. Davis leads the AL league in hits and stolen bases in the month of September. The performance against the Indians in the first of a four game series was a combination of good pitching and defense.

Rookie pitcher Clayton Mortensen allowed just two runs over five innings to earn his second Major League win. "It felt good on the mound," said Mortensen. "I tried to attack hitters and often fell behind, but I did keep us in the game and that's all that matters." Mortensen was traded to Oakland from St. Louis on July 24th for Matt Holliday. He won back to back starts and improved to 2-2 as the A's opened a four game series with Cleveland and a eight game home stand. The A's started off strong with their lead-off hitter Adam Kennedy who doubled twice in the 1st and 3rd innings. Kennedy led the way for the A's scoring rallies but it was Kurt Suzuki's three run homer off an 0-2 pitch from Justin Masterson that gave the A's a 5-0 lead.

"I didn't try to do too much but just looked for the right pitch," said Suzuki. "He threw me a couple of sliders that was pretty much the same speed as the sinker." "I just had to sit and wait for what I thought was the best pitch." Suzuki's three RBI gives him 78 for the season, which ties the RBI total of the Philadelphia A's Frankie Hayes in 1944.

The A's are 31-29 since All-Star break and as team batting .278 which is third best in the American League. Despite the A's standing last in their division they are playing strong. The A's are on the field having fun as a result their winning games.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

PCL Playoff: Sacramento's run at 3-peat comes to end

By Jordan Moore rivercats.com

WEST SACRAMENTO, Calif. - The Memphis Redbirds toppled the Sacramento River Cats 6-0 on Friday night to claim the Pacific Coast League championship and end the Cats' run at a third title in a row.

Memphis was on the attack early as they scored in each of the first two innings to take a quick two-run lead. Allen Craig scored Jon Jay in the first inning with a base hit to center, and Mark Shorey scored in the second when Shane Robinson hit a soft fly ball to left field.

Shown: The rallies fell short for Sacramento in its series with Memphis.

The Redbirds' defense made short work of Sacramento early on, sitting down their first four batters. The Cats started hitting in the second inning when Chris Carter and Adrian Cardenas hit back to back singles, but were left stranded after two straight ground outs.

After the first two innings, the scoring slowed down and the game sped up. This was largely due to the fact that only four batters had seen more than four pitches in the first four innings; players seemed to jump on the first good pitch they saw.

Sacramento starter Jerome Williams intentionally walked the bases loaded in the fifth, when the ever dangerous Allen Craig stepped up with two in scoring position. Williams then threw wild pitch, scoring Jay from third. David Freese then popped a sacrifice fly to center field, giving Jarrett Hoffpauir plenty of time to score Memphis' fourth run.

Williams would make way for Scott Patterson after 5.0 innings, allowing eight hits and four earned runs. He threw 50 strikes in 77 pitches, struck out three Memphis batters and walked two (both intentional). Patterson would only see one out and face three batters before stepping down.

Catcher Anthony Recker had a fielding error when trying to get Shane Robinson at first base after a small pop-up bunt in the sixth. He would get his man one out later as Robinson tried to steal second, and bailed the Cats out of a precarious sixth inning that saw two pitcher changes but no runs.

Michael Benacka would get in some trouble in the seventh inning after walking the bases loaded with one out. The Redbirds would not miss on this opportunity to close out the series as they scored two more on a Brian Barden base hit.

The River Cats, who scored 36 runs over four games in the first round against Tacoma, managed only two runs over three games against Memphis. After slugging 21 extra-base hits against Tacoma, Sacramento had only four doubles against Memphis. The River Cats finished the series 2-for-20 with runners in scoring position.

The Memphis Redbirds will go on to play in the Triple-A championship Tuesday, a one-game, winner-takes-all playoff with the Durham Bulls.

There's no drama as Cats are eliminated

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee

There was no time for the River Cats to build momentum, generate excitement or even let their fans settle in and enjoy that first \$1 hot dog Friday night at Raley Field.

The Memphis Redbirds made sure of that, jumping on Sacramento early en route to a 6-0 victory, a sweep of the Pacific Coast League Championship Series and their first league title in nine years.

An announced crowd of 12,009 watched Memphis score a run in the first and one in the second to lead 2-0. The Redbirds added two runs in the fifth and a pair in the seventh, giving left-handed starter Evan MacLane more than enough cushion.

MacLane, a Chico native, worked 8 1/3 innings, scattering nine hits, striking out eight and walking none to snuff the River Cats' bid for a third consecutive PCL title.

"Our team got hot at the right time," MacLane, a Pleasant Valley High School and Feather River College product, said after a celebration on the infield. "Once we get hot, there's no stopping us.

"This is unbelievable. This is awesome."

When MacLane needed defensive help, his teammates obliged. Exhibit A came in the fifth inning, when right fielder Mark Shorey made a diving catch of Gregorio Petit's two-out drive down the line.

Maybe the main scoreboard going on the fritz during the national anthem, which included fireworks, was simply a hint of what was coming.

The River Cats threatened in the second on consecutive singles by Chris Carter and Adrian Cardenas, but Travis Buck and Anthony Recker hit into fielder's choices to end the inning.

Carter doubled with two outs in the fourth, but Cardenas grounded out to first baseman Mark Hamilton.

It was that kind of night for the Cats, who were held to a total of two runs in the three-game series, the first time they'd been held to two runs in three consecutive games since dropping three in a row at home to Colorado Springs on June 24-26.

"They shut a good team down," River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco said. "That's a good pitching staff there. There's a reason they got to this round."

And there's a reason the Cats came close to their fifth PCL title in seven years.

"It's an amazing run," DeFrancesco said.

Memphis is scheduled to face the Durham Bulls, who swept Scranton/Wilkes-Barre to win the International League, in the Triple-A Championship Game on Tuesday in Oklahoma City.

The Redbirds finished 2009 with a season-high six consecutive wins, all in the postseason, and claimed victories in 12 of their last 14 games.

The River Cats played without center fielder Matt Carson, who was called up to the A's on Friday.

Carson hit .264 and led the team in home runs (25) and RBIs (77).

Hounds Needed Every Home Run For Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The RockHounds led the 2009 Texas League in batting with a .288 average and Northwest Arkansas (at .269) was tied for second. So it should come as no surprise that the two clubs have now combined to score 45 runs in the first three games of the Texas League Championship Series.

The RockHounds & Naturals combined for 16 runs Friday night, driving six baseballs "out of the yard" in the process. The last two of those home runs ... the difference in the game ... came from a very surprising source.

RockHounds shortstop Josh Horton hit five home runs in 510 at bats in the regular season ... one home run in every 100 at bats. Horton hit solo home runs in back-to-back at bats Friday, driving in the last two RockHounds runs in a 9-7 win in the pivotal third game of the championship series.

Horton, Corey Brown & Shane Peterson homered, and Kyle Middleton was outstanding ... again ... as the RockHounds took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-5 Texas League Championship Series.

The RockHounds need one win to capture the second outright Texas League championship in franchise history. The Naturals need a win Saturday afternoon win to force a fifth, and deciding, game.

In the first inning, a double from Josh Donaldson and an RBI single from Alex Valdez combined with a throwing error by NW Arkansas first baseman Corey Smith to give the 'Hounds a 3-0 lead.

In the third, the 'Hounds looked like the (fictional) Cleveland Indians in the movie "Major League."

With Matt Spencer and Valdez on base, Peterson belted a double to deep center field, and manager Darren Bush waved both runners home. In the Hollywood version, both runners (including Willie Mays Hays!) scored. The 'Hounds didn't fare quite as well, but did push a run across. "Spence" eluded catcher Cody Clark's tag ... barely ... while Valdez was tagged out. The RockHounds narrowly escaped a rare "home plate double play," instead taking a 4-0 lead.

Three pitches later, Brown ripped a line drive over the wall in right-center for a 2-run home run and a 6-0 lead.

Peterson made it a 7-0 game with a monster home run ... his second in as many games ... high over the wall in right in the fifth inning. "Pete" finished 3-for-4 with a home run, double, single and a walk, driving in a pair of runs, and is now 8-for-11 in the championship series.

Horton's solo shots in the sixth and eighth appeared to be "icing n the cake," but would instead prove to be the winning margin. The Naturals scored five runs on two swings, with David Lough hitting a 2-run home run in the sixth and Smith atoning for his first-inning error with a 3-run line shot to right in the eighth, bringing NW Arkansas to within 9-6 in the eighth inning.

After struggling in his previous two post-season appearances, Jared Lansford entered the game in the eighth and induced a rally-ending double play. He allowed an unearned run in the ninth, bringing the tying run to the plate with a runner in scoring position and no outs. "Lanny" then retired the next three batters, the last two on strikeouts, getting Lough (the league's leading hitter in the playoffs) to end the game.

Middleton, making his final appearance of the season for the RockHounds, took out his season with 6.0, strong innings, earning his second post-season win. Signed by Oakland in July out of independent ball in his home town (Pensacola, Florida), "K-Mid" went 5-2 with a 2.69 earned run average in nine regular season starts ... and finishes the post season 2-0, with a 2.19 ERA. What the 29-year-old did to solidify the starting rotation ... and his remarkable consistency ... will go into the "books" as one of the terrific stories of the 2009 season. His importance to the club's playoff (and possible championship) drive is hard to overstate.

With the University of Arkansas Razorbacks hosting the Georgia Bulldogs "just up the road" in Fayetteville Saturday night, the RockHounds and Naturals will play Game 4 of the Texas League title series Saturday afternoon at 1:05. If a fifth (and deciding) game is necessary, the clubs will meet Sunday evening at 6:05.

On the mound Saturday afternoon, Tyson Ross faces lefty Anthony Teaford. Ross was the starter ... and winner ... in the RockHounds' Game 4 win over San Antonio when the 'Hounds captured the South Division pennant. The right-hander, who topped out at 98 miles-per-hour on the radar gun in the win over the Missions, was Oakland's second round draft choice out of the University of California in 2008.

RockHounds Radio

The 'Hounds' new radio home is Jack-FM (102.1-FM). RockHounds broadcasts are also available online. Look for the link to Jack-FM on the RockHounds' web site ... then click "Jack On The Box." RockHounds Radio for the final weekend of the 2009 season:

TL Championship: RockHounds' bats make noise in Game 3 win

By Paul Nielsen, Northwest Arkansas Morning News

The Midland RockHounds hit four home runs in building a 9-3 lead but the RockHounds had to fend off a late Naturals rally to win Game 3 of the Texas League Championship Series, 9-7, before 3,965 in Arvest Ballpark.

Northwest Arkansas had a runner at third and twice had the tying run at the plate when the game ended.

Midland now leads the best-of-five series 2-1 and the RockHounds can wrap up the Texas League title today with a win. The game is scheduled to start at 1 p.m.

"You know they (Northwest Arkansas) are going to battle, and it's a good thing we scored when we had the chances," said Midland manager Darren Bush.

Kyle Middleton was Midland's most effective starting pitcher the last month of the season and nothing has changed in the postseason as the right-hander picked up his second win of the postseason

Middleton, 29, was 5-2 with a 2.69 ERA after being acquired by Oakland in late July and was the Game 3 winner against San Antonio in the South Division Series. Middleton scattered six hits and struck out six in 6 1/3 innings of work. Middleton left with the RockHounds leading 8-3.

"(Middleton) got us to seventh, you can't ask for much more than that," Bush said, "outstanding job."

Middleton's job was made easier as the RockHounds led 3-0 before the right-hander ever threw a pitch. Midland finished with 12 hits, including two solo home runs by Josh Horton, a two-run home run by Corey Brown and another solo shot by Shane Peterson.

Brown gave Midland a 6-0 lead in the top of the third with a two-run home run and Peterson upped the lead to 7-0 with a solo home run in the fifth. Horton started the sixth with a home run for an 8-1 lead and then led off the eighth with his second homer of the game that pushed the lead to 9-3.

Midland has hit seven home runs the past two games against the Naturals and the RockHounds have 13 in seven postseason games.

"We are getting a pitch and not missing," Bush said. "It just happens to be going in the air."

Naturals first baseman Corey Smith hit a three-run home run in the eighth inning that cut the Midland lead to 9-6. David Lough added a two-run home run in the sixth as the Naturals finished with 10 hits. Northwest Arkansas scored a run in the ninth on a double by Jarrod Dyson and a Midland error. But Jared Lansford struckout Ed Lucas and Lough to end the game and get the save.

"We battled back and gave ourselves a chance," said Naturals manager Brian Poldberg. "We were down 6-0 and we could have died but they didn't."

Blake Johnson took the loss for Northwest Arkansas after lasting just 2 1/3 innings. Johnson, who lasted just 1 2/3 innings in a no decision against Springfield in the North Division Series, gave up five hits, including two doubles and Brown's home run. Naturals reliever Federico Castaneda gave up three home runs in four innings of work.