

A's News Clips, Sunday, September, 20, 2009

Congratulations all around after A's win sixth straight

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Mark Ellis broke the home run mark for A's second basemen Saturday, which would have made him the man of honor after most victories.

But Oakland's 8-4 win over the visiting Cleveland Indians also included the first major league hits for right fielder Matt Carson, not to mention the first major league victory for reliever Brad Kilby.

Congratulations were in order all over the clubhouse, and it fit with the jubilant vibe surrounding the A's these days.

They've won six in a row, 11 of their past 13 and can complete their second straight series sweep with a win this afternoon.

The A's 11-5 mark in September entering Saturday was tied with Boston for best in the majors.

Keeping up a theme during their win streak, Saturday's victory was an ensemble effort:

Ellis' solo homer got the A's rolling, the first of six consecutive hits strung together against Cleveland lefty Jeremy Sowers (6-10) in a four-run first.

Ellis' blast was his 77th homer as a second baseman, setting a franchise record for homers at the position. He entered the day tied with Dick Green, who hails from the same hometown as Ellis — Rapid City, S.D.

They've been described as similar-type players, a comparison Ellis has no problem with.

"It means I've been here a while now," Ellis said of the record. "It's neat whenever we're in the same sentence together."

Carson, the 28-year-old who made his big league debut Friday, went hitless in his first five at-bats and said he felt overwhelmed. But he lined a single the opposite way in the fifth inning and added a sharp single up the middle in the seventh.

"I didn't even feel like I could swing the bat," Carson said. "Then all of sudden I got that hit, and my next at-bat was easy."

He spelled Ryan Sweeney in right field for the second straight game, but manager Bob Geren said Sweeney's knees are better and that he'd return to the lineup today.

Kurt Suzuki belted his 14th homer of the year, a solo shot to center in the fourth that extended the A's lead to 7-3. He went 3-for-4 in the No. 3 spot and scored three runs.

Suzuki has a team-high 79 RBI. He began the day with 41 RBI since the All-Star break, tied for seventh in the American League.

Kilby was part of a five-man relief effort that held Cleveland to one run after A's starter Gio Gonzalez lost the strike zone and left after 32/3 innings.

Kilby (1-0) relieved Gonzalez with two outs and two runners on in the fourth and got Jamey Carroll to pop out, preserving a 6-3 A's lead. Kilby struck out the side in the fifth and hasn't allowed a run through his first six career outings.

"Our bullpen has just been incredible," Ellis said. "They've been our most consistent asset this year, without a doubt."

The only downer for the A's was that Gonzalez couldn't handle the prosperity of a 6-0 lead. He issued five walks, though he wasn't helped when third baseman Bobby Crosby let a bases-loaded grounder get through his legs in the fourth, allowing two runs to score.

Buck get big league call, but Carter will have to wait

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Buck gets big league call, but Carter forced to wait

Outfielder Travis Buck's bags were packed and he was preparing to head home to Phoenix after Triple-A Sacramento was ousted from the playoffs Friday night.

Much to his pleasure, he was rerouted. The A's called up Buck, along with relievers Henry Rodriguez and John Meloan, before Saturday's 8-4 win over Cleveland.

According to manager Bob Geren, it's "highly doubtful" the A's will add anyone else to the big league roster, including highly touted first baseman Chris Carter, who was mentioned as a call-up candidate in a published report Saturday.

"Chris had a great season," Geren said. "He'll be forcing his way into the picture, just not at this moment."

Buck, 25, was in the A's Opening Day lineup in 2007 and 2008, but it's tough to say where he fits into the current outfield picture after he spent most of this season with Sacramento.

Geren said Buck's playing time with the A's likely will be "sporadic," particularly with outfielders Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney playing so well.

Buck is just happy his 2009 season got extended, and he's been relatively healthy after two injury-marred seasons. He's still optimistic he fits in the A's plans.

"Guys can be bitter down in Triple-A and have the opportunity slip through their grasp and not get a chance to come back," Buck said. "... I just need to prove to them I can be out there every single day and be healthy, and good things are definitely going to come."

Rodriguez, 22, impressed the A's in 2008 spring training with a fastball that touched 100 mph, but harnessing that velocity remains a work in progress. The Venezuelan has 421 strikeouts in 3301/3 innings in the minors, an average of 11.5 per nine innings. But he's issued 245 walks, or 6.7 per nine innings.

This is his first major league call-up.

"When you throw that hard, you don't have to be so fine in the strike zone, but you do have to be in the strike zone," Geren said.

Meloan, 25, was claimed off waivers from Pittsburgh on Sept. 2.

Dana Eveland starts against Cleveland today, filling in for the injured Brett Tomko. Eveland, recalled from the minors Sept. 1, began the season in Oakland's rotation. His last big league start was July 7.

Double-A Midland beat Northwest Arkansas 4-2 in 12 innings to win the Texas League championship. Cal product Tyson Ross struck out 11 in six shutout innings.

Lurie: Many major leaguers who struggled in 2009 may never bounce back

By Marty Lurie, Special to Oakland Tribune

September baseball represents many things on the diamond. The teams battle for the playoffs. MVPs are crowned. Cy Young award winners cement their credentials. Young players are called up to the big leagues to show what they can do.

It's also a time for major league teams to evaluate the future of veteran players who have had subpar seasons.

Is a bad season an aberration for a player? Is a poor year a sign that a career is on downside?

Let's take a look at 25 players who have stumbled during the 2009 season and examine what their prospects are for a bounce-back season in 2010.

Vladimir Guerrero, Angels: Guerrero suffered injuries that curtailed his playing time early in the year. Since coming back the Angels DH has been less than spectacular, hitting .297 with 15 home runs. Guerrero is not the threat of year's past, but if healthy he can still hit with power. Guerrero can help a contender next season.

Jimmy Rollins, Phillies: The Phils shortstop, hitting .247, never got untracked at the plate this year. The power is still there as Rollins hit 19 home runs. Rollins is an excellent player with lots of protection in the potent Philadelphia lineup. Expect a bounce-back season in 2010.

J.J. Hardy, Brewers: Hardy lost his job midseason to highly-touted rookie Alcides Escobar. Hardy's .226 batting average and lack of power (11 home runs) is alarming. Hardy will play elsewhere in 2010. A bounce-back season seems unlikely.

Garrett Atkins, Rockies: This third baseman is only two years removed from a 100 RBI season. With the emergence of Ian Stewart, Atkins playing time was reduced significantly. Even though he is hitting .222 with 9 home runs and 45 RBI, Atkins can help a new team next season. The 29-year-old Atkins would be a good fit for the A's, Twins, or Giants.

Jermaine Dye, White Sox: Dye's power stats are there (25 home runs), but most of his production took place during the first half of the season. Word is Dye can't get around on the fastball. Seems like the beginning of the end for this player who's had a good major league career.

Magglio Ordonez, Tigers: Detroit is on the hook for Ordonez's \$18 million dollar salary for 2010 as the outfielder's option vested this week. The power is gone (7 home runs and 40 RBI) and so are Ordonez's days as a force in the lineup. Ordonez is a very expensive extra outfielder.

David Ortiz, Red Sox: Big Papi got off to a horrible start at the plate for Boston this year. Ortiz's power returned (24 home runs), but the batting average settled around .230 for most of the year. Can't see any more productive seasons in Big Papi's future. The question is will Boston bring him back in 2010? If Ortiz doesn't play in Boston next year, it's hard to imagine another team picking him up.

Alex Rios, White Sox: Toronto essentially gave Rios to the White Sox for nothing. Chicago picked up the remainder of a very expensive contract. Rios has been just as bad, if not worse, in Chicago than he was in Toronto. Rios has problems with his swing. Would not be surprised if Rios' days as a productive hitter are behind him.

Yuniesky Betancourt, Royals: Betancourt showed promise as a young player with the Mariners. This shortstop is a wild swinger who rarely sees a pitch he doesn't like. The Royals won't have any more success than Seattle did in trying to hone Betancourt's game in the middle of the diamond.

Gil Meche, Royals: Meche signed a big contract with Kansas City as a free agent in 2007. The right-hander, when healthy, is an innings eater type pitcher. If the Royals will assume part of his remaining contract, Meche could be traded. I think he can fill a void on a team looking for a veteran pitcher, much like Carl Pavano did this year for Cleveland and Minnesota.

Gary Matthews, Angels: This outfielder has never lived up to his big contract in Los Angeles. He complains about not playing, yet doesn't produce (.238, 3 home runs) when he gets a chance. Matthews is not a helpful offensive player, although his defense is well above average. If the Angels could unload Matthews, they would without hesitation.

Jack Cust, Athletics: The likeable Cust hits home runs (22), walks (88) and strikes out (167) virtually at the same pace each year. At some point, the A's will turn the DH role over to one of their young, minor league power hitters. Cust makes too much money for the A's. If he asks for a raise in 2010, he likely will be non-tendered. Cust can help a club if used low (seventh) in the batting order.

Adrian Beltre, Mariners: Injuries have held Beltre back in 2009. The third baseman never seemed comfortable hitting in Seattle's spacious park after coming over from the Dodgers in 2005. As is the case with many American League players, Beltre -- only 30 years-old -- will be much more effective if he goes over to the NL in 2010.

B.J. Upton, Rays: The star of the 2008 playoffs had an awful season in 2009 (.231, 10 home runs and 43 RBI). This 25-year-old center fielder still has a tremendous upside and will be worth the gamble if Tampa decides Upton doesn't fit with their club. Injuries, as well as some attitude issues, held him back in 2010. A five-tool player doesn't come along too many times; I'd make the Rays a serious offer for Upton this winter.

Pat Burrell, Rays: Burrell was brought to Tampa from Philadelphia to fill the club's need against left-handed pitching. Burrell's days as an effective power hitter appear to be finished (.228 average, 14 home runs).

Vernon Wells, Blue Jays: Toronto couldn't find a taker for Wells in July because of his enormous salary. Wells is no longer a productive middle of the order hitter (.265, 14 home runs). A bounce-back season is unlikely.

Eric Byrnes, Diamondbacks: Byrnes has never been accused of not hustling on the field. Unfortunately, the outfielder has suffered leg and hand injuries the past two seasons. Byrnes projects as a fourth outfielder who can entertain the fans with his aggressive play. It's unlikely that Byrnes will ever recapture the magic he showed in 2006-07.

Chipper Jones, Braves: Chipper said if this season (.268, 16 home runs, 64 RBI) is an indication of what he is capable of achieving as a big league player, then he would retire in 2010. Jones has an upside, if healthy. Even though he has had an awful second half in 2009, he is worth the gamble in 2010.

Garret Anderson, Braves: Anderson is a very good hitter (.275, 12 home runs, 54 RBI) who lost his true power stroke while in Anaheim. Anderson's day as an every day player appear to be over.

Alfonso Soriano, Cubs: Chicago signed Soriano in 2007 with the hope that the player could be a 40-or-more home run slugger in Wrigley Field. Soriano hasn't been able to stay on the field and now, as a 33-year-old with bad knees, his future value is in doubt. If the Cubs could find a taker they would move Soriano in a flash. Soriano still has some productive at-bats ahead, but not like the old days.

Milton Bradley, Cubs: Not sure if there is a team that can cope with Bradley's negative ways. Bradley can hit from the right side, but has fallen off noticeably as a left-handed hitter. It will be interesting to see where he plays next season. Bradley is young enough (31) to help a club, but not as an everyday outfielder.

Rick Ankiel, Cardinals: Ankiel, a pitcher converted to an outfielder, has one of the most respected throwing arms in the game. Ankiel appears not to be in the Cards plans for 2010 (.233, 11 home runs, 88 strike outs). He has a chance to help another club in 2010 and is a candidate to recapture his power (25 home runs in 2008), under the right circumstances.

Jason Giambi, Rockies: Giambi's days as a full-time DH are over. The lefty can be a very productive hitter off the bench, a la Matt Stairs for the Phillies. When Giambi hits late in the game, the pressure is on the pitcher. Giambi will not swing unless he sees a strike, leading to many excellent RBI opportunities as he bats most often with runners on base. If Giambi will take a pay cut, there is a place for him in the game. If he chooses to retire, he will be remembered for his warm nature, among other things.

Russell Martin, Dodgers: Where did this 26-year-old's power go? In 2007, Martin hit 19 home runs. In 2008, he had 13 homers and he's followed that up with six home runs this year. The Dodgers are still waiting for the power to return. Is it the toll of catching full-time that hurt Martin? Did the pitchers spot a weakness? Doesn't seem likely that he will ever hit with the sock seen early in his career,

Chris Young, Diamondbacks: Strikeouts have plagued this outfielder since his first full major league season in 2007 (435 K's in 459 games). Yet, power and speed have been a huge part of his game. His home run totals have dropped from 32 to 13 to 6 over the past three years. Like B.J. Upton, the tools are there. If Arizona decides he is expendable, a team with patience that is looking for a five-tool player should jump at the chance to acquire him.

There are many variables to consider in determining a player's future worth? Is he through because of his age? Drug testing? Can't hit the fastball?

This winter, general managers throughout the game will weigh the variables and decide who deserves a shot with their club in 2010. This will be a tough winter of negotiations for players coming off sub-par years as teams look to go younger when filling their rosters.

Stay tuned.

Big hits, big fun in 6th win in row

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's got a feel-good vibe going as the season winds down, and Saturday brought another win and several personal highlights.

Mark Ellis established a home run mark for A's second basemen when he went deep in the first, and the A's went on to bat around in the inning. Kurt Suzuki also homered in the fourth inning to help beat Cleveland 8-4, Oakland's sixth win in a row and 11th in 13 games.

"It's fun," Ellis said, "a lot more fun than what we'd been through the rest of the season."

Left-hander Brad Kilby, called up Sept. 1, earned his first big-league win, and Matt Carson, called up Friday, recorded his first major-league hit, a single to right in the fifth inning off Tomo Ohka, and he added another hit in the seventh. Every member of the A's lineup had at least one hit.

"It still hasn't sunk in yet," said Kilby, whose parents, Dave and Kim, were in the stands. "I'm just happy to get the opportunity to help the team win."

Kilby struck out the side in the fifth and has not allowed a run in any of his six outings, covering 81/3 innings. "He gets everyone out," Ellis said. "He's not trying to fool anyone. I love his aggressiveness. He's not scared and he goes right at guys."

Carson had been hitless in his first five big-league at-bats, striking out five times, and he said, "It didn't feel like I could swing the bat, I was just up there."

In the fifth, though, Carson was trying to move the runner over. That focus helped.

"That's probably why I got the hit," he said. "I had that game plan, that mind-set, and when you stick with that, good things happen."

Asked if he had the ball, Carson looked around and said, "I hope they have it somewhere. I'd like to hold onto that." (The ball was thrown back into the dugout, so no worries .)

Ellis has hit 77 homers as a second baseman, topping Dick Green's mark of 76 with the franchise. Ellis enjoys being linked with Green, the great second baseman of the 1970s championship teams, because they are both from Rapid City, S.D.

"It's neat," Ellis said. "It means I've been here for a while now."

Gio Gonzalez started for Oakland and looked good for three innings, but he gave up a double and three walks in the third, and the Indians scored three runs.

Before the game, the A's called up outfielder Travis Buck and right-handed relievers Henry Rodriguez and Jon Meloan from Triple-A Sacramento. Buck has spent most of this year and much of last year in the minors and said he was surprised to be promoted. In fact, he was packed and ready to head home. Manager Bob Geren said Buck's playing time will be "sporadic." Though the team had discussed bringing up slugging first baseman Chris Carter, Geren said it is unlikely any more players will join the team. With a possible decision to make next spring between Carter and Daric Barton, the A's decided to leave Barton at first the rest of the way.

"Chris has had a great season and he'll be forcing his way into the picture sometime, just not at this point," Geren said.

Longtime employee dies: Cheryl Polakowski, who had worked at the minor-league complex in Phoenix for 20 years, died of pancreatic cancer Saturday at the age of 47. She is survived by her husband, Ted, who is the team's director of minor-league operations, and four children.

Briefly: Ryan Sweeney's sore knees are improved and Geren said Sweeney will start today. ... Starter Brett Tomko was scheduled to see a neurologist about the irritated nerve in his right arm. ... Double-A Midland won the Texas League title with former Cal starter Tyson Ross working six scoreless innings. He gave up three hits and struck out 11.

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

Last shot? Dana Eveland's stock has plummeted, so he's looking forward to today's start. "Obviously, I want them to remember I can do it, open some eyes back up," he said. "Earlier this year, I did the opposite."

Surging A's wallop Tribe, take series

Suzuki falls triple short of cycle in Oakland attack

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- There was one out in the bottom of the first inning Saturday when A's second baseman Mark Ellis crushed a pitch from Cleveland Indians starter Jeremy Sowers into the left-field seats.

By the time the inning ended, the A's had scored four runs and had batted around, sending 10 men to the plate.

And the beat goes on for the suddenly unbeatable A's.

They hammered the Indians, 8-4, at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, winning their sixth straight game. The A's have won eight of their past nine games and 11 of their past 13. They're one win shy of tying their longest winning streak of the season, which came from June 2-8.

During their six-game streak, the A's have outscored their opponents, 34-8.

The A's pounded out 16 hits on Saturday. Kurt Suzuki had three of those. He doubled in the first, singled in the second and homered in the fifth, coming up a triple shy of the cycle. He also walked in the sixth, reaching base four consecutive times.

Nomar Garciaparra, Bobby Crosby, Daric Barton and Matt Carson all had two hits -- Carson's were his first two in the big leagues.

"That's huge," Suzuki said of the first-inning outburst. "You jump on the board early and try to get the momentum on your side and keep it going.

"We're not putting too much pressure on ourselves. We're just going out and having fun."

The A's had seven hits in the first inning -- six of those were in a row -- but none bigger than Ellis' home run.

Ellis put the A's ahead, 1-0, and put himself in the team's record book. It was Ellis' 77th career home run as a second baseman, breaking Dick Green's franchise record. Green played for the A's from 1963-74 and is from Ellis' hometown of Rapid City, S.D.

"That's cool. That's a very cool feeling. It means I've been here for a while. ... It's neat whenever we're in the same sentence together," Ellis said.

The A's were just getting started against Sowers when Ellis homered. Suzuki ripped a double to right-center, Garciaparra singled him to third then Scott Hairston singled to right, scoring Suzuki.

Crosby grounded a single to left, bringing Garciaparra home and putting the A's ahead, 3-0. Barton singled to right, loading the bases. With two outs, Cliff Pennington made it 4-0, grounding a run-scoring single to left that was too hot to handle for third baseman Jhonny Peralta.

"Ellis, when he started it with that homer, he kind of got everyone pumped up," Suzuki said. "His hit was huge."

The A's knocked Sowers out of the game in the second inning. After Ellis led off with a walk, Suzuki and Garciaparra hit back-to-back singles to load the bases. Exit Sowers, enter Tomo Ohka.

Ohka wild-pitched Ellis home. Suzuki scored on Crosby's groundout. That made it a 6-0 game for the A's.

For Sowers, it was the shortest start of his career. He lasted one-plus innings, allowing nine hits and six runs, all earned.

"They just kept getting guys on base and creating bigger gaps in the field with guys on base so hitters can place balls better," Sowers said. "Unfortunately, what could go wrong, went wrong. It can get you frustrated."

Gonzalez was cruising along until the fourth inning. After Cleveland's Shin-Soo Choo led off with a double, Gonzalez walked Peralta. Travis Hafner lined out to shortstop, but Matt LaPorta walked, loading the bases.

Gonzalez should have escaped the inning unscathed, but Crosby botched Kelly Shoppach's hard ground ball to third. Two runs scored. Trevor Crowe made it 6-3 when he grounded out, scoring LaPorta. When Gonzalez walked Michael Brantley, his day ended.

"Maybe I was trying to overthrow it, trying to be too perfect," Gonzalez said."

A's manager Bob Geren said Gonzalez "got a little excited" and lost his composure and command.

"Tough game, tough business," Geren said. "You have to be able to control your emotions. For the most part he's done a good job. It's easier for some people than others."

Reliever Brad Kilby got Jamey Carroll to ground out, ending the inning. Then he struck out the side in the fifth. He wound up getting the first win of his career.

"It still hasn't sunk in yet," Kilby said after the game. "It's just an unbelievable feeling. I'm just trying to do everything I can to help the team win and keep us on this roll."

Carson had his own Major League first, singling in the fifth inning. Then he added a single in the seventh.

"Every at-bat leading up to that, I didn't even feel I could swing the bat," Carson said. "After that, it was easy."

For most of the A's hitters, it looked easy from the first inning on.

A's find aggression on the basepaths

Oakland (70-78) vs. Cleveland (61-87), 1:05 p.m. PT

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Not that long ago, the A's were a team that played it safe on the bases, waiting for the three-run homer.

That was then. Now the A's are stealing bases and taking the extra base. They've gone from being the Swingin' A's to the Runnin' A's.

"If we were going to wait for the three-run homer, we'd be waiting a long time," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "We aren't hitting a lot of home runs, so we have the guys who can steal bases and run."

"Rajai [Davis] is the catalyst for our team. He's making things happen on the basepaths. We've just got to play with what we have, and so far that's worked out pretty well."

Since the All-Star break, the A's have stolen 71 bases, the most in the Major Leagues. That's the most post-break steals they've had since swiping 71 in 1991.

The seeds for this transformation were actually planted before the season began, said bench coach Tye Waller, who serves as the A's baserunning coach.

"We started out in Spring Training trying to create an image of good baserunning, not just the basestealing but overall going from first to third, scoring from third. What we tried to do as an organization was present an opportunity for everybody to excel."

"We started out kind of slow at the beginning of the year. When you're behind in games you can't run as much."

The A's are finishing the season with an aggressive flurry on the basepaths. Of course it helps having Davis in the lineup as the regular center fielder. He swiped his career-high 40th base on Friday night, taking third. He's the first Athletic to steal 40 bases in a season since Rickey Henderson stole 66 in 1998.

"I think it's just a managerial statement, and it's everyone coming on board and realizing that running helps and it puts more pressure on a defense for them to make more plays," Davis said. "We've been utilizing that really well."

"A lot of the guys at this level can run. Anybody can be a potential threat at any time. Given the right situation, they can help the team and get in scoring position for the next guy."

Ten other current A's have stolen two or more bases this season for Oakland. Adam Kennedy has 19 steals, Ellis nine, Cliff Pennington and Kurt Suzuki seven, Ryan Sweeney six, Jack Cust four, Scott Hairston three, and Bobby Crosby, Nomar Garciaparra and Eric Patterson have two.

"It's becoming a team effort," Waller said. "And now there's talk in the dugout, 'What do you see from this [pitcher]? How quick is he to the plate?' It's become a good atmosphere for guy to keep it on the forefront of their minds.

"And the biggest thing, I think, is it puts pressure on the defense, and it's something they have to contend with. So it adds another dimension to our club. ... Don't get me wrong, I definitely like homers, but if you can just give that pitcher one more thing to think about and maybe in his efforts to rush a pitch home he leaves a ball out over the plate or he falls behind trying to rush and now the hitter's ahead in the count."

If the three-run homer doesn't happen, the A's still have a way to score runs.

"We're just a better baserunning team," Ellis said. "We've got to score runs any way we can. We don't have a really powerful team so we need to do whatever we can."

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Dana Eveland (1-3, 7.26 ERA)

Eveland has pitched in the bullpen since Sept. 1 when he was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento for his third stint with the A's this season. He's pitched three innings of relief, allowing five hits and one earned run. Eveland made the A's Opening Day roster as a starter but was sent down May 5 after going 1-2 with a 7.40 ERA. He was recalled July 6 to start against Boston but lasted just 2 2/3 innings, giving up four earned runs, and was sent down the next day. Eveland made his only career start against Cleveland on April 5 last season and got the win, going seven innings. He struck out seven and allowed one earned run.




CLE: RHP Fausto Carmona (3-11, 6.58 ERA)

Carmona got through the first inning against the Twins on Sept. 15, so that was progress over his two-thirds of an inning clunker against the Rangers in his previous start. But Carmona nevertheless turned in an outing that served as another bit of evidence that his rough 2008 and '09 seasons are more rule than exception. Carmona gave up five runs on nine hits over 5 1/3 innings against Minnesota. Carmona has allowed 19 runs over his past four starts.

Tidbits

Outfielder Travis Buck had his bags packed and was ready to head home to Arizona after the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats' season ended with a third straight loss Friday night to Memphis in the Pacific Coast League Championship Series. Then Buck got the good news. He was headed back to the big leagues. "When I found out I was headed back up I was excited and anxious to see all my boys I haven't seen in months," Buck said. ... The A's also recalled two relief pitchers from Sacramento, John Meloan and Henry Rodriguez, he of the triple-digits fastball. This is Rodriguez's first stint in the big leagues. In 43 2/3 innings at Sacramento, he struck out 71 batters, but he had a 5.77 ERA. "You don't see that fastball very often," manager Bob Geren said of Rodriguez. "In all the years you travel around the game, it's very rare when a guy can hit triple digits." The A's claimed Meloan off waivers from Pittsburgh on Sept. 2. The A's are his fourth organization this season. ... Right-hander Brett Tomko, who has a nerve problem in his pitching arm, will see a nerve specialist. ... Outfielder Ryan Sweeney, who's battling sore knees, was out of the lineup but will start Sunday's game. ... Power-hitting first baseman Chris Carter was not among the callups from Sacramento. "Chris had a great season, obviously MVP," Geren said. "He's going to be forcing his way onto the picture next year. Not just right at the moment." ... Rookie Matt Carson had his first Major League hit, a fifth-inning single. He singled again in the seventh. ... Davis extended his hitting streak to seven games with a double in the seventh inning on Saturday.

Up next

- Monday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-2, 4.74) vs. Rangers (Kevin Millwood, 10-10, 3.94), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Tuesday: Athletics (Clay Mortensen, 2-2, 6.12) vs. Rangers (Brandon McCarthy, 7-3, 4.97), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Wednesday: Athletics (TBD) vs. Rangers (TBD), 7:05 p.m. PT 

RockHounds rule in Texas League

Padron secures championship with 12th-inning homer

By Daren Smith / MLB.com

Raul Padron's only hit of the Texas League playoffs was the biggest of the postseason.

Inserted as a defensive replacement, Padron slugged a two-run homer in the 12th inning Saturday as the Midland RockHounds won their second Texas League championship in five years with a 4-2 triumph over the Northwest Arkansas Naturals.

Padron, who made stops at Triple-A Sacramento and Class A Advanced Stockton before joining the RockHounds in June, came on to play first base in the bottom of the ninth. He grounded into a forceout in the 10th and was 0-for-4 in the playoffs before striding to the plate in the 12th with two outs and a runner at first.

"In my first at-bat, he threw me a hanging curve and I watched it, and I knew he wasn't going to let me see it again," Padron said of Naturals reliever Ben Swaggerty. "It was 2-1, so I could tell he was going to throw me a fastball; I was just looking for my fastball. All that was going through my head was, 'If he throws me a fastball, don't miss. Don't miss.'"

He didn't, sending the 2-1 offering over the right-field fence to snap a 2-2 tie.

"I felt great, I feel great," Padron said. "It's an unbelievable feeling."

"It was a pleasant surprise, but Padron can definitely hit," RockHounds manager Darren Bush added. "He can really hit."

Jared Lansford, Midland's eighth pitcher, worked around a one-out single in the bottom of the 12th to earn his second postseason save. He preserved the win for Jared Fernandez (2-0), who yielded a hit and a walk in two scoreless frames.

Padron's heroics would not have been possible if not for Corey Brown, who forced extra innings with a two-run blast in the ninth. Limited by a knee injury to 66 games during the season, Brown went deep for the second straight contest.

"I've had tendinitis in my knee all year, so it felt good to get out there and battle it out, to fight through and hit the tying home run in the ninth in the decisive game," he said.

Midland, which won the second-half South Division title, reeled off three straight wins in the Finals after dropping the series opener. The turning point came in Game 2, when the RockHounds erased an early five-run deficit and got homers from Shane Peterson, Archie Gilbert and Jemile Weeks in a five-run sixth inning.

"Our guys have done a great job in there. They've been very patient," Bush said. "They waited it out and they waited it out and when they got their pitches, they made sure to hit them."

"This was a great season. These guys have worked hard all season long. That was always their goal. They set out to prove in the beginning that they were the best team in the league, and they did. I'm very, very proud of these guys."

Midland starter Tyson Ross was dominant for six scoreless innings, striking out 11 while allowing three hits and a walk. Everett Teaford was nearly as good for Northwest Arkansas, limiting the RockHounds to five hits over six shutout frames.

The Naturals finally broke through in the seventh against Jon Hunton, the first of Midland's seven relievers. David Lough hit a leadoff single, Corey Smith doubled and Major League veteran Vance Wilson lifted a sacrifice fly to break the scoreless tie. Cody Clark followed with an RBI single for a 2-0 lead.

RockHounds win Texas League title

By Paul Nielsen, Northwest Arkansas Morning News

Corey Brown sent Game 4 of the Texas League Championship Series to extra innings with a two-run home run in the top of the ninth and Raul Padron delivered the Texas League title with a two-out, two-run home run in the 12th inning as the RockHounds defeated Northwest Arkansas 4-2 in 12 innings before 2,680 in Arvest Ballpark.

The Texas League Championship is the second outright title in Midland franchise history, and first since 2005.

Padron was a defensive replacement and had just two home runs in 39 games with Midland. He had just 26 at bats the final five weeks of the season.

"Corey got a pitch and he didn't miss, and (Padron) got his and he didn't miss," said Midland manager Darren Bush. "(Padron) was hurt there for a little bit but he can hit."

Northwest Arkansas was on the brink of forcing a deciding fifth game late in the game and in extra innings, but the Naturals couldn't hold a 2-0 lead in the ninth and they squandered scoring chances in every extra-inning at-bat.

Northwest missed a chance to win the game in the bottom of the 10th when Jarrod Dyson and Kurt Mertins opened with

back-to-back walks. But Midland used three fielder's choice outs to get out of a bases-loaded jam. Corey Smith had a 3-0 count with the bases loaded in the 10th but hit a 3-1 pitch into a fielder's choice out to end the inning.

The Naturals also had the winning run at second in the 11th with one out and Jeff Bianchi hit a two-out single in the 12th.

"We had many opportunities in extra innings but we just couldn't get a guy to get the job done," said Naturals manager Brian Poldberg. "(Midland's) bats did the job."

Midland tied the game at 2-2 in the top of the ninth when Brown hit a two-run home run. Shane Peterson started the Midland ninth by reaching on an error by reliever Aaron Hartsock and Brown hit his second two-run home run in as many games.

Jason Fernandez got the victory in two innings of relief and Jared Lansford worked the 12th for the save. But it was the pitching of starter Tyson Ross that proved critical for the RockHounds.

Ross gave up just three hits and struckout 11 in six innings of work. Ross recorded two strikeouts in the first, second and third innings and used a strikeout and a double play in the fourth to get around an Ed Lucas single. Ross ended the fifth with back-to-back strikeouts after giving up a leadoff double to Smith and he ended his outing with two more strikeouts in the sixth after Dyson advanced to third after reaching on a Midland error.

"(Ross) was unbelievable today," Bush said. "He attacked the zone, good movement, good job."

TL CHAMPIONSHIP NOTEBOOK

Midland Rocks: The RockHounds hit a combined seven home runs in winning Games 2 and 3, and that was the most home runs in back-to-back games in a Texas League Championship Series history since 1924.

Midland History: Saturday's 4-2 Texas League title-clinching victory against Northwest Arkansas was the RockHounds' second outright title since the franchise moved from San Antonio in 1972. The RockHounds last won the championship in 2005 after sharing the title with Lafayette in 1972.

Midland Connection: Naturals groundskeeper and Fort Smith native Monty Sowell spent three seasons with Midland before returning to Northwest Arkansas. The RockHounds' playing surface was voted professional baseball's Field of the Year in 2003 by the Turf Managers Association when Sowell was with the team.