

A's News Clips, Wednesday, September 23, 2009

A's run circles around Rangers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A mad scamper around the bases was the last thing Daric Barton needed Tuesday night.

After sitting out Monday's game with a bone spur in his left heel, Barton returned to first base for the A's and figured prominently in their first two scoring rallies.

That was all the offense required in the A's 9-1 victory over the visiting Texas Rangers in front of another smallish announced crowd — 10,475.

The A's received a solid 52/3 innings from Trevor Cahill, who became the eighth rookie to win 10 games in a season in Oakland history. Fellow rookie Brett Anderson notched his 10th victory in his last start.

Barton, who entered the night hitting .375 with four doubles over his previous eight games, has spurred the A's offense from the bottom of the order. It was his bat — and legs — that jump-started things in the second inning.

With Jack Cust on first base, Barton lined a ball to right field that skipped past a diving Nelson Cruz and went for an RBI triple.

An errant relay throw home by Rangers second baseman Ian Kinsler allowed Barton to complete his journey around the bases. Pitcher Brandon McCarthy, backing up the play, fired another off-target throw as Barton scored.

"I don't like running past second," Barton joked. "I got to third and all I heard was 'Go! Go! Go!' I tried to get my legs going again, but I almost fell. I was tired after that."

That was part of a wacky night that also saw

A's leadoff man Adam Kennedy get ejected for arguing a called third strike in the bottom of the first.

Barton drilled a run-scoring single to right-center his next time up in the fourth to give the A's a 3-0 lead. He also lined into a double play in the seventh.

Barton aggravated his heel Sunday while trying to score from first on Scott Hairston's double, and A's manager Bob Geren was relieved when Barton completed his frantic lap Tuesday and was OK.

"Daric, really the last couple of weeks, has been our hottest hitter," Geren said. "He's been quietly doing it because there hasn't been that big homer. "... We haven't talked about him much, but he really looks good."

The win left the A's 14-6 in September, and they're guaranteed their first winning month since June 2008. They avoid joining the 1979 squad as the only one in Oakland history to post losing records every month of the season.

Cahill was happy to join Anderson in the 10-win club. The A's are just the 13th team since 1900 to have at least two pitchers under the age of 22 reach 10 wins in a season.

"That's kind of one of those goals I set," Cahill said of getting 10 victories. "I'm glad I reached it."

Cahill (10-12) helped his cause with two double-play grounders, each coming as Texas threatened to put a dent in Oakland's lead.

His defense also came through.

Kurt Suzuki made a great play to end the top of the fourth, springing out from behind the plate to fetch Kinsler's roller and throw him out, stranding a runner at third.

After the Rangers trimmed the A's lead to 3-1 in the sixth, center fielder Rajai Davis threw a strike to third to nail David Murphy, who had tagged up from second on Marlon Byrd's fly ball.

The A's broke the game open with a five-run seventh, a rally that featured five straight hits. Suzuki's two-run double highlighted the inning.

A's notebook: Hairston's injuries and frustration are mounting

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Hairston's injuries and frustration are mounting

Scott Hairston's list of injuries is growing, and the frustration bothers him just as much as the pain.

The A's left fielder missed Tuesday's game against Texas with inflammation in his left hip.

But that's just his latest ailment. Hairston has played several weeks with a sore left quadriceps, and recently the sacroiliac joint in his back has given him problems.

"My quad's really sore today, my hip is not feeling too great," he said Tuesday. "It's frustrating. I want to be out there, and my body is not letting me do it."

Hairston, 29, was installed in Oakland's lineup immediately after being obtained in a July 5 trade with San Diego, and the A's consider him a key piece to their future.

He's hit just .236 in 60 games since the trade, though he's chipped in seven homers and 35 RBI.

A's manager Bob Geren, who has praised Hairston for playing through his quad injury, expressed hope that Hairston might return to the lineup tonight.

But that seems doubtful based on how Hairston felt Tuesday. He said he thinks his injuries may be connected.

"That's not what I was told (after being examined), but I'm starting to believe it," Hairston said. "It's like a chain reaction. It's hard being on the field when you have all that stuff on your mind. It's tough enough to play this game healthy."

With just 11 games left, the A's could decide to shut Hairston down for the season if his condition doesn't improve.

Eric Patterson started in left field Tuesday, and Geren mentioned Travis Buck and Matt Carson as options if Hairston misses several games.

When reliever Henry Rodriguez made his big league debut Monday, he became the 26th pitcher the A's used this season. That ties the 1997 team for most pitchers used in Oakland history. The A's have used 51 players total, just three away from the Oakland record of 54 set in 2007. The team's 17 disabled list transactions would explain the need for so many players, though the A's haven't approached last year's Oakland-record 25 DL moves.

The A's media contingent presented catcher Kurt Suzuki the annual Bill Rigney Good Guy Award, given to the Athletic considered most cooperative with reporters. Mark Ellis, the 2007 winner, was nearby when Suzuki was given the award. "I got robbed!" Ellis exclaimed. Suzuki then took his plaque and hoisted it over his head as he walked through the clubhouse, like a boxer who just won a championship belt.

Purdy: Moneyball doesn't go as far as it used to

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

As we all know, baseball is a nostalgic sport. And never more nostalgic than this year. In a very lousy way.

Have you noticed? The same, old pattern of the free-agent era has returned. The big bucks teams are back. They might as well start wearing polyester uniforms again.

Check the standings. In the American League, the four current playoff qualifiers are the teams with the top four payrolls. In the National League, the high-payroll Dodgers and Phillies are the two best teams. Meanwhile, the smaller-payroll teams are coming up small.

Which, in the Bay Area, always lands us on the doorstep of Billy Beane for comment.

Here it is: So?

"We're very competitive around here," Beane said the other day. "And we don't necessarily feel better about losing to the Yankees because of the current situation."

Nevertheless, this had to be a humbling summer for Beane, the A's general manager. As recently as five years ago, he was a complete and utter genius, famous for his "Moneyball" concept of finding undervalued young players to compete in spite of a tiny salary structure.

For many seasons, Beane made his philosophy work. But since 2006, philosophy hasn't been cutting it. Economics has.

The A's began 2009 with a \$62.3 million payroll compared with the Yankees' \$201.4 million. And this summer, the A's fell out of contention early and fell hard. They have rallied in the past few weeks with their callow roster — since the All-Star break, the A's actually have a better record than the Giants — but that doesn't change the bottom line. The A's will finish last in the AL West.

Beane has his reasons for why it happened. Basically, the A's are working through one of their cycles of developing young talent into a core of players for another window of playoff contention. But this is Beane's larger concern: When that window opens, it won't be open for long, not the way it was from 2000-06 for the A's.

"Tampa Bay is a great example of that," Beane said. "They've got a very good young club, a very good front office with very bright people. They get to the World Series after 11 years of building and then "... "

And then this season, the Rays are back in the same nostalgic rut. They have to play small ball in terms of salaries. Thus, in late August, they traded 25-year-old pitcher Scott Kazmir, a two-time All-Star, for three minor-league prospects. By doing so, the Rays saved themselves \$24 million in future contract obligations to Kazmir. They also picked up promising young players who can work cheaply and try to keep the window open a little longer. But the whole thing pretty much stunk for the team's fans — not unlike the exit of Miguel Tejada, Tim Hudson and others stunk for A's fans.

"When I saw what the Rays did," Beane said, "I remember saying to myself, they're already having to play that shell game a little bit. "... They were in the World Series just last year, but already they are going through the cycle that it took us a couple of years to start going through."

What has happened to change things in the past few years to close that window faster? In a nutshell: the conditions on the ground. Other teams, after seeing how the A's and others did it, have learned to scout better — and have been less eager to give up top prospects for more veteran players developed by the small-payroll teams. Instead, the small-payroll teams are getting more second-tier prospects in exchange.

"Traditionally over the years, the A's and Twins really valued young players," Beane said. "Now you have the big-market clubs valuing young players at the same level we do. Now the Yankees are holding onto those players because they see the value in them. That's something that's changed dramatically. So it takes longer for a team to get back in position to win."

Of course, there is another way: by adding to the income side of the ledger. This is why A's owner Lew Wolff is so eager to get his ballpark situation resolved and build a new place in downtown San Jose.

"Our past approach of looking for inefficiencies in the system has faded," Wolff said in a recent e-mail. "This is why we need a way to increase revenues."

A new ballpark would also be just dandy with Beane, naturally.

"My life would be much easier if we could draft a player in the first round and have him stay here his entire career," Beane said. "The best teams are the ones that are able to do that, keep the players through the best years of their careers. Even when we were good, I always said we had players on the way up and we had players on the way down. In that prime area, from age 26 to 31, which is the player's most productive period, we don't have very many of them. We need to make that connection."

As an example, he cited Brett Anderson, at 21 the most promising of the A's young starters.

"I think anybody that has seen Brett pitch will tell you he's one of the best young pitchers in baseball," Beane said. "But we also know that at the age of 26, he's potentially a free agent. That's ultimately the reward you would have with a new ballpark and the new revenue, to be able to keep him."

A winning month, at long last

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

When Texas snapped the A's seven-game winning streak a night earlier, it appeared the Rangers might be bent on avenging the sweep Oakland had dealt them the week before, impairing Texas' playoff hopes.

Instead, the A's turned the jets back on again in a 9-1 victory over the Rangers at the Coliseum. Oakland has won 10 of the past 12, and the team has clinched a winning month for the first time since June 2008. That ends a streak of eight losing months, tied for the second longest such run in team history.

A's rookie starter Trevor Cahill won his fourth consecutive decision and he became the fourth pitcher in Oakland history under the age of 22 to win 10 games, joining Vida Blue (1971), John Henry Johnson (1978) and teammate Brett Anderson (last week).

"It's definitely one of those goals I set at the beginning of the year," Cahill said. "Especially when I hit a rough patch right in the middle, I'm happy I got to 10 and I've finished strong."

The 21-year-old, who is scheduled for one more start, has a 2.28 ERA over his past five starts. Tuesday, he was facing a team he'd seen the week before and held to one hit in seven innings.

"It was kind of one of those cat-and-mouse games," Cahill said. "I just try to throw what the catcher calls, and it was Landon (Powell) last time, so maybe (it was) two different styles."

Things didn't start out ideally for the A's when their leadoff hitter was ejected in the first inning. Third baseman Adam Kennedy struck out looking and complained about the location of the curveball from Texas starter Brandon McCarthy. Although the conversation didn't appear heated, Kennedy made a gesture of futility as he walked away and home-plate umpire Eric Cooper threw him out of the game. That ended Kennedy's eight-game hitting streak.

A comedy of a play helped the A's to their first two runs. McCarthy walked Jack Cust with one out in the second and with two outs, Daric Barton hit a low liner to right. Nelson Cruz dived for the ball, which got past him.

Barton ended up with a triple and Cust scored, but on the relay, second baseman Ian Kinsler threw wide of the plate. Barton, who'd slid into third, jumped up and dashed in. McCarthy, backing up, also made an off-target toss.

"I got to third," Barton said, "and I heard, 'Go, go, go!' I kind of got my legs going again but nearly fell down. I was a little tired after that."

Barton had missed the previous night's game with a sore heel that he'd first felt Sunday on a similar play, trying to score from first on a double in the seventh. He said the training staff taped up the heel so well Tuesday that it didn't hurt.

Cahill didn't allow a run until his final inning, the sixth. In each of the previous three innings, with men in scoring position, Cahill induced grounders, getting back-to-back forceouts in the third, a double-play ball by Hank Blalock in the fourth and a double-play ball by Julio Borbon in the fifth.

Elvis Andrus led off the sixth with a base hit and David Murphy followed with a double to right center to score Andrus. Murphy then tried to tag and go to third on Marlon Byrd's flyout to center, but Rajai Davis threw him out, with Bobby Crosby - in place of Kennedy - lunging face-first to make the tag.

A 'fan'? That'd be generous

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Outfielder **Matt Carson** does not have the ball from his first big-league home run - the fan who caught it Monday refused to give it up unless he was paid for it.

The A's usually trade a signed bat for a milestone baseball, sometimes throwing in a few hats or a shirt, but they will not pay for returned balls.

"I only want money," the fan told clubhouse personnel before leaving.

"He wanted a lot, too," said Carson, who like others heard that the demand was \$10,000, although that could not be confirmed. "Kind of a bummer. They authenticated the bat I used, though, so I'll do something with that.

"It would have been nice to have the ball, and I would have been happy to give him a bat and signed it - that's more than a baseball, anyway. But that's OK, I have a souvenir, I'm happy."

Hairston out? Scott Hairston now has a sore left hip and lower back injury to go along with his left quad strain. The new injuries are probably related to the original quad problem, the outfielder said, but an MRI exam done earlier Tuesday showed swelling and no structural damage, so it's possible he will play again this season.

Manager **Bob Geren**, in fact, suggested that Hairston might be in the lineup tonight if he comes in feeling OK.

"It's nothing to keep him out too long, hopefully," Geren said.

Hairston said: "When I get back on the field, I want to make sure I don't injure anything more. I want to get in there pain-free."

Plasma treatments: Pitchers **Vin Mazzaro** and **Jay Marshall** received platelet-rich plasma injections for shoulder tendinitis.

"It hurt, but it helps the healing go fast," Marshall said.

"It wasn't too fun," Mazzaro said.

It had previously been announced that Mazzaro is done for the season, but Marshall is, too. Both will return to their offseason homes Thursday.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Press pass: The local chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of American presented catcher Kurt Suzuki with the Bill Rigney Good Guy award for outstanding cooperation with the media. The selection was greeted with pretend outrage by 2007 winner Mark Ellis, who yelled, "That's bull!"

A's chemistry cooled Bradley's fire

Gwen Knapp, San Francisco Chronicle

The Cubs' decision to suspend Milton Bradley for the rest of the season serves as a reminder of the extraordinary team chemistry on the 2006 A's. Bradley's volatility didn't entirely vanish that year, but his time in Oakland was relatively stable and pleasant.

Frank Thomas had a remarkably calming effect on Bradley. The Big Hurt could simply tap Bradley on the shoulder or elbow and cool off a heated argument with an umpire. Bradley and Nick Swisher, who along with CC Sabathia has enlivened the Yankees' clubhouse this season, met in the dugout after home runs and executed a goofy, intricately choreographed home run dance.

The easygoing nature of that team carried over. And who can forget the night that manager Ken Macha intervened in Bradley's dispute with the home-plate umpire by wrapping his arms around the outfielder, picking him up and carrying him away from the scene?

Macha ended up being fired at the end of the season, despite reaching the American League Championship Series, largely because of a disconnect between himself and the players. But that moment didn't call for Macha to finesse a relationship. He just reacted, and did so more adroitly than San Diego manager Bud Black, who intervened in a 2007 dispute with an umpire by grabbing Bradley's jersey and knocking him down, tearing the player's anterior cruciate ligament.

Bradley went on to a fairly placid, very productive 2008 season in Texas - perhaps not coincidentally under the command of former A's coach Ron Washington.

Did anyone expect happy results when Bradley went to work for the fierce Lou Piniella? Of course not. But at this point, there might not be an ideal match for him anywhere.

Bradley is very bright - a high school honors student - and often endearing. It's always sad and exasperating to watch him self-destruct. But, ultimately, his experience in Oakland said little about his potential for change, and a whole lot about the people around him.

A's Cahill continues mastery of Rangers

Righty follows up last week's gem with third win vs. Texas

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Athletics pitcher Trevor Cahill isn't getting much mention for American League Rookie of the Year.

If he handled other teams like he does the Rangers, he'd be right up there with Texas shortstop Elvis Andrus or Oakland closer Andrew Bailey. With two straight strong performances against them, Cahill has done as much as anybody to put a serious dent in the Rangers' playoff hopes.

Cahill held the Rangers to one run in 5 2/3 innings in leading the Athletics to a 9-1 victory on Tuesday night at the Coliseum. Cahill has won four straight decisions in five starts for the Athletics, including his last two against the Rangers.

Cahill pitched seven shutout innings in a 4-0 victory over the Rangers last week in Arlington. This one wasn't quite as dominating, but he is still 3-1 with a 2.45 ERA in four starts against Texas this season. Overall, he is 11-13 with a 4.45 ERA.

"He can pitch," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "He's got something on his fastball, and he can move it around. He's got a good changeup, works fast and puts the ball in the strike zone. He's got good stuff."

"This was one of his better outings," Athletics manager Bob Geren said. "The last game in Texas was hard to top, but to come back and face the same team again the next start is impressive. They just saw him."

Brandon McCarthy, on the other hand, has lost two straight to Oakland and three of his four starts against them this season. He lost, 6-1, in Arlington on Aug. 15, when he allowed four runs in three innings. He also lost a head-to-head matchup against Cahill back on May 7 when the Athletics won, 9-4. He is 1-3 with a 6.38 ERA in four starts against Oakland.

"I can still command the strike zone, and I didn't tonight," McCarthy said. "Even if a team is hard for me, I still have to do a good job -- or do a better job than I did tonight -- of keeping us in the game."

Cahill's first Major League victory came against the Rangers on May 7. Texas has really made his season. He has two victories against the Royals -- the only other team he has beaten more than once.

"They are known as a pretty good team," Cahill said. "I just think I got lucky. I had some of my best stuff against them two or three times. Tonight I didn't have my best stuff but I got lucky and got some double plays."

McCarthy wasn't bad, but one crucial miscalculation by right fielder Nelson Cruz in the second inning cost him two runs. McCarthy set it up though with a one-out walk to Jack Cust.

With two outs, Daric Barton smacked a sharp line drive to right. Cruz came in and tried to make a diving catch and missed.

"I was just trying to make a play out there," Cruz said. "It just hit off the end of my glove. If I had turned my glove the other way, I would have had a better chance."

The ball got behind him, and Cust raced around to score. Second baseman Ian Kinsler's relay to the plate was up the line and got away from catcher Ivan Rodriguez, allowing Barton to come home as well.

"Normally I don't like to run past second," Barton said. "But he dove, I got to third and all I heard was, 'Go, go, go.' I had to get my legs going again. I was a little tired after that."

Washington deemed it the key play of the game.

"If we play the ball safely, it's still two outs," Washington said. "The next guy pops out, and we're out of the inning. If you go for that ball, you've got to get it. He tried to make a play and didn't make it."

A pair of leadoff singles by Ryan Sweeney and Kurt Suzuki and a two-out single by Barton in the fourth against McCarthy gave the Athletics a 3-0 lead.

Cahill's 12-inning scoreless streak against the Rangers came to end in the sixth inning when Andrus led off with a single, stole second and scored on a double by David Murphy. Then came another big defensive play. Marlon Byrd hit a fly to left-center that Rajai Davis ran down. Murphy tried to tag up, but Davis gunned him down with a terrific throw to cut short the rally.

"It still should have been 1-1 after six," Washington said.

That was Cahill's last inning, but the Rangers couldn't do anything against relievers Craig Breslow, Jerry Blevins and Brad Ziegler. The Athletics broke it open with five runs off Willie Eyre in the seventh.

Cahill allowed six hits and two walks, but the Rangers were 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position on the night. The Athletics are 10-7 against Texas season and have secured a season-series win.

Patterson to see plenty of action

Oakland (72-79) vs. Texas (82-68), 7:05 p.m. PT

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Eric Patterson spent most of the season proving that he's more than ready for the challenge of regular playing time in the big leagues.

With the most recent injury to A's outfielder Scott Hairston, Patterson figures to get it.

A 25-year-old speedster acquired in the Rich Harden trade with the Cubs last July, Patterson was among the best players in the Pacific Coast League this year, earning MVP consideration with Triple-A Sacramento.

He batted .307 with 29 doubles, 12 homers, 56 RBIs and a .376 on-base percentage in 110 games, broke the River Cats' record for stolen bases in a season with 43 (in 49 attempts), and ranked second in the league in triples (11), fourth in runs (91) and fifth in hits (143).

All while playing all over the field, with 48 games at second base, 29 in center field, 19 in left field, 10 at third base and one at first base.

"Awesome," said longtime River Cats radio announcer Johnny Dosky. "Truly an amazing season. One of the best I've seen here. I kept waiting for that game where he'd play every position, because I'm sure he could do it. He's that good of an athlete."

In his brief stints with the A's, however, Patterson never got much of a chance to show off. He was called up for the third time on Aug. 28, and through Monday he'd gotten all of 58 at-bats, batting .196.

The frequency with which Patterson takes the field likely will increase with Hairston out indefinitely, though. He took over for Hairston in left field on Monday, was in the starting lineup in left Tuesday and might very well be starting again on Wednesday in the third game of a four-game series against the Rangers at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

"Of course you want to get out there," Patterson said upon being recalled. "But you have to be patient, too. The key is being ready when they call your name."

A left-handed hitter who has stolen 12 bases in 13 attempts as a big leaguer, Patterson should hear his name called quite a bit over the final 11 games.

"He's another one of those guys who has an opportunity," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We've had a lot of young guys get into the lineup for one reason or another over the past few years, and a lot of them have taken advantage of it. Obviously, Eric's a very talented guy. I don't see why he wouldn't be someone to take advantage of his opportunity as well."

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Clay Mortensen (2-2, 6.12 ERA)

Mortensen, a rookie who came to the A's in July from St. Louis in the Matt Holliday trade, made it two straight victories on Thursday night, beating Cleveland. He went five innings, holding the Indians to two runs on four hits. He struck out four and walked just three. He pitched out of a two-out, bases-loaded jam in the second, striking out Trevor Crowe. In his previous start, Mortensen held the Twins to one run on five hits over six innings, earning his first Major League win in his third try. He's never faced the Rangers.




TEX: RHP Tommy Hunter (8-4, 3.25 ERA)

Hunter is 2-2 with a 4.23 ERA in his last six starts. He is 2-1 with a 3.08 ERA in six starts on the road this season and has held right-handed hitters to a .203 batting average, while left-handers are hitting .263. Opponents are hitting .169 with runners in scoring position, including 3-for-37 when there are two outs. Hunter is 1-0 with a 3.65 ERA in two starts against the Athletics.

Dribblers ...

Adam Kennedy was ejected from Tuesday's game in the first inning for arguing a called third strike. He ended up 0-for-1, and that snapped an eight-game hitting streak. ... First baseman Daric Barton, who suffered a minor heel injury while trying to score from first base on a double in the sixth inning Sunday and did not play Monday, was back in the lineup Tuesday. He was seemingly fine as he legged out a triple and took home on a throwing error for a de facto inside-the-parker. ... The A's have a 10-7 lead over the Rangers in the season series, with a 5-4 record in Arlington and a 5-3 mark in Oakland, securing their first season-series win against Texas since 2005. ... In dropping Monday's series opener, Oakland fell to 23-25 in such games. The club is 22-25 in the last game of a series this year. ... How good has the A's bullpen been this year? Oakland is 62-1 when leading after eight innings. ... Outfielder Travis Buck, recalled from Sacramento on Saturday, has a 145-game errorless streak. That's the third-longest streak in Oakland history. Stan Javier (1994-95) was flawless afield for 162 games, and the record holder is Jermaine Dye, who didn't make an error in 165 consecutive games over a span bridging Sept. 25, 2002-Aug. 6, 2004. Dye was limited by injuries to 65 games in 2003.

Up next

- Thursday: Athletics (Brett Anderson, 10-10, 4.21) vs. Rangers (Scott Feldman, 17-5, 3.62), 12:35 p.m. PT 
- Friday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 5-6, 6.15) at Angels (Jered Weaver, 15-7, 3.87), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Saturday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 2-3, 6.50) at Angels (John Lackey, 11-8, 3.56), 6:05 p.m. PT 

Hairston may have to pull plug on season

A's outfielder's two-month battle with pain is catching up

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- By A's outfielder Scott Hairston's estimation, he's been playing in pain since July.

On Tuesday, he stopped just short of saying enough is enough. Currently sidelined by a swelling in his hip and a related back problem, he suggested he could very well be done for the year.

"At some point, you've gotta know when to stop," he said. "And right now, I'm stopped. I've gone as far as I can go."

Hairston, who was removed from Monday's loss in the opener of a four-game series against the visiting Rangers at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, said there wasn't a specific play that caused his most recent health issue.

In fact, he's all but certain that everything he's been dealing with is somehow tied to the left quad strain he's been battling since shortly after being acquired in a trade with the Padres on July 5.

"It all roots back to that," he said in the A's clubhouse before batting practice on Tuesday. "I've been playing through things for the past couple of months, and it started with the quad. It's kind of frustrating. ... Everything's connected."

Mired in a 20-for-102 (.190) slump over his past 26 games, Hairston is batting .236 in 60 games with Oakland after batting .299 in 56 games with San Diego.

A's manager Bob Geren said Hairston is "day-to-day," but his next day in the lineup doesn't appear to be anywhere on the immediate horizon.

"A lot of people are hurting this time of year. It's just the nature of the game, and you're conditioned to play through it," said Hairston, who went in for an MRI on Tuesday. "But I've gotta listen to my body this time, and the next time I go through something, I'll have learned my lesson."

Davis' growth not lost on former coach

Mariners' Van Burkleo trumpets protege's progress

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Nobody associated with the A's hesitates to name Rajai Davis as a primary reason for the team's greatly improved play over the past couple of months.

That sentiment extends all the way to Seattle, via St. Petersburg.

That's where Mariners bench coach Ty Van Burkleo, who spent considerable time working with Davis while serving as Oakland's hitting coach last season, was when he told MLB.com on Tuesday that he's been watching Davis' emergence as the "sparkplug" of the A's offense with great interest.

"Oh, I'm fully aware of what Raj is doing for them," Van Burkleo said by phone before joining the Mariners on the field for batting practice at Tropicana Field. "Even if I wasn't close with him, it'd be hard *not* to notice what's happening. He's on the highlights every night these days."

Davis, 28, went from fourth outfielder to starting center fielder shortly after the A's traded Matt Holliday to the Cardinals before the July 31 Trade Deadline, moving Scott Hairston from center to left.

So good has Davis been for so long, it's not quite accurate to say he's on a hot streak. Hot streaks last a week, maybe two or three, maybe a month. But Davis has been tearing it up since the All-Star break in mid-July, even before he became a regular.

Entering the second game of a four-game series against the visiting Rangers on Tuesday at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, Davis was batting .347 -- third-best in the American League over that span -- with 41 runs, 18 doubles, three triples, a home run, 38 RBIs and a Major League-leading 29 stolen bases in 59 games since the break.

Not coincidentally, the A's are 34-30 since the break, fifth-best in the AL.

"I am so proud of Rajai, I really am," said Van Burkleo, whom Oakland manager Bob Geren last week cited as a key contributor in Davis' development. "I'm not really surprised at what he's doing, either. I knew if he got a chance to show what he can do on a regular basis, this is what he's capable of. When we were together, as he got better and better, I'd tell him, 'People are going to find out about you, Raj.'"

"Now when I see him, like when we were in Oakland a couple weeks ago, I give him a big ol' hug and say, 'People are finding out!'"

Van Burkleo said much of the work he did with Davis, a right-handed hitter, focused on getting his lower half to work more in concert with his swing, allowing him to get his hands in a better position to hit the ball to right field.

"And I'm not taking credit for this at all, because you're gonna have a hard time finding someone with a better work ethic than Raj, and [current A's hitting coach Jim Skaalen] is obviously doing a heck of a job with him," Van Burkleo said. "But look at how many of his hits are to right field. He really uses that part of the field well now, and that's something that really makes me feel good about all the time we put in together."

"Raj has a tremendous aptitude for taking something he's told and putting it to use, and you're seeing the fruits of that labor. Whatever credit he's getting, it's richly deserved. If someone wants to give me a little sliver of it, fine. But really, it's all Raj."

"And good for him. I love the kid."

A's Cahill is on a roll

Associated Press

OAKLAND – Kurt Suzuki and Daric Barton drove in two runs apiece, Trevor Cahill won his fourth consecutive decision, and the A's clinched their first winning month in more than a year with a 9-1 victory over the Texas Rangers on Tuesday night.

Texas' loss kept the Rangers seven games behind Boston in the American League wild-card race, and it clinched a postseason berth for the New York Yankees.

Suzuki hit a two-run double and scored on Jack Cust's double during a five-run seventh, when the A's broke the game open to win for the 10th time in 12 games.

Oakland improved to 14-6 in September. It's the first time since June 2008 the A's have had a winning record in a month.

David Murphy had two hits and an RBI, and Iván Rodríguez singled twice for the Rangers, who lost for the eighth time in 11 games.

Texas carried a four-game road winning streak into the game and had scored at least 10 runs in each of the victories. But the Rangers weren't able to get much going against Cahill.

He improved to 3-1 against the Rangers and hasn't lost since falling to Baltimore on Aug. 11.

The A's right-hander scattered six hits and gave up one run over 5 2/3 innings with two walks and one strikeout to become Oakland's second 10-game winner this season. Cahill (10-12) retired the first seven batters and got some help from Oakland's defense, which turned double plays in three consecutive innings and four overall.

The A's got on the board when Jack Cust walked with one out in the second and scored when Nelson Cruz misplayed Barton's sinking liner into a triple. Barton was running to third when the relay throw home from Texas second baseman Ian Kinsler skipped past Rodríguez for an error, so Barton kept going and scored to make it 2-0.

A'S NOTES

The A's won despite leadoff hitter Adam Kennedy getting ejected in the first inning for arguing with plate umpire Eric Cooper after being called out on strikes. It was the fifth ejection of Kennedy's career.

- The A's are trying to finish their sixth consecutive season with fewer than 100 errors, which would establish a major league record. They committed their 90th error Tuesday.