A's News Clips, Sunday, September 27, 2009

Another big rally leads A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Right now, Oakland's offense is clicking with Suzuki, who entered this season with all of 14 career homers, hitting cleanup.

Suzuki hit a two-run homer and had four RBI as the A's erased an early seven-run deficit and then authored another comeback in claiming a wild 15-10 victory at Angel Stadium.

The A's have won 16 of their past 20 games and lead the majors with a 17-7 record this month. They entered Saturday leading the majors in runs, doubles, extra-base hits and stolen bases in September.

Jack Cust had a three-run homer and also drove in four runs. Daric Barton had a career-high four hits and two RBI. Mark Ellis added a three-run homer in the A's six-run eighth, when they turned a 10-9 deficit into a 15-10 advantage.

But Suzuki delivered the crucial hit that opened the floodgates in the eighth. The A's trailed by one and had runners on the corners, only to watch Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney strike out against Angels reliever Kevin Jepsen.

Suzuki lined an opposite-field single that scored Cliff Pennington to tie the game.

"He seems to have a knack for putting the ball in play, especially with guys on base," Geren said.

The A's have shown the ability to fight back often this season, most notably when they erased a 10-run deficit to beat Minnesota 14-13 on July 20.

But the odds were certainly stacked against them Saturday, trailing 9-2 with Angels ace John Lackey on the mound.

"We've played very well the whole second half, but this is probably one of the more impressive wins considering the circumstances," Geren said.

Suzuki, who broke into the majors midway through the 2007 season, continues to watch his overall game blossom. He now has 85 RBI, which more than doubles his total from his first full season of 2008. He also has 15 homers.

His more unheralded contribution this season is the way he's helped mold the A's rookie-dominated starting rotation.

It's no wonder the A's reportedly are interested in signing Suzuki, who turns 26 next week, to a long-term extension in the near future.

The A's continued to struggle defensively, making two errors. One by shortstop Pennington in the first inning, when he failed to tag second on an attempted double play, extended the inning long enough for Juan Rivera to smack a three-run homer off Dana Eveland.

A's third baseman Adam Kennedy committed an error for the fourth straight game.

<u>Lurie: MLB teams will always fall if they don't have hitters to carry them down the stretch</u>

By Marty Lurie, Special to the Oakland Tribune

As the playoff picture solidifies in the waning days of the season, it's time to take a look at a premise we suggested earlier in the year: Do the top teams have the carriers, those players who put up outstanding offensive numbers while leading their ballclub to October baseball?

Let's look at the NL's playoff contenders and see if each has at least one true carrier.

St. Louis: The Cardinals are led by Albert Pujols, the runaway leader for NL MVP in 2009. Pujols leads the league with 47 home runs, 120 runs scored, while driving in 129.

Matt Holliday, in just 56 games since coming over from the Oakland A's, has become a carrier for the Cards. Holliday is hitting .354 with 13 home runs and 50 RBI. St. Louis has posted a 37-19 mark since the trade.

Philadelphia: The Phillies have a carrier in Ryan Howard, who's hitting .273, with 42 home runs and 135 RBI. Chase Utley has scored 110 runs. Raul Ibanez has hit .277 with 33 home runs, 89 RBI, with a .910 OPS.

LA Dodgers: The Dodgers have two carriers in Matt Kemp (.306, 26 home runs, 100 RBI, .869 OPS, 96 runs scored) and Andre Ethier, who has been awesome late in the game. Overall, the left-handed hitting Ethier is hitting .277 with 31 home runs, 103 RBI and a .880 OPS.

Colorado: The Rockies are in the wild-card race because Troy Tulowitzki has caught fire in the second half. The shortstop is now hitting .281 with 30 homers, 86 RBI, 29 stolen bases and an OPS of .824.

San Francisco: The Giants are barely in the hunt heading into the last week of play. Pablo Sandoval has carried the load for the team, but the Kung Fu Panda's numbers (.324 average, 22 home runs, 84 RBI, .902 OPS) are not enough to carry this ballclub by himself. Next year, Sandoval will need some help.

Atlanta: The Braves are a threat to pass the Rockies this week for the NL wild-card berth. The Braves are streaking down the stretch because of their pitching. Still, without second-half contributions from Adam LaRoche and catcher Brian McCann, this club wouldn't be in the hunt. Since coming over to the Braves from Boston, La Roche has been a carrier. The first baseman has played in 48 games and sports a .349 batting mark with 12 homers and 37 RBI, plus a 1.034 OPS. McCann's season numbers are .286, 21 home runs and 90 RBI. Those are terrific numbers for a catcher.

Florida: The Marlins are led by shortstop Hanley Ramirez, who has carried Florida down the stretch. He leads the league with a .348 batting mark, has scored 100 runs and has driven in 105.

As we look to the winter trying to assess the needs of the clubs who are out of contention, one must consider whether those clubs currently have players who are capable of being "carriers" in 2010.

Let's look at the NL first:

Arizona: Has Stephen Drew, Justin Upton and Mark Reynolds. All are capable of breakthrough seasons next year. San Diego: Has a potential carrier in first baseman Adrian Gonzalez. Not many other choices on this club for carriers. The Padres' lack of established players is certainly a reason San Diego is considering acquiring the enigmatic Milton Bradley as an outfielder in 2010.

Piitsburgh: Not a carrier in sight.

Cincinnati: Perhaps Joey Votto might break through, or the oft-injured Jay Bruce.

Houston: Lance Berkman, Carlos Lee, and Miguel Tejada have all seen better days. If all three had one last great season, which is unlikely, the Houston offense wouldn't be all that bad.

The Astros are looking for a manager. This club needs a solid baseball man to take the reins. The man must have a sense of humor, but a healthy respect for the right way to play the game. Cubs third-base coach Mike Quade, a former A's coach, is such a man. Quade knows how to handle the media with charm and class, has an impeccable record as third-base coach for the Cubs, and has won over 1,000 games in the minor leagues. Quade won't put up with shoddy play, but is modern enough in his thinking to work closely with any type of ball player on the roster.

Chicago Cubs: They have a roster full of carriers, if only they would stay healthy and produce. This year Derrek Lee is having a tremendous season with 35 home runs, 109 RBI, .306 batting average and a .975 OPS. Now if Aramis Ramirez, Alfonso Soriano and Geovany Soto can bounce back with carrier-type seasons, the Cubs will be singing once again in Wrigley in 2010.

Milwaukee: Any club with hitters such as Prince Fielder and Ryan Braun must be watched carefully. Pitching has been the downfall for manager Ken Macha's team.

Washington: Ryan Zimmerman and Adam Dunn strike fear into the hearts of any pitching staff. If the Nats can get some more contributors on offense like Josh Willingham and upgrade the entire pitching staff they can move up in the standings within a year or two.

NY Mets: Even though the Mets have carriers in Carlos Beltran and David Wright, the Mets new home ballpark is so pitcher-friendly that it will take not only these two carriers having comeback seasons in 2010, but also a new emphasis on more speed in the lineup to help this club score enough runs to contend.

Playoff teams in the AL abound with carriers having big seasons.

NY Yankees: Mark Teixeira is hitting 293 with 37 home runs, and 119 RBI. Alex Rodriguez has 28 home runs and 93 RBI. Derek Jeter is hitting .330 with 106 runs scored and 203 hits.

Boston: Jason Bay has put together a terrific year with a .265 average, 115 RBI and 36 home runs. Victor Martinez has hit in 25 straight games, raising his average to .301. "Big Papi" David Ortiz, although only hitting .237, has 27 home runs and 94 RBI.

LA Angels of Anaheim: Kendry Morales is this team's carrier. The Cuban-born first baseman is hitting .301 with 31 home runs, 99 RBI and a .902 OPS. Torii Hunter, the team's inspirational leader, is hitting .300 with 22 home runs and 86 RBI. Juan Rivera quietly has carried the club in left field, hitting 24 home runs while driving in 86.

Detroit: Miguel Cabrera has carried the Tigers all season long. Cabrera quietly is hitting .331 with 32 home runs, 100 RBI with a .925 OPS. It's amazing the Tigers are where they are in the standings with Cabrera being the only real carrier in the batting order.

Minnesota: Joe Mauer appears to be the leading candidate for AL MVP. Why? Mauer's numbers are off the charts. The catcher leads the AL in batting .371. Other notable achievements: 28 home runs, 92 RBI, .443 on-base pct., .603 slugging average and a 1.047 OPS.

Michael Cuddyer has carried this club too with a .277 average, 30 home runs and 88 RBI. Let's not forget the 30 home runs and 100 RBI from the injured Justin Morneau.

Texas: Michael Young, now hurt, put up career numbers for Texas this summer. The all-star hit .322 with 22 home runs, 67 RBI and an .898 OPS.

Ian Kinsler became the Rangers' second 30-30 man when he hit his 30th home run Friday to go with his 30 stolen bases. Nelson Cruz (32 home runs) and Marlin Byrd (.282 with 19 home runs and 88 RBI) were close to being carriers for the Rangers, thus offsetting the loss of Josh Hamilton to season-long injuries.

How close are the also-rans to finding the true carriers needed to make a run at the playoffs in 2010?

Oakland: The A's lack a true carrier on their roster. Jack Cust consistently hits in the .240s with 25-30 home runs, 100 walks and 185 strikeouts. Cust just doesn't rise to the class of the true carriers of the game. The A's have closed the gap on the teams in the AL West through terrific overall pitching. Until this ballclub gets some offensive players, such as the carriers listed above, they will be an exciting .500 club to watch.

The A's now steal bases, running much more, playing close games, yet they still are lacking the big hitters to scare the opposition when the game is on the line.

Seattle: No real carrier here. Russell Branyan, like Jack Cust, is not a reliable power hitter who can occupy the third post in the batting order. Adrian Beltre never matured as a carrier in Seattle after his amazing season in Los Angeles with the Dodgers. Ichiro is a fabulous player, yet isn't considered a middle-of-the-order carrier.

Kansas City: Billy Butler is a young hitter (. 305 average, 21 home runs, and 92 RBI) who might be a carrier some day. Once there was hope that Alex Gordon could be that carrier, but injuries and lack of performance have prevented him from doing anything that might be considered hopeful next year.

Cleveland: At one time, Jhonny Peralta was a carrier, but his lethargic season has removed him from that status. Grady Sizemore could be a carrier, if he stays healthy. Injuries have sapped Travis Hafner's power.

Chicago White Sox: Potential here with the speedy, powerful shortstop Alexei Ramirez. Rookie Gordon Beckham might develop into a carrier. Alex Rios looks like a lost cause. Jermaine Dye and Paul Konerko have seen their best days. Carlos Quentin, if healthy, might be a surprise in 2010. White Sox have hope for 2010.

Toronto: Aaron Hill had a fabulous season at second base (34 home runs). Vernon Wells will never carry this club. Adam Lind (32 home runs and 109 RBI) has carrier potential. There is a long road ahead offensively for Toronto.

Tampa Bay: Good potential if the club gets bounce back years from B.J. Upton and Dioner Navarro. Evan Longoria, Carl Crawford, Ben Zobrist and Carlos Pena are carrier-type players. Pitching sunk the team; the offense (home runs and slugging) is still there. Tampa is a team to watch in 2010.

Baltimore: It's still early in their development, but Matt Wieters (.286), Nolan Reimold, Nick Markakis, Adam Jones and Felix Pie might develop into an offense that can compete in the AL.

Clearly, offense is one part of the equation in determining whether your team has what it takes to make a run at the playoffs. If your club doesn't have the potential carrier or carriers on the roster, then it is clear what needs must be fulfilled over the winter. Ignoring the need for a big-time hitter will only lead to the inevitable: Elimination for playoff contention.

Just take a look at the teams as the playoffs begin. Every team in the playoffs has at least one true big-time hitter to look to with the game on the line.

You can count on it.

Pair of comebacks turn into A's 15-10 win

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Going in, this one looked like a mismatch, with A's killer John Lackey pitching against Dana Eveland, who'd spent most of this year in the minors. Add to that the fact that Oakland's defense was spotty and the team fell behind by seven runs.

"The odds weren't in our favor at that point," Oakland third baseman Adam Kennedy said.

The A's offense apparently was not informed of that, twice coming from behind and coming away with a 15-10 victory over the division-leading Angels on Saturday.

Oakland chipped back to cut the deficit to one after seven innings, then Kurt Suzuki tied the game in the eighth with a two-out single off Kevin Jepsen. Jack Cust added a go-ahead double and Daric Barton an RBI single off Matt Palmer in the same inning. Mark Ellis banged a three-run homer to finish things off, and every member of the lineup scored at least one run.

"You go up against a guy like John Lackey and finish the game with 15 runs and 19 hits - that isn't something you'd believe would happen," A's manager Bob Geren said. "To get behind 9-2 with Lackey on the mound, a first-place club with their bullpen, that's a tall task. ... To turn around a win, that's a remarkable performance."

The A's have won 11 of their past 13 games and they have a shot at finishing above .500 - though, at 75-80, they'd have to win their final seven games to do so. They are a major-league best 17-7 in September, and they're leading the majors in runs this month with 159.

Suzuki, batting cleanup, hit a two-run homer and added a double, a walk and a sacrifice fly along with his game-tying hit. He has a team-high 85 RBIs, and his 80 RBIs as a catcher are second most in Oakland history after Terry Steinbach's 96 in 1996.

Like Suzuki, Cust drove in four runs, with three coming on an opposite-field homer off Lackey in the fifth. Cust leads Oakland with 24 homers. Barton had a career-high four hits and Kennedy had three hits, three runs and an RBI.

"That was fun," Kennedy said. "Everyone was doing it up and down the lineup. That was a nice win, a real good win."

Kennedy is batting .382 in September, with nine doubles, 12 walks, 13 RBIs and 18 runs in 21 games. On the flip side, he has been charged with errors in four consecutive games and five of the past six.

"I'm just out of whack over there," said Kennedy, who moved to third this year after a long career at second. "I'm trying to find my rhythm. Maybe my focus isn't the same as when I first went over there."

Oakland made two errors, both of which resulted in unearned runs, and Oakland's total for the season is 100, so the A's will not become the first team in big-league history to record fewer than 100 errors six years in row.

Eveland allowed five hits, four walks and eight runs, five earned. Brad Kilby, who succeeded him, gave up his first earned run of the season when Bobby Abreu homered to right in the fourth with a man (Eveland's) on base. Kilby hadn't allowed an earned run in his first eight career outings, covering 111/3 innings.

Geren said Suzuki will get the day off from catching today, although he might serve as the designated hitter. Landon Powell will catch and rookie outfielder Matt Carson will get a start in place of creaky-kneed Ryan Sweeney against left-hander Joe Saunders.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Spoiler alert: Angels reliever Darren Oliver said the A's are doing a "great job" of playing spoiler in the AL West. Asked how much Oakland would like to prevent the Angels from clinching this weekend, ex-Angel Adam Kennedy said, "A lot."

Shea: Catching up with a few ex-A's

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The transition is just about complete. The A's, who are closing fast, are all about youth now. No shock there. Virtually all of the team's veterans are in different uniforms, playing throughout the majors with different roles and different goals. With the season down to the final week, here's a look at where they are and where they stand:

Streaking to playoffs

- 1. Matt Holliday (.310, 24 homers, 105 RBIs): Never seemed thrilled with A's. Got off to a rotten start (so much for those Mark McGwire batting tips) and hit under .250 through mid-May. Began hitting shortly before his trade (.390 in final 10 games) but saved his best for winning environment of St. Louis (.353, 13 homers, 51 RBIs).
- 2. Jason Giambi (.389, 11 RBIs, 16 games), Huston Street (33 saves in 34 chances) and Carlos Gonzalez (.281, 12 homers, 16 steals): Why are they all so much better in the Mile High City than the East Bay?
- 3. Nick Swisher (27 homers, team-high 92 walks), Chad Gaudin (1-0, 3.71 ERA as a Yankee): Back in their Oakland days, they might have been considered the last two guys who'd wind up in pinstripes. Lockering next to another ex-A, Johnny Damon, Swisher brought lively personality to once-stale clubhouse. The Yanks won all five of Gaudin's starts.
- 4. Joe Blanton (11-7, 3.82): Nice fit in Phils' deep rotation, which includes Cole Hamels, rookie J.A. Happ and newcomers Cliff Lee and Pedro Martinez.
- 5. Terry Francona (91-63 record): Looking to become first Red Sox manager with three World Series titles. In huge market, it helps that he's cool.

Thriving out of race

1. Ron Washington (85-69 record): Should be named AL's top manager after keeping Rangers, who traditionally wilt in summer, alive into September. Might still be contending if they hadn't lost five of seven to A's this month.

- 2. Miguel Tejada (.308, 81 RBIs, leads NL in doubles with 44): What would have happened had the A's re-signed Tejada (went to Baltimore for six years and \$72 million) instead of Eric Chavez (stayed for six years, \$66 million)? Better days at the Coliseum. Miggie's still hittin' in Houston.
- 3. Marco Scutaro (.282, 90 walks, .379 OBP, all career highs): Did all things A's management wanted him to do, but in Blue Jays uni.
- 4. Dan Haren (14-9, 3.02, league's best WHIP): Remains a durable ace and is 30-17 in two years as Diamondback. Among NL's top five Cy Young candidates.
- 5. Don Wakamatsu (80-75 record): Managed Mariners (101 losses last year) into a winner.

Ending with a thud

- 1. Milton Bradley (.257, 12 homers, 40 RBIs): Gerald Perry, Bradley's batting coach in Oakland, recommended the troublemaker to GM Jim Hendry and was fired in June (not just because of Bradley's woes). Thirty million dollars later, Cubs seem surprised about Bradley's latest meltdown.
- 2. Ken Macha (77-78 record), Jason Kendall (.240): According to reports, some Brewers players aren't on same page with Macha, including Ryan Braun, who disputed the shoulder injury brought up by Macha. GM Doug Melvin hasn't said if Macha (lots of injured pitchers in first year of two-year deal) will return. Doubtful Kendall will.
- 3. Eric Byrnes (.214, six homers, eight steals): Diamondback hasn't lived up to three-year, \$30 million extension he received in August 2007, thanks in part to injuries. Had 47 homers and 75 steals in '06 and '07. In '08 and '09, totals are 12 and 12.
- 4. Rich Harden (9-9, 4.09): Didn't pitch beyond five innings in past four starts. Now he's shut down. At least Ted Lilly remains in Cubs' rotation.
- 5. Tim Hudson (2-1, 3.56, five starts), Mark Mulder (0-0, 0.00), Barry Zito (10-13, 4.10): In second half, Zito pitched his best ball as a Giant, but absence of other two brings down Big Three as a hole. As always, only Zito stays healthy.

BASHOF: Five who made the region proud

Tom FitzGerald, Chronicle Staff Writer

Over three decades, the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame has enshrined 135 local athletes and coaches while raising nearly \$4 million for youth sports organizations.

Until last year, though, one very small group was ineligible in the balloting by local sportswriters and broadcasters: team owners.

As a result, a Distinguished Achievement in Sports Award was created, and former 49ers owner Ed DeBartolo Jr. was the first one so honored. Now it's Al Davis' turn.

The Raiders' owner "would have been voted in long ago if we had had this category," said Tom Martz, who became BASHOF president in 2005. "Up until last year you had to be an on-field performer or a coach who had won a major championship. I said there are other people who have contributed so much to Bay Area sports that they need to be recognized."

The others to be honored at the 31st annual BASHOF enshrinement banquet on March 22 at the Westin St. Francis Hotel are Olympic figure skating champion Brian Boitano, baseball great Bert Campaneris, former USF soccer coach Steve Negoesco and ex-49er receiving star R.C. Owens.

Al Davis

Davis, 79, coached the Raiders for three years in the 1960s, but it was as their owner that he built them into a highly successful franchise. He has guided their fortunes for the last 43 years. From 1967 to 1985 they made 15 playoff appearances and won three Super Bowls.

He was inducted in 1992 into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, where he was presented by his former coach and now-retired TV icon John Madden. Davis would have been inducted last year along with DeBartolo, Martz said, but his health prevented him from attending the dinner.

So BASHOF officials decided to delay his enshrinement a year. It is not known whether Davis will be able to attend the March dinner. "He doesn't want to say anything at this time," a Raiders spokesman said. If he can't make it, Madden will represent him, Martz said.

Brian Boitano

Boitano, a gold medalist at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, has reinvented himself at age 45 as a cooking guru. His show "What Would Brian Boitano Make?" premiered in August on the Food Network.

He said he was excited by his BASHOF induction. "The Bay Area is such an important place to me," he said. "It's where I was born and raised (in Sunnyvale)."

He still skates two hours every day in preparation for frequent exhibitions and for four NBC specials this winter.

Meanwhile, he has been preparing such dishes as crab-and-avocado crostini, chicken paella burgers and bourbon bacon apple tarts for his offbeat show.

"I get to be pretty goofy, although cooking is something I'm serious about," he said. "I'm not as much of a perfectionist as I was on the ice. That probably comes with age. I let it be a free-flowing thing."

The title of the show, which is set in his San Francisco home, is a takeoff on the song "What Would Brian Boitano Do?" from the 1999 animated "South Park" movie.

His involvement in the movie "opened my demographics to a new generation," he said, "16- and 17-year-old boys who weren't even alive when I won the Olympics."

Bert Campaneris

Campaneris, 67, played shortstop for the A's on three World Series champions in the 1970s. A six-time All-Star, he holds several franchise records, including most hits (1,882), and led the American League in stolen bases six times.

The Cuban-born "Campy" lives in Scottsdale, Ariz., and spends much of his time fishing, golfing and conducting baseball camps. He recalled his sensational debut for the Kansas City A's in 1964, when he hit two home runs off Minnesota's Jim Kaat, one on the first pitch he saw in the big leagues.

"I went 3-for-4 that day," he said. "I thought, 'If I can get two home runs off Jim Kaat, I'm going to be in the majors a long time.' I had a lot of confidence in myself."

He would play 19 years in the big leagues. After 13 years with the A's, he played for the Rangers, Angels and Yankees and stole 649 bases, ranking him 14th in baseball history in that department.

Steve Negoesco

Negoesco's USF teams won four NCAA titles and 22 conference titles in his 39 years as coach. He retired in 2000. At 84, he's writing his memoirs, and the book should be compelling. At age 15 he was a prisoner in a Nazi labor camp for six months before escaping with the complicity of a guard who was impressed with his soccer abilities.

He earned a scholarship to go to medical school in Romania but was arrested by the Communist regime on trumped-up charges and spent two weeks locked up before being freed. Fearful of another arrest, he fled to the United States, where he learned English in about three months, he said.

He loved San Francisco from a visit with his brother, a sea captain living here, and attended USF and became a two-time All-American soccer player.

As for coaching, he said, "You never do anything because you expect something in return. You do it because you can do some good when working with young people."

R.C. Owens

Owens was a rookie wide receiver for the 49ers in 1957 when head coach Frankie Albert and offensive coordinator Red Hickey loved how he could consistently outjump defenders for Y.A. Tittle's passes in practice. Somebody on the team dubbed it "the Alley-Oop play," and it worked for two touchdowns against the Rams at Kezar Stadium.

Since then, "Alley Oop" has been Owens' nickname. One of the great leapers in NFL history, he is the only player ever to block a field goal attempt directly in front of the goalpost. He was with the Baltimore Colts at the time, and the block came on a kick by the Redskins' Bob Khayat in 1962.

"After that, they changed the rule," he said, "so the only way you can block a kick is at the line."

When told of his BASHOF election, Owens, 74, said, "I screamed. My phone isn't geared for screaming, so I put it to the test. I was so thrilled because I've attended many of the enshrinement dinners and sat in awe of so many people."

Down seven, A's storm back

Ellis, Cust, Suzuki, Barton deliver big hits to stun Angels

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- The A's seemingly love nothing more than to be a thorn in the side of the contending teams in the American League West.

Fresh off splitting a four-game series with the Rangers that put a real damper in Texas' playoff chances, the A's turned their focus to tormenting the division-leading Angels for the last two nights.

Well, the A's couldn't have gotten to the Angels anymore than they did on Saturday when they showed their resiliency by erasing an early seven-run deficit and then overcoming a late one-run deficit in a wild 15-10 win over the Angels in front of 41,014 at Angel Stadium.

"Our team always seems to fight back," A's manager Bob Geren said. "The attitude is right because we never quit. There were so many clutch hits it's hard to pinpoint one. It was contributions from everyone."

It was also especially an impressive win because it came in a game in which they trailed by seven runs against right-hander John Lackey, who entered Saturday's game with a lifetime record of 16-4 against the A's.

"To go up against a guy like John Lackey and you'd say we'd get 15 runs and 19 hits, it wouldn't be something I would believe would happen," Geren said.

Oakland, though, trailed 9-2 after four innings and then erased that deficit over the next three innings before finding itself down a run after Gary Matthews Jr. had a two-out, RBI single off reliever Craig Breslow in the seventh inning.

But the A's came back with six runs in the eighth with all six runs coming with two outs. Kurt Suzuki, Jack Cust and Daric Barton each had RBI hits in the inning before Mark Ellis delivered a three-run homer to put the game out of reach, lifting the A's to their 11th win in 13 games and within five games of .500, with seven to play.

"It was a good rally," Ellis said. "We could've rolled over and let the Angels have the game, but we came back. It was a real good inning for us."

Ellis' home run off reliever Matt Palmer was essentially the backbreaker for the Angels as they couldn't come back from the late five-run deficit.

"Ellis' homer, I thought, was huge," Geren said. "It gave us some breathing room. "The bullpen came in and shut them down the rest of the way. But it's not really uncommon."

But Angels manager Mike Scioscia thought it was Suzuki's two-out, game-tying single in the inning that was the key hit for the A's.

That is obviously a key point in the game," Scioscia said. "If we got that out, we can turn it over to Brian [Fuentes] to finish.

"Those guys [batting with runners] in scoring position were terrific, and with two outs and runners in scoring position, they were terrific. We just couldn't hold them."

It was a drastic change from earlier in the game when starter Dana Eveland struggled before leaving in the fourth inning.

The A's scored four runs in the fifth with Suzuki's sacrifice fly coming just moments before Cust unloaded for a three-run homer off Lackey. Oakland then added two more runs in the sixth against reliever Darren Oliver on an RBI double by Adam Kennedy and a wild pitch by Oliver that allowed Kennedy to score from third.

"The odds weren't in our favor at that point, but our guys kept having good at-bats and stayed aggressive," Kennedy said. "It led to a good win."

The A's then tied the game in the seventh on an RBI single by Barton off reliever Jason Bulger to complete the seven-run comeback.

"It was fun," Kennedy said. "I keep saying this, but everyone was hitting up and down the lineup."

The offensive outburst from both teams came on a night where both starting pitchers struggled. Eveland lasted just 3 1/3 innings, allowing eight runs, five earned, on five hits along with four walks. And Lackey allowed six runs on 10 hits over five innings to also get saddled with a no-decision.

Both starters were also hurt by early home runs as Suzuki hit a two-run homer in the first and Juan Rivera hit a three-run homer in the bottom half.

"Both teams really swung the bat really well," Ellis said. "We were lucky to get some offense against Lackey. He seems to always get the better end of us, but we were fortunate there."

Geren marvels at Suzuki

Oakland (75-80) at Los Angeles (90-64), 12:35 p.m. PT

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- As a former Major League catcher himself, A's manager Bob Geren knows a thing or two about the rigors of catching in the big leagues.

That's why he's been so amazed by Kurt Suzuki, who has evolved into an impressive offensive force for Oakland in his third season with the club despite leading the American League in games caught each of the last two years.

"It's impressive for him to play as much as he does and to look sharp," Geren said. "There's only been one or two games all year where he looked tired. It's amazing to me, especially with as much as we travel and the challenges of being a Major Leaguer and a catcher."

Suzuki, who has been the team's cleanup hitter recently, currently leads the team with 85 RBIs and has 15 home runs, including a two-run homer on Saturday against the Angels.

"He seems to have a knack for putting the ball in play, especially with runners on base," Geren said. "He rarely strikes out in those situations. You always know he's going to have a quality at-bat."

Suzuki, though, is expected to have the day off on Sunday as the A's finish up a three-game series with the Angels at Angel Stadium.

But it's a rare day off for Suzuki, who has played in 140 of 155 games this season, which is the most in baseball this year for a catcher.

"It's a testament to what he does off the field," Geren said. "He takes care of himself perfectly. He gets rest at night and he has a great program."

That conditioning program for Suzuki includes pregame and postgame workouts, icing his knees and shoulder after games as well as sitting in both hot tanks and cold tanks.

And that's not even mentioning all of the time he spends with the team's pitching staff and the time spent scouting in the video room.

"If you look at his pregame and postgame routine, it might be longer than the game," Geren said. "He puts the time and effort in and that's why he does what he does. If you just show up, you'll never last.

"There's that saying about the first one to arrive and the last to leave, but I'd say 90 percent of the time that's true for him. If anyone is later than him leaving it's because they were a slow dresser."

And that commitment to getting better is exactly why Geren thinks that this is still just the start of a lengthy career for the 25-year-old Suzuki.

"It's going to pay off," Geren said. "He's on his way to a very long and prosperous career."

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Edgar Gonzalez (0-3, 5.22 ERA)

Gonzalez, added as the sixth man in the rotation earlier this month as the A's monitor the workloads of their prized young starters, struggled mightily his last time out, Monday against the visiting Rangers. After allowing an unearned run in the first inning, he was touched for three runs in the second, and consecutive RBI singles with one out in the fourth chased him. All told he allowed six runs (five earned) on nine hits and two walks while throwing 73 pitches. Gonzalez, who spent most of the season as a long reliever and hasn't thrown more than five innings this year, made relief appearances against the Angels on July 16 and 18 and allowed two runs on three hits and three walks over 5 1/3 innings.

LAA: LHP Joe Saunders (14-7, 4.63 ERA)

Saunders continued his recent run of success by essentially shutting down the Yankees for 8 1/3 innings on Monday at Angel Stadium. Saunders allowed just two runs on seven hits over those eight innings as the only runs came on solo homers by Alex Rodriguez and Hideki Matsui. Saunders is 5-0 with a 2.11 ERA in his last six starts since coming off the disabled list on Aug. 26 after batting through stiffness in his left shoulder. He's also 7-3 with a 3.97 ERA in 12 career starts against the A's.

Tidbits

Scott Hairston was held out of the lineup yet again on Saturday with a sore hip and SI joint. ... Third baseman Eric Chavez worked out with the team before the game and is hopeful he can return next season after having two back surgeries. ... Ryan Sweeney will get the day off on Sunday with Matt Carson getting the start in right field. ... The Angels can't clinch the AL West against the A's on Sunday as the Rangers won on Saturday.

Up next

- Monday: Off-day
- Tuesday: Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 10-12, 4.45) at Mariners (Felix Hernandez, 17-5, 2.49), 7:10 p.m. PT II
- Wednesday: Athletics (Clay Mortensen, 2-3, 6.07) at Mariners (Doug Fister, 2-4, 4.50), 7:10 p.m. PT

A's erase seven-run deficit with an offensive outburst

Associated Press

ANAHEIM – Mark Ellis hit a three-run homer during a six-run eighth inning as the A's came back to outslug the Los Angeles Angels 15-10 Saturday night.

Jack Cust and Kurt Suzuki also homered for the A's, who overcame a seven-run deficit.

The Angels, whose magic number to clinch their third consecutive American League West title remained at four, lost their season-high fourth consecutive game. They were the only team that hadn't lost more than three in a row this season.

The Angels lead Texas by five games with eight to play, including a four-game series against the Rangers that begins Monday night at Angel Stadium.

Rookie Kevin Jepsen (6-4) was charged with four runs in the Oakland eighth, including a tying RBI single by Suzuki after the right-hander struck out Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney with runners at first and third. Cust's double gave the A's an 11-10 lead, and Daric Barton greeted Matt Palmer with an RBI single before Ellis capped the rally with his homer.

Craig Breslow (8-7) pitched 1 1/3 innings for the victory after giving up an RBI single to pinch hitter Gary Matthews Jr. that put the Angels ahead 10-9 in the seventh.

The A's had 19 hits. Suzuki drove in a season-high four runs, and Cust also had four RBIs.

Los Angeles' Darren Oliver relieved John Lackey after fiveg innings with a 9-6 lead and gave up two runs in the sixth.

Lackey allowed six runs and 10 hits. The right-hander, who hadn't allowed a home run in his previous five starts, gave up a two-run drive to Suzuki in the first and a three-run drive to Cust in the fifth.

After Suzuki's first-inning homer, Juan Rivera responded in the bottom half with a three-run shot over both bullpens, giving him career highs in homers (24) and RBIs (86).

All three runs off Dana Eveland in the Angels' first were unearned after shortstop Cliff Pennington botched Bobby Abreu's potential double-play grounder. Pennington took a throw from second baseman Ellis off the bag and wasn't able to get the out at first, either.

The Angels increased their lead to 9-2 with six runs in the fourth. Jeff Mathis hit an RBI single, and Kendrick scored when Adam Kennedy hit him in the back with his throw to the plate after fielding Maicer Izturis' grounder.