

A's News Clips, Thursday, April 22, 2010

New York Yankees pitcher Phil Hughes near perfect against Oakland A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Tuesday's marathon game between the A's and New York Yankees featured 15 walks and was hideous to the baseball purist's eyes.

Wednesday night's follow-up effort couldn't have been more different.

Yankees right-hander Phil Hughes took a no-hitter into the eighth inning, and New York beat the A's 3-1 to claim the first two games of this three-game series.

The teams combined for just six walks one night after a laborious 3-hour, 21-minute affair.

A's starter Ben Sheets pitched well enough to win, but he was outdueled by Hughes, who retired 21 of the first 22 batters he faced.

Daric Barton's first-inning walk was Hughes' only blemish as he took the mound for the bottom of the eighth.

Eric Chavez led off the inning with a sharp one-hopper that hit Hughes in the ribs and ricocheted back in front of the mound. A disoriented Hughes looked everywhere but in front of the mound, as Chavez reached on an infield single.

"To have it end that way was kind of a bummer," Hughes said.

The A's cut the deficit to 2-1 later in the inning as Jake Fox's pinch-hit single off reliever Joba Chamberlain knocked in Chavez.

But with runners on the corners and two outs, Chamberlain retired Cliff Pennington on a grounder to first to end the inning.

New York added an insurance run in the top of the ninth off Tyson Ross.

The A's put runners on the corners with two outs in the bottom half, but Mariano Rivera retired Kevin Kouzmanoff on a fly to center to end it.

The A's have lost three straight for the first time this season.

Hughes (2-0) allowed just Chavez's hit while striking out a career-high 10 and walking two in 71/3 innings.

Hughes' stuff certainly looked good enough to produce the first no-hitter at the Oakland Coliseum since the Baltimore Orioles used four pitchers to hold the A's hitless on July 13, 1991. That's the last no-hit game the A's have been involved in.

"He had two different fastballs," A's manager Bob Geren said, "a cut fastball that was 88 to 91 (mph) and a four-seamer that was a good 4 to 5 miles per hour harder. He pitched well."

Chavez said he and his teammates were thinking about a victory more than avoiding a no-hitter.

"When the ballgame is close, that's what you're thinking about, just getting on base," Chavez said.

The game drew a crowd of 30,211, an increase of nearly 11,000 fans from Tuesday.

The Yankees scored all the runs they would need during a two-run fourth, fueled by back-to-back triples.

Ryan Sweeney made a diving attempt on Alex Rodriguez's shallow fly to right field, but the ball skip past him, allowing Rodriguez to reach third. Robinson Cano then pulled a ball just inside the first-base line for another triple to put the visitors on the board. Cano scored on Jorge Posada's ground out.

Sheets (1-1) appeared to take another step forward in his fourth start of the season. He allowed just those two runs and four hits in six innings.

"I thought it was OK," Sheets said. "The stuff was better. With that stuff I'd like to pitch better, throw more strikes and pitch deeper in the game."

A's reliever Jerry Blevins left the game in the eighth with back spasms but said he'll know more about his condition after being examined today.

Strained hamstring finally forces A's second baseman Mark Ellis onto 15-day disabled list

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Hamstring injury finally forces Ellis onto DL

Mark Ellis' return to the field was short-lived, as the A's placed the second baseman on the 15-day disabled list Wednesday and recalled catcher Landon Powell from Triple-A Sacramento.

Ellis missed seven games with a strained left hamstring but felt good enough to start Tuesday. He aggravated the injury and left after five innings.

"My first at-bat I took a swing and it grabbed," Ellis said. "I knew I wasn't ready to play. I just kind of wasted seven days, but I didn't know until I tried."

Adam Rosales started at second Wednesday night against the New York Yankees.

Had Ellis not played Tuesday, the A's could have made his DL stint retroactive to April 12, making him eligible to rejoin the active roster sooner. But manager Bob Geren said Ellis figures to need a full 15-day period to recuperate.

Ellis said he's especially frustrated because he was feeling good at the plate. He's hitting .323 in 31 at-bats.

Powell hit just .217 in six games with Sacramento. But he'll give Geren roster flexibility in that Geren can start Jake Fox at DH and still have a catcher available off the bench if starter Kurt Suzuki gets injured.

Travis Buck was a late scratch in left field because of a strained right oblique. He said after the game that it hurt when he coughed or laughed. It's possible he could join Ellis on the DL. He homered and hit the ball hard three times Tuesday. "Just when I was starting to feel good," he said. "It's unbelievable when something like this happens."

Rajai Davis, hitting .140 over his past 10 games, sat for the first time this season until pinch-running in the eighth inning. Cliff Pennington took his place in the leadoff spot and Gabe Gross played center field. Geren batted Suzuki cleanup and dropped Kevin Kouzmanoff to sixth in the order. Kouzmanoff came into the game 0-for-16 with runners in scoring position, the most at-bats of anyone in the majors in that situation without a hit.

Reliever Michael Wuertz (shoulder tendinitis) threw a scoreless inning with two walks and a strikeout in Sacramento's 5-1 loss to Portland.

Chin Music: Mark Ellis to the DL; A's recall catcher Landon Powell; plus other pregame notes

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times, 4/21/2010 5:09PM

The sun has appeared here at the Coliseum as the A's take BP. That's a welcome sign, because it's been about as chilly as I can remember leading up to a night game here. We've had overcast skies, and weather.com calls for a 70 percent chance of rain leading up to the game (dropping to 50 percent by game time). But it's the strong wind that might have players grabbing for turtlenecks tonight ...

-Mark Ellis was placed on the DL and catcher Landon Powell was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento. Ellis said his left hamstring felt great as he worked out leading up to last night's game. But he felt it grab in his first at-bat and knew something was wrong. Ellis said he feels like his seven days of inactivity were a waste, since he could have started his DL stint earlier and let the injury heal. And considering he was hitting .323 and felt good at the plate, he's especially frustrated. "I felt really good, but it'll be fine. I'll get back to that," he said.

Calling up Powell gives manager Bob Geren some flexibility to get Jake Fox in the lineup more if he chooses. He can have Fox DH and still have an extra catcher on the bench. Plus, if Fox is DH and there was a spot to pinch-hit Eric Chavez for him, Geren could do that and still have a backup catcher available. Geren added that he thinks Kurt Suzuki's swing is coming around, and he doesn't have any plans to start Powell at catcher in the coming days.

Powell was hitting just .217 in 23 at-bats w/the River Cats, but the A's are familiar w/what he can do based on last season.

—I spoke briefly with Craig Breslow, who said he was trying to run a fastball inside on Alex Rodriguez last night but instead left the pitch out over the plate. A-Rod crushed a three-run homer.

Breslow, like Brad Ziegler, takes on a more prominent bullpen role until Michael Wuertz comes back. So the A's need the lefty to be sharp. Breslow said he was a little tentative in cutting loose w/his fastball when he first returned from an elbow injury in spring training. But he says he's felt better since then.

—Rajai Davis, hitting .140 over his past 10 games, gets his first day off. Cliff Pennington gets a start in the leadoff spot, though Geren said it's likely just for tonight. "Sometimes guys watch the game and they regroup," Geren said of Davis. Gabe Gross gets the start in center field.

Also, Kevin Kouzmanoff — 0-for-16 with runners in scoring position so far — drops to sixth in the order with Suzuki hitting cleanup.

—Watch the matchups between Daric Barton and Yankees starter Phil Hughes tonight. Barton says the two faced each other in high school a couple times. Hughes attended Foothill High in Santa Ana, while Barton went to Marina High in Huntington Beach.

Tonight's lineups:

A's:

Pennington SS
Barton 1B
Sweeney RF
Suzuki C
Chavez DH
Kouzmanoff 3B
Gross CF
Rosales 2B
Buck LF
Sheets RHP

Yanks

Jeter SS
Johnson DH
Teixeira 1B
Rodriguez 3B
Cano 2B
Posada C
Granderson CF
Winn RF
Gardner LF
Hughes RHP

A's break up Hughes' no hitter, but Yanks win

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Eric Chavez said he knew from the first pitch he saw from Yankees starter Phil Hughes on Wednesday night that Hughes was going to be tough; the ball was jumping out of Hughes' hand.

Through seven innings, Hughes held the A's to one walk, but Chavez thunked the first pitch of the eighth off Hughes' left forearm. Had Hughes not lost track of the ball at that point, he might have kept his no-hitter intact, but as he looked around, Chavez motored to first base.

Hughes said afterward that it felt as if he'd spent eight minutes trying to find the ball.

"I knew I hit it at him, but I didn't know if it deflected off him," Chavez said. "He didn't find it, and that was good. ... When the ballgame is close, you're really not thinking about the no-hitter, you're thinking about getting on base and making something happen."

The A's wound up pinning a run on Hughes in that inning after Gabe Gross drew a walk off the right-hander and pinch-hitter Jake Fox delivered an RBI single off reliever Joba Chamberlain. The Yankees, and Hughes, still got the victory, 3-1 at the Coliseum.

"To have it end there was kind of a bummer, but that's the game, and I'm glad we got the win," said Hughes, who threw 61/3 no-hit innings in 2007 before pulling a hamstring in his second major-league start. "It's so hard to do, throw a no-hitter, and you don't get many opportunities to do it. It's frustrating."

The A's threatened in the ninth against Mariano Rivera, getting two on with one out, but Chavez hit into a force and Kevin Kouzmanoff flied out to end the game.

"We did have the winning run at the plate," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "You've got to love the way we bounced back."

A much healthier crowd than the previous night, 30,211, had a strong New York slant from the get-go, and the Yankees' cheers grew ever louder as Hughes' night went along. Once the no-hitter was broken up, though, there was a loud response from the locals, with a familiar refrain disparaging the Yankees.

Ben Sheets started for Oakland, making his second career appearance against the Yankees - while with the Brewers, he threw seven shutout innings in a start against New York at Milwaukee on June 7, 2005.

It wasn't a bad night for Sheets, who went six. He extracted himself from jams in the first and second, but in the fourth, Alex Rodriguez and Robinson Cano hit back-to-back triples and Cano came home on a grounder by Jorge Posada.

"He's just quietly making his way up," Chavez said of Sheets' improvement in each outing. "To keep us in the ballgame against a team like that is encouraging."

Sheets said he feels good about his stuff, but he'd like to start throwing more strikes and getting deeper into games. He also said he didn't mind Ryan Sweeney diving for the ball Rodriguez hit and, he added of Sweeney, "He didn't throw his glove at me for giving up a triple (to Cano) on an o-2 pitch."

The last no-hitter against the A's was thrown by four Baltimore pitchers on July 13, 1991, at the Coliseum.

Hamstring forces Ellis to DL; Buck might follow

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Injuries, the A's main enemy the past three years, struck in full force Wednesday.

The day began with second baseman **Mark Ellis** going on the disabled list with recurring hamstring tendinitis; because he played Tuesday, the injury cannot be backdated.

Then, outfielder **Travis Buck** was scratched from the lineup 20 minutes before the game. He pulled his right oblique muscle while taking batting practice in the indoor cage, and it sounds as if he will be another DL addition. He said his side hurt when he coughed or laughed.

"It's a freak thing, just when I started to feel good," Buck said. "I've never had this before, but hopefully it won't be as bad as it feels right now."

If there's a chance he'll miss much time, the A's are likely to make a call to Triple-A Sacramento.

Even though one of their top prospects, **Michael Taylor**, is an outfielder, if the A's require a replacement until Buck or **Coco Crisp** (fractured pinkie) is back, the better candidate at this point might be **Matt Carson**. Carson, who was up in September, is batting .357, but he's not on the 40-man roster.

In the eighth inning, in the middle of **Nick Johnson's** at-bat, reliever **Jerry Blevins** had to leave the game with back spasms. He said after the game that his back was still stiff, and he hasn't had the problem before so he's not sure how he'll be today.

Briefly: Catcher **Landon Powell** was called up when Ellis went on the DL. ... **Michael Wuertz** (rotator-cuff tendinitis) threw another scoreless inning at Sacramento - his third - allowing two walks and striking out one. ... **Rajai Davis** didn't start for the first time this season; **Cliff Pennington** hit in the leadoff spot. ... **Kevin Kouzmanoff**, now 0-for-17 with men in scoring position, was moved from the cleanup spot to sixth. **Kurt Suzuki** hit cleanup.

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Billowy: Today's starting pitchers, Stockton's Dallas Braden and Vallejo's CC Sabathia, might sport the baggiest pants in the league. "They're about the same with the bagginess - and Ben Sheets is up there, too," catcher Kurt Suzuki said.

Ellis heads to DL, lineup gets a shuffle - updated

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum

After missing seven games with left hamstring tendinitis, Mark Ellis tried to play on Tuesday night and felt the hamstring grab in his very first at-bat. He came out in the sixth, and today, he's on the DL. It's sort of a shame he played last night, because he can't be backdated on the DL, but Ellis said he wouldn't have known where he was at with the hamstring unless he'd played in a game - game speed is just that much different. He'd felt fine taking batting practice and doing running and agility drills, but trying to hit a big-league fastball is a different animal.

So he's out for the next 15 days and Landon Powell, who was the A's backup catcher all of last season, has returned. That means that Jake Fox will not be behind the plate for a while; he'll DH tomorrow, in fact. (It's doubtful he'll catch at all while Powell is here, really.) And manager Bob Geren said he will feel more comfortable pinch running for Fox if he's in the game now that there's another catcher. Geren said Fox continues to work at other positions (outfield, third, first) but my guess is that Geren probably won't use Fox anywhere but DH unless there's an emergency.

The lineup is a little unusual: Pennington SS, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Chavez DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Gross CF, Rosales 2B, Buck LF. Geren said it's just a night off for Davis against a pitcher, Phil Hughes, who is tough on right-handers;

Davis has been in a funk and Geren believes a rest will do Davis some good. Pennington is getting his first shot at hitting leadoff this year; Geren said it's likely to be just for tonight. Davis had led off every other game this season.

Geren also said he believes Suzuki is coming out of the little slump he's been in, which might be a reason Suzuki is batting cleanup. Kevin Kouzmanoff, 0-for-16 with men in scoring position, had started every previous game at the cleanup spot.

There's been some continued talk about Geren's decision to replace a lefty, Gio Gonzalez, with another left-hander, Craig Breslow, to face Alex Rodriguez, a right-handed hitter who is crushing left-handers this year. Geren said after the game that the fifth inning is too early to start matching up left vs. left - but is that really the case? That actually happens pretty often, especially in a 3-0 game, with two men on, and the best right-handed hitter in the league up. Breslow was likely warming up to face the left-handed hitters behind Rodriguez, and as Geren said, after Rodriguez, the inning set up pretty well for Breslow after A-Rod. Well, if that is so: wait to put him in, or stick in a right-handed reliever.

I thought that might have been a good spot for Tyson Ross. I know the team is trying to work him in slowly, and OK, facing A-Rod with two men on in a three-run game isn't a gimme. Quite the contrary. But Ross has been terrific, he seems to like a challenge, and in that situation, A-Rod has never seen him before - Ross might have the advantage. Or at least more of an advantage than Breslow. Plus, Ross can stay in and go two or three innings. Maybe that string of left-handed hitters and switch-hitters after Rodriguez gave Geren pause, but that's still the matchup I'd have liked to see there.

Breslow said he threw Rodriguez a fastball that didn't get in enough. He'd figured he'd probably come into the game to face Robinson Cano, but relievers don't second-guess where they're used; that's everyone else's job. Breslow is always happy that the A's don't use him as a strict lefty-lefty guy and, he said today, he should be able to get everyone out, left and right, when he's used that way.

Second-guessing the manager is the easiest thing to do, of course, but there was a lot of first-guessing going on last night. There were many people in the stadium who believed that Rodriguez was going to hit one out before he'd even swung the bat.

If you missed this near the bottom of [this morning's game story in the Chronicle](#), Daric Barton was initially told his right elbow was fractured; X-rays showed a crack and doctors said it wasn't an old injury. Barton wanted an MRI to make sure, because he just couldn't believe it was fractured, and the MRI agreed with him.

There's been some talk today about the call/non-call on Barton in the first inning: after knocking down a sharp hopper by Jorge Posada that took a bad bounce, Barton overran the ball and couldn't recover. He wasn't charged with an error. The reasoning: the ball took a bad hop initially. The counter argument: He still had plenty of time to make the play after knocking down the ball, and it's awfully tough to pin all those earned runs on Gio Gonzalez when he'd gotten what should have been an out.

I see the logic in both, but I agree it's rough to pin those runs on Gonzalez. I'm pretty sure Barton would agree that was an error; I haven't had a chance to ask him, but I know he takes great pride in his defense and I bet he'd say that's a play he usually makes.

UPDATE: I finally got a chance to check with Barton and he said the ball struck him in the throat, so he's OK with no error getting charged. That *is* a bad bounce.

The update on home-plate umpire Ed Rapuano, hit in the jaw by a foul tip off Kouzmanoff's bat last night: He was released from Summit Medical Center but he will take a few days off. No further information has been provided, and the A's are expecting a minor-league fill in to augment the umpire rotation tonight.

Sheets can't match Hughes in Oakland

Hitless until eighth inning, A's take third consecutive loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's biggest hit on Wednesday night was nothing more than an infield single off the bat of Eric Chavez.

The ball bounced off the left forearm of Yankees starter Phil Hughes before disappearing from the righty's view while simply sitting right in front of him as Chavez rolled over the white bag at first.

That eighth-inning hit eventually resulted in a run, but it couldn't erase Oakland's overall offensive woes. Nor could it erase the 10 strikeouts tallied by the green and gold's batters.

And no, the hit didn't erase an eventual 3-1 defeat to the Yanks.

It did erase history, though.

Chavez's hit marked the first off Hughes -- literally and figuratively -- as Wednesday's A's lineup came six outs away from forever being etched in history as the victim of a no-hitter in a 2-0 game.

Six outs later, though, the A's simply walked away with their third consecutive loss -- one that made Chavez's hit nothing more than that in a quiet Oakland clubhouse.

"When it's a ballgame that's close, that's really what you're thinking about," Chavez said. "You're just thinking about getting on base and trying to make anything happen. You're not going up there thinking you're trying to break up a no-hitter. You're thinking about trying to win the ballgame. If it's 5-0 or 6-0, it's different. But everyone knows that if you're down, 2-0, you're one swing away from being back in it."

Said Hughes, who was making his first career start against Oakland: "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't [thinking about it]. Obviously, I knew I hadn't given up a hit. It was a first-pitch fastball away, and he hit it back up the middle. It hit off my forearm, which was angled in such a way that I thought it went straight up. Obviously it didn't, and I couldn't find it in time. It's not really the way you want to give up a no-hitter, but that's the way it goes."

After striking out Kevin Kouzmanoff for the third time, Hughes exited with one out in the frame, as Joba Chamberlain came on to offer up that run-producing hit the A's had been waiting for all night. It came in the form of a single from pinch-hitter Jake Fox, who brought Chavez home after the A's designated hitter had advanced to second when Kurt Suzuki was hit by a pitch.

That was one of only three hits Oakland could muster all night, though, as the club left a total of four runners on base in the final two innings, the last of which was pitched by Mariano Rivera.

"Whether or not we got a hit was irrelevant, because the only thing that matters is a win or a loss," A's starter Ben Sheets said. "We were giving ourselves opportunities to tie and win the game in the eighth and the ninth. That's what we should look at. We were right there with an opportunity, and if you get no-hit, it's just a loss. And if you get a no-hitter, it's just a win. Bottom-line results are wins and losses."

Sheets' solid six innings of work were lost in the shuffle of Hughes' gem, but they didn't go unnoticed by his manager.

"It sounds like a broken record, but he keeps getting better and better with every start," A's skipper Bob Geren said. "When you give up two runs against the Yankees, you give your team a solid chance to win, and he did that tonight."

Sheets limited the Yankees to two runs on four hits -- two of which were back-to-back triples in the fourth -- while walking three and fanning four. He echoed Geren's sentiments of his continual improvement, but the bulldog in Sheets knows he has more to offer.

"I thought it was OK," said Sheets, who hasn't given up more than three earned runs in any of his starts this season. "I thought my stuff was a lot better. With that stuff, I'd like to pitch better and throw more strikes to get deeper in the game."

"I felt physically able to go another inning if need be. I could have done it. For me, that tells me I'm getting better, that I'm starting to get right. We lost the game, though. It's tough to cope with."

Eight of Oakland's nine starters struck out at least once in the game, as not much was done to aid Sheets, who wasn't too interested that his opponent retired 20 in a row.

"How Hughes pitches is not relevant to me," Sheets said. "He pitched a great game when you look back on it, but I was worried about trying to throw zeros."

"He was good," Chavez said of Sheets. "He's just been quietly working his way up. For him to go out there and throw the ball against a lineup like that and keep us in the ballgame, it's just real encouraging."

So was an impressive performance from the A's bullpen, which limited New York to one run and four hits in the final three innings. Not so encouraging, though, was left-hander Jerry Blevins' exit in the eighth after he experienced back spasms.

The injury came just three hours following an announcement that Travis Buck was scratched from his start in left field due to what was deemed a strained right oblique. Furthermore, second baseman Mark Ellis was placed on the disabled list before the game with a strained left hamstring.

Still, Geren's glass remained half-full following Wednesday's loss despite the status of his banged-up team.

"We always felt like we were in the game," Geren said. "You've got to love the way they bounced back and fought all the way to the last pitch."

A's place Ellis on disabled list

Second baseman aggravates hamstring strain Tuesday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Just 24 hours after finally making his way back into the lineup, A's second baseman Mark Ellis was placed on the 15-day disabled list on Wednesday with a strained left hamstring.

Ellis started each of the club's first seven games before missing the next seven with the injury, which was aggravated in his first at-bat during Tuesday's 7-3 loss to the visiting Yankees. He went 0-for-2 before leaving the game in the sixth inning, and manager Bob Geren said a recent MRI showed tendinitis near the back of Ellis' hamstring.

"It's not any worse than it was before the game," Ellis said on Wednesday as his teammates prepared to take on New York for the second game of a three-game set. "In my first at-bat swinging, I knew it probably wasn't ready to play. ... A big league fastball is a little different, and it just grabbed."

On Tuesday, the 32-year-old Ellis -- undergoing his fifth career stint on the DL -- was making his first start since April 11 at Anaheim, where he initially experienced the hamstring soreness while running to first base on a grounder. He also missed a handful of Spring Training games with tightness in both hamstrings.

At the onset of his injury, Ellis and the A's believed the veteran infielder would miss only a couple of games before returning and hoping to maintain his .323 average. However, a couple of days turned into a week, and now Ellis knows that wasn't even enough time.

"I just kind of wasted seven days, but I wouldn't have known unless I tested it in a game," Ellis said. "It's definitely frustrating, though."

"I was feeling fine taking batting practice and ground balls. I felt really good at the start of the season, and I'll get back to normal and totally healthy."

Ellis' absence on the roster cleared a spot for the return of Landon Powell, who hit .162 in 20 games with the A's during Spring Training before learning the rather surprising news that he would start the season at Triple-A Sacramento while the club relied on Jake Fox as its backup catcher behind Kurt Suzuki.

At the time of his promotion on Wednesday, the 28-year-old Powell was batting .217 with a home run and two RBIs in six games with Sacramento, having appeared in three games at catcher, two at designated hitter and one at first base.

"It gives me a little more flexibility with how I use Jake Fox," Geren said. "He did a nice job for us last year."

Powell spent all of last season on the A's roster but appeared in just 46 games in place of Suzuki, hitting .229 with seven homers and 30 RBIs in his first full season in the big leagues. Right now, the catcher's presence will simply give the A's plenty of time to get Ellis back up to full speed.

"It doesn't look real bad," Geren said, "so we're happy about that. We'll get him healthy and keep our bench at full strength."

Buck, Blevins among A's wounded

Outfielder strains right oblique before Wednesday's loss

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 4/22/2010

OAKLAND -- Reliever Jerry Blevins joined the growing list of wounded A's players when he left Wednesday's 3-1 loss to the Yankees in the eighth inning after experiencing back spasms.

The injury surfaced on an 0-2 count to Curtis Granderson, whom right-hander Tyson Ross eventually came in to face, replacing Blevins.

"I stepped wrong and landed in a hole," Blevins said after the game. "It seized up real quick when I made that odd landing. I tried to stretch it out, but it's still a little stiff."

The A's won't know much more about Blevins' status until Thursday morning, when they'll also hear news on Travis Buck, a late scratch Wednesday due to a strained right oblique muscle. The outfielder first experienced pain while swinging in the batting cage less than an hour before first pitch.

"I've never had it before," Buck said. "It's a freak thing, really. I was just starting to feel good, so hopefully it won't feel as bad tomorrow as it does today."

However, Buck couldn't hide a rather worried expression on Wednesday night, when he told reporters he's in pain every time he coughs or laughs.

"It hurts pretty good," Buck said. "It's unbelievable when something like this happens. It's frustrating."

A's give scuffling Davis first night off

OAKLAND -- Even Rajai Davis needs a day off every now and then.

The A's speedster, who entered Wednesday tied for the Major League lead in steals, received his first day of rest for the second game of a three-game series with the visiting Yankees.

Along with Daric Barton, Cliff Pennington and Kevin Kouzmanoff, Davis was one of four A's players to start all 15 games this year. However, his recent struggles at the plate influenced manager Bob Geren to sit the outfielder against right-handed starter Phil Hughes.

"It was a good day to get him a day off with a tough righty going," Geren said. "He's been struggling a bit. Sometimes, taking a day off to watch from the bench can help a player."

After going 9-for-24 over his first five games, Davis is 6-for-43 (.140) over his past 10 contests. He was replaced in the leadoff spot on Wednesday by Pennington, who has proven to be a consistent lineup mainstay for the A's in the No. 9 spot.

"He's done a nice job for us and always gives us good at-bats," Geren said. "He can induce walks, as well as homers."

In fact, the switch-hitting Pennington not only leads the team in home runs (two) but also in RBIs (10). He entered Wednesday's matchup batting .239 in 46 at-bats, and Geren said Wednesday's lineup mix will likely be a onetime occurrence.

"He's been in that position before, but it will more than likely just be for today," Geren said.

Wuertz makes third rehab outing

OAKLAND -- In his ongoing effort to return to a Major League mound, right-hander Michael Wuertz didn't give up a hit in one inning of work for Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday.

The A's reliever, rehabbing from right shoulder tendinitis that had him begin the season on the disabled list, walked two and struck out one in the first frame of the River Cats' mid-morning contest.

Wuertz entered the outing having allowed just two hits and a walk, next to one strikeout, in two innings of rehab work.

Following a 2009 season in which he made a team-leading 74 appearances while posting a 2.63 ERA, Wuertz appeared in just two Spring Training games due to the sore shoulder.

The 31-year-old Wuertz is in the midst of his first career stint on the DL. In the meantime, Oakland's bullpen entered Wednesday having posted a 3.35 ERA -- good for fifth lowest in the American League.

Yanks bring out best in Suzuki

OAKLAND -- The streaky Kurt Suzuki is at it again. And A's manager Bob Geren believes his catcher will continue his productive ways.

Suzuki went 4-for-11 over his first three games before entering a 3-for-26 slump during his next eight contests. However, entering Wednesday's matchup against the visiting Yankees, the catcher was batting .333 in his previous three games.

The timing shouldn't come as much of a surprise, though. The 26-year-old Suzuki is riding an 11-game hitting streak against the Yankees dating back to July 18, 2008, a span during which he's 20-for-47.

"He's starting to swing the bat a lot better," Geren said. "He was getting a little anxious in the zone, but now it looks like he's back to where he needs to be."

Suzuki proved just that by going 2-for-4 with a home run in Tuesday night's 7-3 loss. He batted in the cleanup spot ahead of designated hitter Eric Chavez for Wednesday's affair.

Chavez breaks up no-hitter in 8th, but A's lose to Yankees, 3-1

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Phil Hughes took a no-hit try into the eighth inning Wednesday night, losing his bid when Eric Chavez bounced a hard comebacker off the pitcher's side in the New York Yankees' 3-1 win over the Oakland Athletics.

Hughes (2-0) struck out a career-high 10 in the Yankees' sixth straight win. He was in complete control until Chavez opened the eighth with a one-hopper back to the mound.

Hughes had little time to react and the ball hit near his glove, around his left hip. The 23-year-old righty couldn't find the ball in front of the mound as Chavez hustled for a single.

This was the second near-miss for the defending World Series champions this season. CC Sabathia held Tampa Bay hitless for 7 2-3 innings on April 10.

Colorado's Ubaldo Jimenez pitched the majors' only no-hitter of 2010 last Saturday night at Atlanta.

Hughes right-hander was trying for the Yankees' first no-hitter since David Cone's perfect game against Montreal on July 18, 1999. Hughes had come close before — in 2007, during his second major league start, he had a no-hitter going through 6 1-3 innings at Texas before he suddenly hurt his left hamstring and had to leave the game.

Hughes won the fifth spot in the Yankees' rotation by pitching well in spring training, and his outing at Oakland was his best performance this season. After a one-out walk to Daric Barton in the first inning, Hughes retired 20 straight batters before Chavez's infield hit.

Overall, Hughes gave up only one hit in 7 1-3 innings and walked two.

Two batters after Chavez got aboard, Hughes walked Gabe Gross and was done. He was charged with Oakland's lone run in the standout 101-pitch performance after pinch-hitter Jake Fox had an RBI single off Joba Chamberlain.

Mariano Rivera finished the three-hitter for his sixth save in as many chances.

Alex Rodriguez and Robinson Cano hit back-to-back triples to start the fourth off \$10 million A's ace Ben Sheets (1-1). Jorge Posada followed Cano's hit with an RBI groundout. Brett Gardner's RBI single with two outs in the ninth provided an insurance run.

New York matched the 1926 Yankees' franchise record by winning its first five series of the season.

Hughes shut down the A's by pounding the zone with his spot-on fastball and mixing in an effective curveball. He quieted the crowd of 30,211 for much of the chilly, breezy spring evening in the Bay Area. It was Hughes' first career start against Oakland.

Hughes began last season in the minors then was called up April 28. He made seven starts before becoming a reliable reliever as closer Rivera's primary setup man over the final three months.

The Yankees have held opponents to three or fewer runs in each game during their winning streak.

Both managers mixed up their lineups for the middle game of the series. Randy Winn earned a start in right field for the Yankees in place of Nick Swisher. Oakland manager Bob Geren rested leadoff hitter and center fielder Rajai Davis for part of the night, moving Cliff Pennington to the top of the order and putting catcher Kurt Suzuki in the cleanup spot.

The umpiring crew changed, too. Ed Rapuano was replaced for the final two games of the series after taking a foul ball off his facemask Tuesday night as plate umpire. The A's said Rapuano was taking a few days off as a precaution. Pacific Coast League umpire Mike Muchlinski was called up to take Rapuano's spot.

Yankees Wins Game 2 of Series

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 4/22/2010

Oakland, CA – The New York Yankees are inching closer to sweeping a three game series. Pitcher Phil Hughes was close to pitching his first shut out of the season. But a late rally from the Oakland A's in the eighth ended that goal. Yet, it did not stop the world series champions from getting the win 3-1 and taking the series 2-0.

Hughes took a no-hitter into the eighth inning before Eric Chavez led off with a bop-back that hit the pitcher's left forearm. A disoriented Hughes could not locate the ball as many of his teammates yelled from every base "it's right in front of you" meanwhile Chavez was safe first.

"Pitchers elevate early," said Joe Girardi. "Sometimes you can predict that and sometimes you can't, like the night before when we got three runs." "We're going to keep everyone involved with our rotation of pitchers and see how that goes."

No problem for the 23-year old who struck out a career-high 10 in the Yankees' sixth straight win. However, that hit ended his night at the mound and Joba Chamberlain was his replacement. The A's had life restored in them when Gabe Gross was walked and pinch-hitter Jake Fox hit a RBI that brought Chavez in giving Oakland their only run of the game.

The Yankees began their run early, both Alex Rodriguez and Robinson Cano hit back-to-back triples to start the fourth off A's pitcher Ben Sheets. Jorge Posada followed Cano's triple with a RBI ground out that led to Brett Gardner's single which allowed him to score taking New York up 3-0.

"I thought it was OK," Sheets said. "With that stuff I'd like to pitch better, throw more strikes and pitch deeper in the game."

In his four starts this season Sheets allowed two runs on four hits and three walks. He had a solid performance in six innings. The A's bullpen was busy in movement when Jerry Blevins took over at the mound during the seventh inning before experiencing back spasms. Next up was Tyros Ross to close out the game.

The A's have lost their first three straight games of the season. Eight of Oakland's nine starters struck out at least once during the game. Their woes continued as New York moves closer to sweeping the series. Game two is tomorrow at 12:35 where home tome CC Sabathia will be pitching against Dallas Branden.

Notes – Just 24 hours after finally making his way back into the lineup, A's second baseman Mark Ellis was placed on the 15-day disabled list on Wednesday with a strained left hamstring. Ellis started each of the club's first seven games before missing the next seven with the injury, which was aggravated in his first at-bat during Tuesday's 7-3 loss to the visiting Yankees. He went 0-for-2 before leaving the game in the sixth inning, and manager Bob Geren said a recent MRI showed tendinitis near the back of Ellis' hamstring.

The-As-almost-get-nohit-by-the-Yankees-and-have-lost-three-straight

Ryan Leong, examiner.com, 4/22/2010

OAKLAND, Calif -- The A's were almost part of history and not the way they want to be remembered in the record books.

Yankees' pitcher Phil Hughes proved he is a phenom on Wednesday night when he hurled seven no-hit innings against the A's in a 3-1 win for New York. Hughes also added a career high 10 strikeouts in dominating the Oakland lineup.

The pinstripers have won six in a row and improved to a major league best 11-3.

"It's always nice to have stuff like that but it's just so hard to do that any little thing can happen and it did," said Hughes who improved to 2-0 with a 2.19 ERA.

Hughes also has allowed only four hits in 12 1/3 innings pitched while striking out 16 in two outings.

"He's been throwing the ball well," Yankees manager Joe Girardi said. "He threw the ball well in Spring Training. When he came up last year he threw some good games for us. He's just a young man that's gotten bigger and stronger and has matured."

The Yankees won the game but it was another impressive outing for Ben Sheets (1-1) who pitched six innings allowing four hits and two runs but took his first loss of the season.

"I felt physically able if we needed another inning I could have done it," Sheets said. "For me that tells me I'm getting better and starting to get right. I've lost a game now. It's tough to cope with."

The Yankees scored twice in the fourth. Alex Rodriguez hit a slicing fly ball to right. Ryan Sweeney made a diving play on the ball but was unable to make the catch as the ball got away from him and allowed Rodriguez to reach third with a triple.

The next batter was Robinson Cano who grounded a ball past first base for a run scoring triple. Jorge Posada followed with an RBI groundout making it a two run lead.

The A's couldn't muster anything off Hughes who after allowing a one out walk to Daric Barton, retired 20 in a row until Eric Chavez singled off Hughes' left forearm for an infield single.

Hughes thought the ball went straight up in the air and was disoriented while it was in between the mound and home plate. By the time Hughes saw it, Chavez was easily safe with Oakland's first hit of the game.

"I knew I hit it decent," Chavez said. "I'm not sure where it hit him and he didn't find it so that was good. His ball was explosive and it just jumped out of his hand and you knew he was throwing the ball pretty good from the beginning."

Chavez eventually scored on an RBI single by pinch hitter Jake Fox.

The Yankees added to their lead in the ninth on an RBI single by Brett Gardner giving New York an important insurance run which gave closer Mariano Rivera a little cushion. Although the A's had the potential winning run at the plate in Kevin Kouzmanoff with runners at the corners, Rivera induced him to fly out to center for career save number 532.

"Whether or not we got a hit was irrelevant because the only thing that matters is a win or a loss," Sheets said. "Giving ourselves opportunities in the eighth and ninth inning to tie or win the game is what we should look at and realize that we were right there to tie it or win it."

"I mean if you get no-hit it's just a loss and if you throw a no-hitter it's a just a win. The bottom line result is wins, losses."

Said Fox, "I think everybody's at the point of the season where they're just trying to win ballgames and get off to a good start. Everyone hits a lull here or there. We've had a couple of games where we haven't played as well as we're capable of playing and we've just got to get back on it."

"It doesn't matter if we're playing the Yankees, the Red Sox, the Orioles, or the Mariners, we've just got to get back on it, keep playing well and do what we do best."

The A's will try to avoid the three game sweep on Thursday afternoon when the A's send Stockton's Dallas Braden (2-0, 2.70) to the mound against Vallejo native C.C. Sabathia (2-0, 2.84) for the Yankees in what should be a great pitcher's duel.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Portland pitching slows down Sacramento

By Allie Mandel / Sacramento River Cats

The Sacramento River Cats dropped their fourth game in a row Wednesday, falling 4-1 to the Portland Beavers, who took a 2-0 series lead.

Michael Wuertz, down from the Oakland A's on a rehab assignment, got the start for Sacramento. The first two batters walked, and lead-off hitter Luis Durango stole second before Wuertz walked Craig Stansberry. Chris Denorfia grounded into a double play before Wuertz ended his appearance and the inning with a strikeout.

Kyle Middleton relieved Wuertz to start the second. Middleton, 1-0 with 4.91 ERA going into the game, had troubles of his own, allowing two hits in the inning before getting out of the jam with the second double play of the game.

Michael Taylor started the River Cats offense with a ground-rule double to open the second, bouncing the ball over the center-field fence. Catcher Josh Donaldson was thrown out at first for the first out of the inning. After walking Steve Tolleson, Beavers pitcher Will Inman struck out Jai Miller and Michael Affronti to end the inning.

Corey Wimberly led off in the third with a single to right field. After almost getting picked off on first, Wimberly easily stole second as Beavers catcher Chris Stewart bobbled the ball on a tough pitch from Inman. Inman looked shaky as he walked center fielder Matt Carson and first baseman Chris Carter. Michael Taylor then hit into a force out, scoring Wimberly to put the Cats up 1-0.

The Beavers quickly struck back, as left fielder Aaron Cunningham hit a solo home run on the first pitch of the fifth. This was the former River Cat's first home run of the season. Sean Kazmar then singled on a ball that popped in and out of Middleton's glove. A Stewart single and Durango sacrifice grounder scored Kazmar and left Stewart in scoring position.

Middleton looked shaky as he walked the next two Beavers batters to load the bases.

With two out, Craig Cooper hit a two-run single on a play that left Middleton aching. Cooper hit a ball that ricocheted off Middleton toward the first-base line. After absorbing the blow, Middleton dove toward the ball and flipped to Chris Carter at first base. The ball never got to Carter, and Middleton then attempted to throw out Craig Stansberry at home. The throw got past Cats catcher Josh Donaldson, who recovered in time to toss the ball to Carter, who tagged out Denorfia at home plate.

Middleton pitched 6.2 innings, allowing six hits and four runs (all earned).

The Beavers added a run in the ninth, with Baxter hitting a double to left field to start the inning before scoring on a Kazmar sacrifice fly. Carson caught three consecutive fly balls to end the inning.

Donaldson, Tolleson and Affronti all singled to load the bases in the ninth, bringing up pinch-hitter Jack Cust as the tying run. Cust struck out swinging, putting the Cats one out away from the loss. All hopes would be dashed when Wimberly grounded into a fielder's choice to end the game.

It was a tough loss for the River Cats (7-7), who had hoped to end a three-game skid and tie the series against Portland 1-1. River Cats right hander Clayton Mortensen, who is 2-0 with a 3.46 ERA, will get the start at 7:05 p.m. on Thursday, as the River Cats look to take one back from the Beavers.

66ers Blast Ports, 7-3

STOCKTON, Calif. - The rain showers that plagued Stockton this week cleared out around 5 p.m. on Wednesday, and the Ports (5-8) had no problem finishing the series against Inland Empire (7-7). They did have some problems in collecting hits, however, totaling just two hits in a 7-3 loss against Inland Empire to wrap up their opening series at home.

Grant Green collected his second home run of the season and it was the Ports' lone hit until Jermaine Mitchell singled in the eighth frame. The Ports left six stranded as the 66ers issued eight walks in the contest. Stockton starter Kenny Smalley allowed all seven 66ers runs on six hits-including two back-to-back home runs-in 5.0 innings. Paul Smyth and Daniel Sattler combined for 4.0 scoreless innings. Smyth fanned two in his 3.0 innings of work.

Smalley retired the 66ers in order in the first. In the bottom of the first, Grant Green blasted his solo shot into the Ports bullpen in left field, with one out. The Ports got another base runner that inning, as right fielder Jeremy Barfield walked, but Barfield was put out at second as Stephen Parker grounded into a fielder's choice.

Inland Empire pulled ahead 2-1 in the second inning. With one out, first baseman Austin Gallagher walked. He moved to third on a double by Alfredo Silverio. Smalley then struck out shortstop Chris Gutierrez. Catcher Matt Wallach then collected a two-out 2 RBI single to put the 66ers ahead. Second baseman Bridger Hunt flew out to end the frame.

Inland Empire added to their lead in the third inning. Centerfielder Nick Buss led off with a walk. With Cesar Suarez batting, Smalley attempted to pickoff Buss, and committed an error. Buss made it safely to second. Suarez then reached on a fielder's choice as the Ports tried to put out Buss. Buss made it to third and Suarez was safe at first. Right fielder Kyle Russell then stepped up to the plate and launched a three-run shot to right field on an 0-2 pitch. He was followed around the bases by Pedro Baez, who collected a solo shot, his first homer of the season. Smalley got out of the inning, but Visalia wasn't finished.

In the fourth inning, Russell hit a sacrifice fly to Mitchell in center field to score Hunt and make it 7-1 Ports. The Ports pitching staff then retired the next 12 Inland Empire batters in order. In the ninth, Sattler retired the first two batters via groundouts before giving up a single to Buss. Smalley then put out Suarez unassisted at first base.

The Ports bats were quiet from the third through seventh innings. Stockton worked to rally in the eighth inning, and collected two runs. With one out, catcher Ryan Ortiz walked. He advanced to second on a single by Mitchell. Then Edwin Contreras, the 66ers pitcher, walked Green to load the bases. He issued another walk to Spina to bring home Ortiz. The 66ers then called Cole St. Clair to the mound. Barfield then grounded out, scoring Mitchell. St. Clair then walked Parker to load the bases. With two out, first baseman Kala Ka'aihue popped out to St. Clair in foul territory.

The Ports went down in order in the ninth to end the game and the series.

The Ports will travel to Modesto for their first meeting with the Nuts on Thursday. LHP Anvioris Ramirez (0-2, 9.31) will look for his first win on the year for Stockton, while RHP Rob Scahill (0-1, 5.63) will take the hill for Modesto. The game is set for 7:05 PM PST. Fans can follow the game on KWSX 1280 AM or at www.stocktonports.com.

Cougars' Skid Hits Three

PEORIA, Ill. - The Cougars built a 2-0 lead through five and a half innings Wednesday afternoon but could not hold it, as they lost the Peoria Chiefs, 4-2, in front of 6,591 fans at O'Brien Field. The Cougars have lost a season-high three games in a row and also lost three series in a row. Peoria has won six straight.

Leonardo Gil gave the Cougars a 1-0 lead in the second when he singled home Max Stassi, and Rashun Dixon belted his first homer as a Cougar in the sixth to make it 2-0. Starter Chris Mederos was cruising along and vying for his third quality start in as many outings but ran into trouble in the sixth. The first three batters he faced reached with a hit, and an ensuing grounder tied it, 2-2. Mederos gave up two runs on six hits, walked one and fanned three in 5 1/3 innings in the no-decision.

Connor Hoehn replaced Mederos and struck out consecutive hitters to end the sixth but yielded two runs in the seventh. He hit Jesus Morelli and walked Jose Valdez before Matt Cerda roped a two-run single to make it 4-2, and that became the final. The Cougars stranded 10 runners, including two in each of the final three frames. Hoehn (2-1) suffered the loss, Steven Grife (1-0) picked up the win, and Jordan Latham registered his fifth save.

The Cougars (6-8) and Chiefs (9-5) conclude their three-game series Thursday night 6:30 CT. Justin Marks (0-1, 10.13) will face Su-Min Jung (2-0, 0.00). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 6:15 p.m.