

A's News Clips, Thursday, April 29, 2010

Tampa Bay Rays complete two-game sweep of ragged Oakland A's

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

The A's spent a little more than 48 hours in west Florida playing a two-game set with the Tampa Bay Rays.

How, then, could so much have gone wrong in so little time?

The A's lost 10-3 on Wednesday night as the Rays completed a sweep of the short series. Manager Bob Geren was so disappointed in what he saw that he called a brief closed-door meeting with the players.

"It wasn't anybody's best game tonight," Geren told reporters. "It was a very poorly played game. I've liked what we've seen for about 20 games. Tonight I didn't like it, and I don't think anybody in that room likes the way we played tonight. We'll move on tomorrow."

On a day the A's learned standout left-hander Brett Anderson will miss several weeks with a forearm injury, the A's took another hit on the health front before the game started.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki, probably their most valuable all-around player, missed his fourth straight game with a nagging side injury and was sent for an MRI. Results won't be known until today.

But Suzuki, one of the most durable players at his position, didn't sound encouraged after the game. He originally was in the lineup but aggravated the injury, which is centered in his left rib cage, during batting practice.

"Hopefully it's just a strain," Suzuki said. "But it's one of those parts of the body that's so important, you need it to be close to 100 percent. It's not like banging an elbow. It's not in a good spot."

The A's rotation has been among baseball's best, but their starters didn't pitch past the fifth inning in the two losses to the Rays. Dallas Braden (3-1) was charged with six earned runs in four-plus innings Wednesday, but he didn't get much help behind him.

First baseman Daric Barton homered in the first, but he also made two errors, one in the Rays' six-run fifth that broke open a 2-2 game.

Barton, playing with a broken right middle finger, wore a protective pad on his throwing hand because of the injury. But he ditched the pad after the second, when he made an errant throw home.

Braden said he was bothered by the lingering numbness he has in his left foot, the result of nerve damage suffered last season, but he didn't use that as an excuse.

With the game in hand for the Rays, Evan Longoria and Carlos Pena hit back-to-back homers off Brad Kilby in the sixth. But Pena only got his chance because his foul pop fell between catcher Jake Fox and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff to extend his at-bat, typifying the A's night.

The A's managed 10 hits but were frustrated by Rays right-hander James Shields (3-0), who struck out 12 and walked just one in seven innings. Oakland was a miserable 0-for-13 with men in scoring position.

Things went downhill offensively for the A's in the fifth after Eric Patterson was thrown out trying to score from first on Adam Rosales' double. It was an aggressive decision by third-base coach Mike Gallego to send Patterson. There were no outs, and the A's had the makings of a rally with the game tied.

Rosales was a bright spot offensively. He doubled and homered a night after notching a career-high four hits.

"He gives you a tough at-bat every time," Geren said.

TODAY: A's (Justin Duchscherer 2-0) at Blue Jays (Ricky Romero 1-1), 4:07 p.m. TV: CSNCA.
Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

Oakland A's update: Pitcher Brett Anderson will be shut down for two weeks

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

Anderson will be shut down for two weeks

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Left-hander Brett Anderson won't throw for two weeks after Tuesday's MRI showed he has a strained flexor in his left forearm.

Manager Bob Geren said he couldn't offer a timetable for Anderson's return to the rotation. But it figures Anderson will take two to three weeks to work his arm back to major league-ready. So he'll conceivably be sidelined four to five weeks if all goes well in his recovery.

The news could have been worse, as Anderson's elbow doesn't appear damaged beyond some inflammation. The strain is located at the junction where muscle and tendon meet in the forearm.

Anderson was placed on the disabled list Tuesday.

"A strain doesn't sound very serious. It sounded encouraging," Geren said before Wednesday's 10-3 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays.

But Geren was cautious with his optimism regarding Anderson, who was signed to a four-year, \$12.5 million contract extension April 16.

"We'll just have to see when he starts throwing how he does," Geren said.

Efforts to reach Anderson, who didn't accompany the team to Florida, were unsuccessful.

Geren has yet to announce his starter for Friday, the first time Anderson's turn comes up. Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro, both starting for Triple-A Sacramento, are strong candidates to get the call. Friday would be Cahill's regular day to pitch. Mazzaro is supposed to pitch tonight but could be pushed back a day.

Center fielder Rajai Davis was out of the lineup for a third straight game. He's hitting just .213 after a hot start. "I don't think there's anything wrong with my swing," Davis said. "It's a great learning time for me, a time to evaluate. Get my mental state back to where it needs to be." Davis entered Wednesday's game in the seventh and singled in his only at-bat. Geren said he'll likely start Davis, a right-handed hitter, today against Toronto lefty Ricky Romero.

Steve Tolleson made his big league debut, taking over at second base in the seventh. He went 0 for 2.

Jack Cust has homered in three straight games for Sacramento. He's hitting .241 with 14 strikeouts in 58 at-bats.

Chin music: Brett Anderson likely to miss about five weeks; other A's pregame news

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The official word on left-hander Brett Anderson: He'll be shut down for two weeks with his forearm strain and then resume throwing. If things go well at that point, you figure it will take him anywhere from 2-3 weeks to get his arm back to major league-ready. So I'd say we're looking at approximately a 5-week absence for the A's lefty.

Yesterday's MRI showed Anderson has a strain in the musculotendinous junction (raise your hand if you'd heard of that one before). Basically, it's the area where the muscle and tendon meet in the forearm.

Bottom line, the news could have been worse. But manager Bob Geren didn't want to get overly optimistic about the diagnosis. "We'll just have to see when he starts throwing how he does," Geren said before batting practice.

And he still isn't revealing who will start Friday in Anderson's place. Trevor Cahill or Vin Mazzaro figure to be called up from Triple-A Sacramento to pitch that game.

—We almost made it to game time without another injury to report. Kurt Suzuki was in the lineup, but he was just scratched. Jake Fox will replace him at catcher. No word on what's bothering Suzuki, but it's reasonable to assume his back trouble of recent days is acting up. This will be the fourth straight game he's out of the lineup.

—Cliff Pennington leads off for a third straight game, with Rajai Davis sitting again. Geren said the right-handed hitting Davis is likely to start tomorrow against Toronto lefty Ricky Romero. Davis, who's been slumping for about two weeks, said he doesn't think there's anything mechanically wrong with his swing. "It's totally a mental thing, something that I expect to turn around very shortly," he said.

Geren indicated outfielder Matt Carson might get a start tomorrow night as well.

Tonight's lineups:

A's

Pennington SS
Barton 1B
Sweeney RF
Chavez DH
Kouzmanoff 3B
Gross CF
Fox C
Patterson LF
Rosales 2B
Braden LHP

Rays

Bartlett SS
Crawford LF
Zobrist 2B
Longoria 3B
Pena 1B
Upton CF
Aybar DH
Kapler RF
Jaso C
Shields RHP

Study: New ballpark would bring billions of dollars to Oakland, Alameda County

By Chris Metinko, Oakland Tribune

Claiming they are still in the game when it comes to keeping the A's in Oakland, city officials and others trying to keep the team in town released results of a study Wednesday claiming a new waterfront baseball park is worth millions to the city's coffers and billions to the local economy.

The study, commissioned by the nonprofit group Let's Go Oakland, claims that building a new 36,000-seat, \$500 million baseball-only stadium in the city's Jack London Square area immediately would create 1,661 new construction jobs in Oakland while also generating about \$2.6 billion in total economic activity for the city over the next 30 years.

"We really need and want the A's to stay in Oakland," said City Council President Jane Brunner. "The real reason we need to have the Oakland A's is for economic development."

Last December, city officials unveiled three sites in Jack London Square — Howard Terminal, Victory Court and Jack London Square North — where they believe a new ballpark for the Oakland A's can be built. At that time, city leaders also listed the current Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum site as a potential area for a new stadium, although the study released Wednesday did not analyze the economic impact on the area for that site.

Let's Go Oakland commissioned the firm Gruen Gruen + Associates to perform the study and analyze the impacts on the city of Oakland and Alameda County as a whole.

The study's findings included that the city would save 885 current jobs related to baseball operations at the Coliseum while creating an additional 162 jobs. It also estimates property value near Jack London Square would be increased \$4.7 billion in 30 years with a new stadium there as opposed to not having a stadium there.

Due to that increase in property values, the study suggests an additional \$930 million in property tax funds would come to local agencies in the next 30 years, including \$594 million to Oakland and its redevelopment agency. Alameda County would receive \$79 million more in property tax money.

In contrast, the study claims the negative economic impacts associated with the A's leaving would be 900 lost jobs — full and part time — and \$75 million in lost total economic activity for Oakland. Alameda County stands to lose 950 jobs and \$83.5 million in total economic output, according to the study.

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums said there is another reason to keep the team besides dollar signs, saying that the team "speaks to the spirit and character of Oakland" and that the city has become synonymous with baseball.

Dellums said he believes the next "three to four months will be very critical" in determining the A's future home. He said he believes Oakland has an upper hand because of the Giants' territorial rights in Santa Clara County and because Oakland offers a chance to build a stadium near mass transit, cutting down on car emissions.

"Whether Major League Baseball and the commissioner of baseball and the owner of the A's see it that way," he said, "we'll find that out as time goes on."

Major League Baseball has created a special committee to determine the best city to land the A's. That task force has yet to make any of its findings public.

A's spokesman Bob Rose said the team has no comment on the study released Wednesday and will not comment on stadium issues until the Major League Baseball committee releases its findings.

Oakland hobbles out of Tampa Bay

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Nearly every day now, the A's have a late lineup scratch or have someone exit with an injury, sometimes both.

On Wednesday night at Tropicana Field, Kurt Suzuki came out of the lineup less than an hour before game time. The A's best overall player has missed four games in a row with soreness in his left side, and he was sent for an MRI exam during the game. Although the team won't get the results until today, Suzuki didn't sound very encouraged, so mark him down as a possibility to become the 10th man on Oakland's disabled list.

"Hopefully, it's just a strain," Suzuki said after the game. "But that part of the body is so important in this game. You kind of need it to be successful."

Without their regular catcher, Oakland pitchers were pounded again by Tampa Bay. The Rays sent 11 men to the plate in the fifth, the next inning Evan Longoria and Carlos Peña crushed back-to-back homers, and the A's fell 10-3. Oakland allowed 18 runs in the two-game series, and afterward, manager Bob Geren gave the team a quick talking to.

"I just didn't like what I was seeing," Geren said. "I don't think anyone in that room likes the way they played tonight."

The A's gave up a season high in runs and hits (14) and they were 0-for-13 with runners in scoring position.

"We were just a little sloppy all night," A's starter Dallas Braden said.

Braden made national headlines his previous outing when he took Yankees star Alex Rodriguez to task for trotting over the mound on the way back to first base after a foul ball. Braden (3-1) was terrific in that outing, allowing two runs in six innings, but on Wednesday he struggled. He allowed eight hits, three walks and six runs, all earned, in four-plus innings.

"Someone didn't tell the Rays that batting practice is over when they take the cage off the field," Braden said.

It was a forgettable night all around for Oakland. First baseman Daric Barton, playing with a broken right middle finger, made two errors during Rays' rallies. He said he took the protective pad off his finger after a throwing error, but he emphasized that he wasn't making an excuse; he'd just made a bad throw.

Eric Patterson was thrown out at the plate with nobody out in the fifth, waved around by third-base coach Mike Gallego on Adam Rosales' double to left. Carl Crawford winged a strong throw home through shortstop Jason Bartlett, and catcher John Jaso made a sweeping tag.

The A's don't want to miss Suzuki for any extended period, so it's conceivable they will just wait until he's fully ready, especially with backup catcher Landon Powell back on the roster. But the team will need another starter Friday to fill Brett Anderson's spot; if Suzuki's injury appears as if it will linger, that might be the easiest potential roster move.

Rays sting A's

A's pitchers, so stingy through 20 games, were beat up by the Rays:

Stat	First 20	Last 2
Runs/game	3.2	9.0
Hits/game	7.5	13.0
Opp. BA	.229	.356
ERA	2.93	10.12

A's beat

Updating Anderson's arm injury

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Brett Anderson's forearm strain now has a name, and it's an uncommon one: a left flexor musculotendinous junction strain.

That means the strain is partly in the flexor tendon, partly in the muscle, but the result is the same: Anderson won't pitch for two weeks and then he'll be reconditioned to start.

It's unclear how lengthy a process that might be. Anderson said via text Wednesday that there is no timetable for his return. He will miss roughly four weeks at least, and it probably will be more if the team wants him to take things slowly, which is likely.

The news is good, according to manager **Bob Geren**, who said the report he got "sounded encouraging."

Geren said that the team will announce Friday's starter today. The candidates are right-handers **Vin Mazzaro** and **Trevor Cahill**, who are both pitching well for Triple-A Sacramento. Starter-turned-reliever **Tyson Ross** won't be an option; Ross pitched two-thirds of an inning Wednesday.

Briefly: Rajai Davis hasn't started the past three games, but Geren said he'll be in the lineup tonight against Toronto left-hander **Ricky Romero**. Davis, who is batting .222, entered Wednesday's game in the seventh inning and singled in the

ninth. ... Infielder **Steve Tolleson**, called up Tuesday, made his big-league debut in the seventh, playing second base. He reached on an error in the eighth and flied out in the ninth. ... **Adam Rosales**, who had four hits Tuesday night, doubled and homered. ... **Michael Wuertz** had his fifth scoreless rehab outing, working one inning and allowing two hits and striking out one for Class A Stockton. ... **Jack Cust** has homered in three consecutive games for Sacramento.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

History: Tuesday was the first time in franchise history (dating to 1901) that both starting middle infielders (Cliff Pennington, Adam Rosales) had at least four hits and the first time in Oakland history the leadoff and No. 9 hitters did so.

Drumbeat: Suzuki scratched from lineup, misses 4th game in a row

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The latest from A's land: Kurt Suzuki was in the original lineup and he said he was good to go, but he's just been scratched and Jake Fox is now catching and batting seventh. Eric Chavez is now batting cleanup, and everyone else moves up a spot.

This will be the fourth game in a row Suzuki has missed; presumably, this is the same issue, a sore left side.

Brett Anderson's latest - it's a strain of the flexor musculotendinous junction, he won't throw for two weeks - was detailed in today's earlier Drumbeat, but this seemed worth its own post. If this thing keeps dragging on, the A's are going to have to consider putting Suzuki, their best player and now their cleanup man, on the DL.

Other items I should mention: Michael Wuertz is going an inning for Class-A Stockton at San Josey tonight and manager Bob Geren said Rajai Davis will be back in the lineup tomorrow night. Matt Carson is also a possibility tomorrow night.

A's can't minimize Rays' damage

Barton strikes first, but Braden can't finish costly fifth inning

By Chris Girandola / Special to MLB.com

ST. PETERSBURG -- In a short two-game series against the Rays, the A's learned how this new beast of the American League East can win in multiple ways.

While Oakland lamented over its lack of production and overall "character" in Wednesday's 10-3 loss in front of 10,691 at Tropicana Field, it was evident how Tampa could be classified as the Major League's best team.

The Rays made some spectacular defensive plays, namely two plays that prevented runs by superstar left fielder Carl Crawford. One involved tracking down a hit along the third-base line by Adam Rosales -- in which Crawford gathered it and in one swooping motion made a perfect throw to shortstop Jason Bartlett, who nailed Eric Patterson at home.

The other was simply dazzling, as Crawford's sliding catch in the eighth inning on a low-liner by Gabe Gross with one out kept Wayne Tolleson and Eric Chavez on base.

Tampa Bay also showcased its speed and knack for taking the extra base, as was highlighted by Evan Longoria's nifty scamper home in the Rays' six-run fifth inning on Daric Barton's error on a relay throw home.

Most of all, though, the Rays, who entered the contest tied with the Brewers for most runs scored in the Majors while leading the AL in fewest runs allowed, demonstrated how they can definitely light up the scoreboard and pitch.

A day after Ben Sheets suffered his worst outing of the season -- giving up eight runs and nine hits in defeat -- A's starter Dallas Braden met a similar fate. He allowed six runs on eight hits in four-plus innings. The loss was Braden's first of the season and the worst of the season for the A's.

"It wasn't anyone's best game tonight," said A's manager Bob Geren, who held a brief, closed-door meeting with the players following the game. "I just told them I didn't like what I saw tonight. I don't think anyone in there liked what they saw. It was a poorly-played game."

Part of that had to do with Braden's command issues with other elements having to do simply with a Rays team that is off to the best start in the Majors through 21 games since the 2005 White Sox (also 16-5). That White Sox team went on to finish 99-63 in the regular season, winning the American League Central and eventually capturing the World Series title over the Astros in a four-game sweep.

Braden, who threw 88 pitches (58 strikes), was dealing with a 2-2 tie in the fifth when the Rays got to him. He allowed the first five Tampa Bay batters to reach base -- walking Crawford to start the frame and then, after a wild pitch, walked Ben Zobrist.

Braden then surrendered a run-scoring ground-rule double to Longoria and an RBI single to Carlos Pena on which Zobrist scored and Longoria eventually followed on Barton's error.

"Not too happy with strike one," said Braden, who had lasted at least six innings in each of his four starts before Wednesday's outing. "Apparently, he caught the six o'clock flight to Toronto (where the A's will begin a four-game series against the Blue Jays on Thursday).

"I did exactly what their guy (Rays starter James Shields) did not do. He got the big strikeouts when he needed them, the outs when he needed them. That's a testament to why he's a frontline guy. It just wasn't there for me tonight."

It wasn't there for many of the A's, as the pitching staff allowed a season-high 14 hits and 10 runs, including back-to-back homers by Longoria and Pena off Brad Kilby to start the sixth inning.

A's starters had compiled a Major League-best 2.65 ERA entering the series, but against the Rays, they allowed a combined 14 runs over eight innings.

The A's actually got off to a good start on Wednesday, when Barton showed no ill-effects from his fractured finger in belting his first home run of the season -- a solo shot off Shields. The right-hander tied a career high with 12 strikeouts, while improving to 3-0 and lowering his ERA to 3.38.

After the Rays took a 2-1 lead in the second inning, the A's tied it in the fourth when Ryan Sweeney, who had opened the frame with a double, scored on Bartlett's throwing error on a Kevin Kouzmanoff grounder.

With the hit, Sweeney extended his streak of reaching base to 21 games, the longest such streak by an A's player to start a season since Jeremy Giambi had a 25-game run in 2002.

For A's Anderson, rest is best medicine

Cautious approach most important as left-hander heals

By Chris Girandola / Special to MLB.com

ST. PETERSBURG -- At some point during this season, A's manager Bob Geren might be able to answer whatever medical question comes his way. But on Wednesday inside the visitors' dugout at Tropicana Field, before his team faced the Rays in the finale of a two-game set, Geren was stumped when asked to specifically describe the injury to recently disabled left-hander Brett Anderson.

"It's a strained flexor tendon," Geren said when he began his usual pregame meeting with reporters.

Soon, though, when pressed, Geren had to call in A's head athletic trainer Stephen Sayles to fully explain the injury.

According to Sayles, Anderson -- who was placed on the 15-day DL on Tuesday, retroactive to Sunday -- has a strain in the "musculotendinous" in the flexor area of the left forearm. Several medical websites, including medical-dictionary.com, describe musculotendinous as an area "pertaining to or composed of muscle and tendon."

While neither Geren nor Sayles would go into any further detail as to what degree of a strain Anderson has, it appears the forearm injury is a Grade 1 strain, which is damage to less than 5 percent of the individual muscle fibers, according to physiroom.com. Geren and Sayles both said that Anderson would rest and "shut it down" for two weeks before resuming any activity, which is the typical rest period for Grade 1 strains.

While Geren said the results of a second MRI performed on Anderson's forearm Tuesday could be "classified as good news," it is important that Anderson fully recovers from the injury before attempting any action. Many medical websites state that "a Grade 1 strain has the potential to become a Grade 2 strain or even a complete rupture" if a patient continues to play before completely healed.

Anderson was 1-1 with a 2.35 ERA in four starts this year before leaving his last start, on Saturday against Cleveland, with the injury upon allowing one run in six innings.

A's scratch Suzuki shortly before game

ST. PETERSBURG -- It appeared that A's catcher Kurt Suzuki had recovered from the soreness in his left side that has prevented him from playing since Friday, but he was scratched from Wednesday's starting lineup against the Rays. The announcement came just less than an hour before first pitch.

Suzuki was taken for an MRI during Wednesday's contest. A's manager Bob Geren said the team will know the results on Thursday.

Geren said during his pregame session with reporters that Suzuki was "ready to go" for Wednesday's game. The 26-year-old catcher took batting practice soon after yelling over to Geren that he was "good to go."

Suzuki, who had gone 4-for-9 in his past two games, isn't quite sure how the pain arose, but he had hoped an extra day of rest -- combined with Monday's off-day -- would help him fully heal.

Jake Fox once again replaced Suzuki in the lineup.

A's eye Pennington for leadoff spot

ST. PETERSBURG -- Cliff Pennington's career night in Tuesday's 8-6 loss to the Rays -- in which the 25-year-old shortstop collected four hits in five at-bats, falling just short of the cycle -- influenced A's manager Bob Geren to insert him in the leadoff spot once again on Wednesday.

"It was a great night -- something special," Geren said.

Geren said that Rajai Davis, who had been leading off for the A's until Tuesday, would possibly regain his typical role when the A's begin a four-game set in Toronto on Thursday.

Davis' "timing and pitch selection" are part of the reason that Geren has taken a look at Pennington in the leadoff role. Davis entered Wednesday 8-for-56 (.143) over his past 15 games after going 9-for-24 (.375) in his first five contests.

Worth noting

ST. PETERSBURG -- A's manager Bob Geren said that right-handed pitcher Michael Wuertz, out with right shoulder soreness, will make his fifth rehab start on Wednesday. ... Outfielder Coco Crisp, rehabbing a fractured left pinkie finger, practiced throwing with some of the A's assistant coaches during batting practice on Wednesday. Geren stepped in and caught the ball for Crisp during the impromptu session. ... The career-best performances of Cliff Pennington and Adam Rosales on Tuesday, when both collected four hits, marked the 25th time in Oakland history that two or more A's players had at least four hits in a game. It was the first time in A's history that both starting middle infielders completed the feat. ... Steven Tolleson made his Major League debut as a defensive replacement at second base in the seventh inning. He reached on an error in the eighth in his first plate appearance. ... Adam Rosales hit his second homer on Wednesday and finished the series going 6-for-8. He is now batting .500 (10-for-20) on the road.

Gut-check time for A's against Jays

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

Oakland manager Bob Geren held a postgame meeting with his club following Wednesday's 10-3 loss to the Rays.

His message was a simple one: "We just didn't portray the character we displayed throughout most of the season," Geren said.

It will be up to Oakland starter Justin Duchscherer and Co. to regain their manager's confidence Thursday in Toronto. The Blue Jays will counter with Ricky Romero.

"I've liked what we've seen what we've seen for about 20 games, but [Wednesday] I didn't like it and I don't think anybody in that room likes the way we played," Geren said. "We're going to move on [Thursday]."

In his last start, Duchscherer gave up five hits and four walks with two strikeouts over six shutout innings against the Indians on Friday. The start also marked the second time in his last three outings that the veteran has lasted into at least the sixth frame on fewer than 100 pitches.

He is 2-0 with an ERA of 1.32 for the season.

"He wasn't quite as sharp as he has been," Geren said. "He walked a couple more guys than normal, but he wasn't missing by a lot. With him, it's hard to tell because you're only talking inches -- the width of a ball, maybe."

The right-hander has a long history with the Blue Jays, primarily as a reliever. In 11 career games [one start] against Toronto, Duchscherer is 1-0 with a 3.09 ERA.

Romero has been solid all season, going at least seven innings without allowing two earned runs in each of four of his starts. In the left-hander's last outing against the Rays on Saturday, he went seven innings, allowing two earned runs on six hits, before reliever Scott Downs gave up three runs in the eighth.

"The job [Romero] did just tells you what kind of pitcher he's going to be and what kind of pitcher he is right now," Blue Jays manager Cito Gaston said.

Romero has a 2-0 record with a 1.29 ERA in his career against the A's. He is seeking his second win of the season.

"I try not to pay attention to the scoreboard. My job is to put up zeroes out there. That's all I'm worried about," Romero said. "Our offense is good. When those guys get it going, we're going to be good."

Toronto: Day's rest

Adam Lind was given his first off day of the season Wednesday but expect him to be back Thursday against the A's.

Lind is hitting .296 with four home runs and 14 RBIs.

"It's always hard to take that type of hitter out of the lineup," Gaston said. "But he's not going to play 162. So it might be a good night just to rest him."

Oakland: Rosales on a roll

Adam Rosales, who had a career-high four hits in Tuesday's loss, hit his second home run of the season on Wednesday and is batting .500 (10-for-20) on the road.

"He's swinging the bat well," Geren said. "He's a tough out, uses the whole field and makes things happen. I'm happy with the way he's playing."

Worth Noting:

The Blue Jays have not scored 17 straight innings. The stretch is the longest since the Jays went 31 innings from May 9-12, 2008.

A's lose to Rays, 10-3

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — James Shields struck out 12 in seven innings and Evan Longoria and Carlos Pena homered Wednesday night, helping Tampa Bay beat the Oakland Athletics 10-3 for the Rays' 13th win in 15 games.

Shields (3-0) allowed a first-inning home run, then limited the A's to five hits and an unearned run over the next six innings. He walked one and matched his career high for strikeouts as the AL East leaders finished a sweep of a two-game series.

Longoria and Pena led off the sixth with consecutive homers off reliever Brad Kilby and each had two RBIs. They also drove in runs off starter Dallas Braden (3-1) during Tampa Bay's six-run fifth inning.

The Rays improved the best record in the major leagues to 16-5, setting a franchise record for victories in April. They went 9-14 in the opening month of 2009 and were unable to overcome the slow start after reaching the World Series the previous season.

Daric Barton ended a career-long, 41-game homerless streak with his first-inning shot off Shields. But the Oakland first baseman also committed two errors, with each allowing a run to score.

Shields gave up an unearned run on shortstop Jason Bartlett's fourth-inning throwing error. Oakland's Adam Rosales hit a solo homer off reliever Andy Sonnanstine in the ninth.

The A's wasted opportunities to get to Shields in the fourth and fifth, going 0-for-6 and striking out five times with runners in scoring position in those innings. Eric Patterson also was thrown out at the plate attempting to score from first base on Rosales' double down the left field line.

Tampa Bay pulled away from a 2-2 tie in the fifth, with help from a wild pitch with the bases loaded and a second error by Barton that allowed a run to score. The Rays went ahead on Longoria's RBI double off Braden, and Pena, pinch hitter Reid Brignac and John Jaso also drove in runs in the inning.

Braden, trying to become the first Oakland pitcher to go 4-0 in April since Mike Moore in 1992, allowed six runs and eight hits in four-plus innings. Entering the game, he had limited opponents to a .198 batting average, sixth lowest in the AL.

Notes: Rays C Dioner Navarro finished a two-game suspension for bumping an umpire during an argument. ... Tampa Bay manager Joe Maddon received a hoodie in the mail from New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick, which he plans to display in his office.

"It's very cool," Maddon said. He plans to send Belichick a Tampa Bay hoodie. ... Oakland LHP Brett Anderson (left arm strained flexor) will be shut down from throwing for two weeks. He was placed on the 15-day DL on Tuesday. ... Rays LHP J.P. Howell (strained left shoulder) threw 30 pitches in his first bullpen session. He will increase the total to 35-40 on Friday and is targeting a return in about one month. ... Oakland C Kurt Suzuki (left side soreness) was in the original starting lineup but was scratched after batting practice. He has missed four straight games.

Why a Reported MLB Twitter Crackdown Matters

By: Will Leitch, New York Magazine, 4/28/2010

Last evening, around 9:30, Aaron Gleeman, an upstanding fellow and blogger for NBC Sports' excellent HardballTalk site, posted himself quite the scoop: According to "multiple sources," Major League Baseball instituted a new, onerous policy about employees using Twitter. It was not one anyone would consider "fan-friendly."

Here's how Gleeman reported it:

Multiple sources have confirmed to me that Major League Baseball is cracking down on Twitter usage, ordering MLB.com writers to cease tweeting about all non-baseball topics and scolding players for their Twitter usage in general.

Sources inside MLB.com told us last night that there were serious problems with Gleeman's report, and apparently they told him that too. We spoke — and by "spoke," we mean "e-mailed," of course — with Gleeman this morning.

"MLB initially got in touch with me last night, about an hour after my story ran on Hardball Talk," Gleeman said, or typed. "Their spokesperson suggested my story was 'factually inaccurate' to the point that it had MLB folks 'mystified by all of this.' Later, after I relayed to them all the information I'd be given from MLB and MLB.com employees, not to mention all the

information that had leaked out on Twitter from MLB.com and non-MLB.com beat writers alike, they backtracked significantly and instead got into some semantics about whether or not an actual 'policy change' had taken place. The notion that MLB tried to deny the story and told me it was completely inaccurate with all that was going on last night in terms of MLB.com writers creating new Twitter accounts, posting and then deleting notes about the orders they'd be given, and clearly talking to other folks in the press box about the changes ... well, it was a weird attempt at putting the toothpaste back into the tube."

Indeed. Gleeman has since written a post not only standing behind his story, but expanding on the obviousness of the strange attempts to deny it. (He also used the e-mail he sent us — and others asking about it, we'd presume — in his post, for which we do not blame him in the slightest. It's freaking hard writing all these posts, you know.)

It was the talk of press boxes across baseball last night, with dozens of non-MLB.com beat writers tweeting about the fact that their MLB.com colleagues could no longer post non-baseball notes on Twitter. White Sox third baseman Mark Teahen also spoke to Joe Cowley of the Chicago Sun-Times about the players angle. In other words, the notion that my story could have possibly "mystified" anyone at MLB was absurd and struck me as an attempt to mislead.

So, unless you want to go under the assumption that every press box in baseball along with Mark Teahen somehow underwent some collective mass hallucination, let's proceed with the idea that Gleeman's story is correct. The move would seem an odd one, particularly for MLB; they have been light years ahead of any other major sports league when it comes to online, particularly in terms of live video, and to see them take such a hard-line stance toward social media seems dramatically out of character. There are several theories why such a policy would be instituted (or, if you doubt Gleeman's story and are on the collective mass hallucination side, at least *considered*): Gleeman notes that MLB.com is putting a Twitter feed aggregator on their home page (something ESPN does, and something few people we've ever met actually use), and A's relief pitcher Brad Ziegler caused a small ruckus last week with comments on his Twitter about the anti-immigration law in Arizona and his disappointment with the fan base in Oakland. (Others think it's Peter Gammons' fault.) But what such a policy would really signify, if it exists, is the end of that brief moment in sports history that Major League Baseball was actually ahead of the game on something.

We wrote a *Fast Company* piece about this a couple of years ago, but, essentially, MLB was the first league to recognize not just the revenue-producing power of the web, but also the value of its own independence from the major networks, independence that the NBA and (especially) the NFL don't have. MLB, essentially, trusted its product and gave as much of it to the fans as possible, assuming obsessives would delve deep enough into its content that eventually it would pay for itself. It has done far more than that. And there was a certain transparency to it: MLB.com was focused entirely on serving its more die-hard fans and its most casual fans alike. All that mattered was the game. A league that had suffered its fair share of off-field headaches won by trusting the on-field product, and its fans. MLB.com owns the product of "professional baseball" far more than NFL.com or NBA.com own football and basketball. If we want NFL, NBA, or NCAA news and analysis, we go to ESPN and SI.com and sports blogs and other trusted sources. For baseball, we go to MLB.com first. We always have. This has transferred easily to the MLB Network; we don't think we've watched *Baseball Tonight* since that network launched, and that's a show we once never, ever missed. The exodus of Gammons just verified what we we already thought: *Real* baseball fans get their news straight from the source.

With that came a trust that fans had for Major League Baseball: that they wouldn't pull the same censorious junk that other sports leagues have become obsessed with. Sure, it'd be nice if MLB Advanced Media embed their video and not be so crazy about taking shot-from-stands-by-fans video off YouTube and Vimeo and so on, but MLB.com invested so much in video that you almost understood it. But it's a delicate balance: We have to still trust that you're looking out for fans, that you remember why MLB.com has become so popular and powerful in the first place. The idea of a policy like this is exactly what we've all been afraid of happening at some point: MLB.com becoming so popular that they stopped serving fans and started acting like every other sports league. MLB is the one that's supposed to "get" the web — the one that was creating a new kind of beat writer, the one associated with the team but independent, a free voice to talk openly. Craig Calcaterra wrote last night, "Nothing has done more to disprove the false notion that MLB.com is Pravda than getting to know the writers via social media. Now that's gone." That might be an overreaction, and that might be far premature. And we're fully aware that we're a bit of a rube to be so shocked by a billion-dollar corporation acting ruthlessly and with such reckless disregard to the people who made them so successful in the first place. But still. That's what's at stake. MLB Advanced Media was supposed to be the good guys. We'll find out if that, too, is gone.

Trendsetting general manager Billy Beane has Athletics rolling

By Jorge L. Ortiz, USA TODAY 4/28/2010

The spirit of *Moneyball* is barely perceptible in the Oakland Athletics nowadays. Eric Chavez, Mark Ellis and Justin Duchscherer are the only players left from 2003, when the Michael Lewis best seller came out and detailed the small-market team's strategy for success under innovative general manager Billy Beane.

The current A's, coming off three consecutive losing seasons, rank eighth in the American League in on-base percentage and 12th in slugging, two hallmarks of the original *Moneyball* approach.

The advanced statistical analysis Beane and his cohorts employed to mine for undervalued gems now is commonly used, not only by executives, but by fantasy league players, as well.

Could it be the rest of baseball has caught up to Beane?

"Maybe if you're outside this organization, somebody might think that," says Ellis, a second baseman who came up in 2002. "But when you're in the organization and you see the guys they've brought in and the abilities, you know it's going to happen."

Indeed, the Athletics' quick start this season — their 12-8 record entering Tuesday led the American League West — might be the first sign of a turnaround that began when, a year removed from a trip to the 2006 AL Championship Series, Beane dismantled the core of the club.

He traded All-Star pitcher Dan Haren, fellow starters Rich Harden and Joe Blanton and outfielder Nick Swisher.

The return packages included lefties Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez, now two-fifths of the rotation, outfielder Ryan Sweeney, since-traded outfielder Carlos Gonzalez and minor league first baseman

Chris Carter. Fellow power-hitting prospect Michael Taylor arrived in another deal.

Anderson and Gio Gonzalez have joined forces with closer Andrew Bailey, the 2009 AL rookie of the year, on a staff that boasts the league's lowest ERA at 2.93. Promising homegrown starters Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro lurk at Class AAA Sacramento after making their major league debuts in 2009 at 21 and 22, respectively. Bailey is the oldest of the group at 25.

"We're starting to feel some of the players that are here and some who will soon arrive are guys that are going to be here for a long time," Beane says. "And in turn we think they'll contribute to a club that at least pushes for a playoff position."

Although some fellow GMs think Beane gave away too many trade secrets in *Moneyball*, he says word of the team's methods was out and the book only spread it quicker.

Regardless, now that major leaguers with high on-base-plus-slugging percentages are priced out of his budget, he's on to new ways of trying to maximize resources.

Exploring new avenues

The *Moneyball* buzz revolved around on-base percentage and other, more obscure methods of analysis, but the underlying current of Beane's system was exploiting market inefficiencies.

In 2011, the best-selling book will become a movie, with Brad Pitt slated to play Beane.

Meanwhile, efforts to harvest overlooked fields continue.

Oakland, which in 2008 gave Dominican right-hander Michael Ynoa a record \$4.25 million deal, has more than doubled its budget for signing bonuses awarded to international amateur players. In the last year, the club has added scouts in Taiwan, South Korea, Australia and Europe, with China to come.

"There's so much emphasis put now on the Dominican Republic and Venezuela that you hope that if you branch out, you can find some better value in those other countries," assistant GM David

Forst says. "There are only a handful of teams that have really spent a lot of money in the Pacific Rim on amateurs."

The A's aggressively pursued Cuban left-hander Aroldis Chapman; their \$28 million offer was topped by the Cincinnati Reds' \$30.25 million deal.

On the home front, Oakland signed Anderson to a four-year, \$12.5 million extension after one season in the majors. Anderson, who has a 2.35 ERA in four starts, could earn up to \$31 million if the team exercises its options for 2014 and 2015.

The move, part of a plan to secure a nucleus of players before they become unaffordable through arbitration or leave as free agents, follows the pattern the A's established with the teams that went to four consecutive postseasons from 2000 to 2003.

"I know those teams were very young and they had a core group of guys who knew they were going to be there for a certain period," says Anderson, who was placed on the 15-day disabled list Tuesday with elbow inflammation. "If we could build something like that, it would be great."

Considering the A's budget limitations and attendance woes, they may have to do it by clipping coupons and pinching pennies.

The A's opened the season with the smallest payroll in the AL at \$51.7 million and had the majors' lowest attendance last year at 1.4 million. It was their sixth consecutive season of dwindling turnouts at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, which opened in 1966 and expanded for the Oakland Raiders in 1996, a makeover that reduced its baseball appeal.

Team owner Lew Wolff has said the club took in \$32 million in revenue sharing in 2009, but that still left it behind most of its competitors in overall revenue.

"It helps, but it's certainly not going to close the gap," Beane says. "It allows us to bid on Chapman. But does it take a \$50 (million)-\$60 million payroll and take it up to \$130 million? No."

The only way to compete on even footing, the A's believe, is to play in a new ballpark that would significantly increase revenue.

Their plans to build a ballpark village in Fremont, 22 miles south of the Coliseum, were derailed by the economic recession and opposition from residents. Although the city of Oakland has proposed three possible stadium sites, Wolff prefers moving to San Jose, where he has developed land. But the San Francisco Giants hold territorial rights there.

Commissioner Bud Selig has assigned a committee to study the A's stadium options, but there's no timetable for a report.

Wolff says the Coliseum, where the announced crowds are regularly in the 10,000 range, not only detracts from the fan experience but has scared away free agents.

In the last two offseasons, the A's have lost out on Rafael Furcal, Adrian Beltre and Marco Scutaro despite, they say, offering more money than they signed for elsewhere.

The free agents the A's do attract, such as Ben Sheets and Coco Crisp this past winter, usually sign for one season.

"I want to win badly, but I have two constraints," Wolff says. "I don't want to lose money to win. And two, I really do believe the energy in the ballpark is such that we need a venue that is more baseball-specific."

Challenge grows

The losing seasons have done nothing to diminish Wolff's support for Beane, in his 13th season running the A's. Wolff says owners questioned his decision to give Beane a stake in the club when he purchased it with majority owner John Fisher in 2005.

To Wolff it made sense to provide such an incentive for Beane to stay because of his knowledge of the market and knack for overcoming budget shortcomings.

The A's, with the youngest opening-day roster in the majors (average age 27.2), must compete with division rivals such as the Los Angeles Angels (\$105 million payroll) and Seattle Mariners (\$87 million), in addition to heavyweights such as the New York Yankees (\$206 million) and Boston Red Sox (\$162 million).

Former Toronto Blue Jays general manager J.P. Ricciardi, who worked for the A's from 1986 to 2001, says increased payroll disparity has made the challenge more daunting than before; finding value is now a necessity.

He cites the Tampa Bay Rays (\$72 million payroll this season), who won the AL pennant in 2008. The Rays benefited from several years of high draft choices but also have learned to thrive within their means.

"They subscribe to the *Moneyball* theory of getting the best bang (for the money)," says Ricciardi, now an ESPN analyst.

The recent losing seasons in Oakland have fueled Beane's detractors, who wonder if he will parlay his *Moneyball*-enhanced fame and contacts to a job outside baseball.

Beane, 48, does have other interests — he's a minority owner of the San Jose Earthquakes of Major League Soccer and sits on the board of directors of companies such as Bell-Easton Sports and NetSuite — but says he remains as engaged and enthused about his job as ever.

He allows that matching wits with the likes of Yankees GM Brian Cashman or the Red Sox's Theo Epstein has become harder — "It's a pretty formidable pair when you have guys that bright and with those kinds of resources," he says — but relishes the role of franchise builder, even with market limitations.

"He continues to find ways to be successful, and you see where his team is right now," says Cashman, who is close to Beane. "He continues to remake himself and be aggressive and smart."

Before Obama, A's Billy Beane had his own solutions to health care crisis

Jorge Ortiz, USA Today, 4/28/2010

Billy Beane's baseball chops are plenty well established. Though he did not excel in the majors, he was a first-round draft pick out of high school who played 148 games in the big leagues, the last 37 with the 1989 World Series champion A's, before eventually embarking on a highly successful career as an executive with Oakland.

But part of what makes Beane a fascinating personality – and what he gets ripped for occasionally – is his pursuit of interests outside the game.

USA TODAY takes a look at some of Beane's myriad interests in today's print edition, and his bio in the A's media guide is chockfull of such examples. Among them: a speaking engagement during a management retreat featuring former President Bill Clinton and then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair, sitting on the board of directors of a handful of companies and co-authoring a 2008 New York Times article about the U.S. health care crisis.

A's owner Lew Wolff says it was Beane, an avid fan of Tottenham Hotspur of the English Premier League, who got him interested in soccer.

Wolff, now the co-owner of the San Jose Earthquakes of MLS, marvels at Beane's intellectual curiosity.

"I never see him where he's not reading some novel or a new book," Wolff says. "He embarrasses me because he reads 10 books to my one."

At the end of a 40-minute interview at his spring training office in Phoenix, where the TV set played European soccer highlights, Beane inquired about my background. When I told him I'm part Puerto Rican and part Spanish, he told me about his extensive travels in Spain and shared some of his knowledge of the country's history.

He then chastised himself for not following up on his on-and-off plans to learn Spanish.

Because, of course, any 48-year-old who runs a major league team, delivers speeches to companies and is raising twin infants should be able to find time to learn a foreign language.

Spander: Mieuli's impact on Bay Area sports won't be forgotten

By: Art Spander, Special to The Examiner 4/28/2010

He put chandeliers in the Cow Palace and Rick Barry's jersey behind an office door, delivered bags of fruit to sports writers and delivered a championship to the Bay Area.

You could call Franklin Mieuli eccentric. I preferred to call him passionate. He had a beard, a deerstalker hat and a love of life.

A character, that's what Mieuli was: delightful and charming, if manipulative. He was the last of the mom-and-pop team owners, and the team he owned, the Golden State Warriors, did him proud.

Not only because 35 years ago, in a less commercial, less promoted but no less important time, the Warriors won the NBA title — an occurrence judged then as unlikely as the sun rising in the West.

But because the Warriors represented values he held dear, they were a part of the community: a home town team that was property of a home town guy.

Mieuli died Sunday at age 89. He leaves an empty seat near half court at Oracle Arena. He leaves an empty place in our hearts.

One by one the Bay Area's sporting men of history, the Morabito brothers, founders of the 49ers; Charles O. Finley, the A's splendid maverick; Horace Stoneham, the man who brought the New York Giants to the city by the bay; and now Mieuli passes on. Only 80-year-old Al Davis and 89-year-old Lou Spadia remain from the golden era.

No one but Franklin Mieuli would think of a black tie dinner in conjunction with a pro basketball game, ordering chandeliers to be installed temporarily above tables near the floor, a blending of cummerbunds and rebounds.

No one but Franklin Mieuli, in reference to an outlander's term for San Francisco, would have the name "Warriors" on the front of the jerseys replaced with "The City." Even one of the players, Fred Hetzel sniggered, "I thought it said Daly City." But more than 40 years later, retro "The City" uniform tops have returned.

No one but Franklin Mieuli, a minority stockholder in San Francisco's two other franchises, the 49ers — for which he once held radio rights and to the end owned a small percentage of the team — and Giants, would distribute a decal to trumpet his preferences, "We Love Thee All Three."

What I as Warriors beat man for the Chronicle from the mid '60s to late '70s loved were the conversations, debates really, with Mieuli. He would drop by San Francisco's two newspapers with bananas, apples and advice on how to cover his team.

Mieuli was from San Jose and the University of Oregon, a pioneer in radio who produced national broadcasts of the 1960 Squaw Valley Winter Olympics, for which one of his announcers was Lon Simmons.

Mieuli wanted people to think of him as unsophisticated, but he was singularly clever.

When Rick Barry jumped to the new ABA, to play for then father-in-law Bruce Hale, Mieuli took Barry's No. 24 jersey and said it would remain there until Rick returned. Of course, Barry did return, leading Golden State to the championship.

The good days soon ended. Mieuli couldn't compete financially in a sporting world gone corporate and in 1985 he sold his beloved Warriors.

For a quarter century he kept showing up for games. Once his team, always his team. We'll miss you, Franklin.

Minor League News

Capra's Strong Start Propels 'Hounds

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Anthony Capra was Oakland's fourth round draft selection in 2008 (Wichita State) and, while he may not win an Oscar, he got the "W" Wednesday night in Corpus Christi, thanks to 7.0 outstanding innings. Capra allowed one run on three hits, walking one and whiffing six, as the RockHounds defeated the Hooks, 6-1. It was the club's second consecutive win in the series, boosting the 'Hounds into a 1st place tie with San Antonio in a VERY tight South Division race.

Jermaine Michell tripled twice, and now has three triples in two games ... and Steve Kleen hit his team-high fourth home run, a solo shot in a 3-run second inning. The 'Hounds built leads of 5-0 and 6-1, again getting solid production throughout the batting order.

On the mound, Capra and Mickey Storey combined to strike out eight batters, walking one. Bases on balls have been an issue, but not over the last two nights. RockHounds pitchers have walked just three while whiffing 17 in the two wins.

Ports Earn First Shutout With 3-0 Win Over Giants

On Wednesday night, the Stockton Ports did something that hadn't been done in nearly a year: beat the San Jose Giants in a series at Municipal Stadium. The Ports did so by tossing their first shutout of the 2010 season, blanking San Jose by a final of 3-0. With the win, the Ports finish their seven-game road trip at a 4-3 mark heading into a seven-game homestand. The last time the Giants lost a series at home was May 19-21 last season to Inland Empire.

Stockton manufactured their first run in the top of the first inning. Shane Keough reached on a bunt single to start the game and advanced to second on a wild pitch. Grant Green followed and few out to deep center on which Keough tagged and advanced to third. Mike Spina came up next and grounded to short, scoring Keough and putting the Ports on the board 1-0.

The Ports benefitted from another strong rehab outing from A's setup man Michael Wuertz. Wuertz got two quick outs in the first before yielding back-to-back singles to Francisco Peguero and Brandon Belt. Ryan Lormand would line out to third, however, to end the threat. Wuertz pitched just the first inning and allowed two hits while recording a strikeout while throwing 17 pitches (13 for strikes).

Justin Murray (2-1) took over in the second. Murray would have to work his way out of jams in the third (runners at first and second with two down) and the sixth (runners at first and second with one out). Despite putting runners aboard in four of the five full innings in which he threw, Murray did not allow a run in 5.1 innings of work. He earned the win, giving up four hits while striking out five and walking three.

San Jose starter Eric Surkamp (1-1) kept the Ports off the board in innings 2-4, but would be tagged for two more runs in the fifth. Tyler Ladendorf started the inning with a single to left. Two batters later, David Thomas reached on an infield single and both he and Ladendorf advanced to second and third, respectively, on a passed ball. Ryan Ortiz then delivered a two-run double to left to give the Ports a 3-0 edge.

Surkamp would be charged with the loss, going six innings and allowing three runs on six hits while walking one, hitting a batter and striking out five.

Both bullpens turned in strong efforts. Scott Nestor and Edwin Quirarte combined for three scoreless innings of relief for the Giants, while Trey Barham and Paul Smyth (SV, 1) combined for 2.2 frames of scoreless relief. Smyth pitched a perfect ninth to record his first save of the season.

Green was ejected in the top of the third for arguing a called third strike. He would be replaced by Dusty Napoleon who entered the game to play first base, moving Spina to second and Ladendorf to short.

The Ports will welcome the Bakersfield Blaze to town on Thursday to kick off a four-game series that starts a seven-game homestand. Shawn Haviland (2-0, 2.61 ERA) will take the mound for Stockton, opposed by right-hander Kennil Gomez (0-1, 5.06 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Rally for Wild Walk-Off Win

After trailing, 5-0, and not having a hit through five innings, the Kane County Cougars put together a furious rally Wednesday afternoon and came back to beat the Quad Cities River Bandits, 7-6, in front of 5,996 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars have won three in a row and claimed their second straight series while becoming the first team this year to hand first-place Quad Cities a series loss.

The Cougars scored three runs in the bottom of the eighth and three more in the last of the ninth to end it. In the eighth they grabbed three unearned runs. Rashun Dixon singled home Leonardo Gil, Mike Gilmartin walked with the bases loaded and Max Stassi scored on a wild pitch. Then in the ninth, trailing, 6-4, Gil grounded out to score Tyreace House, Anthony Aliotti belted an RBI double and Stassi singled to right to score Aliotti and ignite the on-field celebration.

All four River Bandits hits left the ballpark. Starter Justin Marks allowed only two hits in 4 2/3 innings, but each hit was a two-run homer -- one in the first and one in the fourth. Connor Hoehn gave up one run on one hit -- a sixth-inning homer -- and Hector Garcia gave up one run on one hit -- a ninth-inning homer -- in 2 1/3 innings. Bo Schultz (2-0) picked up the win with 2/3 of an inning of relief in the ninth, and Aaron Terry (0-2) yielded three runs in the ninth for the loss.

The Cougars (10-10) and River Bandits (14-6) conclude the three-game series Thursday at noon CT before the Cougars start a seven-game road trip Friday night in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Thursday's game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 11:45 a.m.

Playing pro ball is in Stassi's blood

By MIKE KNAPP, Sun-Times Media

Last August, Kane County Cougars' catcher Max Stassi was at a bit of a crossroads in his life.

With the signing deadline approaching for players selected in the 2009 First Year Player Draft, the 19-year-old had to figure out the next step in his life: sign a contract with the Oakland Athletics -- which had chosen him in the fourth round, or attend UCLA, where a baseball scholarship was waiting.

Max Stassi provides walkoff hit in Cougars' 7-6 victory over Quad Cities. To read this story go to www.beaconnewsonline.com.

In the end, the decision was easy.

"Over the summer I was playing every day with a travel team, and just doing that was a lot of fun," Stassi said. "I thought 'this is what I love to do, I don't want to be a doctor, I don't want to be a teacher, I want to play baseball every day.' That was the big thing for me and finally getting the opportunity to do that has been unbelievable."

With his decision, Stassi became the fourth generation of his family to play professional baseball, following in the footsteps of his dad, Jim, his grandfather and great-grandfather.

For the Stassis, baseball is definitely a family affair. His father is the longtime coach at Yuba City (Calif.) High School, his older brother Brock is a pitcher/outfielder at Nevada-Reno and younger brother Jake is a left-handed pitcher who has signed a letter of intent to pitch at Long Beach State.

"Baseball is in our blood," Stassi said. "Every time we are around each other we are talking about something. It's neat that I can give my dad a call and talk to him about things I'm going through and he can relate to me. Some people don't have that advantage like I do and I am very thankful that I have a dad that I can talk to about my job and he can help me get through it."

It's his love for the game that has earned Stassi the reputation of being the baseball version of a "gym rat", but there is plenty of talent to go along with it.

A four-year starter in high school, the 5-foot-10, 205-pound Stassi hit 40 home runs during his career and as a senior hit .538 with 11 homers, 11 doubles and 38 RBIs.

Entering last year's draft he was considered the best high school hitting prospect at the catching position, but an arm injury and signability issues dropped him to the fourth round, where the A's snapped him up with the 123rd overall pick and signed him with a \$1.5 million bonus.

Once he finally started his pro career, Stassi wasted little time making an impression, hitting .286 in 14 games with short-season Vancouver and having a solid enough fall in the instructional league to earn a spot as a non-roster invitee to the major league spring training camp. He again opened eyes while in camp, working well with the pitchers and earning praise for his maturity, dedication and work ethic.

"Once we got the chance to put our eyes on him in a professional setting, he stood out," said Keith Lieppman, the A's Director of Player Development. "You would think that an 18-year-old he might be overwhelmed, but that was far from the case. People look up to him, there is an aura about him and the way he plays the game. He's a humble kid but you can see that he could be a great major league player someday."

One of the younger players with the Cougars, and the entire Midwest League for that matter, Stassi -- who is the fourth-rated prospect in the Oakland system according to the publication Baseball America -- has had his ups and downs in his first 20 games of full-season baseball. After picking up two hits Wednesday against Quad Cities -- including the game-winner in the bottom of the ninth -- Stassi is hitting .257 with three homers and 14 RBIs, but on the flip side has struck out 27 times in just 70 at-bats.

It's easy to get frustrated, but Stassi understands that it's a grind and he has to take the good with the bad. And he gets to play baseball every day, which is all he has ever wanted to do.

"You've got to have fun doing this," he said. "It's a long year and you can drive yourself crazy if you aren't doing well. You have to enjoy why you are here."