

A's News Clips, Saturday, May 8, 2010

A's can't solve Price or cool off red-hot Rays

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

A's starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez held a potent Tampa Bay Rays offense to just three hits over the first seven innings of Friday night's game at the Oakland Coliseum.

Turns out that Willie Aybar's RBI single in the fourth inning and Sean Rodriguez's two-RBI double in the seventh were all the red-hot Rays needed in a 4-1 win over the A's on fireworks night.

Rays starting pitcher David Price retired 15 of 16 batters from the third to the seventh innings as Oakland suffered its third consecutive loss this season to Tampa Bay (22-7), which has now won five straight and 10 of its past 12.

"Gio threw well tonight, but they just found ways to get to him, and that's what good teams do," said designated hitter Jake Fox, who was 0 for 2 with a walk and a run scored. "We've got a guy on the mound that's hot and throwing the ball well, and they found ways to get to him and found ways to get runs."

The A's (15-15) finally got to Price in the bottom of the eighth inning. An infield single by Cliff Pennington off Price loaded the bases with two outs, and Fox scored from third base when Evan Longoria threw too high to first on Daric Barton's grounder for an error.

The A's were 1 for 7 with runners in scoring position and left five runners on base. Pennington was the A's lone runner from the third to the seventh inning, but he was caught stealing at second base after reaching on a walk.

"It was a pretty solid outing by both (Gonzalez and Price)," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Theirs was just a bit better."

Geren has said repeatedly since the start of the season that he doesn't like it when his pitchers issue free passes. Gonzalez tied a career-high by going seven innings, but he also tied a career-high by issuing five walks, two of which led to Tampa Bay runs.

Gonzalez walked Longoria to start the fourth inning. After Longoria advanced to second on a deep fly out to center field by Carlos Pena, Aybar singled to right center to give the Rays a 1-0 lead.

In the seventh, Gonzalez allowed a single to Gabe Kapler before he walked Dioner Navarro. Rodriguez then doubled to deep center to score two more runs for a 3-0 lead.

"Patient hitters," Gonzalez said of the Rays. "There were some at-bats where guys would have never laid off. Longoria did a great job of laying off in two at-bats and not swinging the bat. That's very impressive."

Walks have been an issue for Gonzalez for most of the season. He has walked 19 in 352/3 innings in his six starts. But he is lasting deeper in games.

"We try to obviously stress throwing strikes, and young pitchers will do that from time to time," Geren said. "But (the Rays) definitely converted on their opportunities."

Gonzalez was coming off a solid outing against Toronto last Saturday when he allowed three hits, two walks and two earned runs in 62/3 innings in a 4-3 A's win.

Gonzalez's fastball was the best it had been all season in that game, and he finished with eight strikeouts. He had won two consecutive decisions before losing to the Rays.

TODAY: Rays (Wade Davis 3-1) at A's (Ben Sheets 1-3), 1:05 p.m.
TV: None. Radio: 860-AM, 1640-AM.

Chin Music: Dallas Braden transcript

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

As I promised earlier, here's a transcript of the interview a couple of us did with Dallas before tonight's game.

Has the incident with A-Rod been bothering you since that day?

“Not at all. I guess every time something pops up in your guys’ head and you come over, that’s when it becomes an issue. I stated the day that it happened that it was a done deal for me five minutes after the fact. I said what I said to him, he said what he said to me. He answered questions that were asked of him, I answered questions that were asked of me and I think if you ask both of us – as far as that’s concerned — that’s where it ended.

“It’s a non-factor in the preparation that we continue to exercise every day over here. I’m sure he forgot about it five minutes after it happened over there. Overall, the guy’s a professional, we’re professionals over here. It’s been a dead topic. It gets all the play and the banter, if you will, I guess later down the road just because we’re over here on the West Coast. If we were under the microscope that is the New Yorks, that is the Bostons, then things might have been a little different.”

But you understand that there’s an insinuation out there that things might get physical with you guys.

“That was something that was taken completely out of context. Think about it, you guys are grown adults, active members of society, I think for anybody to threaten any type of physical violence or altercation towards another athlete in the realm of their sporting venue would be right next to ludicrous. I had to laugh myself when I heard about that. That’s not what I’m about, that’s not how I play the game. I handle the game just the way I handled that day, with the respect that I have for it. For me to ever be looked upon as someone who would call another guy out physically just out of anger, that’s absurd.”

Did that come from the interviewee or the interviewer?

“I couldn’t really tell you.” (Braden is handed a printed-out copy of the ESPN story on the subject).

“Here I was asked something to the effect, if things are usually handled with knuckles where you’re from, in the 209. And my immediate response to that was, ‘We don’t do much talking in the 209.’ In no way was I saying I’m going to physically fight anybody on a baseball field. Come on. One thing I learned early, you let a sleeping dog lie. A-Rod has turned a blind eye to the subject, commendably so. I have as well. He’s gone on and prepared himself day in and day out for his competition and I’ve done the same.

“For the record, there’s no way I would call another athlete out in our venue, in the sports world. You just don’t do that. There’s a multitude of ways to handle conflicts when they arise. What kind of message do you send to the public and to kids playing the game that you need to get physical when things don’t go well or things are blown up? That’s not the case at all.”

He said he wants to move on as well, but he also said, “I don’t want to extend his 15 minutes of fame.”

“That’s fine. Every breathing entity in this world has a right to their opinion. And if that’s his opinion, so be it. That’s fine. I maintain my outlook on things. It’s a done deal for me. Professionalism is the high road that we both want to take.”

Short on big bats, Oakland loses

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Instead of promoting a hitter from the minors when sending Justin Duchsherer to the disabled list Friday, the A's called up Edwar Ramirez, leaving them with nine relievers.

In the opener of a series pitting first-place teams, the A's didn't need much bullpen help because Gio Gonzalez surrendered three hits through seven innings, but he was out-pitched by Tampa Bay's David Price in a 4-1 Oakland loss.

Price, a 6-foot-6 lefty facing the A's for the first time, gave up two meaningless singles through seven innings and exited with the bases full and two outs in the eighth, only to watch third baseman Evan Longoria make a throwing error that scored Jake Fox for the A's lone run.

Ryan Sweeney bounced out to end the inning, and the A's went meekly in the ninth off closer Rafael Soriano. It gets no easier against the majors' best team. In the series' final two games, the Rays are pitching Wade Davis and James Shields, who beat the A's on April 27 and 28 (a Rays two-game sweep in St. Petersburg) and are a combined 7-1.

"You could tell this team is going to be in it the whole year. We're still treading water and making do" despite a flood of injuries, Eric Chavez said of the A's in an interview before the game. "We've got a real formidable team, and all we need is a few guys in the middle of the lineup to be productive."

Chavez, who didn't play in the opener but presumably will be the designated hitter today and Sunday, wants to "show I can do that."

The A's are operating with a three-man bench, and Friday's was Chavez, outfielder Gabe Gross and catcher Landon Powell.

Jack Cust, also a left-handed DH, is back in the organization at Triple-A Sacramento (.266, four homers in 79 at-bats, tops in the Pacific Coast League in walks, fourth in on-base percentage). Chavez is hitting .220 with no homers, six RBIs and 21 strikeouts in 82 at-bats.

"I'm not swinging the bat well, and they've got a guy in Triple-A who hit 25-plus home runs three straight years," Chavez said. "I know I've got to get it going. Ever since I've been here, I always felt the need and pressure for me to be productive. Only difference this year, this is the last year of my contract.

"I know the hourglass is running out. The team is playing well and needs a productive DH. Trust me, I want to be the guy. I want to be productive. I don't want to hit .200 the last two years of my career and be absolutely terrible.

"I'm battling just like a lot of guys in here and trying to stay positive."

Gonzalez had seven strikeouts but walked five batters, two of whom scored - one on a two-run double by Sean Rodriguez, a friend of Gonzalez since their high school days in the Miami area.

The A's are 6-11 since opening the season 9-4, and the Rays' 22-7 start is the best in the majors since the 2005 White Sox. They're 13-1 on the road, the best 14-game road start since the 1984 Tigers won their first 17 on the road.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Ouches: With Justin Duchscherer joining the group, the A's have nine players on the disabled list, their most at one time since May 29, 2008. The A's have used the DL 11 times this year and 75 times since 2007.

3-DOT LOUNGE

Dead to fans, alive in the West

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer

Nobody's more disgusted by the A's stadium malaise than Commissioner **Bud Selig**. More than a year has passed since Selig appointed a task force to recommend a stadium solution in the Bay Area, prompting speculation that he would happily wait until sometime *next* year, when negotiations begin on a collective bargaining agreement. That way, the thinking goes,

Selig could use the threat of eliminating two franchises - Oakland and Tampa Bay - as leverage in talks with the players' union.

The Los Angeles Times went as far as to ask, in a recent column, "Is Bud Selig trying to kill the Oakland Athletics?"

To which some might reply, "Aren't they already dead?"

From a distance, you'd think so. They field a team with little drawing power, they feature an annually overcrowded disabled list, and when the paid crowd is announced at 8,175, it looks suspiciously like 293.

How remarkable, then, that the A's are *very* much alive. Even after Friday's loss, they're just a game out of first, and although it's ridiculously early, it seems highly unlikely they'll fall drastically out of contention any time soon - if at all.

The Angels aren't nearly as bad as their record, but their pitching is awful, and without the departed **John Lackey**, they won't have an ace - not when **Jered Weaver** is the most likely candidate. They've always taken a cavalier attitude toward big-name departures, but at some point, it begins to add up: Lackey, **Mark Teixeira**, **Francisco Rodriguez**, **Chone Figgins**, **Garret Anderson**, **Vladimir Guerrero**. When someone asked **Torii Hunter** what's wrong with the team, he replied, "Hot tamale," implying it too sensitive to discuss in public.

The Mariners, meanwhile, look about as imposing as a butterfly. They have no power, limited run-scoring potential, eternally disturbing issues with **Milton Bradley** (are they better off as he sorts out his personal problems? What happens when he comes back?), and the wonderful news from **Cliff Lee**'s agent that his client, most likely, will be hitting the free-agent market next winter.

"Only by the grace of divisional flukiness," wrote **Larry Stone** in the Seattle Times, "do the dysfunctional Mariners still have a pulse."

The Rangers are a terrific team to watch, a lineup of vast potential when Guerrero, **Nelson Cruz**, **Ian Kinsler**, **Josh Hamilton** and rookie **Justin Smoak** get healthy together, but their ballpark is a veritable paradise for hitters, and that's no way to win.

I wouldn't discount the A's if they can reassemble their pitching staff by July and call up **Chris Carter** and **Michael Taylor** with proper timing.

No need for concern

With **Mark DeRosa** at a low point, scuffling around the .200 mark, this is the best time to say it: *great* signing by the Giants. This will be proven over time. His track record is too good, his character too strong, to believe otherwise. If he's being truthful about his wrist - no post-surgical pain, just some difficult adjustments - he'll be a huge factor in a month or two. ... As for the **Aubrey Huff** signing, no mystery whatsoever. He's just a hell of a hitter. ... Calling all pitch-count wimps: **Robin Roberts**, who died this week, pitched three times in five days to help the 1950 Phillies reach the World Series. His arm was so worn out that his innings pitched-complete games totals over the next five seasons were 315-22, 330-30, 346-33, 336-29, and 305-26. Over one stretch in 1952-53, he threw 28 complete games *in a row*. And he was no junkballer; the best estimates claim he threw in the upper 90s. Go nine or grab some pine. ... In discussing **JaMarcus Russell** and historic draft busts, people forget perhaps the biggest of them all at the quarterback position. In 1963, the Rams used the No. 1

overall pick on Oregon State's **Terry Baker**, the Heisman Trophy winner and Sports Illustrated's Sportsman of the Year. He started one game in three years, played briefly in Canada, and pursued a law degree. ... **Gordon Hayward** made the lamentable choice of staying in the NBA draft, and as he wades through a non-productive rookie season with a lousy team, we won't have nearly the motivation to watch Butler. Another needless blow to the collegiate game. ... There were heartfelt recollections in taverns throughout the Bay Area upon the news that **Ron Fimrite** had passed. Got this e-mail from **Ed Salzman**: "About 54 years ago, we were both working at the Berkeley Gazette. We had a date to meet our future first wives for dinner, and we hit a bar in San Francisco well beforehand. We packed away a load of double scotches, and we were still about an hour away from the meeting time. Ron says to me, Ed, we'd better sober up. Let's switch to Heinekens."

A's fall to Price's gem in series opener

Gonzalez's solid start not enough vs. young Rays starter

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Though his sweeping curveball looked as devastating as ever, Gio Gonzalez's best just wasn't enough. Outdueled by Tampa Bay southpaw David Price, Gonzalez and the A's lost 4-1 to the American League's top team on Friday night.

"Tough break," Gonzalez said. "Can't do nothing about it. Just a tough break. Your hat's off to the pitcher, we both battled it out pretty strong."

Whether they were waving their bats at offspeed pitches or chasing pitches out the zone, the A's simply had no answers for the Rays' talented young lefty. Oakland managed three hits against Price, all singles, and only advanced one runner to third base against him all night.

Coupled with the Rangers' 4-1 win over Kansas City, the A's fell a game out of first place in the AL West.

Despite being outdone, Gonzalez's effort was nothing to scoff at, as he gave up three earned runs over seven innings.

"You take the positives from this," Gonzalez said. "You can never go out of this game negative. Price is a good pitcher, they're a good team. They're in first place for a reason. The positive is I made pitches I wanted to make; I made outs I wanted to make; I pitched into the seventh inning. I didn't give up."

But Gonzalez's biggest bugaboo -- lack of command -- made an appearance at the Oakland Coliseum Friday night. He walked five batters on the evening, two of which came around to score.

Gonzalez had his moments, though. Of his seven strikeouts, five came via his big, breaking curveball. But it was his changeup that had A's manager Bob Geren talking after the game.

"Instead of a two-pitch guy he's really turned into a three-pitch pitcher," Geren said. "It's going to serve him well for many years to come."

Gonzalez, too, said he's becoming more comfortable throwing his changeup.

"The changeup is definitely a pitch I'm going to need this year," Gonzalez said. "I'm throwing it in there and I'm feeling confident every time I go out and pitch."

Friday's start marked the second time in three tries that Gonzalez completed seven innings of work. He accomplished the feat just once in his initial 27 big league starts.

Gonzalez attributes his recent ability to pitch deep in games to a tweak in his mechanics. Before, Gonzalez said his delivery often caused him to lose track of the strike zone mid-windup. Now, with a slowed-down motion, Gonzalez said he's able to focus more effectively.

"I was kind of like a rocking boat. I took my steps and moved side-to-side; took my eyes off the zone," Gonzalez said. "Now I load up, set my feet then I pick up my target and I'm ready to go."

Price, meanwhile, smothered Oakland's lineup before unraveling a bit in the eighth. He tossed 7 2/3 innings, allowing an unearned run while striking out six and walking four.

Geren said the night's outcome was more a result of Price's effectiveness than his lineup's inability to hit. The players, too, were quick to praise the No. 1 overall pick in the 2007 Draft.

"You got to tip your hat to David Price, he's a good pitcher," said A's outfielder Rajai Davis. "He threw a lot of quality pitches. It seems like he was painting everything on the blacks."

The A's biggest threat came in the bottom of the eighth, when they chased Price after he walked two batters and allowed an infield single to load up the bases. The next batter, Daric Barton, reached on an errant throw by Tampa Bay third baseman Evan Longoria to score Jake Fox, but the A's couldn't do anything after that.

"We haven't been hitting the ball well lately," Fox said. "This team has to battle. We find ways to put runners on base, as we saw tonight in the later innings. It's about finding those hits to bring some runs in. We'll get things going."

The bulk of the Rays' damage came in the seventh inning, when second baseman Sean Rodriguez hit a double to center field over the head of Davis to score two and make it 3-0.

Gonzalez said he and Rodriguez have known each other since their high school days in South Florida.

"He was all up in that head of mine," Gonzalez said with a smile. "Nah, just kidding."

A's Duchscherer to DL, Ramirez recalled

Veteran righty gets cortisone shot, aims for May 15 start

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Not even a trip to the disabled list could subtract from the positive spirit that was pitcher Justin Duchscherer on Friday.

The A's right-hander, officially placed on the 15-day DL with left hip inflammation retroactive to April 30, was replaced on the 25-man roster by fellow righty Edwar Ramirez to give the club a nine-man bullpen.

Duchscherer received a cortisone shot on Wednesday for the inflammation that surfaced at the beginning of the season and eventually led to the pitcher's early exit in his April 29 start in Toronto. He was initially worried the hip would require surgery, as was the case with his right hip that was operated on twice.

However, his body's reaction to the cortisone shot has given him no reason to think that he won't be back on a mound sooner rather than later. This is his sixth career stint on the DL.

"I was a little bit sore later in the evening," Duchscherer said Friday. "I went home and fell asleep, because of whatever drugs they give you to sedate you during the procedure. I was a little sore that night, and then I woke up yesterday and felt great. I came in here and heated up and played catch and haven't felt anything since."

Duchscherer underwent a light and easy throwing session Thursday and reported "pain-free" results. The A's starting pitcher said he made about 25 throws from 90 feet -- numbers he hopes to build on by Monday, when he's scheduled to toss a bullpen session on the team's off-day.

The 31-year-old Duchscherer will join the club on its six-game road trip through Texas and Los Angeles, where he could potentially make his next start on May 15 if his body allows it.

"If I feel like this, I don't see why I wouldn't be able to pitch then," he said. "I feel great."

"I have no fear of completely ruining my hip or anything like that. I don't think if I go out and pitch that I'm going to do severe damage. That's not something that's going to happen. Right now it's just a matter of managing the pain. If I can keep the pain manageable, I'll pitch. I feel 100 percent right now."

Duchscherer, who missed a chunk of time during Spring Training due to lower back pain and, subsequently, a nerve ablation procedure, was 2-1 with a 2.89 ERA in five starts for Oakland before exiting his last outing against the Blue Jays after just 3 1/3 innings.

The A's have the luxury of sticking with a four-man rotation, for the time being, thanks to an off-day Monday that takes away the need for a fifth starter's until May 15. Thus, an unusual nine-man bullpen is "a better fit for us right now," manager Bob Geren said.

Ramirez began the season in Oakland and posted a 1-0 record with a 4.50 ERA in six relief appearances before being optioned to Sacramento on April 27. He held the opposition to a .194 batting average, but issued eight walks in 10 innings. However, the 29-year-old righty served up just one free pass in four innings with the River Cats following his demotion.

"We're hoping he can throw strikes here," Geren said. "He did a decent job for us last time -- it was just a numbers thing when he went down. I personally don't like walks. Nobody does. Strikes will be key for him."

In the meantime, Duchscherer hopes the cortisone shot isn't masking pain that could resurface in the coming days.

"From what the doctor said, you have to give the cortisone a little bit of time to work," he said. "You don't want to pitch off the mound and start pounding on it too quickly. You got to let that stuff settle in there and do its job."

"Any time I feel what I felt when I pitched against Toronto, it's hard to alleviate the fear until I actually get back out there and pitch again. The doctor said there is some stuff in my hip -- that the wear and tear of pitching for 15 years professionally can cause. Sometimes it is just the inflammation from those things that causes the pain. So if I can keep the inflammation down and keep the pain manageable, then obviously I'm going to go out there and pitch. But until I get back out there I really won't know."

Braden wants to move past A-Rod issue

OAKLAND -- As was made evident by last month's word match, Dallas Braden may not particularly see eye to eye with Alex Rodriguez on every unwritten rule that comes along within the game of baseball.

However, two days after once again opening his mouth when asked about his April incident with the Yankees slugger, Braden assured MLB.com that the two ballplayers at least agree on one aspect of it all.

"As far as I'm concerned," the A's lefty said Friday, "and I'm sure he feels the same way, it's a dead issue for me. We've moved on. It's baseball time."

Braden and Rodriguez clashed in an April 22 game in Oakland when the Yankees third baseman made his way over the pitching mound while returning to first base on a foul ball -- an act the A's pitcher views as an obvious no-no.

On Wednesday, the pitcher was asked by a Comcast Bay Area reporter if he and Rodriguez would have to "settle [things] with knuckles," to which Braden responded, "Well, I mean that's pretty much the long and short of it."

Clearly disappointed and slightly frustrated that he's still being questioned about the three week-old incident, Braden sat beside his locker Friday afternoon and assured everyone that he "obviously never physically threatened the guy."

"I was asked about where I came from and how things are handled, and my response was, 'We just don't do much talking,'" he said. "In the venue of the baseball world, there's no place for physical confrontation. There's no place for any kind of physical threats. That's the farthest thing away from my character possible. I'm worried about what's going on on the field, as far as baseball is concerned."

A student of what Braden calls the "medium of the media," the A's pitcher realizes he'll be confronted about the ongoing matter once again when the Yankees make a three-day stop in Oakland, beginning July 5. Just don't expect him to open his mouth as wide this time around.

"I thought my candidness and my honesty with the media was something that everyone's not used to getting," he said. "I guess I'll just have to be introverted from now on and give the cliches and the answers that everyone is looking for."

"I guess you expect it to be blown up, but it's all in the eye of the beholder. The day it happened, I said it was done as soon as I walked off the field. I said what I said to him, and he responded accordingly. Then, I think if you ask both of us, I'm pretty sure that's where it started and ended. It's just the power of the pen."

Rodriguez, meanwhile, was made aware of Braden's most recent comments to Comcast by a member of the Yankees media relations staff on Friday and essentially said he found the words as amusing as he did weeks ago.

So be it, Braden said. After all, "I don't pass any more judgment toward him than I did that day."

"I don't pass judgment toward another player, period," he continued. "Like I stated, we're all after the same common goal -- to be a World Champion, to be on top.

"For this to be going on three weeks later down the road, it's not necessary. Am I concerned with continuing the conversation about it? Not really. It's a done deal. It's a dead topic."

Anderson begins rehab program

OAKLAND -- As current owners of a four-man rotation, the A's expressed hope on Friday that they'll get back one of their original five in a few weeks' time.

Brett Anderson, who signed a four-year contract extension just days before exiting an outing early and subsequently being placed on the 15-day disabled list, with a combination of forearm tightness and elbow tendinitis, tossed 30 balls "pain-free" in the outfield on Friday, manager Bob Geren said.

The A's skipper said the activity is all part of a 2-3 week rehab program designed specifically for the left-hander, who led Oakland pitchers in wins and strikeouts as a rookie last season. At the time of his move to the DL, Anderson was expected to miss at least five weeks -- a timetable that seemingly appears to be on track.

In the meantime, Anderson has been replaced in the rotation by 22-year-old Trevor Cahill, who struggled in his season debut in Toronto before tossing five shutout innings against the visiting Rangers on Wednesday.

Crisp could debut at end of May

OAKLAND -- Following a 4-1 loss to the visiting Rays, Coco Crisp represented something of a bright spot for a depleted A's club by announcing he could be ready to make his season debut by the end of May at the earliest.

Crisp underwent an X-ray on Friday for his fractured left pinkie finger, and was cleared to resume normal baseball activity. He tallied a handful of dry swings in the afternoon, and also played catch with his left hand for the first time in more than a month. The next step for Crisp will be hitting off a tee Saturday.

The 30-year-old outfielder, who signed a one-year contract with Oakland on Dec. 23, has yet to make his regular-season debut in green and gold after being placed on the disabled list April 3. At the onset of his injury, he was told he could miss three to eight weeks, so Crisp now sees himself slightly ahead of schedule.

He will take part in a rehab program in Oakland for the time being before undergoing what he expects to be a four-day Minor League assignment.

"I kind of have a nervous feeling," Crisp said with a smile Friday night. "The team has been playing this whole time, and I haven't been out there at all. I'm nervous, but I'm excited."

Crisp will continue to wear a bandage over the fractured finger, which he said will likely take 12 months to fully heal.

Injury updates

OAKLAND -- The majority of manager Bob Geren's pregame meetings with the media have recently been filled with nothing but injury talk, as a result of nine players being stationed on a crowded disabled list.

Friday's session proved to be more of the same, as the A's skipper spent several minutes providing updates on a handful of key rehabbing players expected to make their respective returns soon.

Both Mark Ellis (hamstring) and Travis Buck (oblique muscle) are eligible to be reinstated from the disabled list at any time, and Geren said the former is likely closer to being lifted off the DL than the latter.

According to Geren, the A's second baseman is "passing every test" of a rehab program created by the club's strength and conditioning coach, Bob Alejo. Ellis has been taking part in baseball activities for nearly a week in Phoenix, but there is still no timetable for his return.

Buck, meanwhile, hasn't shaken off a good dose of pain in his right side and has yet to "cross a hurdle where he doesn't feel anything yet," Geren said. As a result, the club isn't expecting the outfielder back in uniform for at least a couple of weeks.

Kurt Suzuki, sidelined with an intercostal strain, will likely beat both Ellis and Buck back to the field. The A's catcher has resumed baseball activity and will hit off a tee Saturday before attempting to take batting practice Sunday, when he's technically eligible to come off the DL.

However, Geren all but ruled out Suzuki's return Sunday, saying his catcher will need a couple more days to fully get back to game speed.

Minor League News

Sacramento rally falls short in ninth

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

The balls were flying high in Sacramento on Friday, when the Colorado Springs Sky Sox beat the River Cats 10-6. The River Cats could have notched a win had it not been for a six-run fifth inning that included two home runs.

Sacramento outhit Colorado Springs 13-12, but more timely hits from Sky Sox and blown opportunities for Sacramento saw the River Cats land on the losing side of the 16-run affair.

"My mental approach for tonight's start is the same approach that I use for every start," Sacramento starter Lenny DiNardo said before the game. "I want to be aggressive in the zone. Don't dilly-dally around and just go out there and throw strikes. Go right after them."

DiNardo's plan worked through the first three innings, when he walked no batters and stiffened the Sky Sox bats by inducing seven of his nine outs on ground balls.

The lefty's scoreless streak ended in the fourth when a stubborn Colorado offense refused to quit. Chris Iannetta and Brad Eldred drew back-to-back walks with one out. On a groundball to the left side off the bat of Jay Payton, shortstop Steve Tolleson made a slick backhand stop to barely get Eldred at second for the force. DiNardo's efforts to get out of the inning were shattered when third baseman Paul Lo Duca stroked an opposite field line drive into right, scoring Iannetta.

Pitching on a major league rehab assignment, Colorado starter Jason Hammel retired the first nine River Cats he faced. Despite his 6-foot-6 stature and towering three-quarters release, Hammel failed to intimidate the Cats in the fourth.

Corey Wimberly led off the inning with a single, smashing a one-hopper to shortstop Jonathan Herrera that was just too hot to handle. Manager Tony DeFrancesco put the game in motion by giving Wimberly the steal sign. The speedy left fielder, who came into the game fourth in the PCL with nine steals, reached second base, and then advanced to third when Iannetta's throw went into center field.

Tolleson drew a walk to put runners on second and third, setting the stage for a Jack Cust double off the center field wall, scoring Wimberly. Tolleson followed suit after Chris Carter slugged a sacrifice fly to deep right field. Cust finished the rally off by scoring on a Michael Taylor blooper into center.

Hammel reduced the damage after Taylor was caught stealing at second and Corey Brown popped up following singles by Eric Sogard and Adrian Cardenas.

The Sky Sox immediately answered in the fifth with a massive rally. Center fielder Cole Garner pounded a 2-0 fastball from Dinardo over the left-field fence. An error by second baseman Eric Sogard, single to left field courtesy of cleanup hitter Matt Miller and an Iannetta walk loaded the bases with one out.

Big first baseman Brad Eldred roped a hard grounder down the left-field line and past the diving effort of third baseman Cardenas. The drive scored Brad Hawpe and Miller. Lo Duca capped the inning with a his own drive over the left field fence, nearly identical to Garner's. The bomb scored Iannetta and Eldred, giving the Sky Sox a 7-3 lead in the middle of the fifth.

Pitching coach Rick Rodriguez gave his thoughts on the large offensive output from Colorado.

"It's just one of those nights," he said. "Lenny was pretty consistent and then he just got out of sync in that fifth inning. He got behind some hitters and they got to him. We have to cut down on the walks right now. Walks are killing us."

The slugfest continued when Anthony Recker led off the bottom of the fifth with his own left field home run, smoking the first pitch onto the sheet of grass that proved to be a dinger paradise for the night. The shot reduced Colorado's lead to three heading into the sixth.

"It felt pretty good hitting one out," Recker said. "It's been a while since I've hit one and I've been searching for a couple hits, especially a home run, to get myself going a little bit."

The sixth inning was dominated by pitching. Right-hander Michael Benacka struck two of the three batters faced to slow the Sky Sox offense down after their six-run fifth. Hammel labored on through the six with two strikeouts of his own.

Benacka's fire burned out in the seventh once he lost his control. Matt Miller led off with a walk. Benacka managed to get the next two batters out, but a Jay Payton double scored Miller from first. Payton advanced to third on a wild pitch before a walk to Lo Duca forced DeFrancesco to go to reliever Brad Kilby.

The left-hander couldn't keep the Sky Sox bats quiet. Second baseman Warren Schaffer fought off a 1-2 pitch into right to score Payton. Herrera then lined a ball into right to score Lo Duca, bringing the score to a 10-4 Colorado lead.

Following a three-strikeout inning from Kilby, the River Cats feasted for extra runs in the eighth off of reliever Shane Lindsay. Cust, whose .448 on-base percentage is good for second on the River Cats team, opened the inning with a line drive single to right. Reliever Shane Lindsay walked Carter and then threw a wild pitch to allow both runners to advance.

Good situational hitting from the River Cats brought the runners in. Taylor hit a groundball to the shortstop to score Cust, and Sogard hit a sacrifice fly to center to score Carter. Colorado was forced to bring in left-hander Matt Reynolds after Cardenas singled off the glove of a diving Lo Duca. Reynolds got Corey Brown to fly out and end the threat, but the River Cats had shrunk the deficit to four.

Kilby struck out two more batters in the ninth and left the fate of the Cats in the hands of the offense. Recker led off the bottom of the ninth with a six-pitch walk off Reynolds. Wimberly and Tolleson hit back-to-back singles to load the bases for Cust. The designated hitter took a rip at a 3-1 pitch, but hit a one-hopper back to Reynolds, who threw to first to start a 1-2-3 double play. A doinker off the end of Carter's bat ended the game and any comeback hope for Sacramento.

Despite the loss, Recker feels the team needs to continue what they are doing to improve their skill set and record.

"You know I think what we need to do has already started," the catcher said. "We're working hard and having a little more fun out there. We're just trying to play a little more loose. We're hungry for a win. I think we have a good attitude right now and that's really important."

Sacramento will play Colorado Springs again Saturday, looking to end a three-game losing streak.

Injuries and Errors Hurt Hounds In Loss

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

It seemed fitting that Thursday night's losing pitcher, Derrick Gordon, lowered his earned run average by almost two points en route to the "L."

Gordon was the victim of two errors on one play, with the miscues leading to a pair of unearned runs that broke a 1-1 tie. That would be the ballgame, as the Corpus Christi Hooks snapped a 5-game losing streak to the RockHounds with a 3-1 win in front of 4,084 at Citibank Ballpark Thursday night.

After a one-out walk to Koby Clemens, Hooks designated hitter Jimmy Van Ostrand singled to center with Clemens moving as far as second. Matt Sulentic bobbled the ball in center just long enough for Clemens to move to third. 'Hounds shortstop Yung-Chi Chen then tried to catch Van Ostrand off the bag at first, but threw the ball away. Clemens scored and Van

Ostrand moved all the way around to third as the throw went out of play. A sacrifice fly then scored him with second run. Factor out the errors and neither run would have scored. Ouch.

In the first inning, Jemile Weeks was injured running to first base and left the game. Ouch.

Starter Carlos Hernandez struggled. He allowed just one run on three hits (two of them infield singles), but didn't appear to be at 100% and departed (nothing definitive as to why) after just 3.0 innings. Ouch.

Then came the errors. Ouch.

The only good news was the return of reliever Jared Lansford, who had last pitched April 23. While not on the D-L, "Lanny" had been sidelined with tightness in his throwing arm. He threw a 1-2-3 eighth inning with two strikeouts.

The Corpus Christi bullpen was ridiculously good in wrapping the game up. Henry Villar and Danny Meszaros combined for 3.0 innings, allowing no runs, no hits and one walk with seven strikeouts. Both are considered top 30 prospects in the Houston Astros' organization.

The 'Hounds conclude their quick, 4-game home stand Friday night, facing Corpus Christi Thursday (Cap Night) with the first pitch set for 7:00. The RockHounds then travel to Frisco for their first meetings of the season against the RoughRiders, a series running Saturday through Tuesday in the Metroplex.

Kaase Carries Blaze To 9-3 Win Over Ports

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - Heading into Friday night's contest, Bakersfield Blaze infielder Jake Kaase had yet to hit a home run. By night's end, Kaase had not only one, but two to add to his ledger as his two homers and three RBI helped lift the Blaze past the Ports by a final of 9-3. In dropping the first game of their series with the Blaze, the Ports have now lost three straight.

It was Kaase that broke the ice with two down in the bottom of the third with a solo home run that stayed just to the left of the right-field foul pole, giving the Blaze a 1-0 lead. The home run was the first hit allowed by Ports starter Kenny Smalley (2-2) and the only hit he allowed through the first four innings.

Stockton took their first and only lead of the ballgame in the fifth. With runners at first and second and two down, Jose Cirsotomo singled to right, scoring Jeremy Barfield and knotting the game at one. Shane Keough drew a walk to load the bases, and Grant Green followed with an infield single that scored Petey Paramore and put the Ports in front 2-1.

Green's hit signaled the end of the line for Blaze starter Wilfredo Boscan, who received a no-decision after going 4.2 innings and allowing two runs on five hits while striking out one.

Bakersfield fired right back and regained control of the contest in the last of the fifth. Smalley yielded back-to-back singles to Mitch Hilligoss and Jared Bolden to start the inning, and following a sac-bunt from Jose Felix, Tommy Mendonca grounded to second to bring in the tying run. Kaase followed with an RBI single to right, part of a 3-for-4 night with three RBI and three runs scored, putting the Blaze ahead for good at 3-2. Two batters later, Davis Stoneburner knocked an RBI double to left, scoring Kaase and knocking Smalley from the game.

Smalley would end up with his second loss of the year, going 4.2 innings and allowing four runs on five hits while striking out two.

From there, it would only get worse for Stockton. In the sixth, an error made by first baseman Mike Spina at the start of the inning led to an unearned run allowed by Trey Barham, putting the Blaze up 5-2.

The Blaze would slam the door in the seventh. With Jose Pina on the hill, Kaase led off the inning with his second home run of the night. Two batters later, Pina yielded a walk to Stoneburner. Two batters later, with two down, Mike Bianucci hit a two-run homer to center to give the Blaze a commanding 8-2 advantage.

Bakersfield tacked on a run in the eighth when Felix led off the inning with a solo home run off Lance Sewell to make it 9-2.

The Ports made some noise in the ninth as Josh Horton led off with a solo home run off Mark Hamburger, Horton's second since joining the Ports from Extended Spring Training. Paramore and Tyler Ladendorf knocked back-to-back one-out singles, but Crisotomo hit into a game-ending 5-4-3 double-play.

Shane Zegerac (1-0), who tossed a scoreless inning-and-a-third for the Blaze, picked up the win.

The Ports and Blaze will play the second game of their three-game set on Saturday at Sam Lynn Ballpark. Left-hander Anvioris Ramirez (0-5, 9.13 ERA) will take the hill in search of his first win of the year. He'll be opposed by Blaze right-hander Michael Main (1-1, 3.95 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:15 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Cooled Off by Chiefs

Kane County drops to 0-4 against intrastate rivals

GENEVA, III. – After a three-game sweep over Burlington to conclude their seven-game road trip, the Kane County Cougars returned home Friday night and lost, 10-5, to the Peoria Chiefs in front of 6,881 fans at Elfstrom Stadium. A quartet of Cougars pitchers issued eight walks, plunked four hitters and let the Peoria leadoff hitters reach seven times in nine innings.

Kyle Christensen (0-1), making his Cougars debut after getting called up from extended spring training, gave up six runs on six hits in four-plus innings in the loss. After Max Peterson tossed two scoreless innings, Connor Hoehn got touched for three runs in two innings and Ryan Quigley yielded one unearned run in one frame.

Down, 6-0, and hitless through 4 1/2 innings, the Cougars rallied for four in the fifth. Nino Leyja walked and scored on an error, Mike Gilmartin and Anthony Aliotti each poked RBI singles and Leonardo Gil notched a sacrifice fly to cut it to 6-4. Then Max Stassi led off the sixth with his fifth homer to pull the Cougars within one, 6-5, but Peoria answered with four runs over the final three innings to break it open again, 10-5. James Leverton (5-0) picked up the victory for Peoria.

The Cougars (14-15) and Chiefs (19-10) continue the three-game series Saturday at 5 p.m. CT. Justin Marks (0-3, 9.13) is scheduled to take the hill against Jonathan Nagel (0-1, 3.60). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 4:45 p.m.