

A's News Clips, Friday, May 14, 2010

Oakland A's in search of offense, waste Ben Sheets' second straight strong outing in 12-inning loss to Texas Rangers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

After toiling into extra innings on a warm afternoon, the A's surely wanted a victory to show for it Thursday.

They didn't get it, as the Texas Rangers pulled out a 2-1 victory on Vladimir Guerrero's game-winning single off Andrew Bailey in the 12th inning.

But the A's did get more evidence that right-hander Ben Sheets is headed in the right direction. Sheets limited Texas to three hits and one run over six-plus innings, his second straight impressive start after getting shelled in consecutive outings before that.

"It was a good start," Sheets said. "I feel like I picked up right where I left off last time."

But the A's couldn't muster much offense themselves and wound up dropping two of three to the Rangers, who opened up a two-game lead over Oakland in the American League West.

The A's collected just seven hits on the afternoon and couldn't take full advantage of their few scoring chances.

Elvis Andrus' third-inning single scored Julio Borbon to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead. But the A's tied it in the fourth. Kevin Kouzmanoff singled and came around to score on Josh Donaldson's single to left.

After having his string of converting 27 straight save opportunities snapped Tuesday, Bailey showed vulnerability again Thursday when he came on for the bottom of the 12th. Andrus led off with a single but was thrown out trying to steal second by catcher Donaldson.

After Michael Young walked and Josh Hamilton singled, Bailey threw Guerrero an 0-1 cut fastball that caught too much of the plate. Guerrero lined an RBI missile to the left-center gap to end it.

"I wanted to start it away and have it end up off the plate," Bailey said. "It started in the middle and ended up on the outer half."

Sheets struck out eight for the second straight outing. And though he was coy about discussing specifics, he is benefiting from a slightly expanded pitch repertoire. Manager Bob Geren and Donaldson said Sheets is mixing in his changeup and a new pitch that they're calling a cutter.

Sheets avoids that label.

"I definitely wouldn't call it a cutter," he said. "It doesn't do anything."

Donaldson said Sheets began experimenting with the pitch midway through a May 2 start at Toronto when Sheets was torched for nine earned runs.

"It's not a put-away pitch," Donaldson said. "It's a pitch that (keeps hitters) off his fastball. It looks like a fastball, but the velocity is not the same."

There also was talk that perhaps Sheets was tipping his pitches. But Sheets said hitters have told him lots of times in the past that they knew what pitches were coming, even during a good outing.

He attributes his turnaround more to fixing a mechanical flaw.

"I just made a mechanical adjustment and it freed my arm up," Sheets said. "You're starting to see swings and misses, and starting to see foul balls."

Notes: Geren said Justin Duchscherer's bullpen session went very well. But the A's will wait to see how Duchscherer's left hip feels today before deciding whether to activate him to start Saturday against the Los Angeles Angels. ... Right fielder Ryan Sweeney was ill and didn't play.

TODAY:

A's (Dallas Braden 4-2) at Angels (Joe Saunders 1-5), 7:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

Oakland A's Dallas Braden must refocus thoughts on Los Angeles Angels tonight, not on perfect game

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Dallas Braden is trying to move forward and leave Sunday's perfect game in the past, but the outside world isn't likely to cooperate.

After the media crush that predictably followed his historic gem, Braden wants to return his focus to pitching.

His first chance comes tonight when he faces the Los Angeles Angels in the opener of a three-game series in Anaheim.

"If you're living in the past or living in yesterday, that's going to affect today. And today is going to affect tomorrow," Braden, 26, said. "You've got to move on and have a quick memory. I've got to go pitch against the Angels, so that's what I'm thinking about."

Regardless of how his career unfolds from this point, Braden forever will be associated with throwing the 19th perfect game in major league history.

"He'll start having a lot of people coming up telling him where they were at the moment he pitched his perfect game," said former Cleveland pitcher Len Barker, who threw a perfect game against Toronto on May 15, 1981.

After tossing that masterpiece, Barker said he was invited to New York to be interviewed by Bryant Gumbel but declined.

"I didn't want that. I didn't want to have distractions," said Barker, who went on to lead the American League in strikeouts during that strike-shortened season.

Braden, by contrast, has been extremely accommodating with the media.

He became the first Athletic since Jason Giambi in 2000 to grace the cover of Sports Illustrated. He read his own "Top Ten" list on "Late Show with David Letterman." There have been televised interviews with ESPN and CBS' "The Early Show" and an interview on National Public Radio.

But A's reliever Brad Ziegler said Braden's mental toughness won't allow him to get sidetracked.

"He's a guy, and not necessarily to a fault, who's always liked having attention on him," Ziegler said. "He relishes that. When he gets on the mound, you talk about all business, all the time."

How did the previous 18 pitchers fare in the start after their perfect games?

According to research conducted by the Orange County Register, dating back to 1909, pitchers have gone 4-6 with four no-decisions and a 4.93 ERA. Barker had the only complete game.

Former A's pitcher Catfish Hunter posted one of the worst starts after a perfect game, allowing eight earned runs in six innings but still getting a win over Minnesota in 1968.

It's an elite — and eclectic — club Braden has joined. Six Hall of Famers have thrown perfect games, with Randy Johnson sure to be a seventh. But Barker was just 74-76 in 11 seasons.

Hands-down the most interesting member of the club is Monte Ward, who threw a perfect game in 1880 for the Providence Grays.

Ward went 39-24 with a 1.74 ERA that season. His right arm broke down by 1884, so Ward taught himself to throw left-handed, became a center fielder and shortstop, and wound up collecting more than 2,100 career hits.

Poole: Despite pitching perfect game, Oakland A's Dallas Braden has feet firmly planted

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune columnist

Taking the mound tonight with his back bearing little more than the weight of his hometown, as was the case the previous 53 times he has started a major league game, Dallas Braden wouldn't have it any other way.

Oh, but he could. The timing is right. Perfect, actually.

After going the full nine innings Sunday in Oakland, facing precisely 27 batters and retiring every one, Braden is the 19th pitcher in MLB history to navigate a perfect game. Suddenly, he's a legend among men and the celebrity du jour.

With his cleats headed for the Hall of Fame and the congratulatory messages still coming, we should forgive the 26-year-old if he were to indulge in a good cigar or fine glass of champagne.

Who could blame him if he paused for a moment to stare at the mirror and admire the expansion of his head?

But that's not Dallas Braden. As the world around him blows kisses his way, he's not about to smooch himself or stroke his ego. He's the product of a distinctly unprivileged environment, with no sense of entitlement. He's damn proud of this, fiercely defends it.

So he's too true to Stockton to go Hollywood, too humble to buy any of the hype, too "real" to perceive himself as a big deal.

"I'm still trying to find my way," he said Thursday, during a conference call from Texas, "still trying to earn the right to go out there every fifth day."

This grounded, everyman quality defines Braden. He's the cheeky underdog, the genuinely self-effacing guy who Sunday morning, on Mother's Day, drove to work as an unremarkable major league pitcher — 18-23 record, zero complete games — and that afternoon drove home as a national sensation.

Despite appearing this week on "Late Show with David Letterman" and ESPN and Comcast SportsNet and CBS' "The Early Show" and National Public Radio and being on the cover of Sports Illustrated, it's a safe bet to assume Braden will remain the tattooed dude from Stockton who used guts and grit to reach the bigs.

Grinning his way through the nightly "Top 10" segment on Letterman on Tuesday night, Braden offered the "Top 10 thoughts that went through Dallas Braden's mind while he threw his perfect game." No. 3, as read by Braden, perfectly captures his view of himself: "Even I've never heard of me."

That's not to say he isn't enjoying the exposure that comes with carving out a generous slice of history. If he's hustling to meet popular demand, he has his reasons.

Every public appearance is an opportunity to positively represent Stockton, a city with a depressed economy and undesirable national image, as well as a chance to publicize the A's, who in recent years have regressed into the shadows of baseball.

Then, too, Braden sees these appearances as opportunities to advertise possibilities for youngsters who aren't blessed with an abundance of talent, those who might be where he was a decade ago, a bit angry, a bit confused and very uncertain about the future.

Seeing him in the spotlight tells them achievement is realistic, that even legendary achievement can be realized.

"I was a 24th-rounder, so my road was full of obstacles and speed bumps and other guys that just were flat-out better than I was," Braden said of his rise that began when he was the 727th player drafted in 2004. "And I had to compete. But I knew if what I had to do was compete, I'd be OK because that's one thing I've prided myself on."

Mostly, though, Braden seizes the attention to give props to his grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, to honor and display the woman who helped her daughter, Jodie Atwood, raise Dallas. When Atwood died of skin cancer in 2001, Lindsey became the boy's biggest fan and guiding light.

"The most important part is that my grandma's been able to come out along with me and have as much fun as I have, probably more," Braden said. "And being able to put that smile on her face for the whole week has been the best part for me."

So he'll face the Angels tonight with a sober view of his achievement.

"Just because of how rare the feat is, I think everybody else understands I'm not going to go out there and rattle off four or five in a row," he cracked. "That's not going to happen."

"If anything, there's probably going to be a fight at the bat rack for (for the chance to go after) my fastball."

That's Dallas, unchanged by momentary perfection and its spoils. His mother would be proud.

Chin Music: Another right-handed heavy A's lineup vs. Texas

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/13/2010 10:45AM

Pretty quiet scene in the A's clubhouse before this afternoon's series finale with Texas. Ryan Sweeney is under the weather, so he's out of the lineup. Adam Rosales is sporting a nasty shiner above his left eye after a batting practice mishap yesterday — he hit a line drive that ricocheted off the pitcher's screen and nailed him. But he's OK to play second base and he's hitting in the No. 2 spot once again. Like yesterday, the A's have seven right-handed hitters in the lineup with lefty C.J. Wilson going for the Rangers. Not a bad idea ... lefties are 3-for-39 against Wilson this season.

Justin Duchscherer (left hip) was scheduled to throw off the mound this morning. I didn't get word on how he came out of it, but the A's will wait until tomorrow to decide whether he'll come off the DL and start Saturday against the Angels.

Your lineups for today:

A's: Pennington SS, Rosales 2B, Barton 1B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Fox LF, Powell DH, Donaldson C, Gross RF, Davis CF; Sheets RHP.

Rangers: Andrus SS, Young 3B, Hamilton LF, Guerrero DH, Kinsler 2B, Murphy RF, Smoak 1B, Treanor C, Borbon CF; Wilson LHP.

Soft landing for Byrnes in Menlo Park

By Daniel Brown, Bay Area News Group

Eric Byrnes' game didn't start until 8:50 p.m. on Wednesday, which explains why at 7:20 p.m. he was walking through a Menlo Park eatery with a pitcher of beer in each hand.

Such a late start required that The Dutch Goose slow-pitch softball players get their postgame party out of the way before the first pitch.

It was an odd scene: Until two Sundays ago, Byrnes' teammates were Ken Griffey Jr. and Ichiro Suzuki and the Seattle Mariners.

And his new team?

"A bunch of knuckleheads," Byrnes said, as a general introduction to the roster.

If the former Oakland A's outfielder was upset about the awkward end to his 11-year major-league career, it was tough to tell by all the laughter at The Dutch Goose.

It was also tough to see any signs of depression in the way that Byrnes raised his hands in triumph after smacking the first two pitches he saw Wednesday over the left-field fence — and over the trees beyond the left-field fence — for a pair of epic home runs in a 6-2 victory.

Byrnes also jumped a few feet in excitement when his team turned a triple play.

Never mind that the opponent was Vintage Construction, not the Boston Red Sox. Byrnes retrieved the first ball for safekeeping and handed it to his mom, Judy, who was among the announced crowd of, oh, let's say 14. Byrnes said he plans to mount the milestone ball on his wall.

"What was I supposed to do, sit at home and mope?" said Byrnes, 34. "Maybe if I had slacked off over the course of my career, maybe if I had given less than a full effort I might (be upset). But I can look in the mirror and be proud of my career."

Byrnes' new teammates, the knuckleheads, are old friends, guys he played with in Alpine Little League in Portola Valley, or earlier.

Byrnes was playing golf with one such ex-Little League teammate, Brendan Royer, just a few days after being released by the Mariners. He's the one who invited Byrnes to come play — no tryout required.

The Dutch Goose is the team's sponsor, which seemed an ideal fit for the softball demographic.

"Whether we go 0-for-4 or 4-for-4, the beer is still cold, and the burgers are still good," Byrnes said.

Byrnes, a Woodside native, used to play for higher stakes. He spent the first six seasons of his major-league career with the A's starting in 2000. As recently as 2007, he was a dynamo with 21 home runs and 50 stolen bases for the Arizona Diamondbacks.

But he hit only .203 after signing a big contract, a three-year, \$30-million deal that will pay him \$11 million this year — even as he takes his slow-pitch hacks for The Dutch Goose. (The Mariners are responsible for only \$400,000; the rest is Arizona's to bear.)

The end of Byrnes' big-league career came just as he regained his health after a long struggle with injuries. The problem is that, while his body was healthy, his average was not. Byrnes was 3-for-32 with no home runs and no RBIs before the Mariners released him.

His final weekend with Seattle also included a botched suicide squeeze (he pulled the bat back). Byrnes said Wednesday that the suicide squeeze wasn't the reason the Mariners let him go.

"They let me go because I was 3-for-32," he said. "I didn't hit. I have no one to blame but myself. I actually thank the Mariners for giving me the opportunity.

Now, he's intent on being the anti-moper. Last weekend, Byrnes played 99 holes of golf over three days in Palm Springs. Tuesday, he surfed for three hours. And Wednesday, before softball, he played 18 more holes.

Byrnes is going to be all over the airwaves for a few weeks, filling in with the MLB Network, ESPN, Comcast Bay Area and KNBR.

"So many athletes retire, and what happens? You never hear from them again," Byrnes said. "I didn't want to do that.

"When the Mariners let me go, (manager) Don Wakamatsu said, 'Byrnesy, I've never had anyone play harder than you did.' When an established baseball man tells you something like that, you know it's OK to hang them up."

Canseco returning to Bay Area for new kind of bash

By Eric Louie, Contra Costa Times

Jose Canseco is coming back to the Bay Area, with football legend Herschel Walker in his sights.

"Herschel is going down," crowed Canseco, who is hoping to take on the former NFL running back turned mixed martial arts fighter.

Sure, the 45-year-old Canseco's only professional fight was a disaster. He was quickly beaten down last May by 7-foot-2-inch Hong Man Choi of South Korea.

But there's a bigger roadblock: Walker has shown no interest in fighting Canseco.

In a video posted on the website of Canseco's promoters, Walker, 48, said he is a serious fighter and isn't interested in taking on the former Oakland A's great.

"It's a joke," Walker said.

But Canseco has started a rigorous training regimen and has a plan to lure Walker into the ring.

Via <http://cansecovswalker.com>, the former outfielder and his promoters are pushing Walker and his handlers for a match. There's a petition fans can sign if they want to see the fight take place.

"This is a total freak show and hilarious, so I wanna see it," one fan chimed in.

It's the same kind of in-your-face online approach Canseco's promoters used to get him back in the ring.

Renowned Pleasant Hill-based martial arts instructor Cesar Gracie will be training Canseco when he arrives in the Bay Area in a few weeks. The arrangements were made by promoters Terry Burton, of San Ramon, and Ryan Villarante, of San Francisco.

Burton, an amateur fighter with Team Gracie Fighter, said the Canseco-Walker idea hatched a few months ago after Walker's professional fighting debut. Members of the Gracie team thought Walker's performance was strong and talked about who would be a good opponent. Burton said Canseco, a well-known athlete from the same era who has been dabbling in professional fighting, was an obvious choice.

They made a cell phone video inviting Canseco to train for a fight with Walker, and put the video on YouTube. They didn't know if Canseco would see it, but a week later he called.

For the past six weeks, Burton and Villarante have been meeting with Canseco near his Northridge home to train and work on sparring. When Canseco comes to the Bay Area, he will spend at least six weeks in intensive training at schools run by Gracie and the team's featured fighters around the Bay Area.

Gracie is looking forward to molding the 6-foot-4, 250-pound Canseco. If Canseco commits, Gracie said he can make him a good fighter.

"To me it's a challenge," Gracie said.

The trainer admits a Canseco-Walker matchup would be a spectacle, but he says it's a spectacle sport, in which fighters enter a caged ring and beat each other.

Canseco's promoters say they don't want to create a circus atmosphere, and will start Canseco against fighters about his age and skill level.

Canseco knows some may see this as a stunt, but he says he's serious about fighting. He participated in martial arts during his baseball years, and then tried it professionally, but he found it hard to get takers.

Canseco did fight former child star Danny Bonaduce to a draw, but in his one professional fight, against Choi, Canseco was badly beaten. He said he didn't train enough, had a bad knee and that he couldn't overcome his opponent being almost a foot taller and more than a decade younger.

He said a fight against Walker would be different, and followed with some smack talk worthy of a seasoned fighter.

"He showed me nothing as an athlete," Canseco said of Walker's professional fighting experience.

Mike Afromowitz, spokesman for Strikeforce, which has Walker under contract, had no comment on a possible matchup. He said Walker will return to train with the company, in San Jose, but has no fights scheduled.

In the interview video conducted by Burton and posted on his website, Walker was adamant about not fighting Canseco, at least in the ring.

"He can come to my backyard and we can throw down right there," said Walker, who offered to buy Canseco the plane ticket to Dallas.

RANGERS 2, A'S 1

Sheets turning his ship around

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A secret to A's starter Ben Sheets' newfound success came about in the middle of one of his worst outings.

During a 3 1/3 -inning stint May 2 in which he gave up nine runs to the Blue Jays, Sheets started messing around with a cut fastball, and while he has been coy about it since, calling it a changeup, scouts have spotted it. Both A's manager Bob Geren and catcher Josh Donaldson called it a cutter Thursday.

Whatever it is, it's working. Though the A's lost 2-1 to the Rangers in 12 innings, Sheets held the impressive Texas lineup to one run in six-plus innings.

Since a dreadful road trip to Tampa Bay and Toronto in which Sheets allowed 17 runs in 7 1/3 innings, he has made two strong starts, giving up three runs in 12 1/3 innings. Thursday, he had a season-high eight strikeouts.

"I felt like I picked up where I left off last time," Sheets said.

There were reports after that bad road trip that Sheets was tipping pitches, but Geren said that there were no indications that he was telegraphing anything.

"We constantly monitor all our guys for stuff like that," Geren said.

Sheets said that he's tipped pitches occasionally in his career and still pitched well, so that wasn't really a concern to him.

Of the new pitch, Donaldson said, "It's not a put-away pitch; it helps get hitters off the fastball. It's not moving a lot, but it looks like the fastball and it's 5 mph slower."

Sheets' changeup is slower still, so Geren said Sheets is now in essence a four-pitch pitcher.

The A's and Rangers keep taking turns atop the AL West or sharing the top spot, and after needing 13 innings to decide the series opener Tuesday, they played 12 innings in the finale Thursday.

Texas won when Vladimir Guerrero hit a liner into the gap in left off closer Andrew Bailey to send in Michael Young. Bailey, who blew his first save of the season Tuesday, took his first loss of the season Thursday.

"They have a good team. We have a solid team, too," Bailey said. "It's going to be back and forth all year long. We expect to play games like this with them all season."

The Rangers got their run off Sheets in the third inning, and the A's scored in the fourth on Donaldson's two-out, bases loaded single. Then came a string of scoreless innings. Oakland left runners at third in the seventh and the eighth, and in both the seventh and the ninth, the Rangers had men thrown out at the plate on grounders with the infield playing in. The Rangers also left the bases loaded in the 10th.

On both plays at the plate, rookie catcher Donaldson edged away from the runner and still managed to get out calls with tags - even though in the seventh, Ian Kinsler looked safe. Donaldson threw out two would-be base stealers at second, including Elvis Andrus with nobody out in the 12th.

With Bob Davidson - known as "Balkin' Bob" - umpiring behind the plate, Texas starter C.J. Wilson was called for a balk in the fourth, but Jake Fox singled on the pitch, effectively voiding the balk. Another balk call on Wilson in the seventh got catcher Matt Treanor ejected for arguing.

Hey, that was fun. Let's do it again...

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Tonight, **Dallas Braden** gets to try to become the first man ever to throw consecutive perfect games when he starts against the Angels in Anaheim.

On Thursday, Braden said with a laugh that he doesn't expect to "rattle off four or five in a row. I don't think anyone's in fear of that. If anything, there might be a fight at the bat rack for my fastball."

There have been only 19 perfect games in baseball history, and Braden is not shying away from any of the attention during the week. He and his extremely popular grandmother, **Peggy Lindsey**, have been enjoying it.

"I think the way his personality is, he can actually handle instant fame better than most people can," manager **Bob Geren** said, adding, in reference to the A-Rod flap, "He got a lot of media attention before that start and it didn't seem to bother him."

Braden said he got a text after the perfect from friend and ex-teammate **Greg Smith**, a left-hander now with the Colorado Rockies. "It wasn't congratulations," Braden said. "He said, 'I'll have you know that was ball four to Kapler.' "

Duchscherer OK, makes a change: **Justin Duchscherer** threw a 35-pitch bullpen session and then said, "Saturday, here I come," an indication he'll come off the disabled list as scheduled to make his start at Anaheim.

Duchscherer, who had a cortisone shot for left hip irritation last week, said he has altered his mechanics - he's opened up a little with his left leg, taking the pressure off that hip and also improving his cutter location, he said.

Taylor hurt: Top outfield prospect **Michael Taylor** said via text that he has a calf injury, the result of regular wear and tear, he believes, and he's going to make sure it doesn't become a long-term problem. Taylor is likely to go on the seven-day DL at Triple-A Sacramento, but Geren said that the injury isn't thought to be serious.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

And more Braden: On Wednesday, U.S. Reps. Pete Stark, Jerry McNerney and Barbara Lee introduced a House resolution recognizing Dallas Braden's perfect game, and satiric magazine the Onion weighed in with "Angry A-Rod Man Pitches Perfect Game."

Drumbeat: Duchscherer says he's OK to start; Taylor hurt; more Braden

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Rangers Ballpark 5/13/2010 10:28AM

It's the deciding game of the three-game series between the AL West's top two teams, who seem in near lockstep lately.

Here's the A's lineup, again right-hander heavy: Pennington SS, Rosales 2B, Barton 1B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Fox LF, Powell DH, Donaldson C, Gross RF, Davis CF, Sheets P

Justin Duchscherer (left hip inflammation) threw a 35-pitch bullpen session and said it was "awesome," and he said he'll make his next scheduled start. "Saturday, here I come," he said.

Triple-A Sacramento outfielder Michael Taylor is out with a calf injury he said happened on Tuesday. He told me via text this morning that he's going to do everything he can to make sure it's not a long-term thing. Taylor didn't incur the injury doing anything in particular, he said it's probably just normal baseball wear and tear.

A's manager Bob Geren said the injury isn't considered serious. Sacramento is likely to put Taylor on the DL - minor-league DLs allow players to come off in just seven days.

It's still very likely that the A's will call up Taylor and his Sacramento teammate Chris Carter at some point this season, but at this point, it's looking more like sometime in the second half.

Ryan Sweeney is out ill today, but Geren said he'd wanted to get him a day off somewhere on this trip anyway.

Dallas Braden was on just on a conference call in advance of his next start tomorrow night, and he thoroughly entertained the Southern California media. I just got a text from a SoCal reporter saying, "Geez, he's not too great a quote is he?"

Among the highlights, Braden was asked about being on the cover of Sports Illustrated and he said, "My ugly mug slapped on magazines on newstands across the country is scary for readers, but it's good for me."

He also said he got a text from former teammate Greg Smith, who has a running battle with Braden over pickoff totals, after his perfect game. "It wasn't congratulations," Braden said of the text. "He said, 'I'll have you know that was ball four to Kapler.'"

Will the Angels be geared up to face Mr. Perfecto? "If anything, there might be a fight at the bat rack for my fastball," Braden said.

Yep, terrible quote. Poor media, it's just awful having to cover someone like Braden non-stop.

A's can't overcome Rangers in extra frames

Closer Bailey surrenders winning hit in 12th inning

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- A's manager Bob Geren was questioned rather incessantly when he made the unusual decision to go with a nine-man bullpen last week.

"That's what fits the club's current needs," the skipper insisted.

Well then Dallas Braden went and threw a perfect game, and Geren's plan appeared all the more unnecessary.

By the time the A's left Texas on Thursday, though, he didn't look so foolish. In three American League West games against the Rangers this week, all nine relievers were put to use. In fact, five made two appearances.

None of the nine, however, could avoid an extra-innings 2-1 loss at Rangers Ballpark on Thursday.

Closer Andrew Bailey, who ended a career-high 21 2/3 scoreless innings streak Tuesday in an eventual 7-6 A's win, surrendered a walk-off single to Vladimir Guerrero in the bottom of the 12th inning to suffer his first loss of the season.

"I just missed my spot," the reliever said. "That's when you go back to the drawing board and come back out there the next day."

"It was a cutter. I threw it in the same spot on the first pitch and started away so that it would end up slightly off the plate, and [Guerrero] did a nice job of pulling it. You gotta tip your cap."

Said the Rangers' designated hitter: "It was a long game and I was 0-for-5, so I was just trying to give good contact to the ball, and I did it. I found it and got the run in."

Bailey's loss gave the A's their second consecutive defeat, as the team dropped two of the three-game set, which spanned a combined 34 innings and 11 hours and seven minutes. After scoring seven runs in Tuesday's opener, the A's tallied a total of just two runs in the final two contests compared to Texas' 12 -- 10 of which came Wednesday.

"I thought it was actually a pretty balanced series," Geren said. "I think, other than the one game with all those homers, we matched them pretty well. You gotta like the way our pitching handled their lineup."

"Every time we play it should be a good series. I don't like losing two of three, obviously."

Before Oakland's bullpen combined for 5 1/3 innings of work, starter Ben Sheets took the bump and settled for a no-decision following a six-plus innings effort that resulted in one run, three hits, three walks and eight strikeouts.

The right-handed pitcher entered the afternoon affair with an 0-2 record in three road starts, in which the righty coughed up 20 earned runs in just 13 1/3 innings. He endured no such troubles Thursday, though.

"That might be the best start he's had all year," Geren said. "He's going to have a good season -- you can see it. He's added a couple things to his repertoire ... he's getting crafty, and it's really showing."

Sheets has been hush hush regarding said change, which formed in the midst of his Toronto start on May 2. On Thursday, though, both Geren and batterymate Josh Donaldson confirmed the veteran has been working with a new cutter.

Just don't tell Sheets.

"It ain't no cutter," he insisted. "It's an unspecified pitch."

"We call it a cutter," Donaldson said just minutes later. "It's not a put-away pitch. It helps him get off his fastball. It's about 5-6 miles per hour slower than the fastball. ... Our job is to get hitters off balance so they're not just sitting on a fastball."

"He's been using the cutter similarly as he would use the changeup, but the cutter just allows everything else to be better."

No matter the name, there's no denying its effect on the once-struggling pitcher, who said a mechanical tweak has "freed my arm up."

"I'm starting to get life in the zone," he said, "and my breaking ball is breaking. I'm starting to see more swings and misses and foul balls. A good arm slot and a good rhythm can do a lot for you."

Meanwhile, Texas starter C.J. Wilson matched Sheets' solid outing by tossing seven innings of one-run ball. The Rangers' lefty surrendered just four hits while walking three and fanning five.

The A's left runners in scoring position in three of the 10 innings. Oakland's lone run of the game came in the fourth off Wilson, who surrendered a single to Kevin Kouzmanoff, which eventually allowed him to score on an RBI single by Donaldson.

The A's catcher, who entered the game 1-for-19 in 11 games with the team, not only notched a run-scoring hit but also garnered a handful of impressive plays behind the plate -- one that nailed the speedy Elvis Andrus out at second on an attempted steal.

"He loves to run," Donaldson said of the speedy Rangers shortstop, "so I was ready for him to go."

The out, though, represented the first and only one of the 12th frame.

"They're a good team," Bailey said. "You expect to play those kind of games. You just hope next time you're on the other side of them."

Duchscherer's bullpen goes 'very well'

Club will wait on decision for Saturday's start

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Justin Duchscherer came out of a 35-pitch bullpen session on Thursday feeling "very good," the right-hander confirmed shortly after his stint.

Duchscherer, who has been on the disabled list with left hip inflammation, said the session felt "even better" than the successful and more rigorous bullpen outing he endured Monday.

Thus, the club will wait to see how Duchscherer's body responds to the bullpen Friday to determine if he can make his scheduled start in Anaheim on Saturday.

"I'll be ready to go," the right-hander said.

The 31-year-old Duchscherer was 2-1 with a 2.89 ERA in five starts for Oakland before exiting his April 29 outing against the Blue Jays after just 3 1/3 innings due to the hip injury.

Rosales gets shiner in BP

ARLINGTON -- Adam Rosales sported quite the black-and-blue shiner over his left eye Thursday, as a result of a line drive that ricocheted off the pitcher's L-screen and came back to hit him during Wednesday's batting practice.

Manager Bob Geren initially described his infielder as having "a little [Mixed Martial Arts] look to him" and on Thursday dropped another sports movie reference.

"He's got a Rocky Balboa eye," the skipper said. "He's a tough kid."

The bruise didn't keep Rosales off the field, where he hasn't committed an error in 28 games as a second baseman. The 26-year-old is one of just two American League qualifiers at second base without an error.

Suzuki getting closer

ARLINGTON -- In an attempt to return to the A's lineup as early as this weekend, catcher Kurt Suzuki plans on taking batting practice with Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday before playing in a game with the River Cats on Friday.

Suzuki, nursing back an intercostal strain, was expected to join the team in Texas on Wednesday after going 2-for-2 with a double, home run, three runs and three RBIs for Sacramento on Tuesday. However, Suzuki reported soreness when he returned to his hotel, thus putting a halt to his potential return.

He'll make another go at it, manager Bob Geren said, and hopefully be activated Saturday or Sunday.

Worth noting

Ryan Sweeney received a day off Thursday while Gabe Gross was given a start in right field. Manager Bob Geren said Sweeney was not feeling well but was also due for a day of rest. ... While taking batting practice for the first time Wednesday, Coco Crisp (pinkie finger) hit from both sides of the plate and hit at least one home run, Geren said. The A's outfielder will join Mark Ellis in a rehab assignment with Class-A Stockton next week. Ellis was placed on the 15-day disabled list with a strained left hamstring on April 21 and has been rehabbing in Phoenix. ... When asked about recent reports that Thursday's starter Ben Sheets was tipping his pitches in his previous starts, Geren said: "I just think it was bad location. We constantly monitor all of our guys for stuff like that."

All eyes on Braden for perfect-game encore

By Tim Britton / MLB.com

A whirlwind week that commenced with the 19th perfect game in Major League history and has included appearances on "The Late Show with David Letterman," "The Early Show" and a regional cover of Sports Illustrated will come to a close on

Friday for Dallas Braden. There's only one question left for the Oakland southpaw to answer: What does he do for an encore?

Braden earned the media spotlight on Sunday, when he threw a perfect game against one of the Majors' best offenses in the Tampa Bay Rays. But it's not as if the performance was as aberrational as one might think. Aside from one bad outing against, of all teams, the Rays, Braden has improved dramatically in 2010 for the Athletics.

Six of his seven outings have been quality starts, and discounting the loss to Tampa Bay, Braden's ERA is 2.36. He's cut his walks per nine innings in half from 2.8 a year ago to 1.4 this season, and consequently, his WHIP has fallen below 1 and ranks behind only Seattle's Doug Fister in the American League.

"He throws all his pitches for strikes," Angels catcher Mike Napoli said. "He works both sides of the plate. You can be effective that way. Nobody can sit on anything."

In Joe Saunders, the Angels will start a left-hander moving in the opposite direction of Braden for most of the season. After going 33-14 the past two seasons, Saunders is just 1-5 to start 2010. His five losses are tied for the league lead and are just two shy of tying a career high. In his previous two seasons as a full-time starter, Saunders didn't experience his fifth loss until July 8 and June 30, respectively.

The seven home runs he's allowed are third worst in the league, and his WHIP of 1.789 is the highest among qualifying AL starters. It's also nearly twice that of Braden's. Just as Braden has halved his walk rate, Saunders has seen his rise by 50 percent, from 3.1 per nine innings to 4.7.

Saunders applied the brakes on his bumpy start to the season in his last outing though he didn't earn the victory, keeping the Angels in the game by allowing three runs (one earned) in 5 2/3 innings. Prior to that start, Saunders had surrendered 15 earned runs in his previous three outings -- a span of 11 2/3 innings.

"It obviously wasn't one of my best starts, but it was a battle start out there," Saunders said of his last game. "When you can battle your butt off, give your team a chance to win, keep them in the ballgame and the team can still pull it out, that's a victory in my book."

Athletics: Following up the perfecto

How have recent pitchers fared after perfect games? Well, in his first start after his perfect game last season -- which, like Braden's, came against the Rays and included six strikeouts -- Mark Buehrle retired the first 17 Twins before falling apart in the later innings and eventually taking the loss. Randy Johnson's perfect game against the Braves in 2004 was the first of six consecutive victories for the Big Unit, including another sterling performance one start later against the Marlins.

Overall, the past five pitchers to throw a perfect game are 2-2 with a 4.85 ERA in their next start.

Angels: No home-field advantage yet

The Angels are still looking to find their rhythm at Angel Stadium in 2010. The Halos have won between 45 and 54 games at home each of the last eight seasons, but they're off to a rocky start this season with just nine wins in their first 20 home dates. That includes a series loss to the Athletics in the first week of the season. The 11 home losses are tied for most in the AL.

Worth noting

The Angels have taken the season series from the Athletics in five of the past six seasons. Los Angeles won 12 of the teams' 19 meetings a season ago. Oakland last won the season series in 2007. ... Bobby Abreu's sacrifice fly in the seventh inning on Wednesday was his first RBI since April 27 -- a span of 53 at-bats. ... Howie Kendrick's RBI double in the sixth was the 100th two-bagger of the second baseman's career.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento 8, Oklahoma City 5

HIGHLIGHTS: A 14 inning, four hour and 20 minute affair ended in favor of the visiting team as Sacramento defeated Oklahoma City 8-5 at AT&T Bricktown Ballpark.

After a two-run eighth inning for Oklahoma City the scoring fell quiet until the visiting half of the 14th inning. Michael Affronti delivered an RBI double, and Steven Tolleson connected on a two-RBI single securing the River Cats (15-20) first win of the series.

Wes Bankston (.444) continued to stroke the ball since joining the RedHawks adding three hits, including two singles and a two-RBI double. Mitch Moreland contributed three RBIs complimented by three hits.

Oklahoma City starter Michael Ballard (2-1) took a no decision going six innings, allowing three runs atop four hits, and two strike outs. Jonathan Hunton (2-0) earned the win pitching three scoreless innings. Willie Eyre (1-3) took the loss allowing three runs.

It was the longest game of the season (innings,time) for both teams. Oklahoma City leads the series two games to one.

Oklahoma City and Sacramento will conclude their four-game set Friday evening at AT&T Bricktown Ballpark. Tommy Hunter and Vin Mazzaro are slated to pitch for the RedHawks and River Cats respectively with a first pitch scheduled for 7:05 pm.

RockHounds fall to Missions

by Oscar LeRoy, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Midland RockHounds manager Darren Bush said if his team wants to beat San Antonio ace Simon Castro, they're going to have to earn it.

On Thursday, Castro was his usual dominating self, pitching five strong innings and his teammates had a three-run fifth inning as the Missions held on for a 5-3 victory.

"He was pretty good," Bush said. "He locates the ball, he throws strikes and he's not going to give you anything for free. We've faced him already three times and he's a good pitcher. He commands the zone."

Early on, it was a battle of two hard-throwing, highly respected prospects in the righthander Castro (3-1) -- the No. 2-rated prospect in the San Diego Padres organization according to Baseball America -- and RockHounds' lefty Pedro Figueroa (1-2) -- the No. 5 prospect in the Oakland organization.

Both gave up solo home runs in the fourth inning as Matt Clark hit a towering blast to right field. Alex Valdez then answered Clark's shot with a homer of his own to right in the bottom of the inning to tie the game at 1.

Other than that homer by Valdez, it was tough to get any consistent offense going against Castro, who scattered four hits, walked two and struck out six.

Figueroa was tough early but got into trouble in the fifth when the Missions tagged him for three runs on four hits. The rally started with a one-out double by Beemer Weems, who later scored on a fielder's choice grounder by Brad Chalk. Andrew

Parrino added an RBI-double and Cedric Hunter chipped in with an RBI-single for a 4-1 lead.

"I just got a good pitch to hit and I took advantage of it," said Weems about his double to start the rally. "(The inning) was huge. Teams always battle until the last out, so to get a few runs in the middle of game is always big."

Figueroa allowed five runs on nine hits to go with five strikeouts and no walks in his six innings of work.

"He's a good pitcher," said Weems, who had two doubles against Figueroa. "It just seemed he left a few pitches up and we took advantage of it."

The RockHounds cut the lead to 5-3 in the eighth against Craig Italiano, who came in without allowing an earned run this season in 14-plus innings. But the frame could have been bigger for the 'Hounds as they loaded the bases. However, Italiano got out of the jam and the inning by getting Jermaine Mitchell on a called third strike.

Evan Scribner pitched a perfect ninth for his second save of the season.

NOTEBOOK

ROSTER MOVES: The RockHounds announced a few roster moves on Thursday. RHP Justin Souza has been promoted to Triple-A Sacramento. Souza was 1-1 with one save and a 4.40 ERA as a reliever with Midland. ...Second baseman Jemile Weeks has been placed on the disabled list with a leg injury and it's possible he could be out a month. Weeks injured himself while running to first base in a 3-1 loss to Corpus Christi on May 6 and hasn't played since. ...The RockHounds have added RHP Neil Wagner to the roster. Wagner was acquired via trade by the Oakland A's from Cleveland on May 11 for future considerations. He was a 21st round draft pick by the Indians in the 2005 draft.

'HOUND BITES: Hall of Famer and Oakland A's base roving instructor Rickey Henderson won't be in town until just before game time today. He was supposed to be in Midland on Thursday and coach first base but his trip got pushed back a day, according to RockHounds officials.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: Midland is expected to send LHP Anthony Capra (2-4, 2.84 ERA) to the mound against the Missions' RHP Wynn Pelzer (3-3, 4.71).

Ports Rally Falls Short in 8-5 Loss to Nuts

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Stockton Ports (15-20) didn't have a problem collecting hits, but struggled to bring their baserunners home in their series finale against the Modesto Nuts (18-14) on Thursday, losing 8-5. The Ports brought the tying run to the plate in the top of the ninth with two out, but were unable to complete the rally.

The Ports totaled 13 hits in the contest, but left 12 on base and batted .167 (2x12) with runners in scoring position. Michael Spina led the Ports hit parade with two solo home runs. He is now tied with Stephen Parker for the team lead in home runs, and has hit three homers in his last two games. Tyler Ladendorf collected three consecutive singles for the Ports, while Stephen Parker and Petey Paramore also had two hits on the night.

Stockton starter Anivioris Ramirez picked up his sixth straight loss on the year, allowing six runs on seven hits in a season-long 6.1 innings. He allowed just one walk, which was intentional, in the seventh inning. Jose Pina, Lance Sewell and Scott Hodsdon appeared in relief for the Ports. Greg Reynolds collected the win in his second MLB rehab start for Modesto, while Adam Jorgenson collected his eleventh save on the year.

The Nuts took a 1-0 lead on a solo home run by center fielder Tim Wheeler, his third on the year. They pulled ahead, 2-0 in the fourth inning. First baseman Ben Paulsen struck out but reached first on a dropped third strike. Ramirez got the next two batters to ground out, and Paulsen advanced to third. Left fielder David Christensen singled down the left field line, allowing Paulsen to score.

The Ports chalked up their first run in the bottom of the fourth, as Spina slammed his fifth homer of the year over the right field wall.

Modesto made it 4-1 in the top of the fifth on an RBI double by designated hitter Jimmy Cesario and a sacrifice fly by catcher Jordan Pacheco. The Ports came back to pull within one in the bottom of the fifth. Shortstop Michael Richard led off the inning and reached first on an error by Modesto third baseman Ryan Peisel. He advanced to second as Ladendorf collected his second single of the game. Richard came around to score the second Ports run of the game on an RBI single by third baseman Stephen Parker. Later in the inning, an RBI single by catcher Petey Paramore scored Ladendorf to make it 4-3. The Ports loaded the bases in the sixth, but Parker grounded out to spoil the Ports chances of taking the lead.

The Nuts added three runs in the seventh inning. Ramirez put out left fielder Brian Rike to start the frame and then gave up a double to second baseman Maikol Gonzalez. He then intentionally walked Cesario. The Ports next called on Jose Pina to face shortstop Thomas Field. Field singled to load the bases, and then Pacheco collected an RBI walk. Paulsen stepped up to the plate and slammed a double to right-center field, scoring two more runs. Stockton retired the next two batters to get out of the jam.

The Ports closed the gap again in the lead in the bottom of the seventh. Spina led off and slammed his second homer of the night, dropping one over the left field wall. Paramore doubled down the right field line to follow. Designated hitter Matt Whitney then collected an RBI groundout to make it 7-5.

The Nuts added their final run in the eighth on an RBI sacrifice fly by Field. The Ports held them in check in the ninth, and worked to rally in the ninth. With two out, Whitney was hit by a pitch. He advanced to third as right fielder Jeremy Barfield doubled to center field for his lone hit in the game. Ports centerfielder Todd Johnson was struck out looking to end the game.

The Ports finished the series 2-1 against Modesto, and look to go on a seven-game road trip down south, taking on the High Desert Mavericks and Lake Elsinore Storm. The Ports will play at 7:05 PM in Adelanto on Friday. RHP Justin Murray (2-2, 2.90) will start for Stockton, while LHP Ryan Feierabend (0-0, 0.82) will take the mound for High Desert. Fans can tune into the game on KWSX 1280 or listen to a free audio stream at www.stocktonports.com.

Cougars Fall to Bandits in Return Home

Kane County drops series opener to team it's chasing

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars dropped the opener of a four-game series, 5-1, Thursday night against the Quad Cities River Bandits in front of 4,062 at Elfstrom Stadium. The defeat put the Cougars back to .500, and they now trail the first-place Bandits by four games in the Western Division standings at the midway point of the 1st half.

Starter Justin Marks (1-4), coming off his first victory and quality start of the season, suffered the loss. He gave up a first-inning run before settling down to retire 10 of the next 11 hitters. The Bandits managed two in the fifth against him and got a homer from Jason Stidham in the sixth to make it 4-0. Marks gave up the four runs on seven hits, walked two and fanned four. Bo Schultz erased a sixth-inning jam but then got touched for one in the seventh for a 5-0 score. Kyle Christensen posted two perfect relief innings in the stead of Schultz.

The Cougars managed just five hits in the game and fanned 11 times against a trio of Quad Cities pitchers. Shelby Miller (1-2) pitched 5 1/3 shutout innings for the victory. The Cougars' lone run came in the bottom of the ninth against Jesse Simpson when Nino Leyja singled home Anthony Aliotti for an unearned run.

The Cougars (17-17) and Bandits (21-13) continue the four-game series Friday night at 7 CT. Rob Gilliam (2-1, 2.87) is scheduled to face Joe Kelly (2-2, 2.96). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.