

A's Gio Gonzalez learning that fewer strikeouts can lead to more wins

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Gio Gonzalez doesn't temper the fact that he still gets an emotional buzz from a punch-out. Rhetorically speaking, of course.

But it's probably not coincidence that as Gonzalez's strikeout totals have diminished slightly this season, the 24-year-old A's left-hander has started to find more consistent success in what's starting to look like his breakout season as an effective major league starter.

It's not even the end of May and Gonzalez is already just one win shy of matching his entire victory total for 2009. He's 5-3 with a 3.46 ERA, he's thrown at least 95 pitches in all nine of his starts, and he's coming off his best and longest outing in the big leagues — eight innings of shutout ball against the Giants on Saturday in which he retired the last 20 batters he faced.

Generally, when Gonzalez is that sharp he amasses high strikeout totals, but he struck out just five in the 1-0 victory, a development that is not lost on him.

"I miss the strikeouts," he said. "I miss them a lot. But if I can go eight or nine innings and save some of the bullpen's arms, why not?"

This is the lesson the A's have been trying to impress on Gonzalez since they acquired him from the Chicago White Sox on Jan. 3, 2008, in a deal for Nick Swisher. He always has received high marks for his raw ability, but learning to harness that ability has been a work in progress. In a number of starts during his first two seasons with Oakland, he has allowed his emotions and excitability to get the best of him, even on days when he was pitching well and piling up strikeouts.

To his detriment, his lust for the K added to his pitch counts and walk totals. Moreover, in trying to overpower hitters, he occasionally would fall out of rhythm and lose his grip on a game entirely.

"I'm not going to lie to you, my whole career, I've been a high-strikeout guy," he said. "So it's been a challenge learning to adjust and letting the hitters get themselves out and not try to strike out the world. Now, I want to stay in that zone where I can get one-pitch outs as often as I can. The idea is to go 7-8 innings, which is what All-Stars are supposed to do. You want to keep the game in your hands as long as you can."

Gonzalez said he has learned much from watching and conversing with Dallas Braden, himself a pitcher who when he first came up to the A's would let his emotions get the best of him on the mound. Gonzalez said Braden constantly is in his ear during bullpen sessions and in between innings of games, trying to sustain the cool focus Braden obviously has mastered to a significant degree.

"Yeah, I see them talking a lot," said manager Bob Geren. "It's great, because the words of encouragement are coming from a guy who's been there. Coaches can only do so much to impress on a guy how he's supposed to handle himself on the mound. When advice comes from someone who's getting the results, it can have even more impact."

Still decidedly high-energy off the field — it's part of what makes him such an engaging and likable guy — Gonzalez likes to spread credit around. Give him enough time and he'll praise the groundskeeper for keeping the grass at just the right height on the infield.

Interestingly, the person he said helps keep him grounded when he's on the field is rookie Tyson Ross, who has a decidedly unemotional, workmanlike approach despite his lack of pro experience.

"I remember when I was his age, it was more an emotional thing for me," Gonzalez said. "I was excited, I wanted to strike out the world, and when you see a guy like Tyson, who just takes the ball and does his job, it makes you think about how important keeping your composure can be."

Along with a fresh mental and emotional approach, Gonzalez also is expanding his arsenal. He has worked hard to develop an effective changeup since the beginning of spring, and while it's not on par with Braden's just yet, he understands the magic of the pitch and is showing it as often as he can in games.

"I use it just to let the hitters know I have an extra pitch in my back pocket," he said. "It's well known now that I'm not just a two-pitch pitcher (fastball and curve). I want to be a three-pitch pitcher. I want to continue showing that I have a good changeup, and it's working to good effect. If they're making contact for an out, I'll take it. The less pitches I have to make, the better for me."

Note: Brett Anderson threw three innings in a rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento. He gave up two runs on six hits with one walk and one strikeout in 57 pitches.

Long trip key as A's have feasted at home

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

The good news for the A's as they embark on a 10-game road trip, matching their longest journey of the season: They bring some momentum into today's opener in Baltimore, coming off a 5-2 homestand that included a three-game sweep of the Giants.

The bad news: The A's stink on the road (so far).

It's only May, yes, and the A's have played just 18 games away from the East Bay this season. But the disparity is eye-catching and impossible to ignore - the A's are 18-9 at home and 5-13 on the road.

Manager **Bob Geren** and several players struggled to offer a theory, tossing out explanations ranging from injuries to the fact that virtually all teams play better at home. They also know they must get their act together away from the Coliseum.

"Bottom line, we need to start playing better on the road," pitcher **Ben Sheets** said. "And it starts with pitching."

The numbers bear that out. The A's have a sparkling 2.79 ERA at home and an unsightly 5.69 ERA in road games. That's the lowest home ERA in the American League and the highest road ERA. It makes sense on some levels, because the Coliseum is historically one of the most pitcher-friendly ballparks in baseball.

But then how to explain why the A's are hitting .268 at home and .231 on the road?

As Geren pointed out, this trip to Baltimore (three games), Detroit (four) and Boston (three) marks the first time all season the A's have left home at fairly close to full strength. Second baseman **Mark Ellis** and center fielder **Coco Crisp** both came off the disabled list last week, though designated hitter **Eric Chavez** went on the DL.

Ellis, for one, fully understands the stakes in the American League West.

"If you look at our division, it's up for grabs," he said. "It's a little early to be desperate, but why not make a run right now? ... You're not going to win the division if you aren't at least close to .500 on the road."

Anderson pitches: **Brett Anderson** worked three innings at Triple-A Sacramento on Monday, throwing 57 pitches and allowing six hits, a walk and two runs. He also struck out one.

"I felt super rusty, but my arm felt good," Anderson said via text. "Each inning got better. I threw some sliders with no pain. So it was a success."

Anderson, who has been on the DL for nearly a month with a forearm strain, is likely to start at Detroit on Saturday.

Catch this: Crisp's return to health hit a snag when he missed Sunday's game because of a strained right pectoral muscle. He hopes to rejoin the lineup for tonight's game against the Orioles.

Put him in center, with **Rajai Davis** in left and **Ryan Sweeney** in right, and the A's outfield becomes even stronger defensively.

"They've all been major-league center fielders at some point," Geren said. "To have an outfield with three guys who can play center tells you something about their overall range and athletic ability."

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Chavez's outlook: Answering speculation that his neck injury could be career-ending, Eric Chavez said in a text that he wants to emphasize that he's not retiring. "If I recover from this injury, I fully plan on playing," he said.

Suzuki, Sweeney need All-Star votes

Young A's making strong cases for Midsummer Classic trip

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The unassuming young talent that has guided the A's to a respectable start this season needs some help to take part in one of baseball's most storied events.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki and outfielder Ryan Sweeney could represent sleeper picks for this year's All-Star Game thanks to their roles as the club's most consistent clutch hitters and overall lineup mainstays. Both, however, are in need of votes to get a starting nod in the Midsummer Classic at their positions.

Fans can cast their votes for starters up to 25 times at MLB.com and all 30 club sites using the **2010 All-Star Game MLB.com Ballot** Sponsored by Sprint until July 1 at 8:59 p.m. PT.

Starting rosters will be announced during the 2010 All-Star Game Selection Show on TBS on July 4. Baseball fans around the world will then be able to select the final player on each team via the 2010 All-Star Game Final Vote sponsored by Sprint.

And the voting doesn't end there. Fans will have the opportunity to participate in the official voting for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet at the Midsummer Classic via the 2010 All-Star Game MVP Vote sponsored by Sprint.

The All-Star Game, to be played in Anaheim on July 13, will be televised nationally by FOX and around the world by Major League Baseball International. ESPN Radio will provide exclusive national radio play-by-play, while MLB.com will offer extensive online coverage.

Though sidelined for part of the season with an intercostal strain, Suzuki -- deemed by many around the league as one of the game's most underrated players -- has given the A's a sturdy middle-of-the-order hitter while also providing several defensive gems behind the plate.

Sweeney, meanwhile, boasts a team-high .308 batting average to go along with a .390 slugging percentage. The 25-year-old, in just his third full big league season, is also part of what manager Bob Geren has called the league's best defensive outfield.

"As a player, you definitely like to get recognized by other teams and players," Suzuki said. "I don't think any of us go into a season thinking we want to be in the All-Star Game, but it's a great opportunity if it happens. You want to play with the best of the best around the league."

Ben Sheets continues his string of strong starts as Oakland A's blank, sweep San Francisco Giants

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

From the A's perspective, the large wet blanket thrown over the Giants the past three days wasn't as much a function of an opponent's struggling offense as the ongoing emergence of a very special pitching staff.

Five Oakland pitchers combined to display more sterling mound work Sunday in a second consecutive shutout of the Giants, veteran starter Ben Sheets leading the way with six innings of two-hit ball that included eight strikeouts.

Sheets didn't get the win because he departed before the A's broke through against Jonathan Sanchez in the seventh inning en route to a 3-0 victory. But Sheets was looking and sounding like a winner after his fourth consecutive solid outing and perhaps his best of the year, even though he'd posted similar numbers in prior starts.

"Those weren't good outings," he said. "The runs and innings might have looked like they were decent, but it was always a battle. Everything was ridiculously tough and harder than it should have been. But this feels more like something I'm used to, being able to make a pitch and get out of innings."

So what's different?

"I'm just feeling a lot better from start to start," said Sheets. "When I look back at month to month to month, I can really tell a big difference. The more you do something, the more comfortable you feel at it. It feels good, because I think I'm starting to settle in."

Sheets followed up excellent starts by Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez to completely smother the Giants, who scored just one run in the three-game sweep and finished with 20 consecutive scoreboard zeros. It's just the kind of momentum nudge the A's need as they head out on their longest road trip of the year, a 10-gamer starting Tuesday to Baltimore, Detroit and Boston.

"Overall, I thought our whole pitching staff just pitched unbelievable, like they've been doing all season," said catcher Kurt Suzuki, who drove in an insurance run in a two-run eighth. "They've been keeping us in ballgames and giving us chances to win."

Manager Bob Geren said he has seen steady progress from Sheets, despite a two-start blip in which he gave up 17 earned runs. An adjustment in his arm angle seems to have solved the problem, and he's now given up just seven runs over his past four starts.

"He's got a few more pitches and innings under his belt, he's gaining stamina and he's changed his release point ever so slightly," said Geren. "He's added a little cut fastball and he's used his changeup a few more times than his normal percentages, so he's more of a four-pitch guy now than a two-pitch guy, and his velocity is steadily climbing. He hit 93-94 (mph) today."

The A's didn't exactly knock the cover off the ball in the series, but they scored enough to make their strong pitching stand up. They managed just one hit against Sanchez over the first six innings but broke through in the seventh when Adam Rosales opened with a single, was sacrificed to second and scored on Jake Fox's double into the left field corner. Suzuki and Ryan Sweeney added run-scoring singles in the eighth.

Sheets' biggest break was getting out of the fourth inning unscathed. With two out and runners at first and third, Juan Uribe hit an opposite-field screamer that second baseman Mark Ellis leaped high to snare for the third out.

"That was a very well-struck baseball, it was to his left and it was actually tailing," said Geren. "So he not only had to jump up, he had to gauge the distance of how the ball was slicing. Hopefully, I'll see that on somebody's highlight film."

"Every once in a while you get lucky," said Ellis. "It was a good test for the hamstring, and everything felt fine."

NEXT GAME: Tuesday,
at Orioles,
4:05 p.m.

NEXT GAME: Tuesday,
vs. Nationals,
7:15 p.m.

A's update: Adam Rosales, slated for shortstop, takes a left turn

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Rosales, slated for shortstop, takes left turn

Adam Rosales initially thought he was going to make a rare start at shortstop in order to give Cliff Pennington a day off. But when the lineup was finally posted less than an hour before game time, the versatile infielder learned he was making an even rarer start — in left field.

Rosales had made just two prior minor league appearances in the outfield in Double-A while playing in the Cincinnati organization and none in the major leagues before Sunday. But he did play nearly three months in left for Mexicali in the Mexican League last year.

When center fielder Coco Crisp bowed out of the game with a mild pectoral muscle strain, Rosales was moved from short to left. He handled one fly ball during his seven innings there and caught it with no issues.

"It was right at me, so it was pretty routine," he said. "Going into the gaps and going down the line was what I was most worried about. But it was awesome. I had a good time with it."

Manager Bob Geren said he was aware of Rosales' possibilities in the outfield from the outset of the season.

"When we first signed him, I actually called a friend who's a scout for us and I knew he'd been covering the Mexican League, and he told me about Adam's ability to play left field," Geren said. "All along I thought I'd use him out there at times, but with (Mark) Ellis hurt I didn't have the opportunity."

Rosales said he's ready for more outfield duty if called upon.

"Actually, I think I can (play it)," he said. "Whatever I can do to help the team out, really. I feel confident about it."

Geren said he expects Crisp to be back in the starting lineup Tuesday in Baltimore.

Geren was ejected by first-base umpire Greg Gibson in the seventh inning when he argued a reversed call of a swinging strike three by the Giants' Juan Uribe. Geren's contention that Uribe's foul tip had been caught by catcher Kurt Suzuki appeared to be justified by TV replays, but the manager didn't make a big deal out of it afterward.

"They (the umpires) don't obviously get the opportunity to see it over again," said Geren. "He made the call, we disagreed, and I was watching the last two innings on TV."

It was Geren's first ejection of the year and his seventh as A's manager.

Left-hander Brett Anderson will pitch tonight in a rehab appearance with Triple-A Sacramento. Geren said Anderson would throw 50-60 pitches, and depending on how he performs, could return to the majors to make his next start or he might make a second rehab start in the minors. The earliest he can return to the Oakland roster is Saturday.

Giants lose fifth straight

By Alex Pavlovic, Mercury News,

Manager Bruce Bochy doesn't know what else the Giants can change at this point, and neither do his players.

The Giants were shut out by the A's for the second consecutive day, losing 3-0 Sunday at the Oakland Coliseum to finish 1-6 on a three-city trip. San Francisco has lost a season-high five straight and headed back across the bay having not scored in its past 20 innings.

"This is a road trip we've definitely got to put behind us," Bochy said. "We hit some balls pretty good, and it's tough for these guys when they're struggling and they hit the ball well."

"This is a time that you get tested."

Nobody was tested more Sunday than Jonathan Sanchez. The left-hander limited the A's to two runs despite walking five, but it wasn't nearly enough to get his first win since April 26. Sanchez (2-4) is second to last in the National League in run support and has received zero runs of support in five of his nine starts.

"You're battling out there to win games, but when you're not scoring runs, it's kind of tough," Sanchez said. "We're just going through a tough time."

In an effort to mix things up, Bochy moved Andres Torres to the leadoff spot and bumped Aaron Rowand and Edgar Renteria down in the order. The move looked like it might work in the fourth, when Torres drew a leadoff walk and stole second. But Freddy Sanchez struck out, and after Torres advanced on Pablo Sandoval's flyout and Aubrey Huff walked, second baseman Mark Ellis ended the inning with a leaping grab of Juan Uribe's liner.

It was one of several hard-hit balls that failed to do any damage. Uribe also crushed an offering from Ben Sheets in his first at-bat, but Rajai Davis chased it down on the warning track in center field.

Rowand hit a hard shot down the line with a runner on second in the seventh, but third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff was positioned perfectly. Rowand's move from first to sixth in the order failed to snap his slump, and he has gone hitless in his past 13 at-bats.

The Giants left five runners on base Sunday and finished the series 0 for 19 with runners in scoring position.

"It's really, really tough. It's frustrating," catcher Bengie Molina said. "We've just got to find a way to score runs."

Nine players combined for 10 strikeouts Sunday, but Bochy said he will stick with the new-look lineup when the club returns home to face the Washington Nationals on Tuesday.

"Right now, we're planning on keeping Andres in the leadoff spot and Freddy in the two spot, with Pablo right behind them," Bochy said. "We might tinker with the six, seven, eight guys."

There's no need to tinker with anything Jonathan Sanchez is doing. He struck out four and went at least seven innings for the fifth time this season, surpassing his total of four in 2009.

Oakland scored the eventual winner in the seventh on Jake Fox's double and tacked on two more in the eighth, one of which was charged to Sanchez.

"You've just got to leave it in the past," he said of the tough loss. "We've got a day off (today) to get away from baseball for a little bit and come back and start winning."

Prep pitcher Gunnar Sandberg, who was critically injured by a line drive in March, throws out first pitch at A's-Giants game

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Gunnar Sandberg was back on a pitcher's mound Sunday, just 21/2 months after the Marin Catholic High pitcher was critically injured after being struck in the head by a line drive.

Jointly honored by both the A's and Giants at the Coliseum, Sandberg threw out the first pitch, a good-looking strike to De La Salle's Zac Byers, the player who hit the liner that nearly cost the 16-year-old junior his life in a March 11 practice game between the schools.

"I'm doing really well," said Sandberg, who toured both clubhouses and diplomatically wore an A's jersey over a T-shirt of his actual favorite team, the Giants.

Sandberg was accompanied by his father, Bjorn Sandberg, as well as Byers and De La Salle coach Rick Steen. The entire Marin Catholic team joined Gunnar on the field before the emotional first-pitch ceremony, and Sandberg also accompanied A's manager Bob Geren to home plate for the pregame lineup exchange.

Sandberg suffered a life-threatening brain injury and spent three weeks in a coma on a ventilator after the March 11 mishap. But he has made a dramatic recovery in recent weeks with the help of physical, occupational and speech therapy four days a week.

"It got as bad as it can get, but his recovery since then has been pretty remarkable," said Bjorn Sandberg.

Even though Gunnar faces surgery Tuesday to replace a bone flap initially removed to relieve pressure on his brain — he currently wears a helmet to protect the fragile area at all times — he is already plotting a real return to the playing field. Normally a middle infielder anyway, he was less certain if he'd pitch again.

"I'm thinking maybe next winter, and definitely next season," he said. "It'd probably be in the back of my mind a little bit (if he pitches again), but I'm not too scared about it, particularly if I wear a helmet."

Sandberg said he supports pending state legislation that would put a two-year moratorium on the use of metal bats at the high school level. The Marin County Athletic League in late March instituted a ban on the use of metal bats. The North Coast Section, however, rejected a motion to go to wooden bats.

"I would say wood's a great idea," Sandberg said. "If it can save one more kid from going through this, then I think it's definitely worth it."

Just as happy to be part of Sunday's ceremony was Byers, who formally met Sandberg for the first time. But the two have conversed on a regular basis through Facebook.

"I'm just happy for Gunnar and hearing that he's going to be playing next year," said Byers. "It's been pretty tough, especially to go out on the field, because I've heard how much he loves the game. I just decided to play the season for him and play the game the way he'd want to play it, too."

Byers, a pitcher himself, admitted that he had trouble on the mound after the incident.

"I was really nervous," he said. "I really didn't want to pitch for a couple weeks. I was a little scared."

Byers said he received support from both De La Salle and Marin Catholic officials and players.

"He had a burden on his shoulders that people didn't really know that he was carrying," said Steen. "So he feels a little liberated today."

Members of the Marin Catholic team helped collect donations at Sunday's game to help defray Sandberg's medical expenses, and the A's also donated \$5 from every \$28 field-level seat sold for the game to that cause.

Stingy Sheets rounding into form

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

Ben Sheets did not land a one-year, \$10 million contract simply because he offered an experienced presence on Oakland's oh-so-young pitching staff. The A's also hoped he and his surgically repaired right elbow could unleash some howling fastballs along the way.

That's exactly what happened Sunday, as Sheets launched another pitching gem against the run-starved Giants. He and four relievers combined on a three-hit shutout, allowing the A's to sweep their cross-bay rivals with a 3-0 victory before 35,067 spectators at the Coliseum.

It was the second consecutive day on which a sellout crowd in Oakland - yes, it's possible to string together those last four words - watched the A's hold the Giants scoreless. Some of this falls on San Francisco's rampant meekness at the plate, sure, but the gentlemen in green and gold also can pitch a little.

The Giants managed one run in the series and didn't score at all in the last 20 innings.

"I think we have the type of staff that can do that," Sheets said.

Sheets extended his recent surge by tossing six scoreless innings and matching his season high with eight strikeouts. He's 1-0 with a 2.52 ERA in his past four starts, with 29 strikeouts in 25 innings; the A's have won three of those four games.

That's the type of production the A's sought when they gambled on Sheets, who missed all of last season because of elbow surgery. It took some time for him to become acclimated, but he's starting to resemble the pitcher who went 25-14 his last two years in Milwaukee (2007 and '08).

Manager Bob Geren spoke of Sheets adding a cut fastball, using his changeup more often and slightly changing his release point in recent starts. Sheets didn't seem so sure about the roots of his rejuvenation, but he likes his rhythm now - in striking contrast to the perpetual "battle" of his early outings this season.

"This feels like something I'm used to," Sheets said after Sunday's game. "I've been feeling this way my last couple of starts. I think I'm starting to settle in."

The A's needed Sheets at his sharpest, because Giants starter Jonathan Sanchez smothered them through six innings. Then Adam Rosales led off the seventh with a single, moved to second on Mark Ellis' sacrifice bunt and scored when Jake Fox doubled into the left-field corner.

Oakland added two runs in the eighth, giving closer Andrew Bailey (save No. 8) some cushion.

Rosales' contribution was noteworthy in other ways, too. Geren planned to start Rosales at shortstop and give Cliff Pennington the day off - Rosales even took early grounders at shortstop, more than two hours before the game. But then outfielder Coco Crisp scratched because of a strained pectoral muscle, prompting Geren to move Rosales to left field.

It was his first major-league appearance in the outfield - he had played two games there in Double-A and spent three months in left field this past winter in the Mexican League. Rosales handled his only chance, a fifth-inning Aaron Rowand line drive.

"I felt like a kid out there," Rosales said.

Briefly: Geren was ejected for the first time this season, after arguing that catcher Kurt Suzuki held onto Juan Uribe's foul tip (for what would have been strike three) in the seventh inning. Replays confirmed Suzuki caught the ball. ... The last time the A's posted back-to-back shutouts: June 9-10, 2007, also against the Giants. ... Ellis made Sunday's shutout possible with a fabulous leaping catch of Uribe's fourth-inning line drive. The Giants had runners at first and third at the time, with two outs. ... Geren rested outfielder Ryan Sweeney, though he entered the game in the eighth and delivered an RBI single for Oakland's final run.

Teens' reunion turns near tragedy into triumph

Victoria Colliver, Chronicle Staff Writer

Gunnar Sandberg, the Kentfield teenager who was nearly killed by a line drive, was back on the pitcher's mound Sunday, where he stared down the same player who hit the ball that fateful day.

It was the boys' first meeting since the accident more than two months ago - and both are doing remarkably well.

The occasion was the ceremonial first pitch before the interleague game between the Oakland Athletics and the San Francisco Giants at the Oakland Coliseum.

Gunnar, a 16-year-old junior at Marin Catholic High School, tossed the ball to 17-year-old Zac Byers of De La Salle in Concord.

Television commentator Mike Krukow later called it a "seed" - a pitch with some zip.

"Just to be with Gunnar was just such a great feeling," said Zac, who spoke for the first time about the accident.

He said the two hadn't met since Gunnar's injury, but had chatted on Facebook. "I was just happy to see him," he said, "and it felt like we were friends."

The boys were drawn together by tragedy in a March 11 game between their schools, when Zac hit a pitch by Gunnar back into his temple at about 100 mph, putting him in a coma for about three weeks.

The accident spurred a debate over the use of metal bats in youth sports, a stunning recovery by Gunnar, and concern over Zac's welfare as well.

On Sunday, Zac credited the support of both the Marin Catholic and De La Salle communities with helping him to cope after Gunnar's condition turned for the worse and to understand that he didn't do anything wrong.

"We all prayed for Gunnar all the time," Zac said.

Gunnar, who was rushed to Marin General Hospital after the accident, was conscious for at least a day before his brain began to swell. Doctors then operated to alleviate the swelling and put the boy into a medically induced coma.

Gunnar emerged, continued to recover at a San Francisco rehabilitation hospital and returned home this month.

Other than wearing a protective helmet on Sunday, the lanky and soft-spoken teenager shows virtually no signs that he had gone through such an ordeal.

"I'm starting to feel like my old self," he said, adding that he wasn't nervous about pitching in front of the sellout crowd.

Sunday was actually his second time on the mound since his accident. He threw the ceremonial first pitch at AT&T Park on May 6 as part of a fundraiser to help pay his medical bills. The Oakland A's also plan to donate money from Sunday's ticket sales to his medical fund.

Gunnar said he enjoyed meeting and being on the field with Zac, whom he described as a "good kid."

"He felt really bad, too, and he didn't play for a while," Gunnar said. "It was just an accident."

The only sign of rivalry between the boys involved their major league loyalties. Zac, who lives in Clayton, is a dyed-in-the-wool A's fan while Gunnar, who received an Athletics jersey signed by team members, kept his allegiance close to his chest by wearing a Giants T-shirt underneath.

The line drive is still causing reverberations.

Legislation introduced after the accident by Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, would place a three-year moratorium on the use of metal bats in youth sports while the issue is investigated.

The Marin County Athletic League has already banned the use of metal bats, concluding that wood is a safer alternative.

Gunnar's father, Bjorn Sandberg, said Gunnar's Little League will also require pitchers to wear helmets.

"There's an inherent risk in anything," he said, "but why not err on the side of safety?"

Gunnar's recovery is expected to take some time. He will undergo surgery Tuesday to replace a bone flap that was removed, a procedure that is expected to allow him to shed his helmet.

Gunnar does physical therapy five days a week for about four or five hours a day, his father said. It will take up to a year to fully evaluate any long-term effects, he said, but his son is expected to return to school in the fall to start his senior year.

"Short-term memory is definitely the hardest thing for him," he said. "But, then again, he is a teenaged boy so he has that lack of memory anyway."

A's leading off

Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle

Crisp's cough: Outfielder Coco Crisp missed Sunday's game because of a strained right pectoral muscle. Crisp sustained the injury Saturday - possibly when he coughed too forcefully (he wasn't entirely sure). He hopes to rejoin the lineup Tuesday in Baltimore

A's complete sweep with another shutout

Fox's double in seventh breaks scoreless tie with Giants

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Creators of the famed Moneyball theory, the A's showed they can win by using small ball, too.

Behind a pair of key sacrifice bunts, Oakland beat the Giants, 3-0, on Sunday to complete a three-game sweep of their cross-Bay rivals.

"That's what it's about," said Oakland outfielder Rajai Davis. "You got to do what you can -- whatever it is -- to score runs."

Each of the A's initial two runs on Sunday was made possible by a successful sacrifice bunt.

The first, laid down by Mark Ellis, set the table for Jake Fox's RBI double in the bottom of the seventh, which broke a scoreless tie. The second, laid down by Daric Barton in the eighth, allowed Kurt Suzuki to drive in Davis with a solid single to center.

The two runs were more than enough for the Oakland bullpen, who followed Ben Sheets' six-inning effort for a three-hit shutout. In fact, those two runs were enough to outscore the Giants for the entire series. San Francisco was held scoreless for its final 20 innings of the three-game set and scored just one run all weekend.

"We've got that type of pitching staff that can do that," Sheets said. "We've been doing that for a majority of the year. We just got to stay with it."

Sheets tied his season high with eight strikeouts while allowing two hits and two walks. Ever since his consecutive poor starts on April 27 and May 2, Sheets has looked like the pitcher the A's were hoping to get when they inked him to a one-year \$10-million deal this offseason.

Over four starts in that span, Sheets is 1-0 with a 2.52 ERA. In those 25 innings of work, he's allowed 17 hits and 12 walks while striking out 29.

"I feel a lot better from start to start," said Sheets, who missed all of last year after having elbow surgery. "When I look back at month-to-month I can really tell a big difference. I'm starting to settle in and it feels good."

Though Sheets strung together four good starts to begin the season, he said he's pitched much better during his current stretch of quality starts.

"There was always a battle [at the beginning of the season]," Sheets said. "Everything was ridiculously tough and harder than it might have or should have been. This feels more like something that I feel like I'm used to."

If it weren't for a stellar defensive play by Ellis, the shutout wouldn't have been possible.

With two outs in the fourth and runners on first and third, Juan Uribe drilled a ball over Ellis' head. The 5-foot-11 second baseman leaped and made a great snowcone catch to end the inning and keep a run off the board.

"Every now and then you get lucky," Ellis said. "The momentum of the ball probably carried me higher."

During his high school basketball days, Ellis said he never dunked in a game. He said he has thrown down a couple of slam dunks during practice, though.

Uribe was also involved in another episode in the top of the seventh, one that resulted in the ejection of A's manager Bob Geren.

Uribe foul-tipped a 1-2 pitch into Suzuki's glove, but not before the ball hit the dirt, according to first-base umpire Greg Gibson. Geren, upset with Gibson's call, argued with Gibson for about a minute before getting tossed from the game.

"They don't obviously get the opportunity to see it over again," Geren said. "It happens quickly. I didn't like the call, we disagreed. I was watching the past two games on TV."

Geren trotted out a new-look lineup for Sunday's game, giving starting outfielders Ryan Sweeney and Coco Crisp the days off. Geren said Sweeney sat solely for rest reasons, but that Crisp is battling a strain underneath his pectoral muscle. The team is hopeful Crisp can return for Tuesday's game at Baltimore.

Davis took over for Crisp in center field while Gabe Gross occupied Sweeney's post in right. Adam Rosales proved his worth as a utility player once again, making his first career start in left field -- the fifth position he has played this season.

Originally, Rosales was to start at shortstop for Cliff Pennington. After Crisp was deemed unfit for action, though, Rosales was inserted into left. He said he didn't know he was playing left until about an hour before game time.

Rosales' only left field experience consisted of two games in Double-A and two months of winter ball in Mexico this past off-season. Still, Geren said a team official saw Rosales play left field in winter ball and was confident he could handle the task.

"It feels like he can play anywhere, it really does," Geren said. "He's probably never caught, but it almost feels like he can do that. He's such a baseball player."

Sweeney completed the game's scoring by driving in Suzuki with an RBI single to left in the eighth. Andrew Bailey pitched a perfect ninth to earn his eighth save and secure Oakland's first three-game sweep of the year.

"To be able to take all three was huge," Sheets said. "Sometimes whenever you take the first two and give back that last one, it kind of feels like it nullifies the first two games."

Youngest rotation in bigs getting job done

Homegrown pitching talent keeping A's in thick of AL West

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When A's lefty Gio Gonzalez tossed eight innings in a 1-0 victory over the Giants Saturday, it was just the latest example of a young Oakland pitcher getting the job done.

Gonzalez, 24, is in a rotation that also features 22-year-old Trevor Cahill, 23-year-old Tyson Ross and 22-year-old Brett Anderson, who is on the 15-day disabled list. The young quartet has already combined to win 37 career big league games.

"We've got a lot of young talent in that department," said Oakland manager Bob Geren.

The starting staff also features 26-year-old Dallas Braden, a grizzled veteran by comparison, and 31-year-old Ben Sheets, the elder statesman of the group. The staff's average age of 26.7 years is the youngest in the Majors.

"You look in the winter at all the top-notch pitching free agents and see how few real top-notch guys are available," Geren said. "To be able to grow your own and see them blossom into that style of pitching is a credit to numerous people."

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki, only 26 himself, said the structure of the organization plays a key role in the development of young players.

"They all do a great job of getting these kids ready for the big leagues," Suzuki said. "They teach how to be professional and show the ropes before you get here."

A's bring back veteran lefty Halama

OAKLAND -- The A's purchased the contract of left-handed pitcher John Halama on Saturday and will send him to Triple-A Sacramento, according to a team source.

The left-handed Halama spent his 2003 season with the A's, posting a 4.22 ERA over 35 appearances (13 starts). Most recently, Halama was pitching with the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs, who are part of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball. The ALPB has no affiliation with Major League Baseball.

In six starts for the Blue Crabs this season, Halama went 2-2 with a 1.62 ERA. In 39 innings of work, Halama allowed 29 hits and five walks while striking out 22.

Halama, 38, has nine seasons of Major League service. He made his debut with the Astros in 1998 and last played with the Orioles in 2006.

For his career, Halama is 56-48 with a 4.65 ERA. His best years came while he was playing for Seattle at the turn of the century.

He went 11-10 with a 4.22 ERA in 1999, before going 14-9 with a 5.08 ERA in 2000. He also earned double-digit wins in 2001, going 10-7 with a 4.73 ERA.

Rosales plays fifth different position

OAKLAND -- Though he was fielding grounders at shortstop before Sunday's game, Adam Rosales found himself in another position on the lineup card.

Rosales, who started at third base on Saturday, hit fifth as the A's starting left fielder on Sunday. Rosales got his first action in the outfield this season because A's manager Bob Geren held regulars Coco Crisp and Ryan Sweeney out of the lineup against the Giants.

It was the fifth different position that Rosales has played this year. Rajai Davis and Gabe Gross joined him in the outfield, playing center field and right, respectively.

"I don't care where I play," Rosales said after Saturday's 1-0 victory. "It's just great playing, man. It's just great being out there."

Rosales has played a few innings at shortstop and first base, but the bulk of his playing time came at second base during Mark Ellis' extended stay on the disabled list. On Saturday, Rosales played third base for the second time this year, spelling starter Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Rosales' versatility played a major role in the A's decision to acquire him this offseason for infielder Aaron Miles.

Worth noting

After Sunday's 3-0 win over the Giants, Oakland is now 20-0 when leading after seven innings. The A's are 18-0 when leading after eight innings. ... The last time the A's had consecutive shutouts was on June 9-10, 2007. Those two games also came against the Giants. ... The A's tied an Oakland record for fewest runs allowed in a three-game series.

A's sweep Giants with 3-0 win

By JANIE McCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Bruce Bochy could take some solace in seeing more competitive at-bats from his slumping San Francisco Giants.

Still, that doesn't make getting shut out for the second straight day any easier to accept.

Jake Fox hit a go-ahead RBI double in the seventh inning and the Oakland Athletics completed a three-game sweep of the Giants in the Bay Bridge Series with a 3-0 victory Sunday.

The Giants, held to one run all series, stumbled to their season-high fifth straight loss despite Bochy shaking up his lineup in an effort to get out of this rut.

"It's really, really tough. It's frustrating," catcher Bengie Molina said. "It's very sad. Every day we go out there and don't score and this pitching staff pitches the way they do, it's a waste."

Adam Rosales led off the seventh with a single against Jonathan Sanchez (2-4), Mark Ellis sacrificed and Fox followed with the double. Kurt Suzuki and Ryan Sweeney each singled in an insurance run in the eighth.

Oakland swept San Francisco for the fourth time in the last 10 series between the clubs and first at the Coliseum since June 24-26, 2005. The A's earned a three-game sweep in San Francisco in 2008.

This marked the second straight pitcher's duel of the series after Oakland's Gio Gonzalez beat Matt Cain 1-0 on Saturday. Cain pitched a complete game and Oakland managed only an unearned run to win.

Sanchez received no run support for the fifth time in his nine 2010 starts.

"It's kind of hard when you're battling out there to win games for the team," Sanchez said. "We're going through a tough time.

We have to come back Tuesday and the guys will start hitting.

You've got to leave it in the past."

Ben Sheets struck out eight in six scoreless innings but left with the game scoreless. The A's \$10 million ace faced the minimum through three, allowing Pablo Sandoval's two-out single in the first only to get the slugger on a caught stealing.

Michael Wuertz (1-0) relieved and pitched the seventh for the win. Andrew Bailey pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his eighth save in 10 chances.

"My arm is right, my eyesight is right and it feels like I'm starting to make adjustments in time instead of too late," said Sheets, who missed all of 2009 recovering from elbow surgery.

The Giants had two opportunities to bunt with a man on second and no outs following leadoff walks, in the fourth and seventh.

Freddy Sanchez struck out in the fourth and Juan Uribe did so in the seventh. Bochy felt strongly about Sanchez's chances and said Uribe didn't face a favorable count with two strikes.

Oakland, meanwhile, took advantage of a similar situation to score its first run.

Bochy shuffled guys around to try to get the unproductive Giants offense going at last.

"We didn't get a run today — can't say that worked," Bochy said.

Andres Torres batted leadoff and Aaron Rowand dropped down to the sixth hole. Molina had the day off before his pinch-hit single in the seventh that ended an 0-for-17 funk.

"It feels good to get one," he said.

Bochy plans to stick with Torres at the top of the order.

Torres drew a leadoff walk in the fourth, then stole his sixth base. But San Francisco missed a chance to take the lead. Torres moved to third on Sandoval's flyout, then Aubrey Huff walked before Ellis made a leaping catch at second on Uribe's sharp liner to end the inning.

A's manager Bob Geren was ejected by first base umpire Greg Gibson in the seventh for arguing a foul tip call on Uribe that catcher Suzuki appeared to catch on the fly. Geren got in Gibson's face and yelled from close range down the first base line, past the dirt and into shallow right field before turning around and leaving — one of the most animated scenes of his managerial career.

It was his first ejection of the year and seventh of his career.

A wild pitch then advanced Huff from first following a leadoff walk and Uribe struck out on the next pitch.

New A's center fielder Coco Crisp was held out of the lineup with a minor strain of a chest muscle the A's hope will heal in a couple of days. Crisp returned from the disabled list Friday night after being sidelined with a broken left pinkie finger. He drove in three runs in his first two games back.

NOTES: Giants reliever Jeremy Affeldt felt a sharp pain in his left hamstring in the eighth and came out of the game. He was set to have an MRI Monday. ... Rosales made his first career appearance in LF. ... Injured A's RHP Justin Duchscherer headed to Arizona to try to throw off a mound for the first time since being scratched from his May 15 start because of an injury to his troublesome left hip. The two-time All-Star received an injection Thursday to lubricate the joint. ... Giants RF Nate Schierholtz missed his third straight start with a bruised left shoulder but entered in the eighth as a defensive replacement. ... San Francisco opted not to skip fifth starter Todd Wellemeyer in the Nationals series, meaning he will pitch Tuesday and two-time reigning NL Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum will have one extra day of rest before his outing Wednesday. ... The game drew 35,067 fans for the A's second straight sellout and second in all.

Teenage Pitcher's Injury Sparks Wood vs. Metal Debate in California

Jeff Fletcher, fanhouse.com

OAKLAND -- Gunnar Sandberg was just an ordinary high school baseball player until one life-changing day in March, when he became a cause.

Pitching for Marin Catholic High, just north of San Francisco, Sandberg took a line drive off his head. He spent much of the next month in a coma, unaware that his injuries had spawned a [movement that went all the way to the California statehouse](#).

[Assembly Bill 7](#), which will be considered this week by the state senate, would impose a two-year moratorium on the use of metal bats in high school baseball in California.

"Having been around baseball for a while and talking to kids who play, it sure seems those metal bats are a lot more powerful than the wood bats," said Gunnar's father Bjorn Sandberg. "If you have to err on the side of safety, why not? If we can keep anyone from going through what we've gone through as a family and to keep any kid from having to suffer the way Gunnar has, it would be fantastic."

Gunnar is on the [road to recovery](#). He was invited to the [A's-Giants](#) game on Sunday to throw out the first pitch. He was wearing a helmet because he is still missing a piece of his skull, which was removed to allow for the swelling of his brain. He looks pale and somewhat wobbly as he walks. He has some short-term memory issues. For the most part, though, the 16-year-old boy and his family are thrilled with his recovery. He's expecting to return to school in the fall for his senior year, and to play baseball again next spring.

Hopefully facing only wooden bats.

Just for safety," Gunnar said, "I think it's worth it to change to wood bats."

Sandberg's team and the entire league voluntarily switched to wood bats after the accident. Community members were selling "Got Wood?" T-shirts, with the proceeds going to help pay Sandberg's medical bills. California assemblyman Jared Huffman, who represents Marin County, authored the bill to ban the metal bats just weeks after the March 11 accident.

Of course, it's not that simple.

Mike May, spokesman for the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, said he's been devoting almost all of his time to defending the metal bat since Sandberg's accident. May has been plying lawmakers and members of the media with one study after another to show that accidents like Sandberg's are no more likely with metal bats than with wooden ones.

"We just want the decision in California to be made on facts and data, not emotions," May told FanHouse.

The metal bats of today are safer than those of a few years ago, May said, because of standards in place since 2003 to regulate the Ball Exit Speed Ratio (BESR) off metal bats.

"Many people don't realize that the baseball bat of 1980 can't be used today," May said. "People think bats have gotten more juiced up, and frankly it's the opposite."

May also said that the NCAA is adopting a standard to further weaken metal bats in 2011, with the National Federation of State High School Associations adopting it in 2012.

The idea of the standard is to have the metal bats perform more like wood bats.

A study conducted by Daniel A. Russell of Michigan's Kettering University in 2007 concluded that [the differences between the](#)

[performance of metal and wood bats was negligible](#). Russell determined that the maximum velocity of the baseball off a metal bat was about 5 mph faster than off a wood bat, which results in about four hundredths of a second less reaction time for a pitcher. That's "one-fifth of the time required to blink an eye," Russell wrote.

While it's true that perfect sweet-spot contact off a wood bat is essentially just as dangerous as that off a metal bat, it happens less frequently with wood because the sweet spot is smaller.

"A greater percentage of hits from a metal bat will have close to the maximum batted-ball speed, compared to a wood bat," Russell wrote.

Whether that makes metal bats more "dangerous" is a matter of semantics.

Zac Byers isn't sure. He's the player who hit the ball that struck Sandberg. A center fielder at De La Salle High in nearby Concord, Byers has become friends with Sandberg, and he joined him for his tour of the Coliseum on Sunday. Byers said he continued to use his metal bat -- albeit a different one -- for the rest of the season.

"I'm kind of undecided," he said. "I don't know. I'd like to know more about what the actual speed difference would be. I think it could actually happen with any type of bat."

One of the A's players Sandberg met was [Brad Ziegler](#), who had been through a similar life-threatening accident while in the minors. Ziegler was pitching at Single-A in 2004, when his skull was fractured by a line drive. He ended up in the intensive care unit for six days.

While Ziegler obviously knows that wood bats can also cause serious injuries, he was skeptical about the industry defense of metal bats.

"They can say whatever they want, there is no way a ball off wood is the same as a ball off aluminum," Ziegler said.

Bjorn Sandberg has not been paying much attention to what's going on in the state assembly. He hasn't been reading the statistics from the bat manufacturers. He has been too busy tending to his son, suffering through a three-week induced coma that was supposed to last just one week. During the recovery, Sandberg has received support from strangers across the country.

"There are a lot of people who have reached out and some of them have really tragic endings," he said. "I get e-mails from other people who said 'My son had a similar thing and he didn't make it. He died on the fourth day.' There are so many tragic stories."

That's why he's hoping to see the end of the metal bat.

"We don't want them to do it for Gunnar," he said. "That horse is out of the barn. Let's keep it from happening again. Every sport has a certain amount of risk, but if you can lessen the chances, then why not?"

A's Ben Sheets Rounding Into Form

Jeff Fletcher, fanhouse.com

OAKLAND -- It would have been easy to give up on [Ben Sheets](#) after that day he gave up 10 runs in spring training, or after he gave up nine runs in Toronto.

But Sheets keeps bouncing back.

Sheets, who missed all of last season while recovering from flexor tendon surgery, is taking more steps toward looking like the guy who was a four-time All-Star. He pitched six scoreless innings in the A's 3-0 victory over the [Giants](#) on Sunday, lowering his ERA to 2.52 over his past four starts.

"He's showing everyone now he's got it back," catcher [Kurt Suzuki](#) said.

Sheets is making the A's \$10 million investment in him look much better these days. Even if a resurgence by Sheets isn't going to keep the A's in contention all season, it could certainly be enough to generate significant trade interest in July. Sheets could join [Roy Oswalt](#) -- and possibly [Cliff Lee](#) -- in a unusually robust trade market for No. 1 starting pitchers.

For now, though, Sheets is just happy that he's starting to feel like his old self.

Although Sheets had a 2.74 ERA in his first four starts, before back-to-back blowups that ballooned his ERA to 7.12, he said he wasn't comfortable in any of those early games.

"They weren't good outings," he said. "If you look at the runs and innings, it might have looked decent, but everything was a battle. Everything was always ridiculously tough and harder than it should have been. This feel likes it should have been, like something I'm used to."

It's not quite what he's used to, though, because Sheets is a different pitcher from his salad days with the [Brewers](#). Back then he was a fastball-curveball pitcher. Lately Sheets has added a pitch that goes away from right-handers, something between a cutter and a slider.

"It's decent," said Sheets, who doesn't know what to call the pitch either. "It ain't a good pitch, but it's working. The timing is different, which is good. It's not like it's getting a lot of outs, but it's allowing me to get outs from other pitches."

A's Sweep Giants in Bay Bridge Series

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 5/24/2010

Oakland, CA – It's an adequate feeling yet the reality still remains, it's only May! The Oakland A's completed a three game sweep against their rivals across the Bay, the San Francisco Giants. The A's played in front of their second sellout crowd of the season as they shutout the Giants 3-0 for the second time.

"They play well enough to win," manager Bob Geren said. "Still some things to work on but also some good things are happening."

Ben Sheets did some good things on the mound today. Sheets tied his season high with eight strikeouts while allowing two hits and two walks. A vast improvement from a month ago when Sheets struggled at the beginning of the season.

"A month ago things were tough," said Sheets. "Everything was ridiculously tough and harder than it should've been." "This feels like things are better, I'm feeling more comfortable at the plate."

For six innings both teams battled in every position until a controversial call changed the momentum of the game. Top of the seventh inning, Juan Uribe foul-tipped a 1-2 pitch into catcher's Kurt Suzuki's glove, but not before hitting the ground according to first base umpire Greg Gibson. Geren immediately headed out to the field to attest the call and was shortly ejected from the game.

"They don't get the opportunity to see it over again," Geren said. "That was a very well struck baseball, it's a quick play and hopefully we can see it on a highlight film."

Bottom of seventh frame the A's took over, Jake Fox doubled and broke a scoreless tie bringing in Adam Rosales to put Oakland up 1-0. Next inning Suzuki drove in Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney, who was suppose to have the day off singled left and brought in Suzuki to give the A's a 3-0 lead.

"I kinda knew I'd be going in," Sweeney said. "I was crossed from the starting lineup but told if needed, I'll be called upon."

The Giants slump continues, losing back-to-back shutouts extended their losing streak to 20 innings. Frustration looms as the club searches for answers to turn things around. San Francisco created numerous opportunities but they just couldn't get any hits. Despite Jonathan Sanchez pitching six scoreless innings, the only bad pitch he threw allowed Oakland's first run.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy tried switching the lineup to create more of a spark on offense. He made Andres Torres the leadoff hitter and dropped Aaron Rowand from first to sixth in the batting order. The change did little, San Francisco could not get more than three hits.

"We didn't get a run today, so I can't say that worked out," said Bochy.

Notes – Two months after being critically injured from a line drive to his head, Gunnar Sandberg threw out the first pitch today. He delivered a fast ball to Zac Byers, the kid who pitched the ball that almost cost the sixteen year old his life.

Sandberg was honored by both the Oakland A's and San Francisco Giants before the game. Accompanied by his dad, Byers and De La Salle coach Rick Steen, they all got a tour of the A's locker room before the game. Players approached introducing themselves and praised the high school student for being a survivor.

Gunnar is very optimistic about returning to baseball in the near future. This upcoming Tuesday he will undergo surgery to replace a bone flap removed to reduce the swelling on his brain.

Gio and the A's give Giants 2nd loss

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 5/23/2010

Oakland, CA – There's reason to celebrate in Oakland, in front of a sell out crowd of 35,067. The Oakland A's go up 2-0 in the Bay Bridge series. Struggling for hits in the past is no more as the A's continue their outstanding pitching behind Gio Gonzalez.

"Our pitching staff has been great," Coco Crisp said. "It's definitely better playing than being in the dugout cheerleading." "I feel good and I'm glad I can help with getting a win."

Crisp was reinstated from the 15-day disabled list yesterday. He went 2 for 3 with a double and two RBI's in his debut. As the leadoff hitter Coco gives Oakland a spark atop the lineup. Not thinking much about the road to recovery Crisp was apprehensive about his return. "I was nervous, excited and grateful to be back playing baseball."

Gonzalez tossed a career-high eight shutout innings along with 95 pitches. He allowed just two hits, a walk, five strikeouts and retired 20 straight batters. Gio looked more like an ace on the mound instead of fifth in the A's rotation. Humbled and relaxed before the game, he spoke about his good luck charm.

"Every time my family comes to visit on the day I pitch, I win" said Gonzalez. "I don't know what it is but it just gives me a great start!"

Oakland beat the San Francisco Giants 1-0. They are now back at .500 mark and trail only three games behind Texas in the American League West. It was a tough hurdle to return back to their winning ways but having healthy players is the key. Mark Ellis also returned from the disabled list. Although, he was 0-3 his presence was certainly felt on second base.

"These guys have been playing great," Ellis said. "It felt good to come back, you don't want to be the guy that comes back and the team lose." "Every at-bat I felt a little bit better so that's good."

Ellis back in the lineup moved Adam Rosales to third base. Rosales played third the past two seasons when he was with Cincinnati's Triple-A in Louisville. Making his major league debut with Cincinnati in 2008, he played in 18 games at third, second and first base. A very versatile player Rosales has been a great addition to the A's and has not committed an error in 37 games.

"We knew when we got him that he would have incredible versatility," manager Bob Geren said. "He's played solid everywhere I've put him." "You don't see it so much at second but I'm really impressed with his arm strength."

The A's only run came in the third frame when Crisp hit a sacrifice fly to left field bringing in Rosales to score. The Giants only opportunity came in the ninth inning. Closer Andrew Bailey walked Pablo Sandoval putting two runners on first and second base. Next at-bat was Bengie Molina, who was looking to belt one out of the ball park but instead struck out giving San Francisco their fourth straight loss.

"I thought we gave away some at-bats," manager Bruce Bochy said. "They're pressing and there's no getting around it." "We're in a tough rut and the only way that's going to change is if we change."

Notes – Eric Chavez was placed on the 15-day disabled list. Since spring training Chavez has been playing with two bulging disks in his neck and he says the discomfort is progressing. A's trainer Steve Sayles said "there will be no time table as to when Eric will return to the team and no surgeries have been schedule." "Eric will receive all the necessary treatment made available to him."

"Chavez is one of my best friends and the news is very tough to receive," said Ellis. "He's a tough guy and will recover just fine."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Carter smacks 10th home run in Cats victory

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

The River Cats of four Pacific Coast League titles and eight division crowns may finally be peeking through in 2010. Sacramento toppled the visiting Nashville Sounds 8-3 on Monday night for the team's first back-to-back wins since May 8-9. Shortstop Steve Tolleson connected for two home runs in the game, a solo shot to left field for a 2-1 lead in the second inning and a practically identical home run to left in a six-run fourth inning. Tolleson finished 3-for-4 at bat and now has four home runs on the season.

Brett Anderson, pitching a rehab start for the Oakland A's, allowed two runs over 3.0 innings. The left-hander allowed six hits, two walks and struck out one batter while throwing 57 pitches (35 strikes).

The Cats' bats were all smoking in the fourth, as the players swung their way to an 8-2 lead. Corey Wimberly hit a line-drive single that increased his streak of reaching base to 21 consecutive games. Matt Carson doubled on a ground ball to center field that scored Sogard and Wimberly. Chris Carter blasted a fly ball to left field for a two-run homer, his tenth of the season, that also scored Josh Donaldson.

Carson (2-for-5) demonstrated how quick he is on his feet. In the first inning Carson scored from second on a Donaldson single. In the fourth he stole third, his seventh steal all season.

Reliever Travis Blackley, who entered in the fourth inning, got the win for Sacramento, pitching 3.0 scoreless innings.

Sacramento will play Game 2 against Nashville on Tuesday at 7:05 p.m.

Notes: Entering Monday, Matt Carson is hitting a team-high .324...with a team high 43 at-bats against left-handed pitching, Corey Wimberly has a staggering .442 on-base percentage....with the bases loaded, Adrian Cardenas has an amazing 2.000 slugging percentage....coming up clutch, Matt Carson is hitting .400 with two outs and runners in scoring position.

Arguello Shines Against RockHounds

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Sounds like a Disney movie from the '50's, but it was really the storyline from Friday's series opener at Corpus Christi.

Douglas Arguello went the distance for a complete game win, and Jimmy Van Ostrand was up to his usual hijinx at the dish against the RockHounds, as the Hooks defeated the RockHounds, 4-1, at Whataburger Field.

Arguello scattered four hits, including two in the second inning, when both Archie Gilbert and Shane Peterson each singled, only to be caught stealing, each breaking too early against the Hooks lefty.

Van Ostrand, who has been a nemesis of the highest level against the RockHounds, hit his first home run of the season, a solo shot against Travis Banwart in the second inning. It was the only solid hit "Banny" allowed, along with two flairs to shallow left and right field. He walked just one and struck out nine.

The Van Ostrand home run was the game's only run until the eighth. The RockHounds tied the game, aided by a German Duran error, but Duran would later score the tie-breaking run, aided by a 'Hounds miscue. The Hoks' third and fourth runs .. the "insurance" runs ... scored on another flair, this one to shallow center field.

With a "debatable" scoring call included, Banwart's two runs were both earned, as were two allowed by reliever Daniel Sattler. Scoring notwithstanding, Banwart was brilliant, as was Arguello and (naturally, against the 'Hounds) Van Ostrand.

Ports Power Past Rawhide, 7-4

Stockton's balanced offense and solid defense helped propel the Ports (19-27) past the Visalia Rawhide (24-22) in the series finale, 7-4. The victory enabled the Ports to avoid being swept again by Visalia, and snapped Stockton's three-game losing streak. The Ports will enjoy an off day on Tuesday before welcoming the San Jose Giants to Banner Island Ballpark.

The Ports totaled 10 hits in the contest, including three for extra bases. Todd Johnson finished the game 1x3 with two runs scored to extend his hitting streak to 11 games. Jeremy Barfield totaled two hits in the game with a double, and Stephen Parker finished 3x4 with a double, a home run and three RBI.

Justin Murray allowed three runs on five hits in 4.2 innings. Ports reliever Trey Barham picked up the win, his third, tossing 1.1 scoreless, hitless innings. Paul Smyth collected his eighth save of the year, striking out one to close out the ninth inning.

The Ports were the first to score, pulling ahead 2-0 in the bottom of the second on Stephen Parker's two-run home run to the center field Metro PCS Home Run Hill. It was his eighth home run of the year.

The Rawhide responded in kind in the top of the third, as Paul Goldschmidt hit his second home run of the series and ninth on the year, a two-run shot to the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch in right field to tie the game.

But the score didn't stay tied for long. In the bottom of the fourth, Johnson led off with a walk. He stole second while Parker was at-bat. Parker then singled, and moved to second on an error by Rawhide right fielder Kyle Greene. Johnson came around to score on the play. Ports first baseman Mike Spina then walked to put two on with one out for catcher Ryan Ortiz. Ortiz, an Oregon State product, collected an RBI single to make it 4-2.

In the top of the fifth, Murray allowed his third and final run. With two out, he walked third baseman Ryan Wheeler. Goldschmidt then stepped up to the plate and slammed a double off the wall in right field, and Wheeler came racing home to make it 4-3. The Ports then called on Barham to pitch, and he got left fielder Marc Krauss to ground out to end the inning.

The Ports bats stayed active in the fifth frame. With one out, shortstop Grant Green singled. Then Johns collected a hit to put two on for Barfield. Barfield roped a double to center field to drive home two more runs. Later in the inning, Spina knocked an RBI single to bring home Barfield and give the Ports a 7-3 advantage.

Stockton reliever Andrew Carignan surrendered a leadoff solo home run to Wheeler in the eighth inning. It was the last hit the Rawhide would get off Ports pitchers, who retired the last six Visalia batters of the game in order.

The Ports will host the San Jose Giants from Wednesday through Saturday at Banner Island Ballpark. On Wednesday at 7:05 PM, RHP Shawn Haviland (3-1, 3.47) will start for Stockton, while RHP Kyle Nicholson (3-2, 5.87) will take the hill for San Jose.

Cougars Drop Finale of Long Trip **Kane County goes 1-7 on 8-game road trip**

CLINTON, Iowa – With an 8-4 loss Monday in Iowa against the Clinton LumberKings, the Kane County Cougars wrapped up a miserable eight-game, seven-day road trip. They went 1-7 on the trip, dropping three of four in Beloit and then getting swept in Clinton. The Cougars have lost six straight games, fallen to five games under .500 and sunk to 7.5 games out of first place.

Anvioris Ramirez (0-1), a five-game winner for the Cougars in '09, suffered the loss in his outing as a Cougar this year. He gave up eight runs on seven hits in 4 1/3 innings, walked three and fanned two, putting the Cougars in an 8-0 hole through five innings.

Mike Gilmartin got the Cougars on the board with his first homer of the year, a leadoff shot in the sixth. Then in the eighth Leonardo Gil nailed a two-run double and Anthony Aliotti delivered a sacrifice fly to account for the 8-4 final. Gil's two RBIs marked the only time on the road trip the Cougars had a multi-RBI effort. Josh Lansford and A.J. Huttenlocker combined for 3 2/3 scoreless relief innings. Erasmo Ramirez (3-2) got the win for Clinton (24-20).

The Cougars (20-25) return home to Elfstrom Stadium on Tuesday night to start a seven-game homestand at 6 CT against the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (16-28). Rob Gilliam (3-2, 3.33) is scheduled to face Jake Odorizzi (1-1, 4.28). The game will be broadcast online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 5:45 p.m.