

A's overcome Trevor Cahill's wildness to beat the Detroit Tigers again, improving to 5-2 on road trip

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

The logic goes that walks usually come back to bite a pitcher over the course of a game. Then how to explain Trevor Cahill's adventure-filled outing Monday?

Cahill walked a batter in each of the first four innings but dodged trouble at every turn. And after a nearly three-hour "weather delay" for a thunderstorm that never hit fully, the A's beat the Detroit Tigers 4-1 to take three of four games at Comerica Park over the holiday weekend.

Cahill (4-2) allowed one run over 6 1/3 innings to continue a string of impressive starts, but his teammates also backed him with some excellent defense. Toss in a couple of clutch hits against Detroit ace Justin Verlander — who's probably still fuming about umpire Laz Diaz's strike zone — and the A's improved their record to 5-2 on their 10-game road trip.

"The leadoff walks kind of killed me, but I was able to pitch around it," said Cahill, who won his third straight start. "I won't always be that lucky, but today things worked out in my favor."

The third leg of the A's three-city trek begins today against the Boston Red Sox. But the A's will take the field at Fenway Park knowing they've already clinched a .500 record for the trip — an accomplishment in itself for a team that had won just five of 18 away from the Coliseum before it began.

"It's always fun to win, it's a lot easier than losing," third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff said. "And even when we're losing, we're still up in the dugout. The intensity is there, even more so this trip. I think we're hungry on this trip."

The game was delayed 2 hours, 42 minutes as forecasts called for heavy showers to hit Detroit. The downpour never came — though occasional rain sent many fans scurrying for cover — and first pitch was thrown at 3:47 p.m. local time.

Cahill said he passed much of the time watching a movie — "Troy" was playing on one of the clubhouse TVs.

The A's jumped on Verlander (5-4) for two runs in the first. Rajai Davis singled to lead off and came around to score on Daric Barton's double to right-center. Ryan Sweeney's infield single moved Barton to third, and Barton scored on Kurt Suzuki's double-play grounder.

Verlander, who threw a four-hitter against the A's in a 5-1 Tigers win May 19 in Oakland, jawed heavily with Diaz during the top of the seventh, as did Detroit manager Jim Leyland.

The A's increased their lead to 3-0 that inning on a sharp RBI single to center by Kouzmanoff, who was 2-for-25 on the road trip before that at-bat.

Cahill, who allowed five hits, helped himself by inducing two double plays. His best escape job came in the third, when he stranded runners at second and third with one out.

"He made pitches when he needed to," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Left fielder Gabe Gross came up big again, too. Two days after reaching over the fence to take back a potential home run by Gerald Laird, Gross delivered a strong throw home to nail Brennan Boesch, who tried to score from second on Brandon Inge's single in the fourth.

Barton made a terrific stop at first on a shot that Johnny Damon smoked in the fifth, and Cliff Pennington made a backhanded stop and throw from deep in the hole at short to get Carlos Guillen leading off the seventh.

The A's finished May with a 16-12 record, their most wins in that month since they went 18-9 in 2001.

A's update: Gearing up for Boston Red Sox pitcher John Lackey

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

A's expect to see same Lackey, his colors aside

DETROIT — John Lackey hasn't posted great numbers in a Boston Red Sox uniform, but A's second baseman Mark Ellis isn't fooled.

The A's are very familiar with Lackey from his eight seasons with the Los Angeles Angels. Ellis expects he and his teammates will have their hands full when they face Lackey today at Fenway Park.

"He's a competitor," Ellis said before Monday's 4-1 win over the Detroit Tigers. "He's fun to face. Even if he doesn't have his best stuff that day, he'll battle."

Lackey, who signed a five-year, \$82.5 million contract with Boston in the offseason, is 5-3 with a 4.84 ERA in 10 starts (he has not finished a regular season with an ERA higher than 3.83 since 2004).

Facing the A's typically has brought out his best. Lackey is 16-4 with a 2.76 ERA in 29 career starts against them, and no pitcher has more wins or strikeouts (141) against the A's than Lackey since he broke into the big leagues in 2002.

A's officials were scheduled to start meetings this morning in preparation for the amateur draft, which begins Monday and runs three days.

The A's have the 10th pick in the first round, the highest they've chosen since taking Barry Zito with the ninth pick in 1999.

"There's a good group of high school pitching, and good college pitching," A's assistant general manager David Forst said. "College bats are probably the spot that's weakest."

Because the A's pick so high, a chance exists that they could land a top player even in at a position that doesn't have great depth. A mock draft that Baseball America posted Friday has the A's taking University of Texas-Arlington outfielder Michael Choice at No. 10.

Dallas Braden found a way to pass the time during Monday's nearly three-hour weather delay. He sprinted around the bases, with the tarp still on the infield, and dived into home plate. As he got up, he pumped his left fist — mimicking the gesture he made after the final out of his May 9 perfect game.

Chin Music: Weather delays A's-Tigers start

First pitch tentatively set for 3:30 (East Coast time)

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/31/2010 12:07PM

First pitch was just announced for 3:30 p.m. (East Coast time) here in Detroit. Of course, it started raining hard as soon as we heard that. It's 3 p.m. right now, so we'll see if they start playing ball in 30 minutes ... An A's player ran out on the field a few minutes ago, circled the bases (with the tarp still on) and dove into home plate. I couldn't see his uniform number, and he had a beanie on, but it looked a lot like Dallas Braden. Shocker.

Chin Music: Weather delays A's-Tigers start

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/31/2010 10:54AM

First pitch has been delayed here at Comerica Park because of a thunderstorm that supposedly is on the way. We don't have an announced start time yet. As I look around the stadium, it appears people are in "fan limbo." Some have taken cover up in the concourse, others are camped out in their seats. It's not raining at this time, from what I can tell from my perch in the press box.

Weather.com says there's an 80 percent chance of rain through 3 p.m. local time. First pitch was supposed to be 1:05. Who knows when the game will start? Who knows whether I'm destined to miss my flight to Boston? I'm guessing you care more about that first question than the second 😊

Verlander provides another challenge for A's hitters

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/31/2/10 9:24AM

There are threats of rain throughout the afternoon here in Detroit, where Trevor Cahill and Justin Verlander take the mound in the series finale. Mark Ellis gets the day off today, with Adam Rosales playing second base for the A's. ... After Max Scherzer took it to Oakland yesterday, you wouldn't expect a much easier challenge with Verlander, last year's American League strikeout king.

We'll cut to the chase with the lineups:

A's: Davis CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Cust DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Gross LF, Rosales 2B, Pennington SS; Cahill RHP.

Tigers: Kelly CF, Damon DH, Ordonez RF, Cabrera 1B, Boesch LF, Guillen 2B, Inge 3B, Avila C, Santiago SS; Verlander RHP.

Oakland springs back to life

Scott Ostler, Chronicle Staff Writer

Ragin' Rajai Davis was the answer to Monday's big question: How could the A's avoid falling victims to the Pretzel Effect?

After being twisted into knots the previous day by Detroit mystery hurler Max Scherzer, to the tune of 17 strikeouts (three by relief pitchers), would the A's be able to shake off the physical and psychological trauma?

A's manager Bob Geren pondered the question briefly before the game, picked up a scorecard with a cover photo of Detroit's Monday starter, Justin Verlander, and said, "Carry-over effect is, after a big (loss), here comes your American League strikeout king from last year."

In other words: Out of the frying pan, into the deep fryer.

Solution: Ragin' Rajai. With a strong dash of Trevor Cahill.

Result: The A's beat the Tigers 4-1, and took the series 3-1. Oakland has won eight of its last 10 and remains atop the division.

Davis moved into the A's leadoff spot six games ago because Coco Crisp went on the disabled list with a sore rib muscle and Chad Pennington was in a slump. Since then, he has been out of control. Following a two-hour, 46-minute rain delay Monday, he led off the game by working Verlander to a 3-2 count, then singling to center.

Daric Barton, on a seven-game hitting tear, followed with a double to the right-center-field gap and Davis, who was running on the pitch, hesitated momentarily, then scored easily.

Barton later scored and the A's had all the runs they needed.

"The first inning was a disaster for us," Tigers' manager Jim Leyland said.

That disaster was all the help Cahill (4-2) needed, as he scattered five hits over 6 1/3 innings against a truly scary Tigers' batting order, winning his third straight decision.

Cahill struggled with his command early, walking the leadoff batters in the first and second innings, but gutted it out to outduel Verlander, who in his previous five starts limited opponents to a .169 batting average.

Verlander's problems started with Davis, who in the past six games has reached base 13 times in 28 plate appearances. He has scored seven runs and stolen seven bases in seven attempts. Two of the steals were of third base.

Davis has been leading the A's offense, which has been relentlessly annoying on this trip.

"They keep picking at you and picking at you," Leyland grouched. "They're a very good team. I really like 'em. I like 'em a lot. They're a very good team."

Davis increased his major-league lead in stolen bases to 22, ahead of Juan Pierre of the White Sox, who has 19. In center field, the position Crisp figures to eventually reclaim, Davis ran down a sinking liner hit by Miguel Cabrera, helping the A's pitching staff finally silence the ferocious first baseman's bat.

Cabrera went 8-for-13 the first three games of the series, with four homers and eight RBIs. But Monday he went o-for-4, including a big eighth-inning strikeout at the hands of reliever Michael Wuertz.

The A's, flying high, left Detroit immediately to fly to Boston to wrap up their 10-game road trip.

To Detroit fans, ump behind in the count

Scott Ostler, Chronicle Staff Writer

The fans at Comerica Park do some of the best umpiring in baseball.

They tried to help home-plate umpire **Laz Diaz** on Monday when he seemed to miss a couple of close ball-strike calls thrown by **Justin Verlander** in the top of the seventh, in favor of **Kevin Kouzmanoff**. When Kouzmanoff, called out on strikes by the fans, singled home **Kurt Suzuki**, fans explained to Diaz the error of his ways.

Manager **Jim Leyland** went to the mound for a conference with Verlander and the infielders. Diaz marched to the mound and he and Leyland had a spirited nose-to-nose talk, which continued as they strolled off the field together.

At the end of the inning, Verlander got in Diaz's face for a few more words.

The Tigers were yapping at Diaz in the first inning, drawing a reprimand that could be heard throughout the park.

Miggy is tops: Miguel Cabrera leads the majors in RBIs (48), and is among the leaders in home runs (14), slugging percentage (.670) and total bases (122). On Sunday, he robbed **Cliff Pennington** of an at-bat by sprinting to the railing of the A's dugout and doubling himself over the railing while making the catch of Pennington's pop foul.

Detroit News columnist **Bob Wojnowski** ranked Cabrera No. 1 in his Detroit Pro Athlete Power Rankings - based on talent, potential and wow factor. The others, in order: Verlander, **Pavel Datsyuk** (Red Wings), **Calvin Johnson** (Lions), **Henrik Zetterberg** (Red Wings), **Matthew Stafford** (Lions), **Nicklas Lidstrom** (Red Wings), **Magglio Ordoñez** (Tigers), **Joel Zumaya** (Tigers) and **Rodney Stuckey** (Pistons).

Soggy forecast: If the A's are rained out today in Boston, the most likely scenario is a day-night doubleheader Thursday.

A's leading off

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Shades of Rick Dempsey: During the rain delay, Dallas Braden popped out of the A's dugout in his sweats, sprinted around the infield-tarp "bases" and slid home head-first in a spray of water, fans cheering the 209 Express.

Drumbeat: rain update

Now they're calling for a 3:45 pm (Detroit time) start. Sun is peeking through. Tarp still on field.

By the way: Forecast for tomorrow (Tuesday) in Boston: Stormy.

Posted By: **Scott Ostler (Email)** | May 31 2010 at 12:14 PM

A's edge Tigers in Memorial Day matinee

Cahill bends but doesn't break over 6 1/3 innings

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DETROIT -- The A's led Monday's game against the Tigers before it even started.

That's what Dallas Braden would tell you, anyway.

The quirky A's pitcher, always the entertainer, provided 23,000-plus fans in attendance at Comerica Park with a 20-second dose of humor in the midst of a two hour and 42 minute rain delay.

Underneath buckets of rain, with teammate Andrew Bailey standing by to tape the escapade, Braden ran around the bases on top of the tarp, capping off the stint with a head-first dive into home plate.

Once the game officially got underway, the A's needed less than five minutes to get that lead off Justin Verlander, who issued three consecutive hits to start in a two-run first inning. By day's end, the A's had extended that lead for a 4-1 victory over the Tigers and, subsequently, a 3-1 series win.

Verlander, who just 12 days prior had tossed a 5-1 complete-game victory in Oakland, lasted seven this time, surrendering a total of three runs on six hits while walking one and striking out eight. The Detroit righty tallied four 1-2-3 innings, but it was the first frame that allowed the A's to set a winning tone.

"He's one of the best in the league," manager Bob Geren said, "so to get to him so early was huge for us."

Perhaps more thankful than anyone else in the A's dugout for that lead was starter Trevor Cahill, who battled with command issues all afternoon in a rather shaky yet effective start. He issued four walks in the first four frames and allowed Detroit's leadoff batter to reach base four times during his 6 1/3 innings of work.

The A's right-hander escaped much of the damage, though, and walked away having given up just one run on five hits with three strikeouts.

"I didn't have the command I was hoping for," Cahill said, "but I made pitches when I had to."

The young righty, who watched parts of the movie "Troy" while waiting around during the long delay, forced seven ground balls, two of which began key double plays to prevent any type of threat from the Tigers, who left nine on base in the game.

"His command wasn't as good as it has been," Geren said, "but he had great movement and got the ground balls when he needed to."

Cahill used 89 pitches in the effort, but the fact that just 48 of them were strikes perfectly demonstrated the lack of command both the pitcher and his skipper talked about following the game. Verlander, meanwhile, tossed 114 pitches, 72 of them strikes, en route to garnering his fourth loss of the season.

Detroit's ace, who entered the affair with a 2.09 ERA and 40 strikeouts attached to his name in his past six starts, was seen sharing words with home-plate umpire Laz Diaz -- seemingly about the strike zone -- more than a couple of times throughout the game.

"Verlander is one of the best pitchers in the game," Cahill said. "You knew it would be a close game from the get-go ... it was one of those days that worked in my favor."

Along with the pair of first-inning runs, Oakland further supported Cahill's fourth win of the year by posting its third run off Verlander in the seventh courtesy of an RBI single off the bat of Kevin Kouzmanoff, who entered the game mired in a 0-for-12 slump.

"I've been seeing the ball well but just haven't been getting any hits," Kouzmanoff said. "When you start getting in those slumps, you take the good with the bad. You have to have a short-term memory in order to come out the next day and be successful."

"He battles out there," Geren said of his third baseman. "He always gives you a good at-bat, but I'm sure with the way things have been going for him, that was big for him."

Following the one-run seventh, Verlander was relieved by Ryan Perry, who offered up Oakland's final run of the game in the eighth -- a forceout from Ryan Sweeney that scored Rajai Davis, who singled before proceeding to steal his Major League-leading 21st and 22nd stolen bases of the season.

"After this series," Detroit manager Jim Leyland said, "I'd have to think quite highly of him."

The Tigers skipper offered rather high praise for the A's, especially for a group of hurlers that has yielded one run or less in seven of the club's past 10 games.

"I really like them a lot," Leyland said. "They have really good pitching and some nice pieces to their team. They keep picking at you and picking at you. It's obviously early, but with the type of pitching they have, if they can get somewhere and get in, they are going to be tough to handle because the pitching is so good. They are impressive."

Added Tigers outfielder Brennan Boesch: "I think you have to give credit to the A's staff. We like to pride ourselves on having good at-bats and getting the job done against any team. But you can't overlook the fact that their arms are top notch."

With the victory, the A's increased their American League West division lead to a full game over the Rangers, who had an off-day Monday. Heading into Boston, the final stop on their 10-game trip, they are winners of five of their first seven contests on the road. Furthermore, the A's finished May with a 16-12 record, giving the club the most wins in the month since 2001, when it went 18-9.

"That was a good, all-around effort today," Geren said. "We go to Boston for three games, so it doesn't get any easier, but I like what I'm seeing on the field."

Red Sox's Lackey, A's renew acquaintances

Alden Gonzalez/MLB.com

With Memorial Day off, the Red Sox open the month of June with something their upcoming opponent won't have: rest.

The A's are in the midst of a road trip that will have taken them to three cities for 10 games in 10 days. But don't expect Boston to bring out its welcome mats. The Red Sox have won 10 of their past 14 games and look to climb from fourth place in the American League East standings. Beating an AL West club only aids that aim.

In the opener of the teams' three-game set Tuesday at Fenway Park, Boston's John Lackey opposes Oakland's Gio Gonzalez. In his eight-year tenure with the Angels, Lackey went 16-4 with a 2.76 ERA in 29 career starts against the A's.

Plus, Lackey enters Tuesday coming off his first quality start (three earned runs or fewer allowed in a minimum of six innings) in five outings, shrinking his ERA back below five.

"He's been tough on us in the past, so it should be a good game," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He's one of the more fierce type of competitive pitchers. He really challenges our hitters, but we have a few guys who have had success against him."

Lackey will be playing on an extra day of rest, and so will second baseman Dustin Pedroia, who didn't play in Sunday's 8-1 win over the Royals and batted .213 in May.

"Hopefully he can feel a little bit reenergized," Red Sox manager Terry Francona said Sunday. "I think any time you want to maximize the day off, I think this is the best time to do it."

Oakland has to be content with how its grueling road swing is going. The A's took two of three from the Orioles and beat the Tigers in three out of four contests.

Red Sox: Youk's average takes dip

Kevin Youkilis is batting just .154 over his past 10 games, dropping his batting average 20 points to .298.

Athletics: Pitching has been dominant lately

After a 4-1 win on Sunday, the A's have now given up 21 earned runs in their past 10 games, which is good for a 2.15 ERA. Before that 10-game stretch, Oakland pitchers yielded 35 runs in their previous six games.

Worth noting

Oakland went into Monday with the lowest home ERA in the American League and the second-highest road ERA. ... A's second baseman Mark Ellis was given a day of rest on Monday -- his first since coming off the disabled list on May 21 -- and is expected back in the lineup on Tuesday. ... Mike Cameron collected his first RBIs as a member of the Red Sox in Sunday's win. ... This will be the Red Sox's first dose of AL West competition since they swept the Angels from May 3-6. ... A's outfielder Rajai Davis has a Major-League leading 22 steals entering Tuesday's game. No Red Sox player has swiped more than two bags.

Lee's Leftovers: A dose of dribblers

Love me some day baseball, fresh fruit and a cup of chocolate frozen yogurt topped with some more fresh fruit. A handful of random tidbits from a Sunday afternoon game at Comerica that will hopefully help you forget about the 10-2 loss we just witnessed:

- On a slow news day, manager Bob Geren spent a good portion of his pregame media chat trying to figure out how many combined days and, subsequently, years he's spent in hotels during the span of his baseball career. The estimated answer, thanks to my handy dandy phone calculator: 7-plus years. That's a lot of time spent with suitcases, white towels and card room keys.
- In between the fifth and sixth frames, while Powell was busy putting on his gear, Adam Rosales warmed up Dallas Braden. Guess he really can play all positions ...
- Jake Fox's parents have to be one of the most supportive in the big leagues. They've been here all series, sitting right below the press box, wearing Fox jerseys while cheering on their boy. I also remember them coming to a handful of Spring Training games, the first of which had them all decked out in green and gold -- very impressive considering Fox had signed with the A's just two months before.
- Last night, following the game, it appeared that the A's were more interested in watching replays of Kendry Morales' walk-off grand slam trot-gone wrong than of Roy Halladay's perfecto, although Andrew Bailey had a little fun with re-

watching bits of Doc's game over again. "I bet you that ball's caught. ... I bet he gets out here. ... I bet you he doesn't give up a hit" ...

- Gio Gonzalez designed what he believes is a perfect plan to prepare himself for Interleague action. Following his start in Boston on Tuesday, he wants to take to the field right away during BP the next day, bat in hand, and "hit one over the Green Monster."

That's all I've got for you today. Head on over to the A's site for all your news and don't forget to follow me on Twitter for timely updates. Also, here's the link to e-mail me an Inbox question that could appear right here at the blog. Enjoy the rest of your Memorial Day weekend!

Ellis gets the day off on Monday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DETROIT -- Veteran Mark Ellis was awarded a day off on Monday, his first since coming off the disabled list May 21, as the A's battled the host Tigers in the final contest of a four-game set.

Ellis, who tallied two of the club's combined 17 strikeouts on Sunday, was hitless in his first 14 at-bats since being activated before singling in Baltimore on Thursday and posting back-to-back 3-for-4 nights during the first pair of games in Detroit.

The sudden turnaround, which included a home run, a double and four RBIs on Saturday, brings to mind the Ellis who was batting .323 in eight games right before his DL stint, the fifth of his career.

In Ellis' stead, manager Bob Geren placed Adam Rosales at second base, where the A's utility man entered Monday's game as one of just two Major League qualifiers without an error. It marks Rosales' 38th start of the season at second base and the 44th of his career.

As if his defensive skills weren't enough to convince Geren of a start, Rosales has also represented one of the club's most consistent hitters recently. In his past 12 games, he's batting .385 with two home runs and seven RBIs -- numbers that follow a .243 start in his first 32 contests.

Geren not worried about Kouzmanoff's slump

DETROIT -- For a team that entered its current 10-game trip with one of the worst road records in the Majors, the A's 4-2 mark through their first six contests represents something of a shift.

The East Coast journey, with stops through Baltimore, Detroit and Boston, hasn't been kind to everyone, though.

Kevin Kouzmanoff, who was batting .345 with 12 RBIs in the 15 games that preceded the trip, entered Monday's four-game series finale in Detroit with a dismal .087 mark on the current trip. He's garnered just two hits over his 23 at-bats, not all of which have told the whole story, according to manager Bob Geren.

"He's hit balls pretty good," the A's skipper said. "Just no luck. Sometimes when you look at one week or a span of 10 days, the numbers don't exactly indicate how well they're swinging the bat."

Needless to say, Geren's not too worried about his third baseman, who was in the sixth slot of the lineup Monday for the ninth time this year. He's spent most of the season batting fourth, where he's made 35 appearances. He's also played a handful of games in the fifth spot.

Kouzmanoff tallied two quick outs Sunday against Detroit's Max Scherzer, who struck out a career-high 14 in 5 2/3 frames - - the most K's recorded in less than six innings of work since 1920. Kouzmanoff was responsible for just one of those, and it happened to come on a 10-pitch at-bat, which Geren believes may be a sign of improvement for a struggling hitter.

"Those long at-bats seem to really help a player," he said. "The more pitches they see, the more comfortable they're going to feel in the box."

Worth noting

The A's two miscues in Sunday's game -- a fielding error by Vin Mazzaro and throwing error committed by Landon Powell -- snapped a four-game errorless streak for the club. Oakland has posted error-free efforts in 10 of its past 12 games. Overall, the team has 30 errors on the season -- good for sixth lowest in the American League. ... Sunday's 17 strikeouts increased the club's season total to 363, which is fourth most in the AL.

Rain fails to cool off A's Cahill

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT — Oakland pitcher Tim Cahill was running out of things to do during the extended rain delay.

Luckily for him, he finally got a chance to celebrate the way he hoped — helping his Oakland Athletics beat the Detroit Tigers, 4-1.

The start of the game was delayed by 2 hours and 42 minutes due to threatening weather, although no rain fell until more than an hour after the scheduled start.

“That’s tough when you want to pitch, but it is something you have to deal with,” Cahill said of the prolonged wait. “I wandered around for a while, and then the guys had a movie on in the lounge and I watched some of that, and then I moved around some more.”

Once the game started, though, Cahill (4-2) continued his hot streak. He won his third straight start, allowing one run on five hits in 6½ innings, and has allowed three runs in his last 19 innings.

“Trevor didn't have the command he usually has, but he made pitches when he needed them,” Oakland manager Bob Geren said. “He was getting groundballs and getting himself out of trouble.”

Andrew Bailey got the final four outs for his 11th save.

The win was Oakland's third of the four-game series and fifth out of seven during their ongoing 10-game trip.

“We're a deadly team when we hit the ball well, pitch well and field well, and that's what we are doing right now,” said Kevin Kouzmanoff. Detroit has lost five of six.

“We just aren't doing much offensively,” said Tigers manager Jim Leyland. “We had the one pretty good game yesterday where we blew it open a little late, but no, we aren't doing much. That's an understatement.”

Justin Verlander (5-4) took his second straight loss, giving up three runs on six hits and a walk in seven innings. He struck out eight.

Verlander appeared out of rhythm when the game finally began, allowing hits to the first three batters. Rajai Davis led off with a single and scored on Daric Barton's double. Barton took third on Ryan Sweeney's single and scored when Kurt Suzuki grounded into a double play.

“After a long wait like that, you are always afraid your team will come out sluggish, so I was even more pleased to see us get that quick start,” Geren said. “You don't want to wait against Verlander, because he gets stronger as the game goes on.”

Verlander, though, didn't want to blame the delay for the way he began the game. He has struggled with the first inning all season, allowing a .370 batting average.

“I was all over the place and made a couple bad pitches and they hit them,” he said. “It was tough, because I went through my pre-game routine and then had to shut it down for a couple hours, which I've never had to do before. But that shouldn't have any bearing on the game.”

Detroit nearly got on the board in the fourth, but Gabe Gross threw Brennan Boesch out at the plate to end the inning.

Kouzmanoff made it 3-0 with an seventh-inning RBI single after taking two curveballs that Verlander obviously thought should have been strike three. Verlander and Leyland argued with home-plate umpire Laz Diaz after the play and again after the inning.

Neither was ejected, and Verlander downplayed the situation after the game.

"I think it was pretty obvious that I thought they were strikes, and he thought they were balls," Verlander said. "That's the game of baseball. I'm obviously the kind of guy who gets fired up out there, and it was a big situation."

Kouzmanoff's single broke a 0-for-14 slump.

"That felt good — I hadn't had one in a while," he said. "I really liked that it came in a big situation, where we really needed that insurance run."

Austin Jackson pulled the Tigers within 3-1 with a two-out, pinch-hit single in the seventh, but Oakland added a fourth run in the eighth when Sweeney beat out a possible double-play grounder, allowing Davis to score.

NOTES

*Oakland pitcher Dallas Braden entertained the fans during the long rain delay with a running dive across the tarp, while Barton borrowed a news photographer's camera to take pictures of the stadium and crowd.

*Because of the weather, the stadium observance of the National Moment of Remembrance at 3 p.m. came with the fans standing on the concourse, watching the rain.

*Oakland won 16 games in May, the most in that month since going 18-9 in 2001.

*It started to rain again with Detroit batting in the bottom of the eighth, leaving the stadium almost empty by game's end, except for a large group of seagulls that had gathered in center field.

Who will throw next perfect game?

Joe Lemire, Sports Illustrated, 5/31/2010

That strike-throwing, Cy Young-winning, master-of-efficiency **Roy Halladay** and losing-record, never-before-thrown-a-complete-game **Dallas Braden** are the two most recent pitchers to throw perfect games prove there's no formula to completing pitching's rarest feat.

But there are certain attributes that appear to help increase a starter's chances at joining the 20 pitchers who have thrown perfect games.

Yankees manager **Joe Girardi**, who caught **David Cone**'s perfect game in 1999, says a pitcher needs to throw first-pitch strikes, to have "swing-and-miss stuff" and to be supported by a good defense. His pitching coach, **Dave Eiland**, believes that defense is the key for any pitcher with good command.

"If somebody's on top of his game, anybody can do it," Eiland said.

The balancing act is for a pitcher to keep the ball out of play via the strikeout -- the last 14 perfect games have had an average of 9.5 strikeouts -- without going too deep in the count. Of the 10 perfect games for which there is pitch-count data available on baseball-reference.com, the starters averaged 107.2 pitches per game.

Back when Indians closer **Kerry Wood** was a starter with the Cubs, he threw arguably the greatest game ever pitched that wasn't a perfect game, a 20-strikeout shutout of the Astros on May 6, 1998, allowing just two baserunners in his fifth career start. He says it's important to have a large arsenal to keep hitters guessing.

"You've got to have three pitches that you're throwing where you want them," Wood said.

A pitcher can never be *expected* to throw a perfect game, but with these guidelines in mind -- first-pitch strikes, swing-and-miss stuff, several-pitch repertoire and good team defense -- herewith are a list of candidates who would be less surprising candidates.

Brett Anderson, A's

The young Oakland lefthander has a 1.88 ERA and just four walks in 28 2/3 innings. His 0.94 WHIP would lead all American League starters if he had thrown enough innings to qualify, and on Saturday Anderson proved he's healthy again. After missing five weeks with a forearm strain, he threw 5 2/3 shutout innings in his return on Saturday, allowing three hits and no walks. The A's defense, which backed Braden earlier this month, rates as No. 4 in the majors, per Baseball Prospectus' Park-Adjusted Defensive Efficiency (PADE).

Matt Cain and Tim Lincecum, Giants

Supported by baseball's best defense, according to PADE, the Giants' top two starters are always a threat. Lincecum, the two-time NL Cy Young winner, leads all major-league starters in swing-and-miss percentage (30.3). In his last start on Friday Cain threw a complete-game shutout, the third of his career, allowing just one hit and no walks to the Diamondbacks.

Neftali Feliz, Rangers

Given that 2010 is the first year in history with two perfect games, chances are that the next one probably won't come until at least 2011, by which time the Rangers' fireballing closer will likely be inserted into the rotation. That is the club's long-term projection for him, and with a career WHIP of 0.78 and K/9 of 10.4, Feliz's stuff is electric as anyone. And Texas' lax pitch-count limits mean the young hurler could be given the chance to go the distance.

Zack Greinke, Royals

At this rate he may have to throw a perfect game just to get a win -- he's 1-6 this year despite a 3.39 ERA -- but the '09 AL Cy Young winner is as dominant as anyone in baseball when he's at his best. He had a 38-inning scoreless streak in '09, a league-leading 1.07 WHIP and three shutouts.

Felix Hernandez, Mariners

In '09 the precociously talented Hernandez, then just 23, put together a consistent season in which he went 19-5 with a 2.49 ERA with an AL-best 7.5 hits per nine innings. He's already made 45 career starts in which he's pitched at least seven innings and allowed no more than one earned run, including a one-hit, two-walk shutout of Boston in '07.

Ubaldo Jimenez, Rockies

There's seemingly nothing Jimenez can't do this season. The hardest-throwing starter in baseball (96.1 mile-per-hour average fastball velocity) is 9-1 with a 0.88 ERA and threw a no-hitter against the Braves in April. That no-hitter was marred ever so slightly by six walks, but his control has since improved: He's walked only four batters in his last three starts, a span of 23 innings.

Jon Lester, Red Sox

Boston's de facto ace (6-2, 2.97 ERA, 1.13 WHIP) already has a no-hitter to his name. Lester leads AL starters in allowing only 6.3 hits per game and is fourth in the league in swings that result in a miss (25.4 percent). His Achilles' heel has been a high-walk rate of more than three walks per game, but he has made nine career starts of at least six innings without walking anyone, including a complete-game victory over the Twins on May 20.

David Price, Rays

The Rays have ranked among baseball's best defenses for the past three seasons, and Price has the young rotation's most electric collection of pitches. His fastball is in the high-90s fastball, his slider made the Red Sox look silly in the '08 ALCS and his curveball is rapidly improving. Price notched his first complete-game shutout against the slugging Blue Jays in late April.

Ricky Romero, Blue Jays

Romero has broken out in his sophomore season, going 5-2 with a 3.14 ERA, 1.20 WHIP and .229 batting average against through 77 1/3 innings and carrying a no-hitter into the eighth inning against the White Sox in April. Thanks to a fall-off-the-table changeup, he gets more swings and misses than any other AL starter at 27.1 percent. He has the same knock as Lester: too many walks. He's only made one career start in which he didn't walk anyone, but he has good control on his best days, issuing only seven bases on balls in his four starts this season of at least eight innings.

Stephen Strasburg, Nationals

No, he hasn't thrown in any major-league game yet, much less come close to completing a perfect one, but what limits would you place on him? This is an exercise in potential and few, if any, have the upside of Strasburg, whose minor-league record is sparkling (6-2, 1.43 ERA, 0.80 WHIP, 10.7 K/9) and who'd need only one dazzling start to make it happen.

Minor league news

Watson belts two homers; Cats win streak at 6

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Last week, when playing with the Lancaster Barnstormers of the independent Atlantic League, Matt Watson was already legendary River Cat.

His home run in the 2005 All-Star Game at Raley Field was still firmly etched in the memories of River Cats faithful who fondly remember the outfielder's 2005 team MVP season.

Little did Watson know he'd be able to further entrench himself in Sacramento lore.

Watson, three games into his second stint with Sacramento, smashed two home runs Monday afternoon to help lift the River Cats past the host Reno Aces in an 11-8, come-from-behind victory.

Watson hit solo home runs in the first and fourth innings before walking and scoring on Brett Harper's sixth-inning grand slam that brought Sacramento back in the game. Sacramento, which trailed 8-3 through five innings, stormed ahead with a four-run eighth inning that featured Chris Carter's second home run of the night.

Watson, who on Thursday was signed by the Oakland A's organization, is now batting .529 (9-for-17) in his four games with Sacramento (all against Reno), with three doubles, two home runs, five runs and six RBIs. He has multiple hits in three of the four games.

With the win, Sacramento swept the four-game series and extended its winning streak to six.

Entering Monday, the River Cats hadn't allowed the Aces to lead the entire series. The streak broke in the second inning when Mark Hallberg scored on a Doug Deeds single for a 2-1 Aces lead. Cole Gillespie smacked the ball to center field for a three-run homer that scored Deeds and Ed Rogers for a 5-1 lead to close the second.

The Cats demonstrated their hitting power in the fourth when Watson and Carter hit back-to-back home runs to narrow the deficit to 5-3.

The Aces scored three in the fifth inning without a single hit. After pitching to two batters in the fifth, Sacramento starter Jesus Sanchez was relieved by Cedrick Bowers. Bowers walked in a run to increase the Aces lead 6-3. The fifth walk of the inning sent another Ace home for a 7-3 lead. Jon Hunton became the third pitcher of the inning for the River Cats, and Jeff Bailey scored on Sean Coughlin ground out. Hunton struck out Pedro Ciriaco for the final out of a harsh inning.

A game-changing grand slam from Sacramento's Brett Harper in the sixth inning left the Aces clinging to a one-run lead, 8-7. Harper swung and connected for the first time this season, sending the ball to right field to score Eric Sogard, Watson and Carter.

Sacramento scored four runs on six hits in the eighth inning. Carter hit a mammoth, game-tying home run to open the inning. A line drive to left field gave Michael Taylor his first hit since returning from a left calf injury. Adrian Cardenas moved Taylor to third on a single, and Taylor scored the go-ahead run on a wild pitch. RBI singles from Anthony Recker and Michael Affronti capped the Sacramento scoring.

Every River Cats starter except for Michael Affronti collected at least one hit, as the team combined for 14. Corey Wimberly, who went 2-for-5, increased his consecutive games on base streak to 28.

Sam Demel, who pitched two scoreless innings of relief, got the win, and hard-throwing Henry Rodriguez reorded his sixth save.

The River Cats return home Tuesday night (game time is 7:05 p.m.) to open a four-game series with the Tacoma Rainiers.

Texas League: Natural Hounding

RockHounds blister Northwest Arkansas to cap homestand

By Jonathan Hull, Midland Reporter Telegram

The Midland RockHounds' bats have found some life.

The RockHounds blistered four different Northwest Arkansas Naturals pitchers for 16 hits in a 9-1 win Monday afternoon at Citibank Ballpark. The win capped a three-game series with the Naturals and a six-game homestand where Midland went 4-2 in that span.

At times this season, the RockHounds' offensive production has been bulimic, including a three-game series with Tulsa to start this recent homestand, during which Midland couldn't put more than three runs on the board.

Midland scored at least five in every game against Northwest Arkansas as the RockHounds took 2 of 3 from the Naturals, who entered the series with the best record in the Texas League.

"We're just getting our pitches and not missing them," Midland manager Darren Bush said. "We're swinging the bat OK, making hard contact. These guys keep on working and now we're finally finding the ball with the barrel."

The most impressive part of Monday's onslaught was most of it came against starting pitcher Aaron Crow, who was

considered by Baseball America as the Kansas City Royals' No. 1 prospect at the start of this season.

The RockHounds nailed Crow with seven earned runs on eight hits over four innings. Crow's ERA ballooned to 5.04 after beginning the day in the low 4s.

It was the bottom of the Midland order that did the most damage. After facing the minimum in the first two innings, Crow allowed the 7-8-9 batters in the RockHounds' lineup to reach base via singles. Second baseman J.C. Holt led off the third inning with a base hit up the middle, followed by catcher Yusuf Carter, who singled to left.

No. 9 hitter and designated hitter Matt Sulentic slapped a pitch into left to score Holt, placing the RockHounds on the board first. Two batters later, third baseman Alex Valdez hit a two-out single up the middle and just past the glove of Northwest Arkansas second baseman Johnny Giavotella, plating Carter and Sulentic for a 3-0 advantage.

It only got worse for Crow in the fourth as the RockHounds batted around in the inning, scoring four runs. Corey Brown, who was just re-assigned to Midland after spending a few weeks with Triple-A Sacramento, led off with a single and advanced to second on a fielder's choice by Archie Gilbert.

Then, the bottom of the lineup took over again. Holt picked up his second hit of the game with a triple down the right field line, easily scoring Brown from second. Carter dribbled a soft hit but tricky ball just a few feet in front of home plate. Holt sprinted in from third, beating the toss from Crow and allowing Carter to reach base via fielder's choice.

An infield single by Sulentic put two runners on board for leadoff hitter Josh Horton, who promptly doubled to score Carter and Sulentic, placing the RockHounds up 7-0.

While the RockHounds dominated at the plate, pitcher Anthony Capra was having a strong performance on the mound. Capra held the Naturals to two hits and four walks through the first five innings, allowing no runs and striking out eight batters.

"Our pitchers did a great job of attacking the zone," Bush said. "Capra started it off and everyone else came in and followed. They did a good job."

Notebook

'HOUND BITES: Corey Brown is back in a RockHounds uniform after spending a few weeks with Triple-A Sacramento. In two stints in Triple-A, Brown hit .156 in 34 games with three doubles, two triples, two homers and 14 RBI. Jermaine Mitchell was assigned to Stockton to make room for Brown. ... The Naturals played this series without top prospect Mike Moustakas, who leads the Texas League in batting average (.374), home runs (12), on-base percentage (.459), slugging percentage (.764) and is tied with Midland's Alex Valdez with a league-best 24 extra-base hits. ... Yusuf Carter reached base in his first three at-bats Monday. Add that performance to his 3 for 3 showing Sunday and Carter got on base in six consecutive plate appearances before flying out to right field in the seventh inning. Carter has upped his average from .191 to .221 over the last two days.

TUESDAY'S PROBABLES: The RockHounds are expected to send Travis Banwart (4-2) to the mound to open a three-game series with Tulsa, which will counter with Bruce Billings (3-3).

Stockton's Sticks Come Alive In 13-8 Win

MODESTO, Calif. - Don't tell the Stockton Ports they're ranked toward the bottom of the league in team offense. On Memorial Day, the Boys of Banner Island pounded out a season-high 21 hits and matched a season-high by plating 13 runs in a 13-8 win over the Modesto Nuts at John Thurman Field. The win secures a series victory for Stockton, and the Ports have now won six of the nine played head-to-head with the Nuts.

Stockton started the scoring in the top of the third. With runners at second and third, Shane Keough broke the ice with a sac-fly to center, and Grant Green followed with an RBI single to center to give the Ports a 2-0 lead.

Modesto took the lead for a brief time in the last of the third and used the long-ball to get it done. Brian Rike led off the inning with a solo home run to right. Two batters later, Thomas Field followed suit with a solo blast to left to knot the score

at two. With two down in the inning, Ports starter Shawn Haviland (5-1) walked Jordan Pacheco, then yielded an RBI single to Michael Zuanich two batters later that gave the Nuts a 3-2 lead.

The Ports took the lead back quickly and for good in the top of the fourth. Stockton knocked four straight singles to start the inning off Nuts starter Rob Scahill (2-3), the last two being RBI knocks from Ryan Ortiz and Michael Richard to put the Ports out in front 4-3. With two down in the inning, Todd Johnson netted his first hit of the series with a two-run single to center to give the Ports a 6-3 lead. Johnson's hit knocked Scahill from the game. He would wind up the losing pitcher, going 3.1 innings and allowing six runs on 11 hits while striking out five.

Beginning in the third inning, the Ports scored in six straight innings, a streak that ended in the ninth. Stockton added a run in the fifth off Nuts reliever Isaiah Froneberger. Froneberger yielded three straight walks to start the inning and then uncorked a wild pitch to make it 7-3. Froneberger would walk four batters in the inning, but allow only the one run.

Froneberger would be hit up for two more runs in the sixth. A leadoff double from Stephen Parker and a single from Tyler Ladendorf put runners at the corners with nobody out. Froneberger uncorked another wild pitch that scored Parker to make it 8-3. Jeremy Barfield followed with an RBI single to left to make it a 9-3 ballgame. Froneberger allowed three runs on three hits while walking four in 2.2 innings of work.

Modesto rallied in the sixth inning to make it a three-run deficit. Zuanich led off the inning with a single and Jimmy Cesario tripled to center to score the run and make it a 9-4 game. Haviland would strike out Ryan Peisel to end his night and be lifted for Scott Hodsdon. Hodsdon allowed a single to Rike that scored Cesario and made it 9-5, then an RBI double to Scott Robinson that brought in Rike and made it a 9-6 game.

Two of the three runs that scored in the sixth were charged to Haviland, who earned the win after going 5.1 innings and allowing five runs on eight hits while striking out seven. Hodsdon would allow two runs (one earned) on three hits in 1.2 innings of relief.

The Ports pulled back away from Modesto in the seventh. With Michael Marbry on the hill, Green led off with an infield single and scored two batters later on an RBI knock from Mike Spina. Parker came up next and singled to center and two batters later Barfield singled to put two aboard with two out. Ortiz then stepped to the plate and hit a two-run single to center to score a pair of runs and give the Ports a six-run lead back at 12-6.

Modesto added a run in the last of the seventh against Hodsdon to cut Stockton's lead to 12-7, but Stockton got the run back in the eighth on a sac-fly from Spina to make it 13-7. Stockton's final four runs came off Marbry who pitched two innings of relief.

The Nuts took advantage of a Ports error in the eighth and added an unearned run off Lance Sewell to bring the score to 13-8.

Adam Jorgenson and Paul Smyth each tossed scoreless halves of the ninth to close out a game in which the Ports earned their second straight series win over the Nuts.

Green led the charge offensively for Stockton, going 5-for-6 with an RBI and two runs scored. Green is now 8-for-11 in the series. Barfield followed with a 4-for-5 effort while Ortiz knocked in the most runs (three) in going 3-for-5. Every Ports player had a hit with the exception of Keough who failed to reach base but did drive in a run with a sac-fly.

Stockton set a new season-high in hits with 21, the most hits the Nuts have allowed at home on the season. 17 of the 21 Ports hits were singles.

The Ports will go for their first series sweep of the year on Tuesday night at John Thurman Field. Left-hander Paul Oseguera (0-0, 0.00 ERA) will make his Stockton debut after being signed out of the Atlantic League by the A's. Oseguera will be opposed by Nuts southpaw Kenny Durst (5-2, 5.10 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Cougars' Offense Erupts in Finale Win

GENEVA, III. - The Kane County Cougars' offense came to life Monday afternoon, knocking out seven runs on 11 hits and leading the club to a 7-4 victory over the Clinton LumberKings in front of 6,252 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars, who had not scored more than four runs in their previous 16 games and had not led in the Clinton series, never trailed on Monday. Max Stassi and Kent Walton each had three hits, and Myrio Richard had two to lead the attack. The Cougars snapped a three-game skid with the win.

The Cougars had to use their bullpen for eight innings, as starter Ian Krol's outing was interrupted in the second inning by a 1-hour, 7-minute rain delay. The Cougars scored in five different frames. Stassi singled home Conner Crumbliss in the first, and after Clinton answered the second against Jose Guzman (3-1), Richard plated Crumbliss in the second to make it 2-1. Then Stassi homered in the third, Mike Gilmartin homered in the sixth and Walton and Anthony Aliotti notched run-scoring hits in the seventh to account for the 7-4 final.

Guzman got the win, A.J. Huttenlocker tossed two scoreless innings, Jose Pina yielded three runs in 1 2/3 innings and Connor Hoehn retired all four batters he faced to post his first save. Jose Jimenez (1-3) suffered the loss for Clinton (30-22).

With their seven-game homestand over, the Cougars (22-30) start a six-game road trip Tuesday night at 6 CT in Ohio against the Dayton Dragons (20-31). Dan Straily (4-1, 3.55) is scheduled to face Pedro Villarreal (2-3, 3.25). The game will be broadcast online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 5:45 p.m.
