

Oakland A's let another early lead slip away against Boston Red Sox

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's have made a terrific first impression each of the past two nights.

They jumped out to early leads, silencing the sellout crowds at Fenway Park and knocking base hits to all corners of the fabled ballpark.

But for the second straight game, the bottom fell out from under them Wednesday in a 6-4 loss to the Boston Red Sox.

The A's scored three in the first inning off right-hander Daisuke Matsuzaka, then their offense wasn't heard from again until Kevin Kouzmanoff's pinch-hit home run in the ninth inning.

The Red Sox, working their patient approach at the plate much as the A's try to do, eventually broke through against Oakland's pitching and took control.

On Tuesday, the A's commanded a 4-0 lead against John Lackey but never delivered the knockout punch. In similar fashion, Matsuzaka (4-2) steadied the ship Wednesday, hanging around for 62/3 innings and limiting the A's to six hits and no runs over his final 52/3 innings.

"They're the type of pitchers you try to get to early before they get in a groove," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said, "because once they get in a groove, they're pretty darn good."

"Pitching is that way," A's manager Bob Geren said. "(Matsuzaka) has struggled a little bit with his command this year. He obviously did early in the game, and then he found it."

The loss, coupled with a Texas win, knocked the A's out of a first-place tie with the Rangers in the AL West. The A's will try to avoid a three-game sweep today as they wrap up their 10-game road trip. They won five of the first seven on this three-city trek, and they don't want to end on a flat note.

Back-to-back doubles from Daric Barton and Ryan Sweeney got the A's on the board in the first, then Suzuki drilled a two-run homer over the Green Monster for a 3-0 lead.

The Red Sox got two runs back in the bottom of the first off Ben Sheets (2-4), making his first career appearance against the Red Sox.

The game turned in the fifth during a crowd-pleasing showdown between Sheets and Red Sox designated hitter David Ortiz, who hit 10 homers in May and appears back to his vintage form.

With two outs and a runner on second, Ortiz worked the count to 3-2. After Ortiz fouled off a fastball, Sheets tried going upstairs with another fastball but left it out over the plate. Ortiz ripped a hooking drive into the right-field seats to put Boston ahead for good, 4-3.

"Looking back, I threw the same pitch back-to-back in the same location," Sheets said. "He's a good hitter, and he got to it."

Sheets, who gave up four runs in six innings, said he could have benefited from getting more calls on the inner half of the plate.

"When you're pretty sure the ones on your hands aren't going to be called a strike, you've got a pretty good grasp of the strike zone," Sheets said. "It's tough (on a pitcher)."

But the A's should point the finger at themselves for not pushing more runs across.

They put the first two batters aboard in the fourth but didn't score against Matsuzaka.

They chased the right-hander by putting runners on the corners with two outs in the seventh. But hard-throwing reliever Daniel Bard got Suzuki swinging on a slider to end the threat.

TODAY: A's (Brett Anderson 2-1) at Red Sox (Tim Wakefield 1-3), 10:35 a.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

A's update: Rookie reliever Tyson Ross unhappy about recent struggles

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Rookie Ross not happy about recent struggles

BOSTON — Tyson Ross doesn't sugarcoat how he feels about his recent pitching woes.

"It's been tough mentally," the A's rookie reliever said before Wednesday night's 6-4 loss to the Boston Red Sox. "I don't like going out there and struggling. My command has been bad on this road trip."

Ross got a small bit of redemption Wednesday. He entered with runners on the corners in the eighth and a run already in, and got Dustin Pedroia to hit into an inning-ending fielder's choice.

The right-hander had walked six and allowed six earned runs over his three previous outings on the A's current trip.

Ross made the opening day roster despite never playing higher than Double-A before this season, and he justified the decision with his early numbers.

But after surrendering just seven earned runs and six walks over his first 11 outings (19 innings), Ross has allowed 12 earned runs and seven walks in his past six outings (92/3 innings), which includes two starts in place of the injured Justin Duchscherer.

Manager Bob Geren is firmly in the right-hander's corner.

"He just needs to have a clean inning for his confidence," Geren said before Wednesday's game. "He's throwing the ball really well. He's just missed his location the last couple of outings."

Geren, though, also doesn't show much tolerance for young pitchers who can't find the strike zone, so Ross needs to regain his early-season form.

Something about the Red Sox brings out the best in Kurt Suzuki's bat. The A's catcher hit a two-run homer in the first inning and added a single in his next at-bat, finishing 2 for 4 on Wednesday. Suzuki has hit safely in each of the 22 career starts he's made against Boston, and he's hitting .355 overall (33 for 93) against the Red Sox. "I don't know (how to explain it) because every pitcher they've got is pretty nasty," he said. Suzuki is hitting .254 with a homer and nine RBIs in 16 games since coming off the disabled list for a strained rib cage muscle.

Jack Cust, who went 0 for 4 with three strikeouts, is hitting .156 (5 for 32) over his past 10 games.

Cliff Pennington's bunt single in the second snapped his 0 for 27 slump. That was the sixth-longest hitless streak in Oakland history.

Pregame A's notes: Foiled attempt to penetrate Green Monster; finding playing time for Adam Rosales

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/2/2010 3:53PM

A few of us media types wandered down the left-field line here at Fenway during BP and tried to sneak into the door that takes you inside the Green Monster (you remember ... the door Manny Ramirez entered to take his infamous in-game potty break a few years ago). Anyway, long story short, we were denied. They said nobody was allowed in there during batting practice. But you can't fault the effort. ...

Adam Rosales draws a start tonight at third base in place of Kevin Kouzmanoff. Are you surprised Rosales hasn't gotten more starts after he played so well at the beginning of the road trip? He's been a spark when he's played, but with Mark Ellis healthy and Gabe Gross getting regular time in left field, it's tough to find a spot for Rosales. If Cliff Pennington continues to slump, I think Rosales needs to start seeing more time at shortstop. Pennington enters tonight's game in an 0-for-27 funk. That's the longest hitless streak by an Athletic since Jack Hannahan went 0-for-28 during one stretch in August 2008.

—Bob Geren said everyone should be available in the bullpen tonight, but he'd like to avoid using Michael Wuertz, who's thrown in the last two games. Wuertz admitted he struggled last night as he was on the back end of pitching back-to-back

games. His ability to perform on consecutive days is key for Oakland's bullpen. He probably won't duplicate his 2009 dominance, but the A's need him to come close.

—News bit: The A's released minor league infielder Yung-Chi Chen, who spent time in A's big league spring training in 2009.

Tonight's lineups:

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

Red Sox: Scutaro SS, Pedroia 2B, Ortiz DH, Youkilis 1B, Drew RF, Beltre 3B, Hermida LF, Varitek C, McDonald CF; Matsuzaka RHP.

Oakland bowled over by Boston

Scott Ostler, Chronicle Staff Writer

So good! So good! So good!

Oh, sorry, got caught up in the Fenway Park vibe, which includes the infectious "Sweet Caroline" sing-along, a choir of 37,000.

A ballgame at Fenway is something special, as the A's are discovering. The atmosphere is electric, sellout crowds every game. The crowds don't bother the A's; on the contrary, the players seem to feed off the energy.

The tough part for the visiting team at Fenway is the home team, the relentless, intelligent and well-equipped Red Sox.

Wednesday night the A's jumped to a 3-0 lead in the top of the first and lost, 6-4. The night before they jumped to a 4-0 lead and lost, 9-4.

The A's have out-hit the Sox in the two games, 25-24, and have nothing to show for it but two losses and bruised egos.

After starting their 10-game road trip 5-2, the A's will be fighting today to finish above .500 on their longest journey of the season.

The A's are hitting, but that's not enough against the non-stop Sox. Kurt Suzuki hit a two-run homer in the first inning, and Daric Barton continued to pound baseballs on his sizzling road trip, but the Red Sox just outgunned the A's.

Boston designated hitter David Ortiz batted a puny .143 in April with one home run, but since then he's hitting .378 with 11 homers, including a two-run bomb in the fifth Wednesday that proved to be the game-winner.

The Red Sox have more power than the A's can dream of, but it's not just the power. They have a plan, an approach. A's manager Bob Geren said before the game that the Red Sox work counts as well as any team in the league, along with the Yankees and A's.

"It seems like everybody they have up there has a 3-2 count," said A's catcher Suzuki after the game. "They won't expand their (strike) zone until you get two strikes on them. That's what makes 'em so tough. You've got to get ahead (in the count) and put 'em away early before they start to grind it out."

Ortiz, on his homer, worked A's starter Ben Sheets to a 3-2 count before pulling an inside fastball into the stands down the right-field line.

There aren't many soft spots in Boston's lineup. Marco Scutaro, the leadoff man, singled in the first inning off Sheets' glove to start a two-run rally and doubled in the seventh.

Scutaro was once deemed expendable by the A's because he was a free-swinger who never worked a count. Scutaro has since changed his ways and he grinds out at-bats as well as any of his teammates.

The A's hitters try to work counts, too, but Wednesday Matsuzaka limited their opportunities. In his previous start Matsuzaka walked eight. Wednesday he walked zero in his 6 2/3 innings, throwing 109 pitches and 84 strikes. Grind that.

The A's, at least, could say they battled.

"We are swinging the bats a lot better, so that's encouraging," Geren said.

Sheets took the loss and he's 2-4, but it was his sixth straight game working six innings or more. He consistently hit the mid-90s on the radar gun, and said his strength and confidence continue to build.

All good signs for the A's. But at Fenway, against the Sox, the A's need more.

Grandma on the mound

Scott Ostler, Chronicle Staff Writer

Dallas Braden pitches Friday and will fly home with the team tonight. So he'll miss tonight's Sacramento River Cats' tribute to his perfecto. His grandmother, **Peggy Lindsey** will throw out the first ball.

Advice from Braden to grandma?

"I told her, 'Two-strike change-ups, that's what we throw. Just bury it.' "

Braden did not send a congratulatory note/text/whatever to **Roy Halladay** after Halladay's perfect game.

"That guy's so accomplished, he has more complete games in the big leagues than I have innings pitched," Braden said Wednesday. "There's not much I can offer him."

Braden is playing the I'm-not-worthy card, but I bet Dear Abby would say, "When a new member joins an elite club, his induction should be saluted personally by the living members."

Oh-fer no more: **Cliff Pennington's** bunt single in the second busted his 0-for-27 hitless streak. It was the sixth longest hitless streak in Oakland A's history. The longest: **Jose Canseco**, 0-for-40, August 1986.

Briefly: Left-hander **Josh Outman**, who has had some minor setbacks in his return from last summer's Tommy John surgery, said in a text that, after a week off, he resumed throwing Wednesday in Arizona, getting out to a distance of 80 feet. He threw a simulated game last month and he is hoping to get back to that point again soon. ... This morning's game at Boston will be available on the MLB Network as well as CSN California.

Drumbeat: Wednesday pregame

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle, 6/2/2010 2:45PM

Adam Rosales spelling Kevin Kouzmanoff at third tonight. Bob Geren says it's simply a matter of giving Kouzmanoff a day off when there's no break in the schedule. Unsaid: Kouzmanoff is 5-32 (.156) on this trip and .207 over the last 20 games.

Plus, Rosales has been hitting, can't keep him on the bench too long, and he's a sparkplug kind of guy, should feed like crazy off the Fenway energy.

Weather: Beautiful, sunny, mid-70s, slight breeze. But rumors of rain tomorrow.

Bonus incentive tonight: A's must win to have chance at taking this series, which would give them a three-series-winning road trip on the longest trip of year. Not insignificant.

A's leading off

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Red, courtesy of Ted: One red seat in a sea of bleacher green marks the longest Fenway homer - Ted Williams, 1946. The ball pierced the top of a man's straw hat. He said, "How far away must one sit to be safe in this park?"

A's see early lead vanish in loss to Red Sox

Handed three-run lead, Sheets can't keep Boston bats in check

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

BOSTON -- Ben Sheets works rather quickly on the mound.

Always has in his nine-year career.

Thus, an interesting scene unfolded Wednesday night when -- for the first time -- the veteran right-hander took to the bump against the Red Sox, a team notoriously known for compiling lengthy at-bats.

The combination, as expected, made for good entertainment. Sheets battled, worked in some offspeed magic and continually improved on the velocity of his once lagging fastball. Yet, said fastball got him into trouble one too many times.

As a result, Sheets walked away with his fourth loss of the season and Oakland was left on the wrong end for the second consecutive night at Fenway Park -- this time in a 6-4 defeat at the hands of a feisty Boston lineup that left the A's one game behind the first-place Rangers in the American League West standings.

Kurt Suzuki, who entered the game having hit safely in each of his 22 career starts against Boston, quickly extended that mark when he belted a two-run homer off Daisuke Matsuzaka to left field in the top of the first to give Sheets a 3-0 lead.

Dice-K, who allowed eight free passes in his previous outing, had no such trouble throwing strikes in the frame. In fact, Oakland hit four of them.

"At the beginning of the game -- and I hate to say this -- there were almost too many strikes," Boston manager Terry Francona said. "He worked ahead, and he got hurt when he was ahead in the count to Suzuki. But if that's a problem, we'll take it."

The 3-0 lead -- a good dose of hope for the A's -- faded fast, much like the club's 4-0 lead did the night before in an eventual 9-4 loss. This one, under a warm Boston sun, started melting even quicker.

Less than 10 minutes after Suzuki's long ball left the yard, Kevin Youkilis narrowed Oakland's lead to one thanks to a two-run single off Sheets, who surrendered three hits in the frame.

"The first inning kind of stunk," Sheets admitted.

Unfortunately for the A's right-hander, the fifth frame stunk a bit more.

Following Youkilis' game-changing at-bat, Sheets managed to retire nine of the next 11 batters before giving up a double to Darnell McDonald to lead off the fifth. He tallied two more outs, staging a battle with David Ortiz, who rung up a 3-2 count before hitting a go-ahead two-run homer to right field.

"I thought a fastball inside was a good approach," Sheets said. "But looking back, I realized I threw him the same pitch back to back. I tried to elevate the second one a little more, but he just turned on it."

"We tried to get him in," Suzuki said. "[Sheets] was being aggressive in the strike zone and went right after him. That's the type of pitcher he is."

In the meantime, Dice-K put to rest his eventful first inning and retired 14 of the next 19 A's batters, who finally forced his exit with two outs in the seventh having tagged him for 10 hits.

"He found his breaking ball and had pretty good command of the inside corner of the plate," manager Bob Geren said of the pitcher's transformation. "He's struggled with his command this year, and that's why his numbers are up. He seemed to find it, and it shows how a few inches here and there make a big difference for a guy like that."

Said Suzuki: "With the type of pitchers they have, you have to get to them early. Once they get into a groove, they're pretty darn good. He was basically throwing every pitch for a strike after the first inning and locating the ball better."

Sheets took the loss and moved to 2-4 on the season following six innings of work, which resulted in four runs on seven hits with one walk and one strikeout.

"I was up and down today," he said. "I'm still working on being consistent with good arm speed. I didn't think it was great by any means."

Neither was the A's offensive performance, which included eight men left on base. After the three-run first, Oakland put several zeros on the scoreboard before Kevin Kouzmanoff notched his first career pinch-hit homer in the ninth, a blast over the Green Monster off Jonathan Papelbon.

However, that was after Boston had scored another run against reliever Brad Ziegler, whose nine-inning scoreless streak came to an end when he allowed an RBI double to Dustin Pedroia in the seventh frame. And it was after they got Craig Breslow for one in the eighth on former A's player Marco Scutaro's RBI base hit.

"It seems like everybody in their lineup had a 3-2 count," Suzuki said. "They're patient. They wait for pitches and make you throw strikes."

"The bottom line was we didn't get the job done."

Duchscherer surgery set for Monday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

BOSTON -- Right-hander Justin Duchscherer is scheduled to undergo season-ending left hip surgery on Monday, A's assistant general manager David Forst confirmed Wednesday.

Nashville-based physician Dr. Thomas Byrd, who twice orchestrated surgery on Duchscherer's right hip, will perform the operation to correct a femoral acetabular impingement. The injury-prone pitcher, who has missed parts of each of the past five seasons, has a congenital issue in his hips where the femur meets the joint, a problem that was resolved in the right hip by the same surgery.

"I knew [surgery] was inevitable," Duchscherer said last week. "I haven't had a chance to pitch without pain. ... I'd rather have it fixed than risk any damage."

The 32-year-old pitcher initially received a cortisone shot administered by Byrd in early May, but the procedure simply masked the pain rather than completely taking it away. He then was given an unsuccessful injection of joint-cushioning Synvisc before trying out a rehab program in Phoenix, where he underwent a rather painful 20-pitch simulated game and ultimately decided on surgery.

The two-time All-Star was 2-1 with a 2.89 ERA in five starts -- three of which didn't include any earned runs -- for the A's, who gave him a highly incentive-laden one-year contract this offseason. Duchscherer will likely need at least six months of recovery time, and it is unknown whether Oakland will take another chance with him next year.

Rosales' hard work results in playing time

BOSTON -- There was a time Adam Rosales wasn't even sure if he would make the big league club.

Two months into the regular season, it's hard to imagine him anywhere else.

Rosales entered Wednesday's game against the host Red Sox batting .349 (15-for-43) with two home runs and seven RBIs over his past 13 games. Thanks to those impressive numbers, manager Bob Geren awarded his utility player with his 43rd start in the club's past 48 games -- this time at third base, where Kevin Kouzmanoff received a day off.

"[Kouzmanoff's] body needs some rest," Geren said, "and Rosales is playing hard."

Rosales is also playing mighty well, as evidenced by the fact that he's yet to commit an error in 45 games this year at four different positions -- including 36 contests at second base, where he is one of two Major League qualifiers without an error.

Next to Rosales at shortstop on Wednesday was Cliff Pennington, whom Geren keeps running out there despite his recent struggles at the plate, where he's gathered the longest hitless streak of his career in the form of a 0-for-27 slump.

"Every player goes through their bad weeks," Geren said. "The good news is that he's swinging the bat well. He'll be fine."

Ross aiming for better command

BOSTON -- Tyson Ross' move from Double-A to the Majors this season was quite the jump.

Unfortunately, the same can be said of his ERA right now.

After finishing the first month of the season with a 3.55 ERA, Ross' mark is up to 6.89 following Tuesday's two-run outing, combined with a month of May that saw him allow 12 runs, 22 hits and five walks in 15 2/3 innings.

Ross faced just two batters Tuesday in Boston, where manager Bob Geren confirmed the day after that the righty is enduring a bout with command issues.

"He needs a good inning to help his confidence," the A's skipper said. "He's been throwing the ball real well. He's just missing location."

Geren said Ross -- owner of a sky-high 32.53 ERA over his past three outings -- was available for Wednesday's game.

V-Mart punishing left-handed pitchers

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

Victor Martinez is punishing left-handed pitchers this year, and he faces a pretty good one in Brett Anderson when Martinez's Red Sox and Anderson's A's square off in their series finale at Fenway Park on Thursday.

Martinez is hot against all pitchers on the heels of his Monday night outing, in which he went 5-for-5 with four doubles. After slumping early in the season, the catcher has 16 hits in his past 31 at-bats and has raised his season numbers to a .279 batting average with seven homers and 26 RBIs.

Red Sox manager Terry Francona is familiar with how quickly Martinez can heat up, having managed against Martinez when the catcher was on the Cleveland Indians.

"I used to hate it," Francona said. "He's a good hitter. I kind of fall back on that [thought that] good hitters, when they cool off, they [subsequently] get just as hot. Sometimes the formula is a little different"

It will be Anderson's job to cool down not only Martinez but the rest of the Red Sox, a tall order considering it will be Anderson's second start since missing five weeks because of a strained forearm and elbow tendinitis. Then again, Anderson, 22, is one of the most talented young pitchers in the American League, which he showed in his return outing against the Tigers.

Following a one-out single to Johnny Damon in the first inning, Anderson retired 16 in a row and entered the sixth inning having tossed just 59 pitches, 40 of them strikes. He finished with 5 2/3 frames of shutout ball and rave reviews from his manager and the opposing skipper.

"He looked as good as I've ever seen him," manager Bob Geren said. "You can't pitch any better than that."

Added Tigers manager Jim Leyland: "I thought Anderson was tremendous coming back. He's one of the better pitchers in the league."

A's: Suzuki socks the Sox

Catcher Kurt Suzuki has hit safely in each of his first 22 career starts against Boston dating back to Sept. 25, 2007. He is batting .352 (32-for-91) with two homers and eight RBIs in those games. Gary Sheffield is the last player to hit safely in more consecutive starts against the Red Sox, doing so in 26 consecutive games from Sept. 28, 1989, to June 30, 2002. ... First baseman Daric Barton matched a career-high Wednesday night by hitting safely in his ninth consecutive game. He is 12-for-32 (.375) with four doubles, two homers and six RBIs in that span. Barton's previous nine-game streak was from Sept. 16-26, 2007.

Red Sox: Papi stays hot

Designated hitter David Ortiz belted his 12th home run of the season in Wednesday's 6-4 win over the A's. Ortiz now has eight homers in his past 17 games since May 14, batting .386 (22-for-57) with 22 RBIs in that span. Ortiz has hit safely in 19 of his past 22 games since May 5, logging a .387 (29-for-75) average during that stretch. Ortiz now has 863 RBIs with Boston, five shy of tying Manny Ramirez (868) for sixth in club history. ... Closer Jonathan Papelbon on Wednesday made the 286th relief appearance of his career, tying Dick Radatz for third in Red Sox history. Only Bob Stanley (552) and Mike Timlin (394) have more.

Worth noting

A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff belted his first career pinch-hit homer off Papelbon in the ninth inning of Wednesday's game. It was the second pinch-hit homer by the A's this season. Eric Patterson also accomplished the feat May 12 at Texas. ... The Red Sox have received eight quality starts in the past 11 games beginning May 22, during which the rotation owns a 2.99 ERA. Boston has a 2.91 ERA overall during that span.

A's again cough up lead

By JIMMY GOLEN, ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — David Ortiz was the AL's top batter in the month of May, hitting 10 homers and raising his batting average from .143 to .272.

And yet the Oakland Athletics still needed convincing.

The A's pitched to Ortiz with first base open in the fifth inning, and he launched a two-run, go-ahead homer down the right-field line that sent the Boston Red Sox to a 6-4 victory Wednesday night.

His next time up, the A's granted Ortiz his first intentional walk of the season.

Big Papi is back.

"It's been good to see," Red Sox manager Terry Francona said. "He's swinging the bat great."

Ortiz went 2 for 2 with two extra-base hits and two walks, and Daisuke Matsuzaka settled down after giving up three runs in the first inning as Boston rallied for the second straight game.

One night after scoring nine straight runs to back John Lackey and overcome a 4-0 deficit, the Red Sox scored six in a row after falling behind 3-0. Kevin Youkilis had a two-run single in the first inning, then Ortiz made it 4-3 in the fifth with the drive down the right-field line.

"They're the type of pitchers that you have to get on them early," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "Once they get into a groove, they're pretty darn good."

Matsuzaka (4-2) allowed 10 hits and walked none, striking out seven. He gave up consecutive doubles to Daric Barton and Ryan Sweeney before Suzuki's two-run homer in the first gave Oakland a 3-0 lead.

After his shaky start, though, Matsuzaka did not allow a runner to reach third base until the seventh.

"My only thought was to dig in and keep battling," Matsuzaka said. "Things turned around."

In the seventh, Matsuzaka hit Barton with two outs and Sweeney singled up the middle on a 3-2 pitch. Daniel Bard came in and struck Suzuki out to protect the 4-3 lead, then retired the side in the eighth before Jonathan Papelbon earned his 13th save despite pinch-hitter Kevin Kouzmanoff's homer that made it 6-4.

Ben Sheets (2-4) allowed four runs, seven hits and a walk, striking out one to suffer his first loss in a month and end a string of four no-decisions.

Dustin Pedroia singled in a run in the seventh to make 5-3, and Marco Scutaro had three hits, including an RBI blooper in the eighth that gave Boston a 6-3 lead.

Ortiz hit .363 with 10 homers and 27 RBIs in May to earn AL player of the month honors — the fourth time he has been so honored, but the first since September 2007. He also doubled and scored in the first inning, and in the seventh he was intentionally walked — a sure sign that opponents believe his slump is over.

Matsuzaka continued his inconsistent ways.

He took a no-hitter into the eighth inning two starts ago, and in his last outing he matched his career high with eight walks and didn't make it out of the fifth in a 4-3 loss to Kansas City. He showed both forms Wednesday, allowing three runs and four hits in the first inning and then putting up five straight zeros.

At the beginning, it was almost too many strikes. If that's a problem, we'll take it," Francona said. "He gathered himself up in a hurry and pitched well.

NOTES

*Boston's J.D. Drew hit his first triple since September.

*Sweeney was 1 for 11 against Matsuzaka before getting two hits against him on Wednesday night.

*Jon Lester was named the AL pitcher of the month, his third such honor.

*Francona said former ace Josh Beckett won't throw for 10 days as he tries to recover from a lower back strain.

*Red Sox C Victor Martinez, who had four doubles and five hits Tuesday, was rested with a sore left big toe. He is scheduled to catch Tim Wakefield on Thursday.

Sharks, A's Come to SJ Traffic Agreement

SAN JOSE, Calif. (KCBS) San Jose's efforts to lure the A's to its downtown just got a big shot in the arm. The Sharks have agreed to a new plan for a parking garage and traffic improvements that would serve both teams.

For months now the Sharks have raised objections about a proposed downtown ballpark in San Jose, saying it would interfere with traffic and parking at the Shark Tank, especially on days when both teams are playing. Now, however, a deal has been made.

The city has agreed to let the sharks build a four-story parking garage just north of HP Pavillion, and in turn San Jose will make road improvements in that area to ease congestion.

Santa Clara County Assessor Larry Stone says he's not surprised by this deal.

"I always knew this would have some kind of resolution to it," said Stone. "I knew the Sharks were not going to stand in the way of the A's moving to a new ballpark in downtown San Jose. So it was just a question of how it would get resolved, and at whose expense."

The San Jose Sharks have agreed to pay for the parking garage, but there's no estimated cost for the project, which could be totally tossed out if the A's don't get the red light from Major League Baseball to move to San Jose.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Carter hits 13th bomb; Cats can't hold on

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Chris Carter's 13th home run of the season wasn't enough for Sacramento as the River Cats fell 9-7 to the Tacoma Rainiers on Wednesday afternoon at Raley Field.

The Rainiers kicked off the scoring in the third inning with three-run, two-out rally. Ramon Vazquez doubled past Chris Carter, allowing Ezequiel Carrera to score. Brad Nelson followed with a double that scored Vazquez and Jack Hannahan.

The River Cats answered with five in the bottom of the inning. A. Eric Sogard line-drive single scored Brett Harper for the River Cats' first run. Matt Watson blasted a double that scored Corey Wimberly and Sogard, who scored from first to tie the game at three. Watson scored from second on a Josh Donaldson sacrifice fly that sent Tacoma right fielder Greg Halman crashing in the wall. Chris Carter capped the inning with his 13th home run of the season, a fly ball to center field that bounced off the clubhouse and back to the field.

Sacramento extended its lead to 6-3 in the sixth when Josh Donaldson stole second base and scored on a Michael Taylor single.

Tacoma started its come-from-behind rally in the eighth inning. Former River Cat Tommy Everidge singled to score Hannahan and make the score 6-4. A three-run homer from Mike Carp sent Brad Nelson and pinch runner Chris Woodward scored to make it 7-6 and put Tacoma on top. Hannahan hit a two-run homer in the ninth to further distance the lead to 9-6.

With two strikes and two outs in the bottom of the ninth, fans that left early would be disappointed. River Cat Adrian Cardenas walked, advanced to second on defensive indifference and scored on a Wimberly single. With Wimberly on second and Eric Sogard on first via a walk, Watson popped up to second base to end the game.

Wimberly went 2-for-5 with a run and RBI to extend his on base streak to 30 games.

The River Cats will honor Oakland A's pitcher Dallas Braden and his perfect game Thursday, prior to the 7:05 p.m. start against the Tacoma Rainiers. Braden's grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, will throw the ceremonial first pitch. Clay Mortenson (6-2, 4.50) will be channeling his inner Braden as the Cats' starting pitcher.

Cougars Get Even in Dayton

Kane County wins in Ohio behind Smith's mound work, balanced offense

DAYTON, Ohio – After waiting through a 1-hour, 22-minute rain delay at the start of their night, the Kane County Cougars used a late rally Wednesday to cruise to a 6-3 victory over the Dayton Dragons at Fifth Third Field. Murphy Smith posted a quality start in his '10 Cougars debut, and six different Cougars drove in a run to lead a balanced attack.

Smith and Dayton starter J.C. Sulbaran were locked in a scoreless tie through four before the Dragons got one in the fifth. Blair Carson relieved Sulbaran in the sixth, and the Cougars tied it, 1-1, as Leonardo Gil tripled and scored on a sacrifice fly by Max Stassi. The Dragons answered in the bottom of the sixth with their other run against Smith (1-0), who gave up two runs on six hits, walked one and fanned five over six frames.

Smith left in line for a loss but ended up with a win because the Cougars rallied in the seventh and never gave away the

lead. Kent Walton and Gil poked consecutive two-out RBI singles, and in the eighth Mike Gilmartin, Conner Crumbliss and Tyreace House each plated one to make it 6-2. After Bo Schultz tossed two scoreless relief innings, Josh Lansford got touched for one in the ninth before nailing down the 6-3 win.

The three-game series concludes Thursday night at 6 CT. Justin Marks (1-6, 6.66) will pitch for the Cougars (23-31), and Josh Ravin (2-5, 3.96) will go for Dayton (21-32). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 5:45 p.m.