

Unintentional result sets Oakland A's loss to Twins in motion

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A flu-weakened Justin Morneau wasn't in the Minnesota Twins' starting lineup Saturday night, but he didn't need to swing the bat to help sink the A's.

With one out, the bases empty and the score tied in the top of the ninth, A's manager Bob Geren intentionally walked Morneau, the American League's leading hitter. That set in motion the winning rally off Brad Ziegler that beat the A's 4-3 in front of 16,421 fans at the Oakland Coliseum.

Morneau was pinch hitting for Brendan Harris.

It was the second straight disappointing finish for the A's, who

have dropped the first two games of the series to the AL Central leaders despite rallying to tie both games late.

J.J. Hardy pinch-ran for Morneau after the intentional walk, and Hardy came around to score on Matt Tolbert's two-out line single to center to break a 3-3 tie.

Geren acknowledged the decision to walk Morneau purposely with the bases empty was unorthodox. But he said he didn't want to risk giving up the long ball to a player who has a league-leading .372 average and entered the game tied with Detroit's Miguel Cabrera atop the AL with a .691 slugging percentage.

Morneau hit a long two-run home run off A's starter Dallas Braden on Friday.

"Anytime you put the go-ahead run on base, it's a tough decision," Geren said. "But as hot as he is, with that style of pitcher (in Ziegler), it was not a good matchup. "... I didn't want him to beat us right there."

Geren also liked the chances Ziegler had to inducing a double-play grounder to end the inning.

But after walking Morneau, Ziegler also walked Nick Punto.

Denard Span followed with a chopper to third that resulted only in a force out at second base. Tolbert then delivered the game-winning RBI. Lefty Cedrick Bowers was summoned to replace Ziegler (2-3) and induced an inning-ending fly ball.

"It caught me off-guard a little bit," Ziegler said of the decision to walk Morneau. "I didn't do a good job of settling down and getting guys after that."

But Ziegler, a right-handed submariner, said he was gearing himself up in the bullpen to battle the left-handed hitting Morneau.

"It takes a home run to beat us (in that situation), and fortunately in my career I haven't given up many of those," Ziegler said. "I'd like to get my shot in that situation, but it's not my decision."

Ziegler has allowed just six homers in 142 major league games. But lefties came in hitting .310 against Ziegler this season, and both homers he's allowed have come to lefties.

Morneau was battling a stomach bug.

"He said he wanted to hit and then I knew I had to run for him," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "I didn't want to see a grown man go to the bathroom in his pants on the field."

Minnesota broke a 1-1 tie with two runs off A's starter Trevor Cahill in the sixth. The rally began with Joe Mauer's double to left with one out. A's left fielder Eric Patterson appeared to get a late jump on the ball and then got turned around going after it.

Adam Rosales, who spelled Daric Barton at first base, pulled the A's into a 3-3 tie in the eighth with a two-out, two-run triple off reliever Jesse Crain.

Geren then pinch-hit Barton for catcher Jake Fox. Barton flied to right to end the rally. That decision meant Kurt Suzuki, who started at DH, needed to enter at catcher in the ninth, taking away the A's DH.

TODAY: Twins (Nick Blackburn 6-2) at
A's (Gio Gonzalez 5-3) 1:05 p.m.
TV: CSNCA.
Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

A's Report:

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Chavez hopeful he'll be on field before too long

Eric Chavez returned to the A's clubhouse Saturday, and he's hopeful his return to the lineup won't take much longer. Chavez was scheduled to hit in the cage before the A's 4-3 loss to the Minnesota Twins.

The A's longest-tenured veteran had been home in Phoenix since going on the disabled list May 22 with two bulging disks in his neck. He'll gradually increase his baseball activity if he can swing without pain. He said he could at least be on the field somewhere before the team's next road trip.

"Hopefully when the team leaves, I'll be going on a rehab (assignment)," Chavez said.

The A's next trip technically begins Friday with a three-game series at AT&T Park against the Giants. They leave June 14 to play six games against the Chicago Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals.

Chavez didn't specify which date he's targeting, but manager Bob Geren agreed that Chavez's general timetable "sounds pretty doable."

Considering Chavez feared his current injury could be career-threatening, it's encouraging for the A's that the designated hitter is already eyeballing a return.

Chavez is hitting just .234 with one homer and 10 RBIs in 33 games. He said upon joining the DL that his neck pain had bothered him all season.

Left-hander Dallas Braden allowed his first stolen base since Aug. 20, 2008, on Friday. Minnesota's Danny Valencia stole second base in the top of the second.

Braden, who has picked off four runners this season, was disappointed to see his streak end.

"Early in my career, being in the bullpen, one of the things that could always help you was being able to control the running game," Braden said.

Today, Braden will host 275 kids from Hoover Tyler Little League, located in his hometown of Stockton, as part of the A's Little League Day. For the second straight year, Braden also is sponsoring two kids from the league who are being raised in a single-parent family.

Scott Hatteberg, who catapulted himself into A's lore with a walk-off home run that gave the team an American League-record 20-game winning streak in 2002, popped into the clubhouse before the game. Hatteberg, who retired after playing with the Cincinnati Reds in 2008, has aspirations of starting a front-office career, and he's spent this week observing how A's officials prepare for the draft.

"I've just started getting my feet wet," Hatteberg said. "I'm here almost as an intern. I'm purely here to watch the process."

Chin Music: Eric Chavez is back, hopes to come off DL soon; other A's tidbits

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/5/2010 5:35PM

It was an unusually warm afternoon here at the Coliseum. Typically, the temperature drops significantly once the sun goes down, but it's feeling like it might be a short-sleeves night all the way.

–Eric Chavez made a surprise appearance in the A's clubhouse today. He showed up a couple days earlier than expected, and he's hopeful of starting baseball activity and beginning a minor league rehab assignment in about a week or so. Of course, that timeframe should be considered tentative. Chavez, who went on the DL May 22 with two bulging disks in his neck, has been recuperating at home in Phoenix. All indications are he's recovering well, but first he has to show he can swing and run without pain.

"Hopefully when the team leaves (for a road trip that begins June 15) I'll be going on rehab," he said.

–After starting the A's first 56 games, first baseman Daric Barton finally gets a day off, with Adam Rosales spelling him. Not a bad time to do it, with Twins left-hander Francisco Liriano on the mound. "I don't think I need a rest, but it's good to rest your body," Barton said. "We're facing a tough lefty, and it gets 'Rosey' in there. He's been swinging it well."

Barton is hitting .281 with four homers, 22 RBIs and 16 doubles, and he's currently riding an 11-game hitting streak. He's been the No. 2 hitter all season, and he's definitely at his best when leadoff man Rajai Davis is getting on base. Barton handles the bat well and is a good bunter. And it's gotta be nice facing a pitcher whose mind is occupied when Davis is on base.

"He's been our most consistent guy at the plate all year," A's manager Bob Geren said of Barton.

–Ryan Sweeney also gets a night off. I was a little surprised he played last night, just a day after he took a knee to the head as he and Mark Ellis chased a foul pop-up against Boston. Sweeney still isn't quite feeling 100 percent after the collision, Geren said, but he's available tonight if needed.

–Geren said he'd try to avoid using closer Andrew Bailey tonight, but noted that Bailey has pitched in three straight games before. But Thursday's outing was a two-inning effort, so I doubt we'll see Bailey tonight. So who might get the call in the ninth if the A's are protecting a close lead? Brad Ziegler is my guess ...

–Justin Morneau has the stomach flu and is absent from Minnesota's lineup. The Twins are also without shortstop J.J. Hardy, a late scratch because of a left wrist contusion:

A's — Davis CF, Ellis 2B, Suzuki DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Rosales 1B, Fox C, Gross RF, Pennington SS, Patterson LF; Cahill RHP.

Twins — Span CF, Tolbert 2B, Mauer C, Thome DH, Kubel RF, Young LF, Valencia 3B, Harris 1B, Punto SS; Liriano LHP.

Blown call cost the A's Bobby Witt a perfect game, too — in 1994

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News, 6/6/2010

After watching Armando Galarraga just miss a perfect game Wednesday night, former pitcher Bobby Witt told his wife about the frustrating ending.

"You're not going to believe how he lost it," Witt said.

"Was it on a play at first?" Laurie replied.

To the Witt household, the scenario was painfully familiar. Bobby Witt endured the same fate as Galarraga 16 years earlier while pitching for the A's at the Coliseum.

On June 23, 1994, the only base runner Witt allowed in a 4-0 victory over the Kansas City Royals was a bunt single by Greg Gagne with one out in the sixth.

Or so the umpire said.

Replays showed that Gary Cederstrom blew the same type of call Jim Joyce missed in Galarraga's game. With the pitcher covering first base, Cederstrom ruled that Witt was late to the bag on a throw from first baseman Troy Neel.

"Obviously, by the replays, the man is out at first," Witt said after the game. "I think he missed the call. But there's nothing I can do about it now."

Unlike with Galarraga, there were no tearful apologies from the umpire after the game, no attempts at a peaceful resolution. Cederstrom was prohibited from addressing the media, and crew chief Drew Coble issued only a brief statement: "He called

it the way he saw it. What are you gonna do? How are you gonna blow that out of proportion? He just called it the way he saw it, and that's all the comment we have."

Reached on his cell phone Saturday night, Witt, 46, marveled at the class Joyce showed in the aftermath of the Tigers game. Now a player agent, Witt recalled having Joyce as an umpire during his playing days and said the apology "showed he's a class act. It shows what kind of guy he is.

"He knows it's not going to make a difference, but he was a stand-up guy and said, 'I blew it. I missed it.' My situation was handled differently."

Witt, who pitched in the majors from 1986-2001, struggled with control throughout his career but was impeccable that day at the Coliseum.

The right-hander struck out a career-high 14, including six of the last seven. More amazingly, Witt, who led the American League in bases on balls three times in his career, walked nobody against the Royals.

He should have had the 14th perfect game in major league history.

"I think about it," Witt said Saturday. "You see a perfect game, like when (Roy) Halladay did it, and you start thinking, 'What if? What if?'"

But then, as now, the umpire stood in the way.

"He was out," Neel said that day. "I saw feet and assumed it would go our way. The umpire told me he thought it was a tie base. Usually, any time after the fifth inning in a no-hitter, the defense gets the call."

Not in 1994. And not in 2010.

Baseball's season of perfection

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News

Before A's pitcher Dallas Braden kicked off the chic new trend for 2010, perfect games were something of a rarity. Perfect games were baseball's Halley's Comet, a sight to be savored with the knowledge that it will be years before you see it again.

Between 1880 and 2009, there were 18 perfect games.

But between this May 9 and June 2, there were darn near three. Halley's Comet keeps circling back.

Only a blown call by umpire Jim Joyce prevented the first season in baseball history with a trio of perfect games. Joyce ruled incorrectly Wednesday that Detroit Tigers pitcher Armando Galarraga was late covering the bag, giving Jason Donald an infield single with two outs in the ninth.

Nevertheless, the officially recorded masterpieces by Braden (May 9) and the Phillies' Roy Halladay (May 29) give baseball two perfect games in a season for the first time since 1880.

That's eighteen-eighty, Jamie Moyer's rookie season.

In a question akin to asking why the Loch Ness Monster keeps popping up or why the rash of UFO landings, here goes:

What's the deal with all these perfect games?

"How do I explain it?" Minnesota Twins manager Ron Gardenhire mused. "They're putting a magical moon dust on the ball this year, and it's taking all the hits out of the bats."

He smiled.

"Anything else you need explained?"

Actually, Gardenhire's magical moon dust is as reasonable as some of the other explanations put forth.

Twins pitcher Carl Pavano argued, similarly, that it must have to do with the alignment of the stars and the planets.

Here's a look at some of the other theories:

It's A Coincidence, Silly: The most common, and most boring, explanation for nearly having three perfect games in a month is that it's simply a freakish deviation in the baseball continuum. Statisticians Sean Forman and Andrew Kamholz wrote a piece for the New York Times noting that between 1880 and 1968, perfect games came about once every 11,500 games. Since '68, they have come about once every 8,200 games.

"That means the frequency of this exceptionally rare event has increased just a bit," they wrote. "If a couple of umpire calls or ball bounces go another way, the numbers could just as easily be reversed."

They found a slight change in this year's offensive output compared to peak years but added that in 2010 teams were still averaging 12 hits plus walks per game and concluded that "this run of perfection on the mound is a random event rather than a result of some underlying change in the game."

Baseball Prospectus writer Jay Jaffe, responding to an e-mail from the Mercury News, said it's important to remember that there are roughly twice as many games in the 30-team, 162-game era as there were in the 16-team, 154-game era.

Perfect games happen about 0.005 percent of the time.

"Looking at the results of a single year, there's really no sensible interpretation for the distribution of no-hitters and perfect games other than randomness," Jaffe wrote. "The standard deviation for the percentage of no-hitters is 0.056 percent, which means that about two-thirds of the time we should expect to see between 0.3 and 5.7 no-hitters per year."

The De-Juiced Theory: Former All-Star pitcher Bert Blyleven, whose 287 career victories included a no-hitter in 1977, subscribes to the Coincidence Theory.

But if he had to put his finger on another factor, Blyleven said the crackdown on performance-enhancing substances seems to be having an effect. "Maybe the ball isn't jumping off the bat like it did during the steroid era," he said.

Entering play Saturday, the American League was batting .260, the NL .256. Both marks were each league's lowest since 1992.

"The game for the past few years, maybe longer, was all about the three-run home run," said Blyleven, now a Twins broadcaster. "Now, we're getting back to a time when it's all about small ball and getting that runner in from third, just like it was in the 1960s, '70s and most of the '80s."

Still, as Blyleven acknowledged, the math doesn't add up. There were more perfect games during the muscled-up 1990s (four) than there were during any other decade. Jaffe, the Baseball Prospectus writer, argued that the offensive potency of an era doesn't matter as much as people think. "If we check the correlation between scoring levels by decade and perfect game frequency," he wrote, "we find that the relationship is essentially random."

The Give-Them-Some-Credit Theory: Braden, not surprisingly, thinks the guy throwing the ball has a little something to do with the recent perfect games. "There are some pretty good pitchers in this game right now," Braden said.

Braden is in such awe of Halladay, for example, that he didn't want to bother him with a congratulatory message. "The guy's thrown more complete games than I've got innings in the big leagues," he said recently.

Pavano, in his 12th season, agreed that the pitchers deserve credit. He said Halladay "has the stuff to do it every time out" but said other pitchers, such as Braden, help themselves by working fast and throwing strikes. "I think you're seeing a better ball-strike ratio than you've seen in some years past," Pavano said. "That's what Braden did. He knows that a batter can make contact, just make sure (the batter) doesn't square it up."

Then again, pitching talent doesn't necessarily equate to perfect games. Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson, Greg Maddux, Roger Clemens, Steve Carlton and Tom Seaver combined for 2,139 career victories — and zero perfectos.

Of the 18 pitchers to throw perfect games before this season, five are in the Hall of Fame and another (Randy Johnson) will be. But there are also four pitchers — Lee Richmond, Charlie Robertson, Don Larsen and Len Barker — who won fewer than 100 career games.

Larsen, for example, was 3-21 for the Baltimore Orioles in 1954, just two years before he twirled the all-time classic in the World Series.

The High-Tech Positioning Theory: In Braden's masterpiece against the Tampa Bay Rays and Halladay's gem against the Florida Marlins, most of the batted balls were hit right at defensive players. (Only in Galarraga's game was there a spectacular defensive play: Austin Jackson's over-the-shoulder catch in center field.) Those balls being hit right at people are not always a matter of luck. A's manager Bob Geren noted that there is so "much more information available now about how to pitch guys, how to position guys, than there was 10 years ago."

Detailed breakdowns and hit charts are available of where a batter is likely to strike the ball. There are also DVDs opponents can study to see how a batter reacts to a particular pitch selection in a particular count. Dizzy Dean never had it so good.

Gardenhire, however, maintains that trying to explain the perfect games is as futile as trying to hit Halladay with a chopstick.

"I go back to something (late Twins owner) Carl Pohlad told me years ago: Baseball is a game of cycles," Gardenhire said. "That always stuck with me. Right now, we're just in one of those cycles where (perfect games) are happening.

"That's the best explanation: cycles. That and magical moon dust."

Diridon station neighbors hope for 'riverwalk,' parking protection as plans advance

By Stephen Baxter, San Jose Mercury News, 6/5/2010

Several goals are coming in to focus to protect neighborhoods around San Jose Diridon Station if the area transforms into a hub for professional sports and transportation in the next decade.

At recent meetings of the Diridon Station Area Good Neighbor Committee at San Jose City Hall, representatives from neighborhoods, businesses and government agencies began narrowing their guidelines for parks, trails, parking and traffic in a document to be brought to the San Jose City Council. Mayor Chuck Reed initiated the committee in May 2009 to gather input, but the city council is not obligated to act on the committee's Framework for Implementation document.

Six goals have received broad support in recent meetings.

The first aim is to expand paths and trails along Guadalupe River, and to recognize that open space is an economic driver for the city. Another goal is to establish public-private partnerships to enhance parks and trails around the station.

Many neighborhood leaders also welcomed a "riverwalk" concept similar to the one in San Antonio, Texas, potentially with restaurants, music and a more lively atmosphere. Several hurdles are stacked against that scenario in San Jose, from the low water level on the Guadalupe River to financing to rules on interfering with fish habitat.

Councilman Pierluigi Oliverio, one of the city leaders who will act on the Framework document, said the San Antonio concept is unlikely.

"I think the goal should be attainable, and that means building out the trail," Oliverio said.

Plans are still up in the air for a new ballpark for the Oakland A's in San Jose because the team has not received permission from Major League Baseball to make the move. The California High-Speed Rail Project—which could bring dozens of Los Angeles- and San Francisco-bound trains to the station by tunnel or aerial track—is tens of billions of dollars short in funding. Construction is not expected to start on that project for several years.

Despite the stadium uncertainties, the San Jose Planning Commission approved a revised environmental impact report on the potential ballpark on May 19.

Many residents involved in the Good Neighbor committee say they want the area to thrive with activity, but they don't the masses to park across the tracks in neighborhoods such as St. Leo's, Shasta Hanchett and North Willow Glen.

The Good Neighbor committee and city leaders seem to agree that new signs for permit parking will be installed on several streets around the station, based on a largely successful model around HP Pavilion.

"From a neighborhood perspective, I don't want Shasta Hanchett to turn into a giant parking lot," said Helen Chapman, president of the Shasta Hanchett Neighborhood Association.

"That's the one thing I keep hearing over and over again from people," Chapman said.

Although none of the goals are official until the committee votes on the final document, there also was broad support to "protect" the neighborhoods and business districts like The Alameda from a parking crush.

There is support to set a goal on increasing mass transit use to perhaps 20 percent, and a mantra to "plan for people, not cars." But on the other hand, the committee wants "sufficient" parking areas that are not built directly between the potential ballpark and HP Pavilion.

The new ballpark environmental report acknowledged that Interstates 280, 880 and 680 would be more congested on game nights, and it suggested discouraging single-car drivers with preferential spots for carpoolers and expensive parking fees.

With a pinch, Minnesota comes up big

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Justin Morneau, who could barely stand before the game because of a stomach flu, was asked to pinch hit in the ninth inning Saturday night. Fine by him, especially because A's manager Bob Geren had him intentionally walked.

As it turned out, Morneau was replaced by a pinch-runner, J.J. Hardy, who scored the deciding run in a 4-3 A's loss to the Twins.

Geren's decision was against the book, coming with the bases empty and one out, an uncommon practice for a manager in that situation unless the batter is, oh, Barry Bonds. Then again, Morneau leads the American League in hitting, on-base percentage and slugging percentage.

Perhaps nobody was more surprised than A's reliever Brad Ziegler, who followed up the intentional walk by unintentionally walking No. 9 hitter Nick Punto. One out later, Matt Tolbert singled home Hardy.

"I was preparing to face (Morneau) the whole time," said Ziegler, who anticipated the matchup while warming in the bullpen. "I saw (catcher Kurt Suzuki's) arm come up (signaling for the walk), and it caught me off guard a little bit. Bottom line, I have to refocus and do a good job with the next guy, and I didn't do that."

Geren said he made the move because he didn't like the matchup and feared Morneau would hit a home run or double off Ziegler, a submarine-thrower.

"I didn't want him to beat us right there, especially with the No. 9 hitter coming up," said Geren, who would have preferred for Punto to hit into an inning-double play, not draw a walk.

Ziegler wanted Morneau.

"It would've taken a home run to beat us," Ziegler said. "Fortunately, so far in my career, I haven't given up many of them. I'd like to have my shot in that situation, but it's not my decision, and after that, I didn't do a very good job."

Twins manager Ron Gardenhire was quick to remove Morneau after the walk. "I didn't want to see a grown man go to the bathroom in his pants on the field," Gardenhire said. "I just had to get him off the field. It wasn't a pretty thought."

Geren stacked his lineup with right-handed batters against Francisco Liriano, but the lefty collected 10 strikeouts and surrendered one run in seven innings. With Liriano gone, the A's tied it 3-3 in the eighth on Adam Rosales' two-run triple.

At that point, Geren went for the kill and pinch hit Daric Barton for Jake Fox, but Barton lined to right to end the inning. With Fox gone, the A's lost their designated hitter, because Suzuki (who started as the DH) had to catch in the ninth.

The score was 1-1 until the sixth. Joe Mauer doubled over Eric Patterson's head in left. Patterson misjudged the ball, but A's starter Trevor Cahill said he was lucky it was only a double.

"It was a stupid pitch," Cahill said. "I tried to throw it in the dirt but threw it right down the middle. After that, I got a little wild."

Cahill walked the next two batters before giving up a two-run single to Delmon Young.

Griffey set bar for Chavez

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

When healthy, nobody was better than **Ken Griffey Jr.**, says **Eric Chavez**.

"He was the best in the game. The best I've seen. To me, there's not even a question," Chavez said Saturday. "He did it all. He could do whatever he wanted on the baseball field, and he did it gracefully. He was one of those players that fans would always say, 'Where is he? Where's Griffey?' I never heard a bad thing about him."

Chavez is fine talking about Griffey's retirement, but he reaffirmed he's far removed from considering his own. Not unless he's faced with another surgery. Chavez is shelved with two bulging disks in his neck but is feeling better and took batting practice in an indoor cage before Saturday's game, part of a workout that came two days earlier than he had planned.

Both Chavez and manager **Bob Geren** said a minor-league rehab assignment is possible when the A's make their next trip.

Perfect talk: What would **Dallas Braden** have done if an umpire blew the call on the 27th out to prevent him from completing his perfect game, as happened to Detroit's **Armando Galarraga**?

"I don't know how I would react, but I'd hope to think I could handle it with half the class Galarraga did," Braden said. "He did exactly what you needed to do. Shrugged it off, got the next out, got his team the victory and handled it with the utmost respect, and that resonated throughout the clubhouse, and that was carried onto the field the next day."

Briefly: Daric Barton, after starting the first 56 games, got his first rest. He did pinch hit in the eighth and lined out to right, his hit streak ending at 11 games. ... **Adam Rosales** replaced Barton at first base, starting at his fifth position in 11 games, and went 2-for-3. ... **Gabe Gross** was 0-for-4 with four strikeouts. ... **Joe Mauer** was 0-for-8 off **Trevor Cahill** before his sixth-inning double.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Swingin' A's: Who says the A's need more pop? They hit nine homers over their first four games in June, most in the majors. This after hitting 15 in April and 15 in May. They have the third-fewest homers in the AL overall.

Hit left-handed? Take a seat

John Shea from the Coliseum on a warm Saturday night . . . 5:18PM

Bob Geren stacked his lineup with right-handers against Minnesota lefty Francisco Liriano, who's far more successful when a left-handed batter stands in the box.

Oakland's first six batters: Davis, Ellis, Suzuki, Kouzmanoff, Rosales (first start at first base), Fox.

Then Gross (who swings lefty), Pennington (switch-hitter), Patterson (lefty).

No Barton (for the first time in 2010). No Sweeney. No Cust.

Lefties hit .200 (10-for-50) off Liriano, righties .275 (56-for-204).

While Liriano has walked 19 right-handed batters, he hasn't walked a single lefty.

Liriano doesn't have great career numbers against the A's: 1-2, 5.08 ERA, eight games, six starts. At the Coliseum, he's 0-2 and 8.31 in four starts.

A's whiff on chance to even set with Twins

Oakland fans 12 times, offsetting Rosales' game-tying triple

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Less than an hour before the A's found themselves on the losing end of a 4-3 game to the Twins on Saturday, Brad Ziegler could be found in the Oakland bullpen.

It was there that the right-hander was not only preparing to enter a tie game, but he was also fixing to face one of the toughest lefties in the league -- Justin Morneau.

Well aware of the situation, Ziegler was up to the challenge and went to the bump to start the ninth in a 3-3 affair. He quickly retired Danny Valencia on strikes to bring in Morneau, battling a stomach virus, in a pinch-hit situation -- knowing full well the Twins' slugger would have to hit a home run to really do some game-changing damage.

"Fortunately, in my career, I haven't given up many of those," said Ziegler, who has surrendered a total of six dingers in his three years of big league ball.

But the right-handed submariner didn't even have the chance to battle it out with Morneau, whom manager Bob Geren elected to intentionally walk instead.

"Any time you put the go-ahead run on base, it's a tough decision," the A's skipper said. "As much damage as he can do, especially against a pitcher with that kind of style, you walk him and figure you can get two of the next three guys out, maybe get a double-play ball.

"It's a tougher call to do it than not, to be honest with you."

However, another walk -- this time unintentional -- and hit later, Morneau's pinch-runner (J.J. Hardy) scored the go-ahead run on Matt Tolbert's RBI single, and Ziegler sported a noticeably frustrated face following the game.

"I don't remember ever seeing that before," he said. "I felt a good rhythm after facing that first hitter, so it caught me off guard. ... I would have liked to have had my shot in that situation, but it's not my decision."

"Not something you see every day, that's for sure," Morneau said. "I wasn't expecting it walking up there, but it worked out for us."

Not so much for the A's, who received an oomph of momentum in the form of a two-out, two-run triple from Adam Rosales in the eighth to suddenly tie what was once a 3-1 game.

Yet Ziegler, who was credited with the loss, was not about to hand the blame over to his manager. After all, he said, he -- not Geren -- is the one who followed Morneau's at-bat with a walk to Nick Punto and a run-scoring single to Tolbert.

"After that, I didn't do a good job of getting guys out," Ziegler said. "Walking Punto, there's no excuse for that. In that situation, you try to get a ground ball, possibly a double play. With Punto, he wouldn't bite on any of the low pitches. It was a good at-bat for him."

Oakland had no such luck in the bottom half of the inning, a time at which Geren chose to have Ryan Sweeney pinch-hit for Cliff Pennington following Gabe Gross' fourth consecutive strikeout. Sweeney, who had been enjoying a day of rest, reached base on a single -- only to stand there as Eric Patterson and Rajai Davis garnered two quick outs to put an end to a rather interesting game.

Geren started seven right-handers against Minnesota lefty Francisco Liriano, who in turn struck out 10 and allowed just one run on five hits while walking two through seven solid innings of work.

Once the Twins' bullpen was in charge, Geren chose to bring out what he deemed were his best available bats, while at the same time taking Rosales, Jake Fox and Pennington out of the game. With two outs and Rosales still on third in the eighth, Geren called on Daric Barton to take Fox' place -- a move that resulted in a well-hit ball to right field that was caught for the third out.

Barton's entrance forced the club to go without a designated hitter, a spot at which Kurt Suzuki occupied before having to catch in place of Fox. That spot never came up again, but the chain of events left the A's with just one bench player -- Jack Cust, presumably Oakland's biggest power threat.

Much of Geren's decision-making process resulted in moot points in the club's fourth loss in its past five games, one that initially witnessed yet another solid performance from starter Trevor Cahill, who surrendered three runs through six innings -- the last of which forced him to throw 27 of his 100 pitches. The A's righty offered up a total of five hits and four walks while fanning a season-best six.

"I felt all right," Cahill said. "I struggled in that last inning, and it was a close game all along, so it's just one that didn't work out my way."

Said Geren: "He threw well for those first five innings. He had a good sinker and good command of his fastball. He gave us a chance to win."

With the loss, the A's moved two behind the first-place Rangers in the American League West.

"It shows a lot of heart and character that we came back there," Geren said, "but every loss is tough."

Chavez intends to return to Majors

Veteran to begin baseball activity with teammates this weekend

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- On the same day he was placed on the disabled list with bulging disks in his neck, Eric Chavez began hearing the rumors about his supposed retirement.

It was that same day when Chavez insisted his playing career, despite what's been reported or speculated in the baseball community, is not over.

And on Saturday, wearing his usual relaxed smile, Chavez made a surprise appearance in the A's clubhouse -- a scene that only further demonstrated his ongoing efforts to get back on the playing field and avoid retirement.

The A's veteran, who has been sidelined since May 22, will begin baseball activity alongside teammates this weekend and hopes to begin a rehab assignment as early as next week, specifically at the end of the club's current seven-game homestand on Friday.

Chavez -- who for the past couple of weeks has simply been resting in Phoenix -- was scheduled to hit in the cage before Saturday's game against the Twins, and "we'll evaluate as we go along," he said.

Before the injury, the 32-year-old Chavez had started 29 games at designated hitter, all against right-handed pitchers. Overall, he appeared in 33 contests -- a mark that represents more than his combined total of 31 over the previous two seasons.

Barton out of Saturday's starting lineup

OAKLAND -- Daric Barton was out of the starting lineup for the first time all season Saturday, but manager Bob Geren was careful to note it wasn't exactly a day off.

"We could still see him tonight," the A's skipper said.

Still, it put Barton's consecutive games played streak at 56 in jeopardy, a mark that had him tied for the American League lead entering Saturday's contest.

"He's been our most consistent guy at the plate," Geren said of Barton, who has a career-high 11-game hitting streak. "We're real happy with what he's doing."

Meanwhile, ultra utility man Adam Rosales started at first base in Barton's stead. The 27-year-old Rosales has now started 10 of the club's past 15 games at five different positions, a nod to his very-much-appreciated versatility.

"He's played well at every one," Geren said. "It's a big boost to the team. We all have confidence in him no matter what position he's at."

Worth noting

Ryan Sweeney, still feeling effects from Thursday's head collision with Mark Ellis' knee, received the day off Saturday but will be back in the starting lineup Sunday, said manager Bob Geren. ... The A's entered Saturday's contest with a Major League-leading nine home runs in the month of June after hitting just 15 in both April and May. ... Dallas Braden will host 275 players from his former Little League, Stockton's Hoover Tyler on Saturday. Furthermore, the A's pitcher will again sponsor two Little Leaguers from a single-parent household, providing all baseball-related costs. This year's recipients are brothers Reagan Lidden, 11, and Alex Lidden, 9.

Blackburn, Gio have poor history vs. opposition

By Jordan Schelling / MLB.com

Something's got to give for Athletics starter Gio Gonzalez.

In his past four starts, Gonzalez has allowed just six runs in 19 1/3 innings. In two career starts against the Twins, however, Gonzalez is 0-1 with a 28.59 ERA, surrendering 18 runs in 5 2/3 innings pitched.

Both of those starts against Minnesota came last year for Gonzalez, who went 6-7 with a 5.75 ERA in 20 appearances -- 17 starts. Gonzalez has been much improved through two months this season, posting a 5-3 record with a 3.68 ERA over 11 starts.

"We know he knows how to pitch," said Twins skipper Ron Gardenhire. "He's a good competitor, very fierce. We're going to have to find a way -- I don't really know exactly who's going to be able to play out there. We'll see, we're a little thin."

Gonzalez had his best start on May 22 against the Giants, when the young starter tossed a career-high eight shutout innings -- needing only 95 pitches to do so -- allowing a mere two hits and a walk while striking out five.

He retired the final 20 batters he faced.

"He's pretty tough when he's throwing everything for strikes," said Giants outfielder John Bowker. "At least with me, he was getting that curveball over and working the outside of the plate. He has a really big breaking curveball with a lot of break on it, to go with that 92-93 [mph fastball]."

Like his counterpart, Twins starter Nick Blackburn has not fared well against the opposing team.

In five starts against Oakland, the Twins' right-hander is 0-2 with a 6.37 ERA, giving up 21 runs on 37 hits over 29 2/3 innings pitched.

Also like Gonzalez, Blackburn has gotten off to a strong start to the 2010 season. Through 10 starts, Blackburn is 6-2 with a 4.73 ERA, including a complete game against the Tigers at Target Field on May 4.

Blackburn lasted just 3 2/3 innings in his previous start, though, giving up five runs on 10 hits.

"Everything was just a little flat," Blackburn said. "I think my mechanics were a little out of line, and it was one of those things where I couldn't make the adjustment no matter how hard I tried. Obviously, you're going to have days like that, and hopefully that's the end of it."

Twins: Morneau comfortable by the Bay

Twins first baseman Justin Morneau, who did not start Saturday's game against the Athletics and may not start again in the finale, has hit safely in his past seven games in Oakland. During the same stretch, Morneau is batting .500 (14-for-28) with two doubles, five home runs and 12 RBIs. In his career against the Athletics, Morneau has 14 career home runs -- eight in Oakland -- which is his highest total against any team outside the American League Central.

Athletics: Oakland finding power stroke

After posting just 15 home runs in both April and May, the Athletics have a Major League-leading nine home runs in June. Oakland hit a season-high four homers Thursday in Boston, snapping a streak of 61 consecutive games with two or fewer home runs. It was the club's longest such streak since April 24-July 16, 1994, when the Athletics posted a 72-game streak. Oakland has homered 14 times over the past 10 games to snap a seven-game streak without a home run, the club's longest drought in 27 years. The A's 39 home runs are the third fewest in the Junior Circuit.

Worth noting

With his 20th double of the season Friday, Morneau tied Chuck Knoblauch for eighth on Minnesota's all-time doubles list with 210. Harmon Killebrew is seventh on the list with 232 doubles. ... After going 2-for-5 on Friday, catcher Joe Mauer recorded his first multi-hit game since May 22 vs. Milwaukee. The 11-game span between multi-hit games was tied for the second-longest streak in Mauer' career. Mauer's only longer such streak, a 12-game span, came in 2005. ... After losing, 5-4, in 11 innings on Friday night, and 4-3 on Saturday, the Athletics dropped to 10-4 in one-run games this season, but still own the best record in the Majors. Oakland is only five wins away from its total in one-run games in all of last season, when the Athletics went 15-23 in such contests, the second-worst record in the AL. ... With a 3-2 record in extra inning games, the A's also matched their extra-inning win total of 2009, when they went 3-10 -- the worst mark in Oakland history. ... Oakland has four walk-off wins after tallying just five in all of 2009.

Lee's Leftovers: It's your call ...

Jane Lee, mlb.com

In the midst of all the wacky late-inning shenanigans that took place in tonight's loss, one event that was slightly forgotten in it all was Geren's five-minute discussion with the umpires in the first inning after Rajai Davis was held at second base by Matt Tolbert, who held his body against the A's outfielder when a throw from Francisco Liriano went into the outfield. Davis, as we all know, ended up scoring, so in the end it didn't really matter. But Geren was out there for a rather extended amount of time, so of course we had to ask him about the whole ordeal. Here's what he had to say:

"It's an obstruction call when he's trying to get up to go to third. They said [Davis] didn't make the effort to go to third, but my argument was that he didn't because he couldn't move."

As for Geren's decisions in the later innings -- he made a lot of them -- what did you think of these particular calls?

- Intentionally walking Morneau, already battling a serious stomach virus, with one out
- Pulling Wuertz after just 1/3 of an inning to have Ziegler start the 9th
- Taking away the DH (which never came up in the batting order again)
- Letting Patterson bat in the 9th rather than using Cust off the bench (Patterson was the club's only shortstop option left had the A's tied the game, but does it matter at that point?)

On a slightly less serious note, here's what Mr. Gardenhire had to say about pinch-running for the ill Morneau:

"He said he wanted to hit. And then I knew I had to run for him -- didn't want to see a grown man go to the bathroom in his pants on the field."

And, on that note, have a good night. Looking forward to your responses...

Twins' sub sinks A's ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Matt Tolbert is still waiting for the phone call telling him he's headed back to the minors.

Minnesota's utility infielder is used to it at this point in his career, even after helping the Twins to their latest road win.

Tolbert, a late replacement in the starting lineup when J.J. Hardy was scratched due to a sore left wrist, hit a tiebreaking, two-out RBI single in the ninth inning and the Twins made it hold up in a 4-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Saturday night.

"I'm just glad to get a hit at the right time because I hadn't done anything up to that point," said Tolbert, who was recalled from Triple-A Rochester earlier this week. "You always have to be ready. That's just the type of player I am, up and down, and will be for the rest of my career. So you just have to get used to it.

Don't unpack and don't make plans."

The A's thought they had a plan to shut down Minnesota when Twins manager Ron Gardenhire sent Justin Morneau up to pinch-hit for Brendan Harris in the ninth. Morneau, the Twins' hottest hitter who doubled and homered in their win over Oakland on Friday night, was ill before the game and could hardly stand but Oakland opted to intentionally walk him.

Morneau was replaced by Hardy, and after A's reliever Brad Ziegler (2-3) walked Nick Punto, Denard Span hit into a fielder's choice to move Hardy to third. Tolbert then lined a 1-0 pitch into left-center to drive in the eventual winning run.

"I didn't want (Morneau) to beat us right there," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He's one of the best hitters in the game right now. It was the walk that put him in scoring position. As it was, we had two outs and the guy (Tolbert) snuck one through the infield."

Alex Burnett (1-1) retired one batter for the win, while Jon Rauch pitched a scoreless ninth for his 15th save.

Tolbert's hit was only his second in 14 at-bats since returning to the majors on June 1 to replace Alexi Casilla, who went on the DL with a bone spur in his right elbow. The infielder had also not driven in a run since getting called back up but delivered the winner against the A's to help Minnesota even its record to 3-3 on its current trip.

"That's a big hit for him and for our ballclub," Gardenhire said. "He's put some really good swings on the ball lately and has not got a lot to show for it. I felt good with him going up there.

He got one out over the plate and stayed on it and drove it up the middle.”

Adam Rosales had two hits for Oakland, including a two-run triple in the eighth. The A's have lost four of five and fell to 0-2 on their seven-game homestand.

The Twins nearly wasted a solid outing from starter Francisco Liriano. The left-hander scattered five hits, matched his season high of 10 strikeouts and allowed only two runners past second base before leaving with a 3-1 lead after seven innings.

That was welcomed news for Minnesota, which had seen the lanky pitcher struggle for most of May after being honored as the AL Pitcher of the Month in April.

The Twins' bullpen nearly let it slip away.

Mark Ellis and Kurt Suzuki hit singles off of reliever Jesse Crain in the eighth before Rosales lined a two-out triple to left-center to tie it at 3. Burnett replaced Crain and retired pinch-hitter Daric Barton on a fly out to escape the jam.

Oakland starter Trevor Cahill matched Liriano early but struggled with his control in the sixth when five of the first six Minnesota batters reached base. Cahill, who had not allowed more than one run while winning his previous three starts, walked four and struck out six.

Cahill gave up a run in the second on Delmon Young's sacrifice fly then settled into a groove until Joe Mauer's one-out ground-rule double in the sixth. After Jim Thome and Jason Kubel walked, Young slapped the first pitch he saw from Cahill into right field to score Mauer and Thome.

Oakland took a 1-0 lead in the first when Rajai Davis scored on a double-play groundout.

NOTES

*Hardy's ailing wrist is the same one that forced him to miss 13 games earlier this season. Punto was moved to shortstop to replace Hardy, while Tolbert was inserted at second base.

*Oakland 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff was held without a homer for the first time in four games.

*Morneau had been slated to take the day off, his first since April 29, before pinch hitting in place of Brendan Harris with one out in the ninth.

*Liriano is winless (0-3) in five career starts at the Oakland Coliseum.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Grizzlies Come Back Twice, Trump Cats

By Noah Frank / Fresno Grizzlies

FRESNO- When the River Cats made some early noise, the Grizzlies responded. When they did so for a second time, Fresno struck back again. The Grizzlies erased a pair of River Cats leads, taking the first game of the four-game set with Sacramento, 4-3 at Chukchansi Park Saturday night.

Matt Carson got Sacramento on the board first. The second batter of the game, he belted a 1-2 offering from Matt Yourkin into the left-field seats to make it 1-0 in the top of the first. The River Cats (26-31) would add another tally in the third on a two-out, RBI-double off the bat of Josh Donaldson that scored Eric Sogard who had led off the inning with a single.

Fresno starter Matt Yourkin ran into trouble in the fifth, allowing a leadoff double to Corey Wimberly, then lost Josh Donaldson to a walk after a long at-bat one out later. That spelled the end of his night after 4.1 innings and it looked like the River Cats might open up a bigger lead. But Henry Sosa came on to get Chris Carter to fly out, then struck out Matt Watson to end the threat.

After five shutdown frames, Sacramento starter Jesus Sanchez lost it in the sixth, allowing a leadoff single to Tyler Graham, followed by a two-run shot to left-center off the bat of Brett Pill to tie the game. It was Pill's seventh longball of the season,

tying him with Joe Borchard for the team lead. It also ended Sanchez's night after the 5.0+ innings, as he allowed two earned runs on five hits and three walks, striking out four.

Sacramento pushed out in front again with a run in the top of the seventh, but the Grizzlies (36-20) roared back for a second consecutive two-run inning to take their first lead in the bottom half. Jesus Guzman led off with a single and moved to second as Steve Holm walked. After Angel Berroa sacrificed both runners up a base, Brock Bond was intentionally walked to bring up Tyler Graham. Graham blooped an RBI-single to right field, and Pill followed with a sacrifice fly to left to notch his third RBI of the night, putting the Grizzlies up 4-3.

Henry Sosa (3-1) tossed 2.2 innings of relief to earn the victory, and Steve Edlefsen shut the door with a scoreless eighth and ninth innings for the six-out save, his third of the season.

Graham reached base in all four of his plate appearances, going 3-for-3 with a walk and a run scored, raising his batting average to .385. Pill matched his season high with the three RBI, marking the fourth time he has accomplished the feat in 2010, and the second in his last five games. He now leads the team with 32 RBI, the same total Buster Posey reached before his promotion to San Francisco. Guzman also reached base all four times, singling twice and walking twice.

Fresno will add righty Matt Kinney (0-2) to the roster to spot-start for the injured Kevin Pucetas tomorrow against Sacramento lefty John Halama (1-1).

WP: Sosa (3-1); LP: Ramirez (0-1); S: Edlefsen (3); HR: Carson (5), Pill (7)

RockHounds blow 6-run lead in loss to Naturals

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

SPRINGDALE, Ark. -- The Midland RockHounds suffered just the kind of loss they couldn't afford Saturday night -- one in a game they actually put runs on the board.

Having scored just three runs their last three games, the RockHounds put up a nine spot against the Northwest Arkansas Naturals on Saturday, but lost 14-9, allowing a 7-1 lead go by the wayside at Arvest Ballpark.

The RockHounds jumped out to a 5-0 lead in the first inning and took a 7-1 lead into the bottom of the fourth. But that's when the wheels fell off for RockHounds starter Carlos Hernandez. He recorded just one out in the inning, allowing six runs in the process, as the Naturals took an 8-7 lead.

The RockHounds tied the score in the sixth, but the bullpen couldn't hold off the Naturals, who scored six runs between the seventh and eighth innings to pull away.

Ports Roll Past Rawhide 9-2

VISALIA, Calif. - On Saturday night at Recreation Park, the Stockton Ports found the offense that they'd been so desperately seeking. The Boys of Banner Island pounded out 15 hits en route to a 9-2 win over the Visalia Rawhide, just the fourth time the Ports have defeated the Rawhide on the season. With the win, the Ports now find themselves at 3-3 on their current road trip and have the opportunity to have a winning road trip with a victory on Sunday afternoon.

Stockton started the scoring in the second and in the process took advantage of a Rawhide error. Jeremy Barfield started the inning with a single. Three batters later with two down, Petey Paramore singled to right and the ball got by Byron Wiley, scoring Barfield, putting Paramore at third and giving the Ports the 1-0 lead. Michael Richard followed with an RBI single to center to score Paramore and make it a 2-0 score.

The Rawhide countered with a run in the bottom of the inning on a two-out RBI single from Brent Greer to cut the Ports lead to 2-1.

The Ports, though, would pull away for good in the third. Jermaine Mitchell started the frame with a triple to right and scored on an ensuing sac-fly from Grant Green to get the lead back to two at 3-1. Stephen Parker came up next and doubled to left and Mike Spina followed with a two-run blast to left-his team-leading ninth of the year-to make it a 5-1 lead. Barfield would

make it back-to-back jacks with a solo shot to left giving the Ports a 6-1 advantage. With two down, Rawhide starter Dan Taylor (0-3) would walk Tyler Ladendorf and be lifted from the game.

Taylor would be charged with his third straight loss, going 2.2 innings and allowing six runs (five earned) on eight hits.

Ports starter Justin Murray (4-3) would pitch well with the lead. Murray allowed a two-out RBI single to Wiley in the fourth to make it a 6-2 game. As it turned out, it'd be the final run scored by Visalia on the night.

Murray would earn his fourth win of the year, going five innings and allowing two runs on eight hits while matching a season-high with seven strikeouts.

Stockton's offense put the game well out of reach in the sixth. Ladendorf started the inning with a single and a steal of second. Paramore came up next and doubled to left to make it 7-2. Two batters later, Mitchell singled to center to score Paramore. Later in the inning, with runners at the corners and one down, Spina hit into a fielder's choice that scored a third run in the inning and gave the Ports a commanding 9-2 lead. All three runs in the sixth were charged to Rawhide reliever Brett Moorehouse who tossed 2.1 innings in the ballgame.

The Ports bullpen would shut Visalia down over the final four innings. Kenny Smalley, in his first relief appearance of the season, tossed three scoreless frames while allowing just one hit, walking two and striking out two. Paul Smyth tossed a scoreless ninth, allowing an infield single while recording a strikeout.

Justin Mace and Ryan Robowski combined for four scoreless innings of relief for the Rawhide.

Stockton will play the final game of their seven-game road trip on Sunday afternoon at Recreation Park as they attempt to earn a series split with the Rawhide. Ports ace Shawn Haviland (5-1, 3.50 ERA) will head to the bump, opposed by Visalia southpaw Wide Miley (3-4, 3.18 ERA). First pitch is set for 2 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Win a Wild One in Kentucky

Kane County earns 4th straight victory by slugging past Hot Rods

BOWLING GREEN, Kent. – In a slugfest that featured just about everything, the Kane County Cougars beat the Bowling Green Hot Rods, 15-11, Saturday night at Bowling Green Ballpark. The Cougars won their fourth straight game and fifth in their last six and also have claimed consecutive road series for the first time this season. The two teams combined for 26 runs on 27 hits and five errors. Anthony Aliotti led the Cougars' offense with three hits, including his first pro homer, four RBIs and three runs.

The Hot Rods scored first with a three-run opening frame against Rob Gilliam. After Max Stassi doubled home Myrio Richard in the second, the Cougars scored eight runs in the fourth inning for their highest one-inning output this year and a 9-3 advantage. Aliotti doubled in one, Stassi belted a two-run homer and Mike Gilmartin nailed a pair of run-scoring doubles to highlight the frame.

The Cougars' 9-3 lead was cut to 9-7 after Gilliam yielded four in the fifth, but Aliotti's sixth-inning two-run homer made it 11-7. Gilliam gave up seven runs on 10 hits over five innings but still left in line for a win. The Hot Rods scored three -- two earned -- in the seventh off Anvioris Ramirez and tied it in the eighth against Max Peterson. Then the Cougars responded with a four-run ninth, as Tyreace House, Aliotti, Gilmartin and Rashun Dixon each plated one. Peterson (1-1) won the 3-hour, 3-minute marathon over Deivis Mavarez (0-4).

The Cougars (26-31) conclude their six-game road trip Sunday afternoon at 2:05 CT with the finale of the series versus the Hot Rods (22-33). Dan Straily (4-2, 4.61) will face Wilking Rodriguez (3-3, 3.57). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 1:50 p.m. Then the Cougars are off Monday before a six-game homestand begins Tuesday night at 6:30 CT against the Fort Wayne TinCaps.