

Unlucky A's pitcher Dallas Braden is victimized by Angels

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Dallas Braden did his best to escape trouble Wednesday night.

He picked off a runner. He got a double-play grounder. He even received an assist from left fielder Jake Fox, who threw out a runner at the plate to end an inning.

But trouble caught up to Braden in the sixth inning, when the Los Angeles Angels broke open a close game on their way to a 7-1 win over the A's in front of 18,285 fans on a chilly night at the Oakland Coliseum.

The Angels didn't rip Braden (4-6), but they nonetheless collected 11 hits against him, the second time in three outings that the left-hander has allowed that many.

The A's trailed 1-0 in the sixth when Braden allowed run-scoring singles to Juan Rivera and Robb Quinlan, ending the pitcher's night. Erick Aybar greeted reliever Brad Ziegler with a two-run triple off the center-field wall to give Los Angeles a 5-0 lead.

So it goes for Braden, who is 0-4 with a 4.75 ERA in six starts since throwing his perfect game May 9.

He left the clubhouse in a rush without addressing reporters, but he spoke with a pool reporter over the phone.

"I've been battling with some forearm tightness all week," said Braden, who's also pitched recently with a sprained left ankle. "I tried to get it taken care of in the trainers' room. The cold weather didn't help. I felt like I couldn't finish all my pitches."

An unwanted trend continued with the lefty on the mound — the A's simply can't get him any runs. Wednesday marked the seventh time in his 13 starts that he's received one run or less of support.

Joe Saunders (5-6) went the distance for the Angels, scattering seven hits. That followed a four-hit shutout he threw against the A's on May 14. He allowed Kevin Kouzmanoff's RBI single in the ninth to just miss becoming the first pitcher to throw back-to-back shutouts against the A's since Jamie Moyer in 1998.

The A's have dropped two of three to Los Angeles with this afternoon's series finale remaining.

To pinpoint Braden's perfect game as the starting point for his troubles wouldn't be accurate, because he wasn't exactly coasting before that outing. He's 1-6 with a 4.50 ERA in nine starts dating back to April 28, with his lone win coming in his perfecto against Tampa Bay.

"It'll be five days, and you'll look for him to go out and put us in position to win," A's manager Bob Geren said. " "... He hasn't really been hit hard."

Aybar went 4-for-5 to lead the Angels and needed just a homer for the cycle.

The Angels loaded the bases with no outs in the third but got just one run on Torii Hunter's two-out single. Quinlan also tried scoring on the play, but Fox made a strong throw home and A's catcher Kurt Suzuki made a nifty short-hop grab and tag.

Braden picked Kevin Frandsen off first base to end the fourth, giving him an AL-best five pickoffs this season.

Braden was charged with five runs (four earned) in 52/3 innings, but his nightly hardly was as painful as Matt Carson's. Called up from the minors Tuesday, Carson slammed full-speed into the center-field wall while giving pursuit on Rivera's homer in the eighth.

Carson held an ice pack to his left jaw after the game but talked good-naturedly of the collision.

"I thought I had another step," he said. "Apparently I didn't."

TODAY:
Angels (Ervin Santana 6-3) at A's (Trevor Cahill 4-2), 12:35 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

A's update: Team changes drills in preparation for interleague road trip

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Drills change as team prepares for NL road trip

The A's made like it was spring training Wednesday afternoon, with the full squad taking the field for a pre-batting practice workout.

As the outfielders shagged fly balls, pitchers and infielders worked on bunt coverages and other drills.

Starting Friday against the Giants, the A's begin a nine-game interleague swing through National League ballparks, where no designated hitter is used. They expect lots of pitchers to be bunting against them.

Manager Bob Geren said the A's are dusting off bunt-coverage plays that they rarely use in the American League. When an AL hitter squares around, Geren says they're just as likely to pull back and take a full swing.

"It's not a big bunter's league," Geren said. "When (AL hitters) do bunt, guys can handle the bat. If you try to do something tricky on them, they can counter-trick you right back."

Another sign interleague play is approaching — pitchers are taking batting practice.

Geren listed Dallas Braden and Gio Gonzalez as two of his best hitting pitchers.

Gonzalez, who starts Friday at AT&T Park, said he's looking forward to his first major league at-bats. But he'll be facing two-time defending National League Cy Young winner Tim Lincecum, and he's not so jazzed about that.

Gonzalez jacked a homer in batting practice Tuesday, but as he added: "The guy I'm facing isn't going to be throwing 45 miles per hour."

And Gonzalez, who throws left-handed but hits right-handed, wasn't bragging too much about his lone batting practice homer. He said reliever Tyson Ross was routinely putting balls in the seats.

The A's selected 20 players on the third and final day of the amateur draft.

One of their more notable picks: San Ramon Valley High third baseman Bobby Geren, son of the A's manager, who was taken in the 36th round.

Bobby Geren has been accepted to Princeton and is likely to attend the Ivy League school rather than turn pro. His father delivered the news he'd been drafted in a text message.

"That was pretty neat," Geren said. "He's flying pretty high today."

The A's also drafted third baseman Zach Johnson, who attended California High and Ohlone College, in the 48th round. All told, the A's selected 24 pitchers, four catchers, 14 infielders and eight outfielders.

Cam Inman: Catching is beginning to be art form in major leagues

By Cam Inman, Contra Costa Times columnist

Their identities are getting exposed. Their values are skyrocketing. One by one, they are answering the age-old question: "Who was that masked man?"

One is the A's catalyst and cleanup hitter: Kurt Suzuki.

One is the Giants' recently called-up savior: Buster Posey.

One is the American League's leader in All-Star voting: Joe Mauer of the Minnesota Twins.

One (sort of) is the No. 1 overall pick in this week's draft: Bryce Harper of the Washington Nationals.

All are purebred catchers, a position suddenly booming with baseball's next generation of stars.

"It's kind of funny, they finally notice what we're doing back there," Mauer said when his Twins visited Oakland last weekend. "Sometimes we get lost."

Suzuki is a marvelous talent who is insanely overlooked, as evidenced by his exclusion among the top-five vote getters for AL All-Star catcher. Posey is already in bloom, hitting everything in sight these past two weeks.

Catching is an art appreciated best by anyone who ever spent a Little League practice off to the side while an assistant coach peppered baseballs into the dirt in front of him. If a catcher is the so-called quarterback of the diamond, then this uprising of talented stars is a welcome treat.

"Maybe it is catchers' turn. A whole bunch are coming up," Suzuki said. "Everyone says it's hard to find a catcher. Now a whole bunch of them are turning up."

"I wouldn't say that," countered A's manager Bob Geren, himself a former big-league backstop. "It's very difficult to find a catcher who can do every phase of the game. With the demands of the position, if guys show they can do all that early, they might end up playing a different position."

Cue up Harper, Monday's No. 1 overall selection in the first-year player draft. Raised as a catcher, the 17-year-old phenom initially has been deemed an outfielder by the Nationals' brass.

"We made the early decision that we are going to take the difficult position of catcher away from him and really let him concentrate on the offensive part of the game and let his athleticism take over as an outfielder," Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo told the Associated Press on draft day.

Starting Harper somewhere beside catcher is something Giants fans can comprehend. Posey's promotion May 29 came with the caveat he must masquerade as a first baseman rather than immediately supplant Bengie Molina behind the plate.

Drafted fifth overall by the Giants in 2008, Posey made his first start this season at catcher on Monday night and earned praise from manager Bruce Bochy, also a former big-league catcher.

"Everything I've heard about him has been great," Mauer said of Posey. "It's one of those things you can't wait to see a guy you hear about."

As for whether Posey — or Harper, for that sake — should mind breaking into the big leagues without being in a catcher's squat full time, Mauer said: "Anybody would just be happy to be in the big leagues. Whatever the organization wants you to do, that is what you are going to do."

Mauer, 27, is recognized as the gold standard for any organization. A homegrown talent and the 2001 draft's top pick, he's won three of the past four AL batting titles. The Twins rewarded him with a \$184 million contract extension in March.

"He's got it all. There's not one thing he cannot do well," Suzuki said. "I haven't played with him, but he seems humble and works hard. He's the total package. You can see why the Twins committed what they did to him."

Catchers? Who watches them? Well, the aforementioned ones are worth watching. So are these in the under-30 age bracket: Brian McCann (Atlanta Braves), Matt Wieters (Baltimore Orioles), Russell Martin (Los Angeles Dodgers), Geovany Soto (Chicago Cubs), and Yadier Molina (St. Louis Cardinals).

"I tell young guys coming up that the most important thing is handling a staff. If you hit, it's a bonus," Mauer said.

The way the A's and Giants are structured — their pitching staffs must carry their shallow hitting — both will need their capable, upstart catchers to carry their defenses for seasons to come.

Postgame A's notes on Braden and others

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/9/2010 11:37PM

Here's some quick postgame notes after the A's lost 7-1 to the Angels. Some of this made it into my stories for tomorrow's paper, some didn't.

—It's easy to look at Dallas Braden and say he's hit rough times since his May 9 perfect game. Indeed he has, but let's remember that Braden hadn't pitched that great leading up to that unforgettable day either. Dating back to April 28, Braden is 1-6 with a 4.50 ERA in nine starts, his only win being the perfect game.

Braden bolted after the game without talking to reporters, which is bad form and unusual for such a media-friendly dude. But he told a pool reporter over the phone that he was battling forearm tightness tonight. "I tried to get it taken care of in the trainers' room," Braden said. "The cold weather didn't help. I felt like I couldn't finish all my pitches."

—How painful was it to watch Matt Carson's face plant into the center field wall in the eighth inning? Ouch ... His teammates got a kick out of watching the clip afterward. They all came streaming out of the video room with smiles on their faces. Believe it or not, Carson said the collision didn't hurt all that bad immediately after. He hit the right side of his face, but he was holding an ice pack to his left jaw. "It just jostled my jaw a little bit," he said. "I thought I had another step. Apparently I didn't."

—A bright spot for the A's: Kevin Kouzmanoff continues to swing it pretty well. He had two hits tonight and drove in the A's only run in the ninth. That gives him a career high-tying 10-game hitting streak, during which he's hitting .395 (15-for-38). "When a guy splits the gap in right-center and is hitting homers to left field, that's a good sign that there's no way to pitch (him)," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Kouzmanoff isn't a flashy player, but he's pretty darn steady. I think we'll look back at his numbers at the end of the season and realize this guy had a pretty good year.

Curtis Pashelka will be covering tomorrow's game. I'll be back at the yard Friday

Back to basics for the A's in their pregame activities

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/9/2010 5:52PM

There's generally little variation in a major league team's pregame routine. That's what makes this A's homestand a bit unusual. There's been a lot more on-field activity — early in the day, before batting practice — than normal. I walked out on the field today and the entire squad was out there. Pitchers and infielders were practicing bunt coverages; outfielders were taking fly balls. This is in preparation for the upcoming interleague games in National League parks — the A's expect to see lots of pitchers bunting, so they're making sure to brush up on all the fundamentals.

As for other A's news, Rajai Davis continues making progress with his sore left hamstring. He said he ran foul pole to foul pole and felt pretty good, but he's still day-to-day.

—With Davis out, it's an outside-the-box A's batting order. Mark Ellis is in the leadoff spot at DH. Adam Rosales gets a start at second base, and Jake Fox is playing left field. A's manager Bob Geren wanted to load up on right-handed hitters against Angels lefty Joe Saunders. I can understand the logic. But after last night's game, I'm surprised Jack Cust isn't back out there. Cust is a streaky guy, and if that opposite-field homer last night is indeed a sign that he's getting dialed in, why not keep him in there?

—Gabe Gross isn't in the lineup, but Geren said Gross is available after slightly injuring his back last night.

Tonight's lineups ...

A's: Ellis DH, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Rosales 2B, Sweeney RF, Fox LF, Carson CF, Pennington SS; Braden LHP.

Angels: Aybar SS, Kendrick 2B, Abreu RF, Hunter CF, Matsui DH, Napoli C, Rivera LF, Frandsen 3B, Quinlan 1B; Saunders LHP.

ANGELS 7, A'S 1

Saunders, wall crash Oakland's efforts

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Matt Carson's extraordinary, face-smashing collision with the wall in center Wednesday night was a good summation of Oakland's game against the Angels. Despite their best efforts, it was just not the A's night.

Carson's highlight-reel play - "for the wrong reasons," he noted - left him icing a sore jaw.

The rest of the A's were shaking their heads after getting overwhelmed by left-hander Joe Saunders again. Saunders, who threw a four-hit shutout against Oakland less than a month ago, recorded a complete game in the Angels' 7-1 victory at the Coliseum.

"Again, we've run into big Joe," said A's left-hander Dallas Braden, who also opposed Saunders in Anaheim on May 14.

Braden said he had some forearm tightness this week that he'd hoped would disappear with treatment, but the cold weather didn't help Wednesday and he thought he wasn't able to finish all his pitches. Braden also has had to deal with a sprained ankle and a left foot that has permanent nerve damage.

Braden hasn't won since his perfect game May 9, but his poor backing has much to do with it: In his four losses in that six-game span, the A's have scored a grand total of two runs while Braden was the pitcher of record, including none Wednesday.

"It's too bad, because he pitches his guts out every time," Oakland second baseman Mark Ellis said. "He always gives us a chance to win."

Oakland's right-handed-heavy lineup - which featured Ellis at designated hitter and batting leadoff - couldn't figure out Saunders again. He allowed two hits to start the game, then got three quick outs and the A's didn't get another runner to second until the seventh, and Saunders quickly got a double-play ball from Ryan Sweeney.

Braden kept Oakland in it much of the way, allowing only one unearned run through the first five innings, but in the sixth, the Angels put up four that were charged to Braden, including two on Erick Aybar's two-out triple off reliever Brad Ziegler.

Braden said he'd hoped to stay in. "Anytime I'm in that situation, I'm confident I can get out," he said.

The Angels' next run came on a homer to center in the eighth by Juan Rivera off Cedrick Bowers. Carson, recalled Tuesday and not regularly acquainted with the Coliseum, sprinted headlong toward the wall and slammed into it at full speed.

"I thought I had another step," Carson said, "and I guess I didn't. It was pretty shocking, because my next step was going to be up on the wall."

He bounced back as the ball sailed over the fence. "Freight train," said a member of the A's coaching staff after much of the team watched the video after the game.

Angels center fielder Torii Hunter said, "Man, he's still alive, that's good. ... I've been there."

Rajai Davis remained out with a hamstring strain. Davis jogged and did stride work before the game, and he also took batting practice. A's manager Bob Geren said that Davis won't play until Friday at the earliest.

Buck looks to be on the mend

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Travis Buck is playing in simulated games in Phoenix, and he said Wednesday that he hopes to go on a rehab assignment soon.

Buck has missed seven weeks with a torn oblique muscle, and he said he felt it catch a little last week on a check-swing, which might have delayed plans to send him to play in minor-league games.

Now, though, Buck is feeling good, and the outfielder doubled against right-hander **Brett Tomko** on Wednesday.

"I'm just trying to see as much live pitching as I can," Buck said.

Buck said that Tomko, who is coming back from a nerve problem in his arm, looks terrific.

"From what I saw, he could definitely come up and help the team," Buck said. "He could get big-league hitters out."

Buck also faced one of the A's most highly publicized prospects, 18-year-old right-hander **Michael Ynoa**. "He's a work in progress, but he's definitely got the tools," Buck said.

Tomko said he recently had a setback with a small tear in his ulnar collateral ligament, but like Buck, he's hoping to go on a rehab assignment this month.

Eric Chavez (neck) doesn't have a rehab assignment planned, either, but he took regular batting practice with the team Wednesday.

Geren's son drafted: Among the A's picks Wednesday was manager **Bob Geren's** son, **Bobby**, a third baseman at San Ramon Valley High School. Bobby Geren plans to play at Princeton in the fall.

"That was pretty neat," said the elder Geren. "He's flying pretty high today; it's a very exciting day."

Briefly: Dallas Braden recorded his league-leading fifth pickoff. ... **Kevin Kouzmanoff** extended his hitting streak to 10 games, matching his career high. Kouzmanoff also drove in Oakland's run in the ninth. ... **Jake Fox** threw out **Robb Quinlan** at the plate in the third, with catcher **Kurt Suzuki** making a nice play to get the ball and put the tag on Quinlan.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Bailey 2.0: On Wednesday, the A's drafted a right-hander named Andrew Bailey from Concord (W. Va.) University in the 35th round. "It's a ploy," general manager Billy Beane joked. "We can call teams and ask if they want to trade for Andrew Bailey."

Drumbeat: Rajai Davis update, plus an unusual lineup

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 6/9/2010 6:33PM

Rajai Davis jogged and did some stride work before tonight's game, and he also took batting practice, but he definitely will not play before Friday, according to manager Bob Geren. The team wants to make sure Davis' left hamstring has adequate time to heal. Davis feels as if there's been significant improvement, but few teams know like the A's that there's nothing wrong with caution. How many Oakland players now have had recurrences of previous problems? Mark Ellis with his hamstring earlier this season, Brett Anderson's left elbow/forearm, etc.

So with no Davis still and the team wanting to load up with right-handed hitters against lefty Joe Saunders, it's an odd lineup: Ellis dh, Barton 1b, Suzuki c, Kouzmanoff 3b, Rosales 2b, Sweeney rf, Fox lf, Carson cf, Pennington ss. Geren wanted to get Rosales into the lineup, and he saw a chance to get Ellis some limited rest with the DH spot.

Eric Chavez took regular batting practice with the team today - he had been taking early batting practice but not jumping in during in the real pre-game session - and he said there is still no exact plan for him to go on a rehab assignment. He's just taking things day-to-day, anyway - I think he's never going to get ahead of himself when it comes to saying when he's going to play after all the injuries and setbacks he's had over the years - so he'll just go wherever they want to get at-bats when the team goes on the road, whether that's batting practice or actual rehab games.

Gabe Gross said he's OK to play today despite some back stiffness, the result of a weird slide into home last night; catcher Mike Napoli managed to catch Gross' foot with his own, vaulting Gross up and sideways.

Some fun names in the final day of the draft: Oakland took a right-hander named Andrew Bailey (the A's big-league closer Andrew Bailey said he got numerous texts this morning asking how he could be drafted twice) and they also took Bobby Geren, Geren's son, who is a senior at San Ramon Valley High School. Bobby Geren is heading to Princeton in the fall, and his younger brother, Brett, is considering some Ivy League possibilities, too.

Braden falters as A's can't get offense going

Starter winless since hurling perfect game on Mother's Day

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's and Dallas Braden have seen quite enough of Angels left-hander Joe Saunders for a while.

For the second time in less than a month, Saunders dominated the Oakland hitters and beat Braden, who lost Wednesday night for the fourth consecutive time since pitching a perfect game on Mother's Day.

The A's bats went silent against Saunders in a 7-1 defeat, one night after ripping 18 hits in a 10-1 win over the Angels

Braden faced Saunders back on May 14 in his first start after his perfect game. Braden was good, holding the Angels to four runs and pitching a complete game. Saunders was better. He pitched a shutout, allowing a career-low four-hits and struck out six in a 4-0 victory.

This time, Saunders pitched another complete game, giving up seven hits -- all singles except for Daric Barton's ninth-inning double -- and just one run, coming one frame shy of another shutout.

Braden, meanwhile, allowed 11 hits and five runs -- four of them earned -- in 5 2/3 innings. He struck out four and walked one.

"Battling with some forearm tightness all week," Braden said. "The cold weather didn't help. I felt like I couldn't finish all my pitches. Again, we run into big Joe."

Saunders won for the fourth time in his past five decisions, improving to 5-6 this season and lowering his ERA to 4.35. Barton went 3-for-4 with his double, and Kevin Kouzmanoff had two hits and an RBI in four at-bats, extending his hitting streak to 10 games. Mark Ellis and Adam Rosales each had a single.

That was it.

A's right fielder Ryan Sweeney, who entered the game with a team-leading .324 average, went 0-for-4 and hit into a pair of double plays.

"Honestly, I didn't have my best stuff," Saunders said. "A lot of credit goes to the defense. The defense played unbelievable behind me. Both [Braden] and myself were kind of battling tonight. It was just a case of being fortunate to make a few pitches and get the ground ball for a double play."

Not his best stuff? That's a scary thought for the A's.

"Last time he was [coming] off of a couple bad starts and all of a sudden we saw him pitch," said A's manager Bob Geren. "What we saw, you couldn't really see why he'd been throwing poorly before that. He threw so well that night. He had another good one tonight. We've seen him a lot at his best. He's one of the elite pitchers in the league. I know statistically he's had some rough games, apparently, but we haven't seen it."

What the A's saw, Geren said, was a pitcher with two speeds of breaking ball, a nasty changeup and supreme command of his fastball.

"Saunders came out and threw strikes and was throwing his off-speed stuff when he wanted to," said A's left fielder Jake Fox. "He kept us off-balance. He never really made mistakes that we could do some damage with. He never left anything over the heart of the plate."

The Angels took a 1-0 lead in the third inning, after an earlier error begat an RBI single for Torii Hunter. Robb Quinlan nearly scored from second base on the play, but Fox threw a strike home and Kurt Suzuki applied the tag.

The Angels scored four more times in the sixth, taking a 5-0 lead.

"He always is one of the most competitive guys to go out there," Geren said of Braden. "Every five days you look for him to go out and put us in position to win, and he really did. Through five we were just down by one. We weren't getting to Saunders and they weren't getting to him."

"Then in the sixth they bunched some hits together. He made some pretty decent pitches. It wasn't that they squared up a bunch of balls solidly."

Hunter and Hideki Matsui hit back-to-back singles off Braden leading off the inning. After Mike Napoli struck out, Juan Rivera lined a single to center, scoring Hunter. Then with two outs, Quinlan blooped an RBI single to right, making it 3-0.

That was it for Braden. Brad Ziegler came in, and Erick Ayber crushed a two-run triple high off the center-field wall.

Braden, naturally, said he wanted to stay in the game.

"I want the ball. I want to stay in," Braden said. "Anytime I'm in that situation, I'm confident I can get outs. I always want to go deep."

The A's had a scary moment in the top of the eighth inning when rookie center fielder Matt Carson collided face-first at full speed with the outfield wall while chasing Rivera's solo home run.

Carson stayed in the game, but afterward he had an ice pack on the right side of his head. He said he initially made contact with the left side of his jaw.

"I thought I had another step, but apparently I didn't," Carson said. "It didn't hurt as bad as I thought it would."

Like almost every other Oakland player, Carson struggled at the plate, going 0-for-3 against Saunders.

"I felt real comfortable," Carson said. "Everyone looked really comfortable against him. A comfortable 0-for. He was staying out of the middle of the plate. Fastball counts, he came with off-speed. Off-speed counts, he came with fastballs. He just pitched."

Rajai, Gross, Patterson out of A's lineup

Davis to sit finale vs. Angels as well with sore left hamstring

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Center fielder Rajai Davis was out of the lineup for the second straight game Wednesday to rest his sore left hamstring, and he'll rest again Thursday against the Angels, A's manager Bob Geren said.

"He's feeling better today. He feels improved," Geren said. "We're trying to give him three days and see where he's at. We'll know more Friday. Don't plan on playing him today or tomorrow."

Davis hurt himself while legging out a fifth-inning triple Monday night.

Outfielder Gabe Gross came up with a sore back Tuesday after sliding into Angels catcher Mike Napoli and scoring a run in the seventh inning. He wasn't in the lineup Wednesday, but Geren said he was available.

"Just playing the righties today, but he could definitely enter the game later if needed," the skipper said.

Outfielder Eric Patterson, who was hit in the face by a ball that bounced off his shoulder while he was running to first base Tuesday, was also out of Wednesday's lineup -- but he was available to enter.

Ellis leads off as Carson starts in center

OAKLAND -- A's second baseman Mark Ellis was back in a sort-of-familiar spot Wednesday night, hitting leadoff for the 220th time in his career -- but for the first time since 2008.

"They can put me wherever," said Ellis, who also got his second start at designated hitter this season with super-utility-man Adam Rosales playing second. "I don't care where it is in the lineup. I think I've hit about everywhere."

With regular center fielder and leadoff hitter Rajai Davis out with a sore left hamstring, A's manager Bob Geren had to juggle his lineup. Ellis moved into the leadoff spot against Angels left-hander Joe Saunders. Rookie Matt Carson, who was called up Tuesday from Triple-A Sacramento, started in center field and batted eighth.

Ellis entered the game hitting .268 for his career as a leadoff hitter. He said he doesn't change his approach when perched atop the order.

"It only matters one time, the first at-bat of the game, so it's no big deal," Ellis said. "Same exact thing. I wish I could go out and steal five bases tonight, hitting leadoff, but that's probably not going to happen."

Ellis responded by singling to right field in his first at-bat.

Gio's first at-bat? Lincecum will be on rubber

OAKLAND -- A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez will make his Major League batting debut Friday night against none other than Giants right-hander Tim Lincecum, the reigning National League Cy Young winner.

Gonzalez tuned up Tuesday by hitting a batting practice home run, then took the day off on Wednesday.

"Hit one out of the park, finally," Gonzalez said before Wednesday night's game against the Angels. "I had to keep up with the rest of the bomb squad that we have on the pitching staff. I actually put everything I've got into it. I kind of drained myself on that BP.

"I'm just resting myself for Friday. The guy I'm facing is not going to be throwing 40 mph for me to hit it over the fence. Hopefully, I get my bunting down pat."

Gonzalez throws left-handed but bats right-handed. Lincecum throws right-handed but bats left-handed.

"We're both going to be wearing nice elbow braces when we go up there," said Gonzalez, who's also lined up to pitch -- and hit -- against the Cubs next week at Wrigley Field.

"Pretty exciting. Not too many could say they're going to get an opportunity to hit for the first time in the Major Leagues, as a pitcher. That kind of memory, especially against Tim Lincecum, I'll remember for the rest of my life."

Hot-hitting Sweeney not altering approach

OAKLAND -- A's right fielder Ryan Sweeney entered Wednesday night's game hitting .324, eighth-best in the American League.

Imagine what he'll do once he gets locked in.

"I feel all right," Sweeney said. "I've been hitting the ball the other way a lot, but they've been pitching me outside.

"I feel OK. I don't feel like the greatest, but I feel like I'm getting hits and hitting the ball good. I want to be driving the ball a little bit more. Hopefully that will come."

Sweeney, a career .291 hitter, certainly can't complain about his .324 average. He's had three straight multi-hit games, going 8-for-13 with three doubles.

"He stays on the ball really well," said A's manager Bob Geren. "He doesn't get fooled very often. He's maturing as a hitter. I think the more experience he gets, the better he's going to get. He's still very young. Obviously talented, and he's going to keep improving, I think."

Sweeney has only one home run this season and hit just six last year, but he's not pressing.

"I've always been a gap-to-gap and average guy," Sweeney said. "Home runs just come. I'm not going to try to change the type of hitter I am. If it comes, it comes; if it don't, it don't. That's the way I look at it. Of course, everybody always wants to hit more home runs, but I'm not going to push it. I'm not going to change my swing or anything."

Worth noting

With upcoming Interleague road series against the Giants, Cubs and Cardinals, the A's got back to defensive basics before Wednesday's game against the Angels. Pitchers and infielders spent time preparing for what could be a heavy dose of bunts from their National League foes. "We do it periodically, No. 1, and it was time," said manager Bob Geren. "No. 2, we have to go over our bunt defenses, being there will be a lot more bunts in the next week to 10 days, I would imagine with some National League pitchers. So we have to make sure that we do them perfectly."

Talented young arms duel in series finale

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

Angels right-hander Ervin Santana looks like he's back to the form that made him an All-Star two years ago. A's right-hander Trevor Cahill is looking like he might become an All-Star someday, and that day might be soon.

Combine these two talented young arms and you have one of the more intriguing Thursday matchups in the American League, one that serves as a dramatic starting point for the finale of the series between these two AL West contenders.

Santana is on a serious roll, winning his previous outing against the Mariners to notch his fifth straight win and lower his season ERA to 3.29 after seven starts.

He's also been taking advantage of big-time run support, which he enjoyed when the Angels erupted for an 11-spot against Seattle.

After scoring a total of 22 runs in Santana's first seven starts -- he went 1-3 over that stretch -- the Angels have produced 44 runs in the right-hander's past five outings. Santana has yielded just five earned runs across his past 29 innings.

"My slider wasn't great, but it was good enough," Santana said of his past start. "It makes it nice when we score runs like that. We're getting better."

Santana has ruled the Athletics in his career, going 11-2 with a 1.50 ERA in 16 starts and 18 appearances. He's 5-0 with a 1.38 ERA in nine games and seven starts in Oakland.

Cahill is getting better, too, and the A's postseason chances figure to improve as the second-year right-hander does.

Cahill actually saw a personal winning streak come to an end in his past outing, but he still notched a quality start against the Twins by going six innings and giving up three runs on five hits with six strikeouts and four walks. His final inning did him in.

"He threw well for those first five innings," said A's manager Bob Geren. "He had a good sinker and good command of his fastball. He gave us a chance to win."

Cahill is undefeated in three home starts this season and has a 2.04 ERA in Oakland. Cahill faced the Angels on May 16 in Anaheim, allowing three earned runs on five hits over seven innings, while striking out two.

Angels: June jumping

The Angels are 7-2 to open the month and 24-11 in the past two seasons in June -- they rode a 17-9 mark in 2009. The Angels' 57 wins in June since 2007 are the most in the Majors, according to STATS, LLC.

Athletics: A's getting offensive

The A's are batting .289 (155-for-537) with 72 runs scored (4.8 per game) over the past 15 games, and the club has hit a Major League-leading 12 home runs in June after tallying 15 total long balls in April and May.

Worth noting

Angels first baseman Kendry Morales is scheduled to undergo surgery Thursday on his fractured left leg. Phil Kwong, a foot and ankle specialist with the Kerlan-Jobe Clinic, will perform the procedure. No timetable has been set for a rehab schedule or for Morales' return. ... The A's have a 15-7 record during day games compared to a 16-23 record at night. They have the best record in day games in the Majors and the lowest day ERA (2.96) in the AL.

A's conclude Draft with 20 picks on Day 3

High school, college players split on Wednesday's board

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

The Oakland A's wrapped up the 2010 First-Year Player Draft on Wednesday, making 20 selections that included 10 college players and 10 prep stars.

The A's selected Bobby Geren in the 36th round -- the son of manager Bob Geren. Geren, who is committed to play at Princeton, is a left-handed-hitting corner infielder from nearby San Ramon Valley High School. Geren batted .213 with a home run and nine RBIs in 24 games for San Ramon Valley this season.

"He's worked hard," the Oakland skipper said. "He's worked as hard as he can in school and baseball. It's something he feels real good about. Obviously, we're proud about what he's done."

Three other managers' sons were selected by their father's organizations on Tuesday, including San Francisco's Brett Bochy, son of Bruce. The White Sox selected Ozney Guillen, son of Ozzie, while the Tigers drafted Patrick Leyland, son of Jim.

Another familiar name came in the 35th round, as Oakland drafted another right-handed pitcher named Andrew Bailey -- this one from Concord University.

In 14 starts (five appearances) this season, Bailey went 5-1 with a 4.82 ERA. He struck out 41 batters in 46 2/3 innings while allowing 57 hits and 19 walks.

Oakland also selected a couple of players with local ties, as 6-foot-4 lefty Louie Lechich, picked in the 42nd round, is from the famed 209 -- Stockton, Calif. Lechich is committed to play baseball at nearby University of California-Berkeley.

In the 44th round, the A's selected Lonnie Kauppila, a shortstop from Burbank (Calif.) High School. Kauppila is a solid defender who hits for a high average, and he is committed to play baseball at Stanford.

To start off Day 3, the A's selected Fresno State signee Aaron Judge, a 6-foot-7, 230-pound third baseman from Linden (Calif.) High School. Judge hit .500 with seven home runs and 32 RBIs this season, according to MaxPreps.com.

Oakland followed up Judge's selection with four more college picks. Included in that group was 6-foot-6 right-hander Sean Murphy, who played for Division III Keystone College in La Plume, Pa. Murphy went 6-3 with a 3.22 ERA in 2010, allowing 63 hits and 20 walks in 64 1/3 innings, while striking out 56.

Todd McLinnis became a member of the A's organization in the 32nd round. McLinnis went 6-5 with a 3.30 ERA for the University of Southern Mississippi, allowing 85 hits and 34 walks over 95 1/3 innings, while striking out 87.

The A's selected seven consecutive high school players in Rounds 40-46. Right-hander Andrew Smith (40th round) has committed to play at North Carolina, while 46th-round selection Tyler Skulina -- a 6-foot-5, 252-pound righty -- is signed to play at Virginia.

Oakland picked Zachary Johnson, a third baseman from Ohlone College, in the 48th round. Johnson attended nearby California High School in San Ramon.

A's lose to Angels, 7-1

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Joe Saunders threw a complete game, Erick Aybar had a two-run triple among his four hits and the Los Angeles Angels beat the Oakland Athletics 7-1 on Wednesday night.

Oakland left-hander Dallas Braden dropped to 0-4 with a 4.75 ERA in six starts since his perfect game against Tampa Bay on May 9.

Saunders (5-6) took a shutout bid into the ninth inning before giving up Kevin Kouzmanoff's RBI single. Saunders, who shut out the A's 4-0 on May 14 in Braden's first start after that perfecto, was efficient all night this time in an impressive 101-pitch outing that took 2 hours, 26 minutes.

Juan Rivera homered in the eighth as the first-place Angels rebounded from a 10-1 loss a night earlier for their seventh win in eight games — and seventh in eight contests at Oakland.

Saunders allowed seven hits, struck out two and walked one in his fourth career complete game. He faced the minimum in the second, fourth, fifth, sixth and eighth innings and got Ryan Sweeney to ground into double plays in the fourth and seventh.

The lefty received plenty of run support to win back-to-back starts for the second time this season. Saunders beat the A's for the seventh time in the last nine matchups, and his 11 victories versus Oakland are the pitcher's most against any opponent.

Torii Hunter singled in a run and scored and Rivera and Robb Quinlan added RBI singles in the sixth, with Quinlan's hit chasing Braden (4-6). Aybar then tripled off Brad Ziegler. Hideki Matsui hit a run-scoring single in the ninth.

Improving to 8-2 during their current 14-game stretch away from home, the Angels have won eight games on a road trip for the first time since June 22 to July 1, 1987. That time, they went 8-1 against Texas, Chicago and Cleveland.

A's center fielder Matt Carson slammed face-first into the wall trying to chase down Rivera's solo drive, but he was OK and stayed in the game.

Oakland had little success against Saunders a night after producing a season-high 18 hits to snap a six-game home losing streak to the Angels.

Braden matched a season high by allowing 11 hits for the second straight start. He yielded five runs, four earned, in 5 2-3 innings.

After Hunter singled home the go-ahead run in the third — it was unearned after shortstop Cliff Pennington's throwing error started the inning — Oakland left fielder Jake Fox saved a second score with a strong throw to the plate and a perfect lunging tag of Quinlan by catcher Kurt Suzuki.

NOTES: Kouzmanoff matched his career-best hitting streak of 10 games. ... Angels 3B Maicer Izturis had the night off. He missed two games with a sore hamstring and knee before returning to the lineup Tuesday night. ... Oakland OF Gabe Gross was held out of the lineup after tweaking his back Tuesday while sliding into home. ...

A's CF Rajai Davis, whose left hamstring tightened up on a triple Monday, missed his second straight game. Manager Bob Geren said Davis wouldn't play in Thursday afternoon's series finale and will be re-evaluated Friday. ... Geren's third baseman son, Bobby, was drafted by the A's in the 36th round out of San Ramon Valley High.

He has committed to Princeton and appears headed to college.

"Pretty good opportunity," the elder Geren said. ... Los Angeles 1B Kendry Morales, who broke his left leg jumping on home plate in a celebration following his game-ending grand slam vs. Seattle on May 29, will undergo surgery Thursday.

Braden Struggles Continue at the Plate

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, June 10th, 2010

Oakland, CA – Dallas Braden will be forever known for his perfect game on Mother's Day. Unfortunately, since then Braden has lost four consecutive games and continues to struggle at the plate.

The Angels took a 1-0 lead in the third inning due to a throwing error by short stop Cliff Pennington. The A's backed their pitcher with strong defense through three more innings before the Angels scored four more runs to control the game.

Erick Aybar was in a zone when he hit two singles in the third and ninth inning, a double in the fifth, and a triple in the sixth. Aybar's stellar performance was the key to the Angels victory over Oakland 7-1. He went 4-for-5 and needed a home run for the cycle.

"Erick's starting to come alive on the offensive side," said manager Mike Scioscia. "He got a great bunt and killed that ball to right-center." "He was struggling through the first and third season but now he's coming out of it."

The A's avoided a shutout when they got their only run in the in the ninth inning when Kevin Kouzmanoff singled and Daric Barton scored. After coming off a game with 18 hits, Oakland fell flat against Joe Saunders. He held the A's scoreless for eight innings and felt he wasn't his best on the mound.

"I didn't feel like I had my best stuff," Saunders said. "A lot of credit goes to the defense because they were the driving force behind me." "Everyone knows that Oakland is a pitchers ball park so I feel very comfortable when I come here." "You always have to bring your "A" game when playing the A's."

Saunders almost threw back-to-back shutout games against the A's before allowing one run in the ninth frame. He won for the fourth time in his past five decisions, improving to a 5-6 this season. Stating that he didn't play his best game, Joe gave up seven hits (all singles) and allowed one run being shy of another shutout.

Braden pitched 5 2/3 innings, gave up 11 hits, five runs (four earned), struck out four and walked 1. This is his second time in three outings that he has allowed so many hits. He is now 0-4 with a 4.75 ERA in six starts, since his perfect game.

Reds lead list of turnaround teams with eyes on October

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated 6/10/2010

One of the greatest underappreciated truths of wild card era baseball is that losers turn into playoff teams every year. In the 15 years since baseball split into six divisions and allowed eight playoff entries, every postseason but one included at least one team that had a losing record the previous season. Thirty teams -- fully one-quarter of all playoff teams from 1995-2009 -- made the immediate turnaround from a losing record to the postseason. Why should this year be any different? Who will it be?

One-third of the way through this season, we have five teams that have emerged as the most likely of the latest surprise playoff teams: the Padres, Reds, Mets, Blue Jays and Athletics. They are the only teams with a winning record this year that had a losing record last year.

Now is a good time to start separating contenders (welcome back, Cincinnati) from pretenders (nice knowing you, Seattle and Milwaukee). Hall of Fame manager **Sparky Anderson** used to say it took 60 games to take the measurement of a club. More recently, Oakland GM **Billy Beane** parcels the season in thirds: the first third for taking stock of your team, the second third for roster adjustment and the final third to let the modifications play out.

One-third of the way in, the first-place Padres rate as the biggest surprise of all. They are tied for the most wins in the league. Still, does a team with the fifth-worst offense in the league have enough bats to be a playoff team?

"I think we have enough here," manager **Bud Black** said. "The way I look at it is we have a lot of guys who aren't hitting close to what their normal levels are. **Tony Gwynn** is not a .210 hitter, **Will Venable** .220, **Jerry Hairston** .240 . . . we have a bunch of guys right here who will be better and give us more offense. I think we're okay."

The Padres are a handful even if they get middle-of-the-pack hitting. Their pitching is that good. One potential trap door, however, is the development of 22-year-old right-hander **Mat Latos**, who threw only 127 1/3 innings last year. The Padres don't want him to make more than roughly 27 or 28 starts this year -- roughly about 160 innings -- so Black said the team

will be have to be creative in having Latos take extra days of rest and skipping starts. The Padres, for instance, will give him an unofficial "vacation" this summer by scheduling off days before and after the All-Star break. (The Tigers gave **Rick Porcello** 15 days off last year using this strategy. He still finished with 31 starts and 170 2/3 innings.)

So will the Padres take this year's role of Cinderella? We have two-thirds of the season to see if the shoe fits. In the meantime, here are the best turnaround teams and their prospects for the playoffs, ranked in order of their likelihood to be playing in October.

1. Cincinnati Reds

Reasons to contend: They are the best offensive team in the league, ranking first in runs, homers and slugging, and they pummel lousy pitching. The Reds are 17-7 against intradivision punching bags Chicago, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and Houston, none of which figure to get much better, so Cincinnati can take advantage of a weak division. (They are 16-19 against all others.) **Scott Rolen** is playing like an MVP. **Mike Leake** is unbeatable (5-0) straight out of college. A little luck helps, too. Twelve of their 33 wins have come by one run.

Warning signs: Is Rolen too old and is Leake too young to keep this up? Rolen, 35, has averaged 118 games the past three years, and his production at this age runs counter to everything that has happened in baseball over recent years with the reduced value of older players. Rolen has a .953 OPS; no other 35-or-older infielder has even an .800 OPS. Leake, a 2009 draft pick who never threw a game in the minors, is bound to hit a wall in the second half. **Aroldis Chapman**, 22, may provide second-half help, but he is walking almost five batters per nine innings in the minors.

2. San Diego Padres

Reasons to contend: The Padres' pitching and defense are good enough to keep them from falling out of the race. Only the Giants turn more batted balls into outs than does San Diego. And the Padres' bullpen is magnificent: 10-6 with a major-league best 2.61 ERA and lowest rate of allowing inherited runners to score (18 percent).

Warning signs: Contrary to Black's optimism, the offense might not get any better. The top of the order is abysmal; the 1-2 spots have a combined OBP of .299. (Black is giving his worst hitters the most plate appearances.) The outfielders are hitting .222 with 14 home runs, leaving room for GM **Jed Hoyer** to find a bat next month. By then, San Diego should have a good idea of where it stands. The Padres are in the middle of the first of four straight road trips that take them into the Eastern time zone, a grueling stretch in which they will visit Philadelphia, New York, Tampa Bay, Florida, Washington, Atlanta and Pittsburgh. And their division, the NL West, is very strong.

3. New York Mets

Reasons to contend: The Mets have plenty of upper echelon talents, including **Johan Santana**, **Francisco Rodriguez**, **David Wright**, **Jason Bay** and **Jose Reyes** -- though Reyes, at 27, mysteriously has gone backward in his development. He has the 17th worst OPS of any regular in the league, which the Mets hope only means he is due for a huge correction just to get back to his average production. **Mike Pelfrey** is bidding to join those elite; the Mets are 11-2 when he pitches, 20-25 when he doesn't. New York has been the best home team in baseball (23-9).

Warning signs: Santana has the worst strikeout rate of his career as a starter (6.5 per nine innings), adding to the concern of what is not a very good pitching staff. Only the Pirates and Nationals have a worse strikeout-to-walk rate than the Mets. New York waffles between contender and pretender with regularity. The Mets' month-by-month records capture their inconsistency: 14-9 in April, 12-17 in May, 5-1 in June.

4. Toronto Blue Jays

Reasons to contend: Few teams can throw more pure stuff at the opposition than Toronto. The Jays lead the league in strikeouts and have more quality starts than any AL team except Tampa Bay. Overall, they have been remarkably healthy.

Warning signs: There are plenty. Start with the strength of their division. The Jays pretty much have to win at least 94 games to be a playoff team out of the AL East. They are beating people with home runs, but they're next to last in the league in on-base percentage. It's a dangerous way to live, especially when **Jose Bautista** is helping to carry them. Bautista, 29, on his fifth organization, is slugging .596 -- 196 points better than his career mark entering this year. He has ambushed AL pitchers, having hit eight of his 18 home runs on the first or second pitch of an at-bat. Scouting reports on Bautista are being adjusted.

Starting pitchers **Brandon Morrow** and **Brett Cecil** have not thrown more than 124 2/3 and 142 1/3 innings, respectively, in any pro season, so their workload will become an issue in the second half.

Most ominous of all is the schedule. Toronto has capitalized on a soft early schedule. The Jays are 18-7 against losing teams, including 10-1 against the three last-place AL teams, Baltimore, Cleveland and Seattle. They have a losing record (15-19) against winning teams. Their reckoning begins August 2, when they hit a killer portion of their schedule just as their young pitching is entering a danger zone. Starting that date, they play 35 of their next 38 games against teams that have winning records: the Rays (9 times), Yankees (9), Red Sox (6), Angels (3), Tigers (4) and Rangers (4).

5. Oakland Athletics

Reasons to contend: Even the awful Mariners can hang around the AL West, so the bar here is not too high. The Athletics can be a pest if only because they are so tough at home (20-12). The bullpen (10-10, 4.19) figures to be better. After a slow start with control issues, **Ben Sheets** (20 strikeouts, four walks in this past four starts) gradually may be pitching himself back into form.

Warning signs: Oakland's fate hinges on the elbow of **Brett Anderson**, the left-handed ace-in-the-making who is on the DL with tendinitis. The Athletics hope all he needs is some rest. If true, and Anderson turns out to be fine, move up Oakland two spots on this list. We'll see.

The Athletics have been outscored and been fortunate in one-run games (11-4), giving them the look of team with little margin of error if they hope to hang in there. Actually, their chances depend on whether the Rangers or Angels get hot. They need a slow-speed division race -- one in which 85-87 wins are enough to capture the AL West.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

RockHounds shut out Hooks 3-0

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

The Midland RockHounds had been involved in three shutouts entering Wednesday and, all three times, they've been on the wrong side. On Wednesday, they bucked that trend, putting the Corpus Christi Hooks on the business end of a blanking.

Thanks to seven steady innings by starting pitcher Ryan Edell and two more from Justin Souza, the RockHounds took the first game of a four-game series with the Hooks, 3-0, at Citibank Ballpark. Edell scattered seven hits in seven innings and struck out four, while Souza allowed just two base runners in his two innings. The defense pitched in with four double plays.

Pitching and defense hasn't been a problem for the RockHounds this season, leaving manager Darren Bush and pitching coach Scott (E-Mo) Emerson in disbelief that this was the club's first shutout of the season.

"E-Mo said that and that was surprising as well as we've pitched all year," Bush said. "(Edell) did a good job of moving the ball around the zone. Then Souza came in right behind him. And the defense made some big plays behind them."

Edell was dominant early in his start, striking out three of the four batters he faced in the first inning.

"I think I was just a little over-amped and I was throwing invisible fastballs because I was on six-days rest instead of five," Edell said.

He needed only 87 pitches to navigate seven innings, marking his longest start in five appearances with the RockHounds. Eight of those pitches went toward striking out the first batter of the game, T.J. Steele.

Edell (2-0) said finishing off batters early in counts was the biggest reason he lasted so long.

"Today I was just more efficient," Edell said. "I didn't have as many pitches get fouled off. (Against the first batter, though) it was like here we go again."

Of course, the RockHounds were having enough problems of their own mounting any offense against Hooks starter Tyler Lumsden (4-2). Finally, in the sixth inning, the RockHounds broke through.

Corey Brown led the inning off with a single up the middle. Alex Valdez followed with a tailor made double play ball to sure-handed shortstop Wladimir Sutil, but Sutil booted it, putting two men on with no outs.

Archie Gilbert drew a one-out walk to load the bases and Val Majewski made Lumsden pay with a two-run single up the middle on a first pitch fastball.

"The bases were loaded, so there was nowhere to put me," Majewski said. "I just wanted a good pitch to hit and he gave me a first pitch fastball and I was fortunate to get a single up the middle. I saw the ball pretty good tonight."

Josh Horton followed with an RBI-ground out to bring home the RockHounds' final run of the game, but his standout play came in the top of the next inning.

The Hooks led off the seventh with back-to-back singles, threatening the lead the RockHounds had just built. But Jhon Florentino hit a hard grounder up the middle that was Edell deflected. Horton stayed with it, dove up the middle to field it and, from his stomach, flipped the ball out of his glove to Valdez, who threw to first to complete the double play.

Edell then retired the next batter to end the inning and finish the night with his ERA lowered to 0.71. It didn't hurt that three of the RockHounds' four double plays came when he was on the mound.

"I felt like I was accurate with everything I was throwing," Edell said. "The defense played great behind me, too. Horton made an incredible play behind me in the seventh. Getting two outs for the price of one is always nice."

Ports Win Third Straight, 3-2, against Blaze

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Stockton Ports (27-33) overcame the Bakersfield Blaze (25-33) by 3-2 to hang on for their third straight win on Wednesday night at Banner Island Ballpark. It's their longest winning streak of the season, and also moves the Ports into solo possession of fourth place in the North Division.

The Ports totaled five hits in the contest, with Jermaine Mitchell leading the team with a pair of hits. Mike Spina collected a pair of RBI while Ryan Ortiz notched the game-winning RBI. Stockton starter Michael Madsen pitched a strong game, allowing just two hits in 5.2 scoreless innings with five strikeouts. Lefty Trey Barham pitched the Ports out of jam in the eighth and Fautino de los Santos picked up his first save on the year.

After Madsen retired the first six batters he faced, the Ports took a 2-0 lead. In the bottom of the second, right fielder Jeremy Barfield walked to get things rolling for the Stockton offense. Left fielder Todd Johnson then singled to right field to put two on with no out. Spina then stepped up to the plate for his first at-bat of the evening, and launched a double to left field to bring home both base runners. Blaze starter Michael Main then retired the next three batters to get out of the inning.

Main and Madsen kept their opponents scoreless through the sixth inning. In the top of the seventh, Bakersfield scored its first run. Andrew Carignan was on the hill for Stockton, and he issued a leadoff walk to first baseman Johnny Whittleman. He then retired the next two batters before issuing back-to-back walks to load the bases. The Ports then called on Brett Hunter to pitch. He walked right fielder Jared Bolden to bring in Whittleman and make it 2-1. Hunter struck out left fielder David Pasiano to get out of the jam.

The Ports added their third and final run in the bottom of the seventh run. Barfield led off and reached on an error by shortstop Davis Stoneburner. Johnson then hit into a fielder's choice and advanced two bases as Main overthrew the ball trying to pick him off at first. With one out and a runner at third, Spina struck out. Ortiz stepped up to the plate and doubled to center field to bring home Johnson.

But the Bakersfield offense wasn't finished yet. Hunter gave up back-to-back singles and then walked Whittleman to load the bases to start the eighth inning. Hunter then walked catcher Jose Felix to bring in their second run of the game. Stockton then brought out Trey Barham to face third baseman Tommy Mendonca. The bases were still loaded with no out, but Barham neatly got out of the jam. Mendonca lined out to shortstop Tyler Ladendorf. Designated hitter Mike Bianucci came up to bat, and lined it to Ports third baseman Stephen Parker. Parker tagged third base to put out the advancing runner and threw the ball to Spina, who ran into Bianucci on the path to first for the inning-ending double play.

De los Santos retired the side in order in the ninth to secure the victory for Stockton.

The Ports will work for the series sweep on Thursday night on 7:05 PM at Banner Island Ballpark. RHP Justin Murray (4-3, 3.95) will start for Stockton while RHP Carlos Pimentel (5-1, 3.52) will take the hill for Bakersfield.

Cougars Can't Hold Lead in Game 2

Kane County gets solid outing from Marks but quiet offense

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars led, 1-0, through seven innings Wednesday night, but the Fort Wayne Tincaps put up four runs in the top of the eighth and beat the Cougars, 4-2, in the middle game of a three-game series at Elfstrom Stadium. Justin Marks pitched five scoreless innings and struck out nine in a no-decision.

The Cougars scored the game's first run with some help in the third. Myrio Richard singled and scored on a three-base error by Fort Wayne starter Mike Watt, who threw the ball away on a comebacker from Conner Crumbliss. Marks gave up two hits, walked three and struck out nine. He left with the 1-0 lead but ended up with a no-decision. The nine strikeouts matches his career-high, set two outings ago.

After two scoreless innings from A.J. Huttenlocker, Max Peterson (1-2) entered to work the eighth and walked three batters before giving up a grand slam to Edinson Rincon. The Cougars got one run back in the bottom of the inning on an RBI single from Tyreace House but also stranded two men on base. Nick Schumacher logged the ninth for the TinCaps and got his 12th save, and Jose De Paula (2-1) picked up the victory.

The Cougars (27-33) and TinCaps (30-30) conclude the three-game series Thursday night at 6:30 CT. Ian Krol (3-2, 2.03) is scheduled to face Daniel Sarria (1-1, 2.61). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 6:15 p.m.