

San Francisco Giants' Barry Zito gets monkey off his back, records first win over his ex-team Oakland A's

By Daniel Brown, San Jose Mercury News

At long last, Barry Zito has slain the dragon. He got the win in the Giants' 5-4 victory over the A's on Saturday night, taming the beast that had tormented him since he switched sides of the bay in 2007.

Before Saturday, the Giants lefty was 0-4 with an 8.84 ERA in four starts against his old team.

This time, he allowed just two runs over seven innings and crossed the A's off his to-beat list. They were the only major league team he had never defeated.

"It's definitely a monkey off my back," Zito said. "But it was all about Brian Wilson tonight. He stole the show."

Wilson entered in the eighth inning, inheriting a bases-loaded, one-out situation. He struck out Adam Rosales on an 88-mph slider and got Rajai Davis to ground out on a 95-mph fastball.

It was Wilson's second five-out save of the season. He said he's willing to pull extra duty whenever manager Bruce Bochy asks.

"That's what I signed up for," Wilson said. "In those situations, you can be a hero or a failure, and I always try to choose the hero option. It's more lucrative and the fans like it."

Wilson followed that escape act with a scoreless — if dicey — ninth inning to secure Zito's milestone win.

Wilson said teammates were aware their starter was oh-for-the-A's and joked that he considered rewarding Zito with a beer shower in the post-game celebration.

More seriously, beating the A's — who had battered him silly — could be the strongest indication yet that Zito (7- 2) has turned things around after a midcareer crisis. No National League left-hander has more victories, and he lowered his ERA to 3.10.

Zito pitched for the A's from 2000-06. But he insisted there was no mental block facing his old team.

"They were catching me on off-days, but they also put up great at-bats," he said. "They have a great approach up there (at the plate) as an organization."

When Zito got into fleeting trouble Saturday, allowing a single to Kevin Kouzmanoff and a walk to Jack Cust to start the fourth inning, he responded by getting two strikeouts (both on gravity-defying curveballs) and a ground out to end the threat.

In the seventh, Zito allowed a two-out homer to Rosales and a single to Davis but ended that threat by striking out Daric Barton on a slider for his final out of the night.

The AT&T Park crowd — which has treated Zito roughly at times over the years — gave him a standing ovation as he strolled off the mound.

Zito wasn't the only Giants player in bounce-back mode. Pablo Sandoval, stuck in a terrible power slump, hit his first homer since May 28. The funny thing is, he knew it was coming. Before walking to the plate, he said, he told teammate Andres Torres: "I'm going to look for one pitch and I'm going to hit it out."

Sandoval got a fastball on the outside corner from Ben Sheets and hit an opposite-field shot that just cleared the left-field wall. "He's been pressing," Bochy said, "but that ball was well hit. ... It was just a matter of time."

Sandoval's homer in the sixth gave the Giants a 5-1 lead. But it was a rocky road after that, especially in the eighth, with the Giants up 5-2, when reliever Guillermo Mota opened the inning by walking Mark Ellis, surrendering an RBI double to Kouzmanoff and walking Cust.

Relievers Santiago Casilla and Jeremy Affeldt each walked a batter, with Affeldt's four-pitch walk to Gabe Gross driving in a run to make it 5-4. That's when Bochy summoned Wilson, who recorded his 17th save in 19 chances this season.

"He saved us," Bochy said. "We've got one of the elite closers in the game. You see his stuff, and you see his poise, and I've got all the confidence in the world when I bring him in."

Oakland A's late rally against Giants comes up short

By Joe Stiglich_Oakland Tribune

They had a golden opportunity to change the complexion of this weekend series against their cross-bay rivals.

Then again, not much has come easily for the A's over their first two games at AT&T Park against the Giants. Twice they had the tying run within 90 feet in the late innings Saturday, only to fall short in a 5-4 defeat in front of 36,861 fans.

Instead of entering this afternoon's finale with a chance to win the series, the A's will try to avoid a sweep against right-hander Matt Cain, who has allowed just one earned run over his past four starts combined. Three of those have been complete games.

It was easy to dissect the A's failures with men in scoring position Saturday. They went 0 for 8 in that department.

But they also could look back on two errors they committed that led to two unearned runs.

"We put together a nice little rally," A's starting pitcher Ben Sheets said. "But at the end of the day, we fell short in all aspects of the game."

The A's were down 5-2 in the eighth, but Kevin Kouzmanoff's double to right-center scored Mark Ellis to get things going.

The A's eventually loaded the bases with one out, and Giants lefty Jeremy Affeldt walked pinch-hitter Gabe Gross to bring the A's within 5-4.

But from there, Adam Rosales struck out swinging against Giants closer Brian Wilson, and Rajai Davis hit into an inning-ending force out.

The A's put runners on the corners with two outs in the ninth, but Powell swung at the first pitch against Wilson and dribbled a game-ending fielder's choice grounder to short.

With that, the A's fell three games behind first-place Texas in the American League West.

"With the bases loaded and one out (in the eighth), that's a big situation to get a guy in," said Rosales, who had a pinch-hit homer in the seventh. "It's frustrating because you want to win today and have a chance to win the series."

Sheets (2-6), who threw six shutout innings at the Giants on May 23 in a 3-0 A's victory, lasted six innings, but the Giants put good wood on him.

He hasn't won in his past seven starts.

"It was tough to get in a groove today," Sheets said. "I thought (my stuff) was about average, maybe a little bit under. Nothing was that sharp."

Sheets was most peeved about the way he fielded his position. He hurt himself in the second inning, when after walking Pablo Sandoval, he made an errant pickoff throw that moved Sandoval to second. Sandoval scored when Andres Torres cracked a two-out single to right field for a 2-1 Giants lead.

"I thought I had a good double-play candidate up, and (the runner) ended up scoring," Sheets said. "That was a big run for them, being it ended 5-4."

Matt Carson's solo homer to left-center in the top of the second had tied the game.

A's shortstop Cliff Pennington couldn't field Freddy Sanchez's grounder cleanly to start the bottom of the third, putting the leadoff man on. He scored on Aubrey Huff's triple, and Juan Uribe scored Huff with a single.

Sheets surrendered Sandoval's homer in the sixth to put the A's behind 5-1.

Kawakami: Giants' youngsters trump A's kiddie core

By Tim Kawakami, San Jose Mercury News columnist

The A's could use their own Buster Posey (or two), but the Giants aren't sharing.

Yes, I'm vastly over-simplifying the comparison of two local ballclubs that played another interleague game Saturday at AT&T Park and seem evenly matched.

Neither team has a world-beating offense. Both have a squadron of quality pitchers. Both look like they can stick around their division races into August or September.

The A's swept the Giants last month in Oakland. The Giants could be on their way to sweeping the A's in San Francisco.

But if you take a close survey of their separate inventories, one difference easily identifies the difference between the franchises:

The Giants have a bevy of young players who all have the makings of stardom — or are already there. The A's young counterparts? Well, maybe not so much. Or they're often hurt. Or both.

I'm using Posey as the quick example. He's here and producing; meanwhile the A's top two power prospects, Michael Taylor and Chris Carter, are both older than Posey but haven't made it up yet.

"He's quite an athlete," A's manager Bob Geren said of Posey on Saturday afternoon. "Played well last night at first base. Definitely adds more of an offensive dimension to a team."

Geren didn't quite sound wistful while describing Posey's impact, but that wouldn't have been off-base.

If we're talking young Giants core players, let's add Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain, Brian Wilson and Pablo Sandoval, all of whom are healthy, and, assuming Sandoval snaps out of his deep slump, pointing to big things. In Lincecum's case, he's already achieved big things.

Look at what has happened since Posey was called up and put right into the lineup in late May: In the 14 games since Posey's debut, the Giants have scored 67 runs — an average of almost 4.8 per game. Before Posey's arrival, the Giants had averaged about 4.1 runs per game.

It hasn't just been Posey, of course. Juan Uribe has been hitting all year and Andres Torres started getting regular at-bats, and getting hits regularly, in mid-May. Also, Freddy Sanchez was activated about 10 days before Posey came up, and Pat Burrell was added a few days after Posey arrived.

But the raw data says the Giants were 25-22 before Posey and they're 9-5 since he arrived.

"They've been throwing up some good at-bats," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said of his hitters before the game. "They have good approaches and we've been putting some runs on the board."

The A's have an interesting young core, too, led by closer Andrew Bailey and catcher Kurt Suzuki.

But beyond those two are the injured (starter Brett Anderson), the pretty good (Daric Barton), the intriguing (Dallas Braden) and the still-rising (Trevor Cahill, Ryan Sweeney).

Here's the quick explanation for how the Giants have over-taken the A's in young star talent: It's about the draft, silly.

Surprisingly, given the scouting reputations of both teams, the Giants have been much better at using their first-round picks of late. Granted, they've usually drafted ahead of the A's, but the results are hard to deny.

From 2002 to 2007, the A's landed Joe Blanton (since traded), Nick Swisher (ditto), back-up catcher Landon Powell (2004) and starting shortstop Cliff Pennington (2005) in the draft, all of whom have made it to the big club. During that same period, they also picked James Simmons (2007), Richie Robnett (2005), Brad Sullivan (2003), Brian Snyder (2003) and John McCurdy (2002), none of whom lived up to their billing as first-round picks.

In that same 2002-2007 period, the Giants tabbed Cain (2002), Tim Lincecum (2006), Tim Alderson (the 2007 pick later traded for Freddy Sanchez) and Madison Bumgarner (also 2007 and a possible starter by the middle of this season). They added Posey in 2008.

So, if the A's are going to get a Posey-style boost, it'll have to come from two prospects acquired via trade — Taylor, 24, and Carter, 23. They're both playing for Triple-A Sacramento. Taylor went into Saturday's action hitting .220 with two home runs; Carter was hitting .240 with 14 homers.

"They're both obviously highly thought of in the organization and throughout baseball and they're going to make an impact up here," Geren said of the two. "To determine when is hard to say at this point. But they will at some point."

Until that happens — if that happens — the A's will continue to look a lot like the Giants, except with slightly less thump and a lot less headline talent.

Chin Music: Rajai Davis back at leadoff for A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/12/2010 5:39PM

Quick pregame update for you on another very pleasant evening here at AT&T Park. ...

—Rajai Davis returns to the A's lineup tonight, hitting leadoff. An interesting wrinkle: Mark Ellis hits third, as Ryan Sweeney's aching right knee required a day off. An occasional rest seems to do Sweeney's body some good, but it's still a bit worrisome that someone so young is having regular knee trouble, even if it is mild.

As for the A's upcoming rotation, manager Bob Geren said he's considering giving both Dallas Braden and Ben Sheets some extra rest. He wanted to see how Sheets fared in tonight's start. But with Monday's day off, I see Trevor Cahill going Tuesday against the Cubs, followed by Gio Gonzalez and Braden. Sheets could either pitch Friday or Saturday, getting one or two extra days off.

On to tonight's lineups:

A's: Davis CF, Barton 1B, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust LF, Fox C, Carson RF, Pennington SS, Sheets P.

Giants: Torres CF, Sanchez 2B, Huff RF, Uribe SS, Burrell LF, Posey 1B, Sandoval 3B, Molina C, Zito P.

Newhouse: Before the Coliseum, before the A's

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist

Oakland A's baseball franchise — "Money Ball" in maverick's clothing — is eager to hit the road again, treating Oakland as it mistreated Philadelphia and Kansas City by bolting yet another town.

Only this time, the A's haven't clearly defined their next greener pasture. San Jose has nosed out Fremont, but there's that territorial rights stop sign blocking the A's in San Jose that the San Francisco Giants handcuffed themselves to before tossing the key into McCovey Cove.

So, possibly, the A's won't leave Oakland after all. Major League Baseball is wrestling with this quandary, which involves three new ballpark sites in Oakland, before deciding on the A's future.

Some historical perspective is needed — a look back in time to when Oakland didn't have a big-league baseball team, or a stadium to house it, and Oakland hadn't yet established itself as big-time sports town.

What were Oakland's dreams back then? Two men played integral roles in its emergence as a championship city. Their voices should be heard now.

Ray Ward became assistant general manager of the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum in 1965 — one year before the Coliseum Complex opened — and then served as its general manager from 1980 to 1989.

George Ross was Oakland Tribune sports editor from 1961-75. Editorially, he lighted the Raiders path to Super Bowl status, then played pivotal roles in the A's relocating from Kansas City and the Warriors abandoning San Francisco.

Today, we get Ward's insights on the A's. On Monday, it's Ross' turn.

Ward, 75, lives with his wife, Rosemary, in a plush housing tract in Granite Bay, a Sacramento suburb in Placer County.

"Oakland was a different community at that time," Ward said of the 1960s while sitting on his patio May 27. "It had a core of people that were at the level of (Tribune Publisher) Bill Knowland, (engineering mogul) Edgar Kaiser and (developer) Bob Nahas, people with credibility who were participants in the community and were willing to step forward."

"Oakland made a commitment to keep the Raiders, who were the catalyst. The Warriors were playing in the Cow Palace, and we were building a new basketball building. We had ice, so the (National Hockey League) Oakland Seals came about. And Charlie (Finley) was using Oakland to get things in Kansas City. But Nahas and Finley got along well, and Bob gave Franklin Mieuli his first deerstalker cap — right off Bob's head."

The Coliseum Complex, which opened in 1966, cost \$25.5 million and was paid for with bonds over a 40-year period. Compare that with the San Francisco 49ers' proposed \$937 million stadium in Santa Clara that doesn't include an arena.

The Coliseum Complex — stadium and arena — actually came in under budget with bigger facilities than were projected. And it produced profits for 21 consecutive years through the 1980s, even with the Raiders in Los Angeles.

"Our biggest profit years were after the Raiders left," Ward noted. "The Raiders paid \$125,000 a year in rent. We'd make \$300,000 to \$400,000 on two Days on the Green."

Nahas — the father of the Coliseum — kept politicians at arm's length from the complex because of "selfish" motives. Civic leaders made up the Coliseum board. Much later, the Joint Powers Authority, composed of city and county politicians, operated the Coliseum poorly, ending the annual profit stream.

There were plans and drawings as far back as 1944 to build a sports stadium in Oakland by Hegenberger Road. But it would take 22 more years to accomplish.

Ward, a former high school and college cheerleader, was assistant athletic director at his alma mater, UC Santa Barbara, when picked from 50 candidates to become assistant to Bill Cunningham, the Coliseum's first general manager.

"We did a lot of things at the Coliseum that hadn't been done before, like signage and in-house marketing," said Ward. "With the Coliseum, "... it was, 'Why not?'"

New York Jets owner Sonny Werblin praised the Coliseum as "the best complex I've ever seen."

"I would agree," said Ward. "We were leading edge."

The Coliseum offered star power and multiple tenants. Oakland has had seven professional teams: A's, Raiders, Warriors, Seals, Clippers and Stompers (soccer), and Oaks (basketball). And roller derby outdrew some of them.

The Coliseum's Days on the Green were entertainment extravaganzas. Icons played at the complex: Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, The Rolling Stones, Luciano Pavarotti, The Jackson 5, Elton John, Bob Hope, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Johnny Cash, Bee Gees, The Beach Boys, The Who and Pink Floyd.

Those days have gone. Ward is convinced HP Pavilion in San Jose is a major deterrent to the Coliseum's ability to consistently present major attractions.

The Coliseum Complex is 44 years old — but looking much older to its tenants than to its fans, who only care about winning teams, not inferior management.

"Nothing happens if you don't have butts in the seats," said Ward. "The people who sit and harp about (negative) things are not the people who go with their families to have a good time at the games."

Ward, now a stadium management consultant, has some sage advice for A's owner Lew Wolff.

"Don't forget about the 95 percent of fans who don't have luxury boxes," he said. "(The A's) are in a tough market. They don't have the corporate infrastructure in Oakland and the East Bay. But when owners say, 'I can't afford to be here,' people really don't give a darn. They'll say, 'You got a lot of money; do a better job.'"

Like the Haases, who hugged Oakland instead of pushing it away, who created A's stars instead of trading them all away, and who drew 2.9 million fans one year.

Stop being disingenuous, Mr. Wolff, and do a better job.

A'S DEFENSE

Early errors make late comeback that much harder

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A strong late push by the A's on Saturday night at AT&T Park left the team wishing it had played a little more cleanly before that.

Helped by four combined walks from three Giants relievers, the A's threw some doubt into the proceedings by scoring twice in the eighth inning. They had the tying run at third with two outs in the ninth before Landon Powell's fielder's choice ended things, with the Giants holding off Oakland for a 5-4 victory.

With such a close finish, the A's earlier defensive lapses stood out all the more.

"We put together a nice little rally, but, at the end of it, we fell short in all aspects of the game," said starter Ben Sheets, who made one of two Oakland errors, both of which led to runs. "Realistically, we didn't do what we needed to do to win the game."

Sheets was one of the three A's starters to hold down San Francisco last month, when he allowed two hits and two walks in six scoreless innings. He'd had success against the Giants throughout his career, with a 2.15 lifetime ERA against them in nine starts, eight with Milwaukee.

On Saturday, though, Sheets was far more hittable than he was in May. Giants hitters appeared to be looking for the fastball, especially early, and not missing it much. Sheets gave up eight hits, three walks and five runs, but only three of those were earned thanks to the errors by Sheets and shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Sheets threw away a pickoff attempt at first base in the second inning, allowing Pablo Sandoval to advance to second, and, with two outs, Andres Torres singled in Sandoval.

"We're a team built on pitching and defense," Sheets said. "It's very important for me to keep the double play in order in that time."

The next inning, the Giants' first hitter, Freddy Sanchez, reached on an error by Pennington and scored on Aubrey Huff's triple.

"If you give an out away, it can always come back to get you," Oakland manager Bob Geren said.

The A's also missed an opportunity to add runs in the eighth. After Kevin Kouzmanoff's RBI double and Gabe Gross' bases-loaded walk, they still had the bases loaded with one out, but Adam Rosales struck out and Rajai Davis hit into a force at second. Davis was back in the lineup after missing four games with a left hamstring strain, and he went 1-for-5.

Ryan Sweeney didn't start because of his occasionally sore knees, an issue that arises every few weeks. He pinch hit in the eighth and walked to load the bases; he expects to be in the lineup today. Matt Carson, starting in right in Sweeney's stead,

banged his second career homer, a solo shot in the second. Rosales also hit a solo shot, sprinting around the bases shot in the seventh.

Kouzmanoff's streak: 13

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's offense is not always the team's strong suit this season, but recently, there's one constant: Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Kouzmanoff extended his career-best hitting streak to 13 games Saturday with his second consecutive three-hit night. He also has five multi-hit games in a row, and during his hitting streak, the A's third baseman is batting .451. At .287, his average is the highest it has been since the third game of the season.

"It's the consistency with his approach," hitting coach Jim Skaalen said. "And his swing is really controlled and easy."

"As much as anything, I'm impressed with the at-bats he's had against the hard-throwing guys like Justin Verlander and Tim Lincecum; he's not getting rushed with guys who have velocity. He's staying short with his swing ... not trying to do too much."

Manager Bob Geren said that because Kouzmanoff's swing is simple and lacks a lot of moving parts, when his approach is good and he swings at strikes, he can get on a roll and stay there.

Penciled in: Geren said that Dallas Braden won't miss a start with his left forearm and elbow inflammation, but, as Braden had said the day before, he will get pushed back.

Geren said he'd like to keep Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez on regular rest, so they will go Tuesday and Wednesday, and also that he'd like to keep Vin Mazzaro, today's starter, on turn, so Mazzaro will go Friday. That means Thursday for Braden (as he figured) and Saturday for Ben Sheets, giving him some extra rest, too.

Briefly: Adam Rosales' homer in the seventh was the 100th pinch-hit homer in Oakland history. The A's have three pinch-hit homers this year after having just three over the previous four seasons. ... Coco Crisp (ribcage strain) was going to play in an intrasquad game Saturday, two days earlier than expected, but he had the flu. ... Eric Chavez (neck) was not with the squad Saturday but Geren said he'd had no reports about any physical issues or setbacks. Chavez is scheduled to begin a rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on Monday.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Just grand: Kevin Kouzmanoff was the first man to hit a grand slam on the first major-league pitch he saw until Boston's Daniel Nava did it Saturday. "I felt like I was floating around the bases," Kouzmanoff said. "He's got to be feeling great."

Wilson helps Zito finally beat old team

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Barry Zito was destined to beat his old team one of these times. He pitched well enough to do it Saturday night, but the Giants' bullpen pitched poorly enough to ruin it.

Almost.

Closer Brian Wilson entered in a virtual lose-lose situation in the eighth inning and turned it into a win-win. He escaped a bases-loaded, one-out jam and earned his 17th save, preserving the Giants' 5-4 victory and Zito's first win over the A's.

"It was about Brian Wilson tonight," Zito said. "He stole the show."

Wilson, however, wanted to pay his respect to Zito now that the lefty has beaten every big-league team.

"Yeah, we were aware of that," Wilson said. "I was thinking about a little beer shower afterward, but he's got 10 years in. It ended in dramatic fashion. That's how you like to do it."

Before Saturday, Zito had lost all four of his starts against Oakland (while producing an 8.85 ERA), and none of the games was close - the Giants were outscored by a combined 32-5. On Saturday, he completed seven innings for the first time against the team for which he played the first seven years of his career.

Then he waited for the relievers to wrap up the win. Not an easy task.

The bullpen issued four walks in the eighth inning, including two on eight consecutive balls thrown by former A's reliever Santiago Casilla and Jeremy Affeldt.

Guillermo Mota began the conga line by failing to retire any of his three batters, walking Mark Ellis, surrendering an RBI double to Kevin Kouzmanoff and walking Jack Cust.

One out later, Casilla four-pitch-walked Ryan Sweeney to load the bases, and Affeldt four-pitch-walked Gabe Gross to make it a one-run game.

Manager Bruce Bochy had seen enough and called on Wilson for his first five-out save since May 9 in New York. One little mistake would have kept Zito winless against the A's, but Wilson struck out Adam Rosales on an 88-mph slider and got Rajai Davis to bounce to shortstop.

In the ninth, Wilson overcame more drama after giving up singles to Ellis and Cust.

"That's what I signed up for," he said. "You get a chance to be a hero or a failure. I always like to choose the hero option. It's more lucrative, and fans like it."

Zito gave up homers to Matt Carson and Rosales and exited with a 5-2 lead.

Andres Torres doubled and scored in the first inning and singled home a run in the second. The Giants added two in the third on an RBI triple by Aubrey Huff, followed by Juan Uribe's single.

Pablo Sandoval homered in the sixth - his first homer since May 28 and second in 45 games - but not before telling Torres he'd do exactly that.

One month after the Giants were swept in Oakland, the Giants could return the favor with a win in today's matinee.

Drumbeat: Davis is in lineup, Sweeney is out for a day

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at AT&T Park 6/12/2010 5:26PM

Rajai Davis is back in after missing for games with a minor left hamstring strain; he's leading off and playing center. Right fielder Ryan Sweeney is out with the usual, sore knees. "I've had bad knees my whole life," said Sweeney, who said it's the result of growing too fast as a kid.

Manager Bob Geren is back after missing last night for son Bobby's graduation from San Ramon Valley High School. He said he followed the game on his Blackberry, and watched the last three innings on TV.

He said that Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez are likely to stay on normal rest next week, as will Vin Mazzaro, who is still trying to get built back up to 100 pitches. That means Dallas Braden, who has some forearm and elbow tendinitis, will go Thursday, as he'd said yesterday, and Ben Sheets also will get an extra day (two days, really, with Monday's offday) and he'll start on Saturday at St. Louis.

Here's the lineup: Davis cf, Barton 1b, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Cust lf, Fox c, Carson rf, Pennington ss, Sheets p.

Geren said he wanted Fox in against left-hander Barry Zito; Landon Powell will be back behind the plate tomorrow.

A's rally late, but can't top Zito, Giants

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- The A's, more than anything, knew they would have to beat great pitchers this weekend.

More specifically, they knew they would have to beat the likes of Tim Lincecum, Barry Zito and Matt Cain -- the former two having Cy Young Awards on their resumes, the latter likely a future winner.

On Friday, they struck out against Lincecum -- literally and figuratively. And on Saturday they didn't fare much better against Zito. But, for the second consecutive night, it was Brian Wilson who stood in the way of victory.

The Giants closer, who on Friday left A's runners on first and third in the ninth to secure the win for San Francisco, this time closed out the eighth with two significant outs to leave the bases loaded and, subsequently, eventually leave the A's on the losing end of a 5-4 contest at AT&T Park.

The game-telling eighth frame began with Guillermo Mota on the mound for the Giants in a 5-2 game, a scene that resulted in a walk to Mark Ellis and an RBI double to Kevin Kouzmanoff, who posted a 3-for-5 night en route to extending his career-high hitting streak to 13 games.

Mota proceeded to walk Jack Cust, a move that brought in Giants reliever Santiago Casilla, who struck out pinch-hitter Landon Powell before offering up a free pass to Ryan Sweeney to load the bases. The Giants brought in reliever Jeremy Affeldt, and the lefty immediately walked in a run to narrow San Francisco's lead to one. Wilson was brought in and promptly struck out Adam Rosales and got Rajai Davis to hit a grounder for the force out to end both the inning and the A's comeback attempt.

"Wilson's best pitch is a fastball," said Rosales. "You have to attack it in that type of situation. I did, and he just beat me.

"That's a big opportunity right there with the bases loaded. It's frustrating because it's definitely a game you want to win so that you have a chance to get some momentum going and to win the series."

That momentum was brought back yet again, if only for a brief few moments, when the A's put runners on first and third against Wilson in the ninth frame. However, Landon Powell -- Oakland's fourth pinch-hitter of the game -- hit a grounder to Giants shortstop Juan Uribe for the force out to end the game.

"We just kept pushing 'til the end," A's manager Bob Geren said. "That was a real nice offensive attack in the late innings, especially from guys coming off the bench. We were just one swing away from bringing [Andrew] Bailey in and closing it out. To come back like that and not get the win is a little disheartening."

"I try to look at the situation as a win-win situation rather than as a pressure situation," Wilson said. "It's easier said than done, obviously, but we're in the driver's seat. They have to score on us and we're at home. Even if I fail and give up a run, we have two at-bats left.

"You have a chance to be a hero or a failure. I always like to choose the hero option. It's more lucrative and the fans like it."

The A's, not so much. Wilson's tremendous performance, a five-out appearance that earned him his 17th save of the season, gave Oakland its second consecutive loss -- one that could have potentially been avoided.

In the first frame, A's starter Ben Sheets quickly gave up a run-scoring single to Uribe, who collected his second RBI of the night by driving in Aubrey Huff during the third inning. Huff had tripled earlier in the inning to bring home Freddy Sanchez, who initially reached base on a fielding error by shortstop Cliff Pennington.

That mistake, coupled with another in the second by Sheets -- he threw the ball away on a pickoff attempt with Pablo Sandoval on first base and Bengie Molina at the plate -- had the A's singing the "What if?" tune.

"I felt like Bengie Molina was a good double-play candidate," Sheets said.

"Every time you give away an out, it has a chance to come back to bite you," Geren said. "With 27 outs, any time you give one away it's a disadvantage."

Especially when Zito is on the mound. The Giants southpaw cruised through seven frames, allowing just two runs -- solo shots to Matt Carson and Rosales -- along with six hits, two walks and six strikeouts. The victory, Zito's seventh of the season, was his first career win against his former team.

"It's definitely nice to get the monkey off my back," said Zito, who has now beaten all 30 Major League clubs. "I didn't have great stuff tonight. But I grinded, we had great defense and guys came out swinging. So I had a lot of support.

As for Sheets, both the right-hander and his manager agreed that his six-inning outing was nothing more than "average." He threw 99 pitches, allowing eight hits -- including a sixth-inning long ball to Sandoval -- while walking three and fanning two.

"It was tough getting in a groove today," Sheets said. "Nothing was too sharp. They were getting a lot of first-pitch and second-pitch hits. They had good at-bats.

"It was a weird day. I didn't get the ball down. It's tough to keep them off the board, and it was disappointing to help them out that one inning. We're a team that's built on pitching and defense, so it's important for us not to make mistakes."

Sheets' last victory came May 8 against Tampa Bay, marking a seven-game winless streak -- his longest since July 17-Aug. 28, 2004, when he went nine consecutive starts without a "W." But the veteran righty doesn't care much for personal wins and losses, as long as his club gets the win -- and as long as he goes deep into games, something he believes he's yet to do much of this year.

"Six innings isn't really that great," said Sheets, who has racked up seven frames just once this season. "I prepare to go nine every time."

Now, the A's will look to win the finale against Cain, who owns a 2.44 ERA in seven career starts against Oakland.

"We've seen the best of both teams," Geren said. "That's the nature of Interleague Play and having that rival. We've played close games, and we have a chance to get the win [Sunday]."

Davis returns to lineup on Saturday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- Outfielder Rajai Davis was back in the A's starting lineup leading off against the Giants on Saturday after missing four consecutive games due to a left hamstring injury.

Davis, who left Monday's game against the Angels in the sixth inning after experiencing hamstring soreness while running to third base on a triple, started in center field against his former team.

"When it first came up we thought it would only be a few days, and it was just that." A's manager Bob Geren said. "We're glad to have him back."

Davis lends the A's a much-needed dose of speed, an important run-scoring facet when names such as Barry Zito and Matt Cain are on the mound for San Francisco, as they are Saturday and Sunday.

Davis entered Saturday's game second in the Majors with 23 stolen bases and is just the second A's player in the past 16 years to steal at least 20 bases before the All-Star break.

Sweeney given a day off to rest knees

SAN FRANCISCO -- Because of a bout with sore knees, A's manager Bob Geren held Ryan Sweeney out of the starting lineup on Saturday, but he expects the outfielder to be back for Sunday's series finale in San Francisco.

The 25-year-old Sweeney has experienced knee problems his entire career and simply needs an occasional day of rest. The A's on Sunday conclude a stretch of 20 consecutive games, 15 of which the outfielder has played.

"It's always good to give his legs some rest," Geren said.

With Sweeney out of the mix, the A's skipper was able to hand recent callup Matt Carson a start in right field while also giving Jack Cust a defensive opportunity in left field.

New A's radio show to debut on Sunday

SAN FRANCISCO -- Beginning on Sunday, a familiar voice will return to A's radio in the form of a weekly pregame segment featuring plenty of interviews with several past and present Oakland players.

A's broadcasting director Robert Buan, who for 10 years hosted the club's postgame live show, "Extra Innings with Robert Buan," is returning to the air with a brand new segment. "This Week in A's Baseball with Robert Buan" will feature plenty of elements reminiscent of "Extra Innings," but will also boast a handful of fresh facets.

The show, which will also highlight great A's moments of the past, will be on every Sunday two hours before scheduled game time on Xtra Sports 860 KTRB.

"My experience around this team has given me insight not a lot of people have," Buan said. "I have the opportunity to bring that back to the fans. Everybody wins, especially A's fans."

Worth noting

A's manager Bob Geren said on Saturday that starter Dallas Braden, who on Friday revealed forearm and elbow tendinitis, will likely be pushed from his Tuesday start and instead go Thursday, as expected. Thus, there's a chance Ben Sheets could receive two days of extra rest and start Saturday at St. Louis. The A's skipper mentioned that Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez are likely to stay on normal rest, as will Vin Mazzaro, who is in the process of building up arm strength.

A's to face red-hot Cain in finale vs. Giants

By Matt Fortuna / MLB.com

Another strong outing for Giants starter Matt Cain will likely land him in San Francisco history

Cain, who will start against the Athletics on Sunday in the finale of a three-game set, is on a tear like few before him since the Giants moved to the Bay Area. The right-hander has gone at least eight innings in each of his past four starts, allowing just one earned run in 34 innings. He's gone the distance three times and shut his opponent out twice during that stretch.

His ERA during that span is 0.26, and it has lowered his season ERA from 3.33 on May 17 to 2.11 entering Sunday. He has been the winning pitcher in each of his past three starts, as well.

Fans would have to go back to 1970 to find a similar stretch in a San Francisco uniform. Gaylord Perry pitched four consecutive shutouts and 39 consecutive scoreless innings from Sept. 1-23 of that year. Three years earlier, Perry went 45 consecutive innings without allowing an earned run, from Aug. 28-Sept. 15, 1967.

For Cain, this stretch began against the same team he hopes to continue it against: the Athletics.

Cain tossed a complete game on May 22 in Oakland, but an unearned run was enough to hand him a 1-0 loss. The Giants were swept that weekend but will look to return the favor against the A's on Sunday at home after winning on Friday and Saturday at AT&T Park.

They will face A's starter Vin Mazzaro.

Athletics: Davis hits in return

Rajai Davis led off Saturday and went 1-for-5 with a single in the seventh. Davis had missed the past four games with a left hamstring injury. ... Ryan Sweeney, who was held out of the lineup Saturday because of sore knees, pinch-hit in the eighth and drew a walk. ... A's manager Bob Geren said Dallas Braden's next start will likely be pushed from Tuesday to Thursday because of forearm and elbow tendinitis.

Giants: Zito finally beats the A's

Barry Zito's win against the A's on Saturday was the first of his career against his former team. The 32-year-old has now beaten every Major League team. ... Giants manager Bruce Bochy said he and Giants officials would get together with Edgar Renteria on Monday to discuss Renteria's return from a right hamstring strain. ... Bochy also said there is no decision on Tuesday's starter, as Todd Wellemeyer is on the 15-day disabled list with a right quad strain.

Worth noting

Oakland's Mazzaro, a 23-year-old right-hander, is 0-2 with a 5.25 ERA in two career starts against the Giants.

Giants hold on for 5-4 win over A's

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — Barry Zito had his closer to thank for preserving a long-awaited victory against the Oakland Athletics.

"That was all about Brian Wilson," Zito said. "He stole the show."

Zito finally got the best of his former team and only club he'd never beaten, ending a four-start winless stretch in the San Francisco Giants' 5-4 victory over the A's on Saturday night.

Zito (7-2) was the 2002 AL Cy Young Award winner with the A's and left for a \$126 million, seven-year deal with the Giants before the 2007 season. It took him five tries to beat Oakland after going 0-4 with an 8.85 ERA over his first four outings.

"It's definitely a monkey off my back," said Zito, who credited the A's for tough at-bats against him each matchup. "It was different the first year over here. Since then they've been getting me on off days."

Pablo Sandoval homered, Juan Uribe hit a pair of run-scoring singles and Aubrey Huff added an RBI triple for the Giants. They made it two in a row in the Bay Bridge Series after being swept across the bay in Oakland last month.

While Zito gave up solo home runs to Adam Rosales and Matt Carson, he outpitched Ben Sheets (2-6). Wilson earned a five-out save, pitching out of two jams.

"That's what I signed up for," Wilson said. "You get a chance to be a hero or a failure. I always like to choose the hero option because it's more lucrative. Fans like it."

Zito lost to the A's 6-1 on May 21 at the Coliseum — tagged for season highs of nine hits and six runs — and had three straight no-decisions since then.

This time, he allowed two runs on six hits in seven innings, struck out six and walked two. He won on an unseasonably warm Bay Area night featuring a first-pitch temperature of 73 degrees, highest all season at AT&T Park.

The Giants nearly lost their lead in the eighth after the A's loaded the bases against former Oakland reliever Santiago Casilla. Jeremy Affeldt relieved and walked pinch-hitter Gabe Gross to force in a run that made it 5-4.

Wilson entered and got the final two outs of the eighth, then finished for his 17th save in 19 chances after allowing two singles.

Perhaps this win will help get Zito on a roll like the left-hander was on when he began the season 5-0. Zito, who beat out an infield single in the fourth for his fifth hit of the year, improved to 11-17 in interleague play.

Wilson was happy to get Zito back in the win column — against the A's, no less.

"We were aware of that," Wilson said of Zito not beating Oakland. "I was thinking of getting a little beer shower going, but he's got 10 years in."

Oakland's Kevin Kouzmanoff singled in the first to extend his career-high hitting streak to 13 games and added an RBI double in the eighth.

Sheets, on a \$10 million, one-year contract, lost his third straight start and is winless over seven outings since beating Tampa Bay on May 8. He was done after six innings for the third straight time.

"Six innings isn't that great," Sheets said. "That's where I am right now. I'm starting to feel better toward the end of games so I'll just keep pushing forward. It's a long season."

Sandoval led off the sixth with his fifth home run of the year and first in 58 at-bats since his last on May 28.

Andres Torres hit a go-ahead RBI single in the second, an unearned run after Sheets' throwing error allowed Sandoval to advance after he drew a leadoff walk.

A's manager Bob Geren rejoined the team after missing Friday night's 6-2 loss to attend the high school graduation of his son, Bobby.

"To come up short was a little disheartening but it was a great comeback," Geren said.

Also, center fielder and leadoff man Rajai Davis returned to Oakland's lineup after missing four games since his left hamstring tightened up Monday night against the Angels.

NOTES

Kouzmanoff is batting .451 with 10 RBIs during the hitting streak.

With an off-day Monday, Geren is leaning toward giving both Sheets and Dallas Braden — winless in six starts since his perfect game May 9 — an extra day or two between starts.

Giants SS Edgar Renteria, on his second DL stint of the year this time with a strained right groin, ran the bases for the second straight day and is getting close to returning.

Injured Giants LF Mark DeRosa, dealing with numbness and nerve irritation in his left wrist and hand, will know Monday what the next step is after seeing a neurologist Friday. He believes he needs surgery and would rather do it right away and get started on the three-month recovery.

More than 20,000 people watched the 1-1 England-U.S. soccer match earlier Saturday on the ballpark's scoreboard video screen.

Minor League News

Halama, River Cats hold off Beavers in 5-3 win

06/12/2010 10:20 PM ET

PORTLAND, Ore. – John Halama threw 7 2/3 innings of two-run ball and the Sacramento River Cats used a three-run third inning to take down the Portland Beavers 5-3 at PGE Park on Saturday night.

Halama (2-1) allowed only four Beavers base runners through the first seven innings before giving up two hits in the eighth. He surrendered five hits and walked one in the game, striking out three for Sacramento (29-34).

Michael Taylor went 2-for-4 for the River Cats with a line-drive solo home run in the top of the sixth.

Anthony Bass (0-1), who made his first career start above Class A, took the loss for the Beavers (23-38). In 5 2/3 innings of work, Bass allowed five runs on seven hits, striking out three and walking three more.

Chris Stewart had two hits for the Beavers, including a two-out single in the ninth that brought Portland within two runs of Sacramento.

Henry Rodriguez earned the save for the River Cats, allowing a run on two hits in the ninth.

A third-inning rally started the scoring for Sacramento. Sacrifice flies from Josh Donaldson and Adam Heether and an RBI single from Eric Sogard gave the River Cats an early three-run lead.

The River Cats scored again in the fourth after Michael Affronti led off the inning with a triple and later scored on a Sogard ground out.

Mike Baxter hit a solo homer to right in the fourth for the Beavers.

Two innings later, Taylor smoked a line drive high over the left-field fence for a solo home run of his own.

Craig Stansberry led off the bottom of the eighth with a double and was driven in by a Stewart double later in the inning.

With two men on in the ninth, Stewart came through again, lacing a single into left-field to score Baxter from second.

The Beavers conclude their series against the River Cats Sunday afternoon at 2:05 p.m. (Pacific) at PGE Park.

NOTES: In 2009, Bass led all Padres minor leaguers in ERA and was third in wins ... Bass was 10 years old when Halama made his major league debut on April 2, 1998, for the Houston Astros ... Brad Chalk was held hitless, ending his seven-game hit streak ... Aaron Poreda made his 2010 Beavers debut, tossing 2 1/3 innings in relief of Bass ... Luis Durango stole his 22nd base of the season for the Beavers, good for second in the PCL.

Beavers Game File

SATURDAY'S GAME: Sacramento 5, Beavers 3

WINNING PITCHER: Halama (2-1)

LOSING PITCHER: Bass (0-1)

SAVE: Rodriguez (8)

HOME RUNS: Baxter (6), Taylor (3)

'Hounds Unload 16 Runs on Hooks

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The special events schedule for Saturday night called for POST-game fireworks. The RockHounds got things started early. The 'Hounds methodically built a 6-0 lead ... dodged a Corpus Christi bases-loaded rally in the top of the sixth ... and scored three of their own in the last half of the inning, making the lead 9-0. Then, with the post-game variety standing by, the team capped its own fireworks display scoring seven times in the eighth inning, finishing the game with 16 runs on 21 hits.

To tell you what kind of night it was at "the dish," every RockHound batter but one collected at least two hits. The exception? Josh Horton, who had the most important swing of the game, a 2-run double in the third, that gave the 'Hounds a 4-0 lead.

Alex Valdez had four hits, with Jeff Baisley and Val Majewski leading the way with three RBI each. Val ripped a 3-run home run to right field in the eighth inning uprising, and "Bais" belted a pair of RBI doubles, each kept in the ballpark only by the 30-mile-an-hour wind. Gabe Ortiz and J.C.Holt each added three hits in the game.

Anthony Capra pitched into the seventh inning, allowing just two hits, for his fifth win.

A Saturday night crowd of nearly six thousand (5,826) loved both fireworks shows, and the RockHounds took 3-of-4 from Corpus Christi in the home series. The last three games of the home stand drew a combined 16,000 fans.

The 'Hounds now return to the road, opening an 8-game road trip (four at Frisco and four at San Antonio) on Sunday.

Mitchell, Parker Lead Ports to 10-4 Win

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Stockton Ports (29-34) bounced back from a rough 10-2 loss on Friday with a strong 10-4 victory over the Modesto Nuts (33-28) on Saturday at Banner Island Ballpark. The Ports pitching staff turned in a solid performance and the Ports had some stellar performances at the plate. The Ports will look to secure the series victory in the 2:05 p.m. Sunday matinee.

Center fielder Jermaine Mitchell finished the game 4x4 with a solo home run, while third baseman Stephen Parker went 3x3, a home run short of the cycle. Both had three runs scored and two RBI. Mike Spina also homered in the contest.

Southpaw Paul Oseguera collected his first victory as a Ports player, striking out nine in 6.0 innings. Fautino de Los Santos fanned three in 2.0 innings and Andrew Carignan closed out the game for the Ports. Lefty Kenny Durst picked up the loss for the Nuts, allowing seven runs on seven hits with five walks in 3.1 innings.

The Nuts scored first, making it 1-0 in the top of the first inning. Oseguera gave up a leadoff single to left fielder Mike Mitchell. He stole second while center fielder Tim Wheeler was at-bat. He then moved to third as catcher Ryan Ortiz tried to catch him stealing, but the ball went wild for an error. Mitchell came running home on a fielding error by Parker. Wheeler walked, but was put out at second as Ortiz caught him stealing. Oseguera would walk another batter in the inning, but get Scott Robinson to pop out to end the inning.

The Ports scored three runs in the bottom half of the inning to make it 3-1. From there, they wouldn't look back. Jermaine Mitchell singled to lead things off, and advanced to second as Green walked. Parker also walked to load the bases with no out. Right fielder Jeremy Barfield then stepped up to the plate. During his at-bat, Durst threw a wild pitch which scored Mitchell and allowed all runners to advance. Barfield hit a sacrifice fly to centerfield to bring home Green. Parker later scored on an RBI single up the middle by catcher Ryan Ortiz.

Modesto answered by scoring their second run in the second inning. With two out and two on, Mike Mitchell singled to score third baseman Ryan Peisel.

Stockton made it 4-2 in the third inning as Spina slammed his 10th home run of the year over the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch in right field. The Ports pounded out three more runs in the fourth inning to pull ahead, 7-2. Jermaine Mitchell led off the fourth inning with a solo shot over the Back Porch. Durst next walked Green for the third straight time, and Parker notched an RBI triple off the left field wall. Barfield picked up his second RBI of the night with a single. Modesto then called in Stephen Dodson who retired the next two batters to stop the Ports offense.

Stockton added a run in each of the sixth, seventh and eighth innings. Parker hit an RBI single to score Jermaine Mitchell in the sixth. In the seventh, with the bases loaded, the Nuts called on Isaiah Froneberger to pitch. He walked Jermaine Mitchell to bring home Spina. Parker led off the eighth inning with a double, and later scored on a wild pitch by Rex Brothers.

The Nuts added their final two runs in the top of the ninth. Carignan took the hill for his 15th appearance of the year. He hit right fielder David Christensen to start the inning. Peisel came to the plate, and launched the ball toward second base. Ports second baseman Gernaldo Castillo made a great leaping grab to put out Peisel, and then threw to first to get out Christensen for a snappy double play. Carignan then gave up a two walks and a single to bring up Wheeler. Wheeler hit a two RBI single up the middle to make it 10-4. Carignan then got catcher Jordan Pacheco to strike out swinging to end the game and tie the series 1-1.

The Ports will face the Nuts in the series finale at 2:05 PM on Sunday. LHP Ben Hornbeck (1-1, 3.26) will toe the rubber for Stockton while RHP Dan Houston (3-4, 5.46) will start for Modesto.

Straily Gets Cougars Even with Captains

Right-hander's 6 scoreless innings lead Kane County

GENEVA, Ill. – Dan Straily pitched six shutout innings, Anthony Aliotti drove in three and Conner Crumbliss and Tyreace House each scored twice Saturday night as the Kane County Cougars rolled to a 7-0 victory over the Lake County Captains in front of 6,812 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars evened the three-game series and Sunday will try to claim their fourth straight series.

Straily (5-3) turned in a bounce-back performance. At one point in May he gave up two earned runs over a 28-inning span but then combined to give up 14 runs in 7 2/3 innings in his previous two starts -- both losses. Saturday he tossed six innings of three-hit shutout ball with no walks and four strikeouts and retired the final 11 men he faced. Anivoris Ramirez followed with three run-free innings to confirm the shutout and earn his first save.

The Cougars missed a pair of early scoring opportunities but broke through in the fifth against Brett Brach (0-3). House nailed an RBI double, Crumbliss scored on an error and Rashun Dixon delivered an RBI single. Then in the sixth the Cougars put up four more. Aliotti smoked a three-run double and Stassi singled him home. The Cougars finished with 12 hits.

The series concludes Sunday afternoon at 1 CT. Murphy Smith (2-0, 3.65) will pitch for the Cougars (29-34), and Matt Packer (4-3, 2.37) will go for the Captains (40-22). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 12:45 p.m.