

A's News Clips, Friday, June 18, 2010

Oakland A's bullpen lets Dallas Braden down in late loss to Chicago Cubs

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Dallas Braden was lined up for a well-deserved win, and the A's were poised to leave the Windy City with a series victory.

That script never played out on a picturesque Thursday afternoon at Wrigley Field.

Oakland's bullpen laid an egg in the late innings, and Kosuke Fukudome's walk-off RBI single off Jerry Blevins in the bottom of the ninth gave the Chicago Cubs a 3-2 victory in front of 36,942 fans.

"That's a tough way to lose," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "Give (the Cubs) credit. They had some good at-bats there at the end."

This one had to sting on several fronts for the A's.

They could have carried some momentum into St. Louis as they begin a challenging weekend series against the Cardinals tonight. Instead, they watched the Cubs win their first series since taking two of three from the Los Angeles Dodgers on May 25-27.

Oakland also spoiled an excellent start from Braden, who threw six innings of one-run ball and left with a lead but still hasn't found the win column since his May 9 perfect game.

"Dallas pitched so hard. He gave us a chance," manager Bob Geren said.

With the first-place Texas Rangers gathering steam, the A's have lost 11 of their past 16 and are a season-high six games out in the American League West.

Ellis led off the seventh with a homer off Randy Wells to give Oakland a 2-1 lead. But reliever Michael Wuertz

eighth and walked Derrek Lee to load the bases.

Geren called on closer Andrew Bailey, who gave up Xavier Nady's sacrifice fly to tie the game but struck out Alfonso Soriano and stranded the potential go-ahead run at third.

With the pitcher's spot due up leading off the ninth, Geren lifted Bailey in favor of pinch-hitter Ryan Sweeney. But the A's failed to get a runner home from third with one out.

Gabe Gross popped up on the first pitch he saw from Cubs closer Carlos Marmol, and Rajai Davis grounded out to third.

With Bailey out, Geren went to Blevins (2-1) for the bottom of the ninth. The left-hander couldn't find the strike zone, walking three of the first four hitters (one intentionally) to load the bases.

With the infield playing in, Fukudome grounded the first pitch from Blevins past a diving Ellis at second base to score Geovany Soto for the game-winner.

"It's heartbreaking when your team is fighting to come back, your starting pitcher pitches his (rear) off, and you basically lose a game yourself," Blevins said. "It's just embarrassing."

After the Cubs tied it in the eighth, Geren said it was an easy call to pinch-hit Sweeney and remove Bailey.

"I'm trying to keep (Bailey) to one inning right now," Geren said. " ... I felt like (in the eighth), absolutely the game's on the line right there."

Bailey threw just 10 pitches in the eighth. Would Bailey have returned to the mound in the bottom of the ninth if the Cubs hadn't tied the game?

"That would have been a decision to make," Geren said.

Bailey said he feels fine physically but that Geren is trying to limit him to one inning in an effort to find more defined roles for the entire bullpen.

Had Geren pulled a double switch when he called on Bailey in the eighth, it could have avoided the pitcher's spot leading off the top of the ninth.

Oakland A's update: Dallas Braden is sharp after rocky first inning

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

CHICAGO — What began as a rough outing for Dallas Braden turned into his finest start in quite some time.

The left-hander held the Chicago Cubs to one run and five hits over six innings Thursday, but he walked away with a no-decision as Oakland's bullpen faltered in a 3-2 defeat at Wrigley Field.

Braden allowed three hits, including Jeff Baker's home run, and a walk in the first inning. But he went on to retire 16 of his final 18 batters, leaving for pinch-hitter Gabe Gross in the top of the seventh with the A's leading 2-1.

For just the second time this season, the A's bullpen blew a win for a starter after he left with a lead. That leaves Braden (4-6) winless since he threw his May 9 perfect game against Tampa Bay.

He's won just once in 10 starts dating back to April 28.

"It doesn't matter how many I retire in a row," Braden said. "If we can't come out on top, it's got to be a better effort next time."

Braden has battled tendinitis in his left elbow recently and was given two extra days of rest leading into his start.

"It was tight all game," he said. "Any time I tried to hump up (on his fastball), it barked a little. But you buy yourself time, step off the mound and try to conjure up the velocity again."

Braden said his elbow was a big enough issue that he probably couldn't have pitched the bottom of the seventh. But he said he expects to make his next start Tuesday against the Cincinnati Reds.

Rajai Davis was back in the leadoff spot and went 2 for 4 with a stolen base. He led off the game with a double and tied it 1-1 with an RBI single in the fifth. Davis had expressed mild disappointment that he didn't start Wednesday's game, adding that if he hits well, he has no doubts he'll continue to play. "I like guys that are confident," manager Bob Geren said. "I like guys that want to play."

The A's signed right-handed reliever Jamey Wright, 35, and assigned him to Triple-A Sacramento. Wright was released last week by the Cleveland Indians. "... Geren said outfielder Coco Crisp (strained rib cage) is on a minor league rehab schedule that has him gradually building up to playing nine innings. He's expected to return on the next homestand, which begins Monday against the Reds.

Chin Music: Food for thought from A's 3-2 loss to Cubs

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/17/2010 5:47PM

Just a quick post here after the A's 3-2 loss against the Cubs, a heartbreaker from Oakland's perspective. An interesting point from the Cubs' ninth-inning rally: The A's had the entire infield playing in with the bases loaded and one out, and Kosuke Fukudome's game-winning single snuck just past diving second baseman Mark Ellis. One option was for the A's to play the middle infielders at regular depth to possibly get a second-to-first double play. But you can see the logic in playing the whole infield in. Sometimes a team wants to be safe and make sure it can cut off the runner at home, and possibly still get a home-to-first double play.

Ellis told me after the game the A's have played both alignments with the bases loaded in that situation — sometimes the middle infielders stay back, sometimes everyone plays in. I asked if he thought it was possible the A's could have turned a 4-6-3 double play were he playing at normal depth to field the ball. He said he wasn't sure, but that it was possible (he also added that Fukudome runs pretty well, so he would have been tough to double up).

Anyway, just thought that was something interesting that you might have been wondering about too.

I'll check in tomorrow from St. Louis ...

Chin Music: Day baseball at Wrigley; Rajai Davis back at leadoff for A's; Conor Jackson batting second

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/17/2010 11:00AM

We get a day game here for the finale of the A's-Cubs series, and with baseball taking place under the sun, it feels like the true Wrigley Field experience. I wandered down the right field line during BP just so I could get to the outfield fence and touch the ivy. ... Had to do it. ...

You probably know about the rooftop bleacher sections that have been installed on buildings across the street from the ballpark. Most of them have banners displaying the Web sites where you can go to purchase tickets ... www.wrigleyrooftops.com, www.skyboxonsheffield.com, www.beyondtheivy.com ... It's a sign of the times, of course. You gotta advertise. But Wrigley's such a classic jewel, and seeing Web sites splashed across the front of these sections takes away from the old-school feel ...

—Today's A's lineup has more of a conventional look that I can see Bob Geren using more. Rajai Davis is back at leadoff, with Conor Jackson hitting second and Daric Barton third. When Jackson was acquired Tuesday, Geren said he might experiment with this sequence in the 1-2-3 spots, with Ryan Sweeney possibly dropping to fifth. But Sweeney isn't in the lineup (those knees require periodic rest), so that part is irrelevant today.

—Davis didn't hide his disappointment that he didn't start yesterday after having a big game Tuesday. He also said if he hits well, there won't be any way Geren can keep him out of the lineup. (Rajai, in general, is one of the more soft-spoken and humble players you'll encounter. But let's just say he's not lacking confidence in the stance he's taking on his playing time). Anyway, Geren said this morning he doesn't have a problem with Davis' line of thinking. "I like guys that are confident," the manager said. "I like guys that want to play."

Enough rambling, here's the lineups:

A's: Davis CF, Jackson LF, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust RF, Ellis 2B, Pennington SS, Braden LHP.

Cubs: Theriot 2B, Baker 3B, Byrd CF, Lee 1B, Nady RF, Soriano LF, Soto C, Castro SS, Wells RHP.

Limiting Bailey comes back to haunt pen

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Bob Geren and Andrew Bailey had a chat last weekend in San Francisco, and the topic of conversation played out in Thursday's 3-2 A's loss to the Cubs.

The manager told the closer, who's not unfamiliar with outings lasting four or more outs, that he would try to limit his appearances to one inning. The purpose, apparently, is to keep Bailey strong all season and allow other relievers to fit into setup roles.

As a consequence of the new philosophy, Bailey wasn't on the mound in the ninth inning Thursday. Jerry Blevins was. The left-hander issued three walks, one intentional, before surrendering a bases-loaded, game-ending single to Kosuke Fukudome.

Blevins wasn't the only reliever to blame. Dallas Braden, who has been working with a tender elbow, pitched six innings of one-run ball, and Mark Ellis' seventh-inning homer put the A's up 2-1. With the game in the hands of the bullpen, the Cubs tied it in the eighth and won it in the ninth.

"The starting pitcher pitches his ass off, and you basically lose the game yourself," Blevins said. "Just embarrassing. You want to throw strikes. It's the No. 1 job for a pitcher."

With Braden gone after 83 pitches - he said his elbow was "tight the whole game" - Brad Ziegler and Craig Breslow combined on a scoreless seventh. But in the eighth, the Cubs loaded the bases off Michael Wuertz on two singles and a walk, and that's when Geren summoned Bailey.

It was a tough save opportunity, and Xavier Nady's sacrifice fly handed Bailey his third blown save. Bailey got the final two outs of the inning on 10 pitches, but he was done.

Bailey was scheduled to hit first in the ninth, and Geren replaced him with pinch-hitter Ryan Sweeney. The manager could have avoided replacing Bailey if he had executed a double-switch when he put him in the game.

Asked if Bailey would have stayed in the game if the A's had maintained their 2-1 lead, Geren said, "That would have been a decision right there."

Bailey described his weekend meeting with Geren as "a little discussion, and he said because of the longevity of the season, he wanted to limit me to one inning. He needed me in the eighth, so that's when I went in. It's his call. We just didn't get it done today."

Bailey said he feels fine physically. Five times this season - and 22 times last season - Bailey had appearances of more than four outs.

"I just think he wants to get guys more roles and have them confident in certain situations, which will play out through the end of the year," said Bailey, recalling how the relievers divided last year's late-inning relief chores. "I think it's a smart move."

Braden remains winless since his perfect game on Mother's Day. He surrendered hits to four of his first eight batters - including a homer to Jeff Baker - but only one of his final 15 batters reached base, and he was doubled off.

A's Adam Rosales has Wrigley memories

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

After losing two of three to the Cubs, the A's said goodbye to the not-so-friendly confines of Wrigley Field for another six years. That's how often teams visit interleague opponents who are not geographic rivals.

"It's a big treat for these guys to come to a park like this with the history here," A's manager **Bob Geren** said.

Adam Rosales' Wrigley experiences date to his childhood. It's where he saw his first big-league game, sitting in the upper deck.

"Sat right up there. Must've been 4 or 5 years old," said Rosales, who grew up in nearby Park Ridge. "Cubs and Pirates. Watched **Barry Bonds** and **Bobby Bonilla**. I remember being glued to the game."

The Cubs' were Rosales' team, and **Shawon Dunston** was his favorite player. Rosales was a shortstop himself in high school, college and the minors. But, "My dad (**William**) always hit me fly balls. He taught me how to catch flies before I started taking grounders. He encouraged me to play all the positions."

Worked out well. Rosales is the A's most versatile player, appearing at five positions.

Way back when: **Conor Jackson** had never played in the majors with any of his new A's teammates, but he was on the U.S. national team in 2002 (which played in Italy and the Netherlands) with **Landon Powell** and **Eric Patterson**.

"I think he'll be a good clubhouse guy for this team," Powell said. "I think we got him at the right time, from all I hear. Hopefully, he'll help us out. I know he will."

Briefly: Without the designated hitter rule, **Jack Cust** stayed in the lineup the past two days as the right fielder. **Rajai Davis** sat out Wednesday and **Ryan Sweeney** (sore knees, according to Geren) was reduced to a pinch-hitting role Thursday. ... The Cubs won consecutive games for the first time since May 22-25.

A'S LEADING OFF

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Joy ride: Lew Wolff, A's managing general partner, is on a trip down memory lane. He grew up in the St. Louis area (a fan of the Cardinals and old Browns) and is looking forward to this weekend's stay. As for Wrigley Field, it's the first time he visited the place since he drove from his college (University of Wisconsin) for a Bears game in the late '50s.

Drumbeat: And when the music stops . . .

John Shea from the North Side of Chicago, where the A's wrap up their interleague series with the Cubs . . . 10:46AM

Today's musical-chair loser is Ryan Sweeney, who's out of the lineup. Yesterday, Rajai Davis was omitted after a three-hit game. Today, Sweeney. Manager Bob Geren said it's partly because of Sweeney's achy knees.

Conor Jackson, who led off in place of Davis yesterday, is hitting second. Geren called the newcomer a "top of the order hitter," and Jackson agrees.

Dallas Braden's on the mound, looking for his first win since his Mother's Day perfect game. Geren cited elbow and ankle issues for Braden, saying, "In fairness to him, he's battling through some injuries and going out there every fifth day. He's been OK. I hope today will be his break."

Before the game, Geren was asked about his history at Wrigley Field, and he mentioned the home run he hit in 1993 against Dan Plesac. It was a seventh-inning shot to left-center, giving the Padres a 4-1 lead. Fred McGriff homered in the eighth, and they won 5-4. Geren had three hits that day, out-hitting Tony Gwynn (two) and Gary Sheffield (one).

Geren homered one more time. It came later that season in the second-to-last game of his career.

"It's a big treat for these (players) to come to a park like this with the history here," said Geren, not necessarily speaking of his own.

Coco Crisp will play his third rehab game with Triple-A Sacramento. Geren said the plan is for Crisp to play five innings his first two games, seven innings his next two games. Take a day off. Then play nine innings for three or four games before joining the A's on the homestand.

The lineup: CF Davis, LF Jackson, 1B Barton, C Suzuki, 3B Kouzmanoff, RF Cust, 2B Ellis, SS Pennington, LHP Braden.

For in-game coverage, check out Twitter @

A's bullpen lets Cubs slip away in finale

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CHICAGO -- Through all the injuries, all the offensive woes, all the ups and downs this A's team has endured this season, the bullpen has been considered perhaps its most reliable and efficient facet.

The 'pen had taken away just one win for an A's starter entering Thursday's rubber match against the Cubs, who -- by day's end -- forced spoiler No. 2 in the picture.

- **66 wins**
- **60 wins**

Lefty Jerry Blevins, who hadn't allowed a run in 10 of his past 11 outings, gave up a doozy of one in the bottom of the ninth -- a walk-off single to the right side to Kosuke Fukudome that left the A's on the losing end of a 3-2 game at Wrigley Field.

"I was just trying to have solid contact," Fukudome said. "That was the only thing I was focusing on."

Blevins couldn't carry all the blame, even though he essentially offered to while talking to the media following the affair. After all, it was Michael Wuertz who was brought on in the eighth with the A's leading, 2-1. It was Wuertz who surrendered two consecutive hits and a walk to load the bases. And it was Wuertz' run, inherited by Andrew Bailey, that scored on a sacrifice fly to tie the game.

Furthermore, when Bailey was placed in the game in the eighth, Geren didn't utilize the double-switch approach but rather pulled his closer after the inning in order to not only preserve his pitcher but place Ryan Sweeney in the lineup in an effort to win the game. Sweeney singled, but the frame ended with runners stranded at first and third -- a common scene in the past two games, which saw the A's go 2-for-19 with runners in scoring position.

In the end, though, it was Blevins' loss. The Oakland southpaw walked Geovany Soto to lead off the ninth, at which point the Cubs catcher advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt put down by Starlin Castro. With one out, Blevins intentionally walked Tyler Colvin before loading the bases on another free pass, this time to Ryan Theriot.

Looking for any way out of the inning, Blevins delivered a fastball to Fukudome, who perfectly placed the pitch between first and second to bring home Soto and the victory.

"Late in the game like that," manager Bob Geren said, "walks come back and haunt you."

"You want to throw strikes," Blevins said. "That's your No. 1 job as a pitcher. I just didn't do my job. It's as simple as that."

By the time the A's walked off the field, starter Dallas Braden's potential victory lay a good distance in the rear-view mirror. His last victory, the one that came along with his historic perfect game on May 9, stands even further in that mirror.

Braden entered Thursday's contest 0-4 with a 4.75 ERA over his last six starts and found himself off to a rocky start against a Cubs lineup he had never faced, allowing hits to four of the first eight batters he faced -- including a solo shot to Jeff Baker. But after those initial eight, the A's southpaw retired his final 15 opponents and left after six innings with one run, five hits, one walk and four strikeouts attached to his name.

Braden wasn't aware of the 15 mark -- one which, following a loss, doesn't mean all that much to this competitor.

"That's all for naught, really," he said. "It doesn't matter how many I retire in a row if we don't pull out the win."

Braden tossed 83 pitches in the effort, which came after seven days of rest to nurse tendinitis in the flexor tendon of his left elbow -- a soreness very much felt during Thursday's battle.

"I was physically at the end of the rope," he said. "I left what I had out there and felt it was time to go to the back of the bullpen. To ask any more out of myself would have been hazardous. You want the right guy in the right situation, and I wasn't it at that point."

"I felt tightness throughout the whole game. Every one of those 83 or 84 pitches, it barked a little."

However, in typical Braden fashion, he noted, "See you in five days."

Upon the lefty's exit, the A's were knotted in a 1-1 game, which changed with one swing of the bat when Mark Ellis led off the seventh and launched a home run to left -- his second long ball of the season -- to make it 2-1 and position Braden for the potential win.

"Braden had great stuff today and kept guys off balance," Chicago starter Randy Wells said. "Every time [Cubs hitters] came back in the dugout, they were positive. It was a positive mental attitude in the clubhouse all day from the time I showed up to here."

That positivity, coupled with Oakland's bullpen struggles, took away that win for Braden, who -- before the seventh -- had received just one run of support in the form of an RBI single from Rajai Davis. The A's outfielder collected two hits and a

walk against Wells, who went seven strong frames for the Cubs, giving up two runs on seven hits while walking one and striking out six.

Oakland, which lost the series one game to two, now heads to St. Louis for another three-game Interleague road set beginning Friday, when the A's relief corps hopes to return to consistent form.

"Right now, we're struggling a bit," Bailey said. "Hopefully we can start rolling here again."

A's debut CoJack in expected No. 2 hole

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CHICAGO -- This is the lineup manager Bob Geren envisioned upon welcoming in outfielder Conor Jackson.

The new A's acquisition, brought into the fold Tuesday via a trade with Arizona, was spotted in the No. 2 hole for the rubber match of a three-game set at Wrigley Field on Thursday.

"I like him there," Geren said. "He's a good top-of-the-lineup hitter. It balances out the lineup pretty well."

Jackson made his starting debut in green and gold on Wednesday in the leadoff spot, where he enjoyed a 2-for-3 day with a walk. Before being shipped off to the American League, the 28-year-old outfielder had made 13 starts in the leadoff spot for Arizona this season and hit second 18 times.

"I don't really change my approach much no matter where I am," Jackson said. "I'm really comfortable anywhere in the lineup."

With Jackson batting second, Geren utilized Rajai Davis -- who was held out of Wednesday's lineup following a 3-for-5 night -- in the leadoff spot while placing Daric Barton, Kurt Suzuki and Kevin Kouzmanoff in the three-five spots, respectively.

The only name missing that could become a regularity once American League play resumes on Monday was Ryan Sweeney, who received a normal day off -- influenced partly by an ongoing bout with sore knees.

In Sweeney's absence, Jack Cust was given his fifth straight start in the outfield, where Geren has had to sit regulars such as Davis during the club's current nine-game Interleague road trip. Davis expressed some disappointment on Wednesday when not seeing his name on the lineup card following his three-hit night, saying, "It's pretty tough for anyone to fill my shoes."

"I like guys that are confident," Geren said. "I like guys that want to play."

Geren recalls Wrigley Field experience

CHICAGO -- There's no denying the rustic yet unique ambiance that greets players at the historic Wrigley Field, where Oakland typically travels just once every six years due to the game's Interleague schedule.

"It's a treat for the guys to come to a park like this with all the history here," manager Bob Geren said.

On Thursday, the A's skipper recalled some of his own history at Wrigley, where -- during his playing days on May 9, 1993 - - he guided the Padres to a 5-4 victory over the Cubs thanks to a 3-for-4 day, which included a solo shot off Dan Plesac.

It was on that day Geren outhit the likes of teammates Tony Gwynn, Gary Sheffield and Fred McGriff. Among those on the opposing end were Mark Grace, Ryne Sandberg and Sammy Sosa.

Geren played just three games at Wrigley during his five seasons of Major League ball, but they were enough to inspire story time during his pregame media session.

"It's great here," he said. "It's one of those places I think everyone looks forward to seeing."

Crisp continues progress with River Cats

CHICAGO -- A's outfielder Coco Crisp, rehabbing an intercostal strain that put him on the disabled list May 26, is slated to play his third game with Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday night.

He played five innings with the River Cats on Tuesday and Wednesday, going a combined 3-for-5. Manager Bob Geren said Crisp will likely play seven innings for the next two days before taking a day off and returning to play at least three full games. If all goes well, the A's outfielder could be back during the club's next homestand.

Youth vs. experience on display in St. Louis

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

The A's game against the Cardinals at Busch Stadium on Friday night is an Interleague matchup of the ages.

Vin Mazzaro, the A's young right-hander, is only 23 years old but shows tons of promise. The Cardinals' sage veteran, Chris Carpenter, is 35 years old and a perennial Cy Young Award contender.

Mazzaro took the loss in his last outing against Oakland's Bay Area rival, the San Francisco Giants, but he continued to impress his skipper. Mazzaro, who replaced the injured lefty Brett Anderson in the rotation, gave up four runs (three earned) in six innings to notch a quality start.

"He made some mistakes, and they hit them," manager Bob Geren said. "But I thought he threw the ball extremely well. I like what I've seen from him. He'll be staying in the rotation and going every five days for us."

That type of arrangement has never been in doubt for Carpenter, who is 7-1 and, as usual, one of the better starters in the National League so far this season.

He also turned in a quality start in his last outing, going six innings with three runs allowed and needing 117 pitches to do so. Carpenter worked out of a bases-loaded, no-out jam in the fifth, and a two-on, one-out situation in the sixth before he was lifted.

"They put good at-bats on me the whole game, fouling some tough pitches off," Carpenter said. "But I was able to continue to make pitches when I had to make pitches and give my team a chance. At least keep them in the game a little bit."

A's: Coco still with Sacramento

Outfielder Coco Crisp will continue his rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento, where he is expected to remain for at least eight more days. The A's outfielder (intercostal strain) went 2-for-3 with a triple and two runs scored in five innings during the River Cats' game on Tuesday and went 1-for-2 in five innings on Wednesday. He's likely to play seven innings on Thursday and Friday before taking a day off, then returning to play at least three full games. If there are no setbacks, he could be back by the club's next homestand.

Cardinals: La Russa has faith in Reyes

Reliever Dennys Reyes might be slumping lately, but Cardinals manager Tony La Russa won't hesitate to use the lefty. "It would be nice not to bring him in bases loaded and nobody out," La Russa said. "Give him a chance to feel out what he's doing. But if it came down ... where you had to bring him in against a left-hander, I wouldn't hesitate." ... Carpenter has a 2.16 ERA and has averaged more than seven innings per start at home this year.

Worth noting

A's pinch-hitters have seven hits over their past 17 at-bats (.412) with four walks, two home runs and five RBIs and are now hitting .289 (11-for-38) with six walks, three homers and seven RBIs for the season. ... Cardinals outfielder Colby Rasmus has started in each of the last six games in which he was healthy and the Cardinals faced a left-handed starter.

Fukudome's single in 9th lifts Cubs past A's 3-2

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Despite being benched by Cubs manager Lou Piniella, Kosuke Fukudome hasn't sulked, pouted, thrown a fit or demanded a trade.

"Would I change my situation by getting angry? I don't think so," Fukudome said. "I'm just going to keep working for my opportunities. And when I get an opportunity, I just need to do my job."

He did just that Thursday, singling as a pinch-hitter to start the tying rally in the eighth inning and then driving home the winning run in the ninth as Chicago defeated the Oakland Athletics 3-2.

The former Japan League star was an immediate smash with the Cubs in 2008 after signing a four-year, \$48 million contract. But a blazing April led to a mediocre May and then it got worse each month after — all the way down to .178 in September.

The pattern repeated last season. And it was happening again this year; he batted .344 in April and .253 in May, and he took a .214 June average into Thursday's game.

Piniella had seen enough. The manager started Fukudome in right field only four times in the last 12 games — and in none of the last five, going with a platoon of Xavier Nady and rookie Tyler Colvin.

"It has no relationship to my past," Fukudome, speaking through an interpreter, said when asked if he was frustrated to lose his job after his stellar history in Japan. "If the manager decides to do it this way, all I can do is work hard. Because getting angry wouldn't make any difference."

With one out in the eighth and the Cubs trailing 2-1, Fukudome singled off Michael Wuertz. Marlon Byrd singled and Derrek Lee walked before Nady tied it with a sacrifice fly off closer Andrew Bailey.

After Cubs closer Carlos Marmol (2-1) escaped a first-and-third, one-out situation in the top of the ninth, Jerry Blevins (2-1) opened the bottom of the inning by walking Geovany Soto.

Starlin Castro sacrificed, pinch-hitter Koyie Hill was intentionally walked and Ryan Theriot walked to load the bases. On the next pitch, Fukudome singled through a drawn-in infield to give the Cubs their first series victory since late May and their first winning streak of any length since they took three in a row from May 22-25.

"I didn't do the job, simple as that," said Blevins after the A's lost their fifth in six games to fall two games under .500, matching their low-water mark this season.

"It's heartbreaking when your team fights to come back ... and then you basically lose a game yourself. It's embarrassing."

The A's had been 28-0 when leading after seven innings, but their inability to hold the lead this time deprived Dallas Braden of his first victory since his May 9 perfect game.

Braden, who allowed one run on five hits in six innings, is 0-4 in his last seven starts. The A's have scored two runs or fewer in six of those outings.

The left-hander was able to throw only 83 pitches due to stiffness in his elbow, which has bothered him for two weeks. He vowed to make his next start in five days and said he was pleased with his outing "considering what I've been battling."

"Physically, I was at the end of the rope," said Braden, who retired 14 of the final 15 batters he faced. "Asking more out of myself ... would have been hazardous for the team. You always want to have the right guy out there in the right situation. It wasn't going to be me."

Cubs starter Randy Wells also pitched well, giving up two runs on seven hits in seven innings. Although he is 0-5 with a 5.89 ERA in his last nine starts and hasn't won since April, he was encouraged by the physical and mental adjustments he has made.

"It's a little unfortunate it took this long to get the problem fixed," said Wells, who had a 3.05 ERA as one of the majors' top rookie pitchers last season. "Today I was pretty pleased with the way I calmed my emotions, didn't let the negative things bother me and just focused on executing."

Jeff Baker homered in the first for the Cubs. Oakland tied it on Rajai Davis' fifth-inning single and went ahead in the seventh on Mark Ellis' home run.

NOTES: Going into Thursday, the A's were 11-5 in one-run games, an MLB-high .688 winning percentage. The Cubs now are 10-15 in such games; their 15 losses lead the majors. ... Before drawing his key ninth-inning walk, Theriot was 0 for 4 with two strikeouts on the day a bobblehead in his likeness was given to fans. With Theriot slumping, Piniella said Mike Fontenot would get more playing time at second base. ... Cubs 3B Aramis Ramirez, on the DL with a sore left thumb, will start a rehab assignment Saturday at Class A Peoria. ... Back in his playing days, A's manager Bob Geren went 3 for 5 at Wrigley Field, including a homer off Dan Plesac on May 9, 1993. He joked that the tiny visiting clubhouse "builds team camaraderie."

A's co-owner will have homecoming

By Rick Hummel

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Friday, Jun. 18 2010

Lew Wolff, a former center fielder for the mighty Indians at University City High School when they played at Heman Park and a former Knothole Gang member at old Sportsman's Park, will be appearing at the newest Busch Stadium this weekend. As an owner and managing partner of the Oakland Athletics.

Wolff, who many years ago used to be a minority owner of the Blues, will bring his Athletics team to St. Louis for the first time under his stewardship and that of majority owner John Fisher. The Fisher-Wolff group (Fisher, son of David Fisher, founder of the Gap, owns 80 percent), purchased the A's in 2005.

"I'm very excited about it," said Wolff, as he rode the team bus to Wrigley Field in Chicago on Thursday, where the A's finished a series with the Cubs and where Wolff last had seen a game when the Chicago Bears played there. "It's going to be a pretty tough time beating the Cardinals," said Wolff, "but I'm delighted in getting a chance to play there."

Wolff is inviting all his St. Louis friends to join him for Sunday's game in a couple of suites. With children and grandchildren, that will total more than 100 people.

"I hope it's fun for everybody," said Wolff. Then, mindful that the A's already will have faced Cardinals aces Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright, he said, "I hope it's the rubber game."

Wolff, 74, still takes batting practice once in a while at home. "I asked one

of our coaches what the average speed of a batting practice pitch was and he said 70 miles an hour," said Wolff. "I said, 'Why don't you speed it up?' And he said, "I want everybody going into a game feeling really good about themselves.'

"Including the owner," Wolff said.

Regarding his own playing days, Wolff said, "I was a very good hitter as I recall. But I'm tending to expand on those memories."

Besides the A's, Wolff and Fisher own the San Jose Earthquakes soccer team. Wolff has been involved in the development, acquisition and management of commercial, office, parking and hotel properties in several California cities. His interests include the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Clayton.

It seems that Wolff has as much fun as a baseball owner can have, but his enthusiasm and enjoyment are tempered by what he feels is an untenable stadium situation for the A's, who still share the aging Oakland-Alameda Coliseum with the National Football League Raiders.

His ownership group first tried to put together a development, which would have included a Ballpark Village, in Fremont, Calif., some 25 miles from Oakland. But that venture was scuttled, in large part, by local opposition, which was concerned by additional infrastructure and police costs.

Wolff said his group invested some \$80 million in real estate there, and \$45 million of it will not be recouped. So the A's next target has been downtown San Jose, some 40 miles from Oakland and 50 miles from San Francisco.

But, according to current Major League Baseball regulations, the A's can't move there. "That was a territory inadvertently assigned to the Giants many, many years ago (1992)," said Wolff. "And much to our surprise, they're fighting to retain that territory.

"It's the most ridiculous thing. That's 60 miles from them and they can see our stadium now (in Oakland) from where they are. Their ownership would rather we don't draw and stay where we are."

The Giants contend that they have a large fan base in San Jose that would be at risk and are prepared to file suit, if necessary, to keep the A's out of there.

Commissioner Bud Selig is a former fraternity brother of Wolff's at the University of Wisconsin (Wolff has a master's degree from Washington

University) and has entrusted a committee to study the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose situation.

"It's a little frustrating," said Wolff. "I'm disappointed we haven't had the decision we need from Major League Baseball. It's been 15 months and we're desperate for a new venue. But baseball has its own time frame. There's not much we can do. We're following the process established by the commissioner."

The A's rank 26th in attendance among the 30 major-league clubs, averaging only 17,838 a game, which was just above what the A's averaged last year when they drew slightly over 1.4 million fans.

The A's already have naming rights for a new stadium from Cisco Systems, but there will be no public money involved "because it's not the style in northern California. You can't get any public financing," said Wolff.

Wolff said, "We're doing this with total private financing. We're ready to go. All we need is the go-ahead from Major League Baseball."

In the meantime, Wolff will watch his two favorite teams play this weekend.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Rally pants help Sacramento claw past Reno

By Nicholas Lozito and Kevin Poveda / Sacramento River Cats

Just when River Cats batters seemed to get a bit tight, Brad Kilby got even tighter.

The 241-pound relief pitcher, who has been on the disabled list since May 27, trotted out to coach first base in the eighth inning wearing skin-tight rally pants. With Sacramento trailing the Reno Aces 6-5, Kilby had gone back into the clubhouse to squeeze into a pair of pants that would better fit a West Sacramento little leaguer.

By the end of the inning, Kilby was jogging awkwardly back to the dugout - let's just say there wasn't much breathing room - after Sacramento had scored three runs en route to an 8-6 victory Thursday night at Raley Field.

Adam Heether and Michael Taylor opened the eighth inning with opposite-field singles, both slapping Kilby with high fives after reaching safely. Steve Tolleson followed with a sacrifice bunt down the third-base line to put runners at second and third for Wimberly. The River Cats left fielder, in his first at-bat after replacing Coco Crisp in the outfield, sliced an opposite-field double into the left-field corner to give Sacramento the lead. Eric Sogard followed with a single to score Wimberly.

"It's awesome to be able to get a big hit like that," Wimberly said. "I could feel the crowd right away. Everyone wants the opportunity to be the big guy. I just happened to get that opportunity, and I took advantage of it."

After scoring five runs in the first three innings, Sacramento batters collected only one hit between the fourth and seventh innings. That's when Kilby found it necessary to, with the help of a clubhouse manager, cram his legs into a lucky set of trousers.

Jon Hunton (4-1, 3.12), who currently leads all Pacific Coast League relief pitchers in fan voting for the 2010 Triple-A All-Star Game, earned the victory by recording the final four outs.

Matt Carson went 3-for-4 for Sacramento with two doubles and two RBIs. Crisp, on a rehab assignment with Sacramento, went 0-for-3 with a walk and his first stolen base in three games with Sacramento.

With the four-game sweep of Reno, Sacramento has won seven of nine overall and eight in a row against the Aces.

"We're starting to gel together as a team, build some chemistry," Wimberly said. "We are really starting to perform and that's what's helping us get wins."

Hounds Battle Back From Five Run Deficit

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The RockHounds will not win the Texas League South Division first half pennant, but to become a factor in the second half quite often requires a strong finish. The 'Hounds made a statement to that effect Wednesday, erasing a 5-0 deficit after two innings, and rallying in the ninth to defeat division leading (and soon to be first half champs) Frisco, 7-6.

The win was the 'Hounds' second consecutive comeback win over the RoughRiders, and gained a split of the 4-game series at what is also the midway point of an 8-game road trip (the club now travels to San Antonio for four games).

The RoughRiders jumped on Texas League All-Star Carlos Hernandez for five runs on a 3-run home run in the first inning off the bat of Wes Bankston and a 2-run shot in the second from Matt Lawson (his second in as many games).

The RockHounds chipped away, with Gabe Ortiz driving in a pair with a fourth inning single and Corey Brown ripping a solo home run in the fifth, drawing the 'Hounds to within 5-4. Frisco then manufactured a run with outstanding fundamentals (double, sac bunt, sac fly) in the sixth and held onto that 6-4 lead into the ninth.

Facing hard-throwing Josh Leuke (he regularly hits 95+), the 'Hounds got two men on in the ninth and Shane Peterson doubled down the right field line scoring both runners to tie the game at 6-6. "Pete" alertly went to third on the throw, which turned out to be a key play.

Josh Horton, who went 4-for-5 with hits in each of his last four trips to the plate, singled sharply to right. "Pete" would not have scored in the play from second, but did so routinely from third, scoring the winning run on Horton's RBI.

Mickey Storey went 3.0 strong innings in relief for the win and Jared Lansford (the winning pitcher in Tuesday night's comeback win) pitched a scoreless ninth for his eighth save in as many opportunities.

Rawhide Power Past Ports, 10-1

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Visalia Rawhide (35-33) definitely brought the lumber to the ballpark, as they totaled five home runs in a 10-1 victory over the Stockton Ports (31-37). Outfielder Jeremy Barfield accounted for the lone Stockton run with a solo home run.

Visalia starter Ryan Cook turned in a strong performance, no-hitting the Ports through the first four innings. He struck out eight batters in 8.0 innings, and allowed all three Ports hits. Stockton starter Paul Oseguera picked up the loss, allowing three runs on five hits and striking out seven in 5.2 innings. Lance Sewell allowed three runs on three home runs and Brett Hunter allowed four runs on two home runs in relief for the Ports. Only right-hander Andrew Carignan kept the Rawhide hitless and scoreless.

Visalia took a 2-0 lead in the first inning. Shortstop Brett Greer started the game by walking. He moved to third on a double by centerfielder Alfredo Marte. Oseguera then struck out Ryan Wheeler. First baseman Paul Goldschmidt grounded out in a 3-1 play, which allowed Greer to score. Left fielder Marc Krause doubled to center field to bring home Marte.

The Ports made it 2-1 as Barfield dropped a home run over the left field wall for the first Stockton hit of the game. It was his seventh home run of the year.

Visalia added on another pair of runs in the top of the sixth. With one out, Oseguera walked catcher Rossmel Perez for the third time of the game. He then got second baseman Gerson Montilla to fly out. The Ports then replaced him with lefty Sewell, who turned 24 today. Greer then slammed the first pitch he saw off Sewell out of the ballpark for a two-run home run. Sewell got the next out to get out of the inning. But Sewell gave up a pair of solo home runs in the seventh inning, one to Goldschmidt and one to Kyle Greene.

Carignan pitched a scoreless eighth inning to keep it 6-1. But then the Rawhide piled on four more runs off Hunter in the ninth. With one out, Hunter issued two consecutive walks. Designated hitter Josh Ford then slammed a three-run shot over the visitor's bullpen in left field to make it 9-1. He then gave up a solo home run to Greene, a giant shot that bounced off the Kinder's BBQ building in straight center field to make it 10-1 for Visalia.

The Ports left four runners on the base in the game, and stranded two in the eighth inning. The Ports went down in order in the ninth. The two teams will meet at 7:05 PM on Friday at Banner Island Ballpark for game two of the series. LHP Ben Hornbeck (1-1, 3.16) will start for Stockton, while LHP Taylor Sinclair (4-2, 4.05) will take the hill for Visalia.

Cougars Win 5th Straight Series

Gilliam and pair of relievers lead Kane County to another winning set

DAVENPORT, Iowa – Rob Gilliam gave up one run in 5 1/3 innings for his first win in over a month, Max Stassi belted his ninth homer and Anivioris Ramirez and Jose Guzman posted shutout bullpen work Thursday night to lead the Kane County Cougars to a 3-1 victory over the Quad Cities River Bandits at Modern Woodmen Park. The Cougars, who took two out of three with their finale win, have won five straight series and 11 of their last 16 games, and their win prevented Quad Cities from clinching a first-half playoff spot.

The Cougars jumped on Deryk Hooker (3-3) with all three of their runs in fourth inning. After Anthony Aliotti singled, Stassi launched an opposite-field, two-run shot to make it 2-0. Then Rashun Dixon reached on an error and later scored on a home-plate collision with catcher Robert Stock after a fielding error by Hooker. Dixon was hit by a pitch in his next at-bat, leading to a warning from the home plate umpire. When Leonardo Gil was plunked later in the frame, Hooker was ejected. Quad Cities manager Johnny Rodriguez argued and also was ejected.

Gilliam (4-3) now has beaten the Bandits three times this season. He gave up one run – in the sixth – on three hits, walked two and established a new season-high with eight strikeouts. It was his first win since he beat the Bandits on May 14. Ramirez took over with 2 2/3 scoreless, and Jose Guzman handled the ninth for his eighth save. The Cougars are 7-3 against Quad Cities this season.

The Cougars (32-35) return home Friday night at 7 CT as they welcome the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (24-42) to Elfstrom Stadium for a three-game set, the final series before the all-star break. Dan Straily (5-3, 4.76) will face Kyle Heckathorn (4-4, 2.58). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.