

A's News Clips, Sunday, June 20, 2010

Free-falling A's can't stop slide

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's scored twice in the ninth inning and advanced the tying run to second base before falling short against the St. Louis Cardinals on Saturday night.

Some folks might rank that as encouraging, others as bitterly disappointing.

Regardless, it went in the books as a 4-3 defeat, and it continued the A's recent free fall in the American League West. They've lost four straight and seven of eight to drop eight games behind the first-place Texas Rangers, who won their seventh straight Saturday.

To put the A's slide into context, just nine days ago they were two games out of first. Their 5-13 record in June is second-worst in the AL behind the 19-49 Baltimore Orioles (4-13).

"We don't care about Texas, we don't care about the (Los Angeles) Angels, we don't care about the (Seattle) Mariners," first baseman Daric Barton said. "All we can do is control our own team."

For the second straight night, Matt Holliday torpedoed his former team's spirits. He drove in three of the Cardinals' four runs and smashed a two-run homer off Ben Sheets in the seventh that extended the Cards' lead to 4-1.

"He was pretty much on everything I threw tonight," Sheets said. "I think that last one, I just got the ball lower than I wanted. I was trying to go in on his hands. He's so big and strong, if he can get the barrel on it, it's got a chance."

The A's made it a nail-biter in the ninth. Their first three batters reached base, and Ryan Sweeney's RBI single chased Cards closer Ryan Franklin. Jason Motte relieved him, and after Kevin Kouzmanoff struck out and Ellis flied out, Gabe Gross delivered a pinch-hit RBI single to make it 4-3.

But with runners on first and second, Motte got pinch hitter Adam Rosales to wave at strike three to end it.

Sheets (2-7) with a 4.95 ERA, hasn't won in his past eight starts, his longest streak since going nine straight from July 17-Aug. 28, 2004.

"You take a win or loss for what it is," Sheets said. "(But) 2-7 sucks any way you draw it up."

Sheets was having a whale of a time early. He blanked the Cardinals through the first four innings and lined a third-inning single to right off Adam Wainwright, noteworthy considering Sheets' .076 career batting average entering the game was second-lowest in major league history among players with 400 or more plate appearances.

But St. Louis got to Sheets for two runs in the fifth, both with two outs, to erase a 1-0 deficit. Then Holliday delivered the big blow in the seventh, turning on a 1-0 fastball and hitting a two-run shot down the left field line to make it 4-1.

The A's also jumped on the scoreboard early for the second straight game, only to watch a repeat of their offense taking a nap after that.

Rajai Davis led the game off with a double, stole third and scored when Yadier Molina's throw sailed into left field. Then Wainwright (10-4) found his groove, allowing just two more runners to get as far as second base over eight innings of five-hit ball.

"He has quite a few different ways to get guys out," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Geren said A's pitchers need to get better on the road, which is true. Their 54 homers allowed on the road are the most in the AL.

Geren did talk more encouragingly about the offense, but the A's hardly are getting the job done in that department either. They've averaged 3.5 runs per game on this nine-game road trip and in general have failed to cash in fully with runners in scoring position.

A's update: Aaron Miles back with St. Louis Cardinals

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

After detour, Miles back in majors with Cardinals

ST. LOUIS — Aaron Miles' winding road has led him back to a familiar city.

The Antioch High product, a middle infielder who won a World Series ring with St. Louis in 2006, is back with the Cardinals after being promoted from the minors June 1.

"I was sitting at home a month-and-a-half ago," Miles, 33, said before Saturday's game against the A's. "To be in a big league uniform and have a chance to help a team out is great."

A nice story looked to be unfolding when the A's acquired Miles along with Jake Fox from the Chicago Cubs in a December trade. But they shipped Miles to Cincinnati on Feb. 1 in a deal that brought infielder Adam Rosales to the A's.

A broken finger set Miles back during the spring, and the Reds designated him for assignment just before Opening Day and released him.

Miles, who spent eight seasons in the minors before debuting with the White Sox at age 26, said he never considered retirement. He signed a minor league contract April 27 with St. Louis, where he played second base and shortstop from 2006-08. A switch hitter, Miles has appeared in just eight games since being promoted. But he said any role suits him fine.

"(The key is) do you still want to fight and claw your way back to the big leagues?" Miles said. "I was prepared to do that, and luckily a spot opened up here."

A's manager Bob Geren listed catcher Kurt Suzuki, right fielder Ryan Sweeney, closer Andrew Bailey and starting pitcher Trevor Cahill as deserving of All-Star consideration.

But he said Suzuki is particularly deserving.

"If there are five or six (catchers who make) the All-Star Game, I don't believe there are five or six better than Kurt," Geren said.

No Athletic is ranked in the top five among infielders or top 15 among outfielders in fan balloting, which determines starters. Reserves and pitchers are chosen by player voting and All-Star Game manager selections.

Cahill, who starts today for the A's, estimated he drank 10 bottles of water Friday to help hydrate his body in preparation for the start. The first-pitch temperature is expected to be 93 degrees with 52 percent humidity.

Chin Music: Overcast skies and rain as A's-Cards prepare for Game 2

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/19/2010 3:30pm

Storm clouds have moved in quickly over Busch Stadium, and without the lights on, I've never seen a field this dark at 5:30 p.m. There's not a whole lot to report from the A's clubhouse, so we'll cut to the lineups ...

P.S: It just started pouring rain as I'm about to post this!! Groundskeepers are working quickly to tarp the field, so stay tuned for whether this game starts on time ...

A's
Davis CF, Barton 1B, Jackson LF, Suzuki C, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Pennington SS, Sheets RHP.

Cards
Schumaker 2B, Holliday LF, Pujols 1B, Ludwick RF, Rasmus CF, Freese 3B, Molina C, Wainwright RHP, Ryan SS.

A's ugly month continues with 4-3 loss

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's led the American League West at the end of May and now are closer to last place than first.

It's Oakland's version of the June Swoon, and the month's 5-13 collapse is concurrent with the rise of the Rangers (14-4) and Angels (13-5). The A's are eight games back after Saturday's 4-3 loss to the Cardinals, in which Matt Holliday hit another home run.

Nobody comprehends the consequence better than Ben Sheets, the \$10 million acquisition who hasn't won a game since May 8 - or a road game since Aug. 26, 2008.

"My win-loss record sucks," said Sheets, who's 2-7 this season, 0-4 this month. "That's just the way it is. There are guys with better win-loss records who have pitched worse than I have. You take a win or loss for what it is - 2-7 sucks any way you draw it up."

Speaking of the S-word, the A's are 1-7 on the trip, and the only win came when the charitable Cubs committed four errors. In 18 June games, the A's have dropped nine games in the standings. The only team with a worse June record is the Orioles.

Good news for the A's: The next trip begins in Baltimore. But not until June 29. More than a week remains.

"Knowing we got off to a hot start, that's frustrating," manager Bob Geren said of the free fall. "But if you look at our overall play, we're playing well, and our overall lineup is stronger than in April and May, and with the addition of Conor (Jackson) - and we'll get Coco (Crisp) back soon - our offense is actually better. It will reflect."

The A's are 0-4 since Jackson joined the lineup. If there's a bright side, three of the losses were by a combined four runs, and not many teams beat Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright, St. Louis' starters the past two nights.

On Friday, the A's collected 10 hits off Carpenter and still lost. On Saturday, Wainwright limited them to five hits and one unearned run - Rajai Davis scoring on Yadier Molina's throwing error - in eight innings.

The A's didn't get comfy at the plate until the ninth, when the first three batters reached against Ryan Franklin, capped by Ryan Sweeney's RBI single. That prompted manager Tony La Russa to replace his closer with Jason Motte, who surrendered a run-scoring single to Gabe Gross before striking out Adam Rosales to end it.

Holliday, who's suddenly an A's killer, drove in three runs against his old team with a two-run homer (his second in two nights) and RBI double. A's pitchers have given up 58 homers on the road, 17 at home.

"He was pretty much on everything I threw tonight," said Sheets, who's 6-15 against the Cardinals, the team that has beaten him the most.

"When you have a team that loses 90 games against a team that wins 90 or 100, chances are you're going to lose a lot of games," said Sheets, recalling his days with the Brewers.

Sheets did smile once on the field. He opened the third inning with a single. He hit .076 in eight years with the Brewers. With the A's, he's .333 (1-for-3).

Geren boosts Suzuki for All-Star Game

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Who's the A's All-Star? Manager **Bob Geren**, when asked for candidates, listed four and put the most emphasis on **Kurt Suzuki**.

"I think Suzuki is an All-Star," Geren said. "I think he should've been last year without a doubt."

Closer **Andrew Bailey** was Oakland's representative last year and could be again in 2010. Last year, American League manager **Joe Maddon** carried only two catchers (**Joe Mauer** and **Victor Martinez**) on his roster. The National League had three.

Maddon's reasoning: All-Star catchers can re-enter in case of an injury.

In many circles, Suzuki is considered the second-best catcher in the league (considering both offense and defense) behind Mauer. This year's manager is New York's **Joe Girardi**, who could make a push for **Jorge Posada**.

Geren will be an All-Star coach and hinted he'll make a case for Suzuki, who's hitting .333 in June and sports the lowest catchers' ERA in the league.

"He's one of the best all-around catchers in the game," Geren said, "and if there are five or six (who make the) All-Star Game, I don't believe there are five or six better than Kurt."

Others mentioned by Geren as candidates were Bailey, **Trevor Cahill** and **Ryan Sweeney**. The A's haven't had a position player make an All-Star team since catcher **Ramon Hernandez** in 2002.

Hot Coco: In his first three games with Triple-A Sacramento, Coco Crisp (intercostal strain) was 8-for-13, but Geren said the A's aren't necessarily prepared to rush the rehab based on Crisp's hot hitting (5-for-5 Friday) or the A's struggles. For now, it's still a 10-day assignment.

"He's still being built up. He hasn't played nine innings yet," Geren said. "We want to make sure he's ready physically."

A's leading off

John Shea

More humidity: Trevor Cahill will pitch today's muggy-fest matinee. He got a taste of Midwestern weather in Chicago on Tuesday, when he repeatedly used the resin bag to wipe sweat off his hands so he could grip the ball.

A's late rally falls just short in loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ST. LOUIS -- For the second night in a row, the Cardinals' Matt Holliday put on quite the show against his former team. He knocked out a homer and tallied three RBIs on Saturday, handing Oakland a 4-3 loss at Busch Stadium.

Holliday, who went 2-for-4 with a homer on Friday, tagged A's starter Ben Sheets for an RBI double in the fifth before launching a two-run shot -- his eighth of the year -- to left field in the seventh.

Prior to the fifth, Sheets held the Cardinals scoreless. He lasted seven frames, surrendering four runs on six hits and four walks while striking out two. The loss dropped his record to 2-7 on the year.

The A's offense immediately handed Sheets one run of support in the first thanks to Rajai Davis' hustle. The Oakland center fielder doubled before recording his 26th stolen base of the season and crossing home plate on a throwing error by Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina. Following the first, though, the A's were limited to four hits and no runs by Cards starter Adam Wainwright.

The A's mounted a rally in the ninth inning, falling just short of tying the game. Ryan Sweeney singled, scoring Conor Jackson for the A's second run, and Gabe Gross added a pinch-hit single that plated Kurt Suzuki.

Wainwright notched his 10th win of the season after compiling eight solid innings that resulted in just one unearned run, five hits, one walk and four strikeouts.

Ziegler reunites with old foe Pujols

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ST. LOUIS -- A's righty Brad Ziegler and Cardinals first baseman Albert Pujols began their careers just 27 miles from each other more than 10 years ago in Missouri.

Before he converted to a submariner in the A's organization, Ziegler was just another pitcher at Odessa High School in Odessa, Mo.

Pujols, meanwhile, was a slugger during his days at Fort Osage High School in Independence, Mo.

Yet the 30-minute distance that separated these two future big leaguers didn't keep them from playing with -- and against each other -- in summer ball, a time during which Ziegler admits he didn't exactly own Pujols.

"He hit a couple home runs off me," Ziegler said with a laugh. "He hit a couple balls hard off me that were right at guys. Average-wise, I think I did OK against him. But it's not like I was punching him out every at-bat. He was a phenomenal hitter in high school, and we all knew that he was going to go on to bigger and better things."

Ziegler and Pujols played in the same district, and their respective performances in American Legion ball often brought them together as teammates for all-star games. This weekend in St. Louis, they're opponents in Interleague Play, but that didn't stop the A's reliever from lending a hello to the three-time National League MVP.

"He didn't recognize my face, but as soon as I said who I was he knew right away," Ziegler said. "He was very gracious and very encouraging. He was always such a nice guy then, and it sounds like he's the same guy now."

Crisp progressing, could return next week

ST. LOUIS -- Coco Crisp boasts a good amount of history with the Cardinals, the team that picked him up in the seventh round of the 1999 amateur draft.

Instead of reuniting with his early baseball roots this weekend, though, the A's outfielder was left with Triple-A Sacramento to continue an ongoing rehab assignment that the club hopes will end with his intercostal strain at full health.

Crisp enjoyed a perfect 5-for-5 day with five RBIs on Friday night with the River Cats and is now hitting .615 (8-for-13) with six runs, one double, one triple and one stolen base in four starts in center field, while leading off for the club.

However, his Minor League numbers won't be a deciding factor in his return date, insisted manager Bob Geren.

"The exact date when he'll be ready is still to be determined," the A's skipper said. "The good news is that he's playing well. We'll see where he's at and try to make sure he's ready physically."

The A's could very much use Crisp's .615 average on their current road trip, which has resulted in a 1-6 start entering Saturday's contest at Busch Stadium. In that span, Oakland has been outscored, 37-25. But the club isn't taking any chances with the injury-prone Crisp, who played in two games with the A's after beginning the year on the DL because of a fractured finger.

Crisp, who has been limited to stints of five and seven innings in Sacramento, will play his first nine-inning game on Saturday and take part in at least three more full contests thereafter. If all goes well, he could join the A's during the next seven-day homestand that begins Monday.

"He's still being built up," Geren said. "His schedule was built in a way where we could make adjustments."

Suppan hopes to show progress in finale

By Jocelyn Syrstad / MLB.com

Temperatures in the mid-90s and a heat index that makes it feel as hot as 106 degrees can make anyone break a sweat and feel uncomfortable -- especially when you add a uniform and baseball glove to the mix.

For the A's and the Cardinals, a forecast like that during an afternoon start may affect the way they play their Father's Day series finale on Sunday.

The Cardinals, although playing at home, are preparing for the unbearable temperatures, and their opponents are doing the same. St. Louis manager Tony La Russa said his club still expects starting pitcher Jeff Suppan to throw the ball in the mid-80s despite the heat.

Trevor Cahill, Oakland's starting pitcher for Sunday's game, said the heat can make it hard for players to grip the ball and make accurate throws due to the sweat.

Cahill pitched in high temperatures during his last start against the Cubs, giving up four runs on six hits in 5 2/3 innings pitched. He said that some of his struggles came from pitching in the heat, but he is prepared to deal with the uncomfortable temperatures on Sunday.

"We tell them the day before to load up on fluids," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "They also need to be prepared to change jerseys and [undershirts] in order to stay cool throughout the game. The more experience you have in this weather, the more you learn."

A's: Cahill worthy of All-Star nod

In only his second year in the league, Cahill may be deserving of a trip to Anaheim for the All-Star Game. In Cahill's 10 games this season, he owns a 3.23 ERA and only two losses. Cahill has limited opponents to one run or fewer in half his starts. ... Catcher Kurt Suzuki was the only hitter in Saturday's 4-3 loss to have more than one hit. His two appearances on the basepaths resulted in one run. He also accounted for one of the 16 players the A's left on the base in that game.

Cardinals: Suppan's hitting streak

Jeff Suppan has recorded a hit in every Interleague game he has played in during his 14-year career. So far this season, he is batting .286 with two hits -- one being a double -- in seven at-bats. His career year came in 2003, when he finished with a .279 average and 12 hits.

Worth noting

Cahill's struggles this season have come on the road, where he has gone 3-2 with a 4.29 ERA. He is undefeated at home. ... Suppan has a 0-2 record and an ERA of 7.20, but he pitched well in his last start, throwing four innings of one-run ball in his return to the Cardinals.

A's fall to Cardinals, 4-3

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. LOUIS -Adam Wainwright threw eight sharp innings and Jason Motte struck out Adam Rosales with the tying run in scoring position in the ninth, preserving the St. Louis Cardinals' 4-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Saturday night.

Ryan Franklin started the ninth but left after Ryan Sweeney's RBI single got the A's within two. Motte struck out Kevin Kouzmanoff and got Mark Ellis to fly out before Gabe Gross singled in a run.

With runners on first and second, Rosales swung and missed for strike three, giving Motte his second save in two opportunities.

Matt Holliday homered and drove in three runs for the second straight day, and Skip Schumaker had two hits for St. Louis, which has won four of five.

A's former owner Charlie O. Finley revolutionized game, died 'broken man'

Mel Antonen, USA Today, 6/19/2010

Owner Charlie O. Finley is known for moving the Athletics from Kansas City, Mo., to Oakland before the 1968 season and pushing for the DH, interleague play and night starts in the postseason and All-Star Game. He was also behind the revolution in uniform color and design.

Finley owned the A's from 1961 to 1980 and won three consecutive World Series titles (1972, '73, '74). But according to the authors of the book *Charlie Finley: The Outrageous Story of Baseball's Super Showman*, Finley lost most of his fortune because of a divorce and his need to pay off creditors. He died in 1996 of heart disease at age 77.

"He died a lonely, broken man - estranged from baseball, his family and many friends," says author G. Michael Green. "A sad ending to a remarkable but flawed life."

The book, due out in July, was written by Green and Roger Launius, members of the Society for American Baseball Research who have day jobs in Washington. Green is a planner for NASA and Launius a curator at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

Sports Weekly talked with Green and Launius:

What is the best way to describe Finley's legacy?

Launius: Finley had an innate understanding of how to build a championship club. He could find talent, sign it and develop it. For instance, he could call up other teams' scouts and get them to tell him who their hot prospects were and then go sign these players out from underneath them. Finley was the master manipulator and super salesman.

Who were Finley's biggest supporters?

Launius: Almost nobody. The only two former players who came to his funeral were Catfish Hunter and Reggie Jackson, both of whom had their battles with Finley but also respected and admired him at some level.

What was his wackiest idea that never saw the light of day?

Launius: So many that it's hard to choose - orange baseballs, designated runners, three-ball walks. But the one we like best was installing an elevator under the pitching mound that would lift relief pitchers into the game.

You write how Finley was known for his bullying and self-destructive behavior. What made him a success in the insurance business?

Green: He was an incredibly hard worker. His son told us that Finley once said, "Others may be smarter than me, but no one works harder." And Finley had one great idea that he was able to turn into tens of millions of dollars: selling group disability insurance to doctors.

Could Finley ever be paternal?

Green: Yes, but at his own whim. He based his life on controlling everything. For instance, he handpicked the layouts and pictures for all of the A's team yearbooks.

Did Finley have any regrets?

Launius: Yes, he always said later in life that he regretted moving the A's from Kansas City. He missed the enthusiasm of the K.C. fans.

The A's Mike Andrews was forced by Finley to go to the disabled list during the 1973 World Series. Did the two ever reconcile?

Green: No, they never did. In fact, Finley never agreed with Bowie Kuhn's reinstatement of Andrews during the Series. Andrews later sued Finley for his actions in the Series and reached an equitable settlement.

Did Finley and Yankees owner George Steinbrenner have a relationship?

Launius: Not much of one, but Finley and Steinbrenner formed an alliance to oust Commissioner Bowie Kuhn in the mid-1970s; they failed. Of course, after Finley sold the A's, Steinbrenner became the new bad boy of baseball. Finley often commented on Steinbrenner's antics and criticized him in the same way the baseball establishment had criticized (Finley).

MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Wimberly, Rally Pants lift Sacramento to walk-off victory

By Kevin Poveda / Sacramento River Cats

Corey Wimberley's walk-off single gave the River Cats an 8-7 win over the Salt Lake Bees in front of a sellout crowd of 14,012 at Raley Field, giving Sacramento its sixth win in a row.

Sacramento starting pitcher Clay Mortensen, who has dominated this season with a 9-2 record and 3.66 ERA, retired the first three batters (two by strikeouts) to start the game, setting the tempo for the River Cats. Mortensen went on to pitch a solid 7.0 innings, striking out seven batters while allowing one unearned run and only four hits.

The River Cats' offense got started in the second inning as Bees starting pitcher Will Smith walked Adam Heether and outfielder Michael Taylor, setting up Eric Sogard. Sogard's single to right field gave the River Cats the 1-0 lead going into the third. Sacramento got a home run from designated hitter Matt Watson, his sixth of the season, in the third inning for a 2-0 lead.

The River Cats continued to dominate Smith in the fourth. Third baseman Dallas McPherson homered on a fly ball to right field to start things off. Taylor and Sogard were walked by Smith, and Corey Wimberley's sacrifice bunt put both runners in scoring position for the River Cats. With the bases loaded, slugger Chris Carter doubled on a line drive to left field bringing in two runs for the Cats.

With Sacramento leading 7-1 after seven innings, things looked all but over for Salt Lake City. However, the Bees scored three in the eighth and used a Mark Trumbo three-run home run to left-center field in the ninth inning to tie the game. Trumbo leads the league with 17 home runs.

Sacramento needed a rally of its own in the ninth, and for the third time this season pitcher Brad Kilby jogged down the third-base line and to the clubhouse to put on his skin-tight Rally Pants.

"The guys like it," said Kilby, who is on the disabled list with a left shoulder injury. "It gets everyone relaxed and have a little laugh before we go out and hit. It's caught on a little bit, and we are 3-for-3 with them on. I'll keep going with it, if I can't play I'm going to do anything I can to help the ball club right now."

Sacramento started its ninth-inning rally right away, with a little help from Salt Lake reliever Bobby Cassevah, who walked Heether and then gave up consecutive hits to McPherson and Taylor. With the bases loaded, the Bees switched their defensive alignment, bringing in center fielder Peter Bourjos to play the infield. Salt Lake's switch had no effect on the River Cats and shortstop Corey Wimberley, who again came through in the clutch hitting a ground ball that bounced over Bourjos' head to scoring pinch-runner Michael Affronti and give Sacramento the victory.

"To come through in the clutch, it's an awesome feeling," Wimberley said. "We played a good game, everybody battled out there and we couldn't have asked for a much better inning."

As for the Rally Pants, Wimberley says the team has no choice but to stick with them.

"Until they don't work you have to go with them," he said. "They have been working so far, so you have to stick with it."

The six-game win streak is the River Cats' longest at home and of the season. Sacramento will continue its series with Salt Lake City on Father's Day at 1:05 p.m.

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.

Rough fourth inning costs Ports in 13-4 loss

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Visalia Rawhide (37-33) swept the Stockton Ports (31-39) in their first series at home this season, and again in their final series of the first half. The Ports tied a season-high by allowing eight runs in one inning, as they fell to the Rawhide, 13-4, on Saturday night at Banner Island Ballpark. The Ports have struggled all season long against Visalia, and end the first half with a 4-15 record against the Rawhide.

Kenny Smalley picked up the loss for Stockton, allowing six runs on eight hits in 3.1 innings. Reliever Scott Hodsdon allowed six runs (five earned) on two hits with three walks in 0.1 innings. Trey Barham allowed one unearned run in the contest, while Paul Smyth, Brett Hunter and Andrew Carignan combined for 3.2 scoreless innings of relief. Chase Anderson picked up the win for the Rawhide.

Grant Green scored three hits, all infield singles to third base, in the contest. Diomendes Lopez made his California League debut, and finished 2x3 with a walk. The Ports stranded eight in the game, and both Jermaine Mitchell and Mike Spina collected a solo home run in the game.

Smalley retired the Rawhide in order in the top of the first, and Stockton took a 2-0 lead in the bottom of the inning, chasing the Rawhide starter out of the game. Mitchell led off with a solo shot over the batter's eye in center field, his third homer of the season for Stockton. Green then singled toward third. He advanced to second on a walk by Parker. Spina stepped up to the plate and flew out to center field. Visalia starter Brett Moorhouse then walked right fielder Jeremy Barfield to load the bases with one out. Moorhouse next walked Johnson to score Green. Visalia then pulled Moorhouse in favor of righty Justin Mace. Shortstop Tyler Ladendorf then grounded into a double play to end the inning and leave the bases loaded.

Visalia tied the game in the second inning on a two-run home run by right fielder Kyle Greene.

Visalia made it 4-2 in the top of the third. Dan Kaczrowski led off with a single and moved to third on a double by Brent Greer. Smalley then walked Ryan Wheeler to load the bases with no out. Paul Goldschmidt then hit a single to left field to score two runs. The Ports retired the next two batters. Kyle Greene stepped up to the plate and singled to right-center field. Barfield fielded the ball and threw it to catcher Lopez to put out Wheeler at the plate to end the inning.

Stockton made it 4-3 in the bottom of the third, as Barfield collected an RBI on a groundout to third.

In the fourth inning, Visalia plated eight runs to take a commanding 12-3 lead. Rossmel Perez led the inning with a single. He moved to second on a single by Kaczrowski. With two on and one out, the Ports called on Hodsdon to pitch. Greer stepped into the batter's box. Hodsdon threw a wild pitch, allowing Perez to score. Hodsdon hit Greer with a pitch and then walked Wheeler to load the bases. Goldschmidt hit a sacrifice fly to bring home Kaczrowski. Marc Krauss then walked to keep the bases loaded. A two-RBI single by Alfredo Marte made it 8-3.

Greene then walked and then Perez came back up and notched a two-RBI single. The Ports then replaced Hodsdon with Barham on the mound. Gerson Montilla then collected an RBI-double off Barham to make it 11-3. Perez later scored on an error by Lopez. After issuing a walk to Kaczrowski, Barham got Greer to ground out to end the inning.

Visalia scored their final run in the fifth, as Goldschmidt scored while Marte hit into a fielder's choice play.

In the seventh inning, Spina launched his 12th home run of the year to left field to make it 13-4. The Ports shutdown the Rawhide in the final innings, as Smyth struck out five straight batters. The Ports retired nine of the last 10 batters they faced to keep the Rawhide scoreless.

The Ports end the first half with a 31-39 record, which is a six-game improvement over last season, in which they went 25-45 in the first half.

The Ports will enjoy a four-day All-Star Break before hitting the road to face the Lancaster JetHawks from June 24-27.