

A's end up rough road trip with narrow victory

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Sunday's events hardly rescued the A's from the hole they've dug themselves.

But for just the second time on a now completed nine-game road trip, there was a victory to celebrate as the A's beat the St. Louis Cardinals 3-2 to avoid the broom in front of 42,271 fans at Busch Stadium.

The win snapped a four-game losing streak and was just the A's seventh victory in the past 21 games. But surely it made the flight back to the Bay Area a bit more enjoyable.

"Obviously we haven't been playing good on the road this year," closer Andrew Bailey said. "It's nice to get out of here with a victory and take some momentum into the homestand."

Just how much they can reverse the tide is the key after their 2-7 trip through three National League ballparks. The A's were two games behind in the AL West when they began their trip against the Giants at AT&T Park but now find themselves eight games out as they welcome the Cincinnati Reds for the start of a six-game homestand.

Sunday's victory wasn't an easy one to nail down. In an unlikely ending, it was Jack Cust — who entered the game as part of an eighth-inning double switch and hardly is known for his defensive prowess — who tracked down Felipe Lopez's fly in right-center for the final out.

Cust went into right field in the eighth when Bailey relieved Michael Wuertz with two outs and the tying run on first.

A's manager Bob Geren said earlier in the trip that he'd like to hold Bailey to one-inning appearances unless he's well rested. Bailey was on two days' rest Sunday.

He allowed Matt Holliday's single that put runners on the corners, setting up a showdown with three-time NL MVP Albert Pujols. Bailey stuck with mid-90s fastballs and retired Pujols on a pop-up to left, then delivered a 1-2-3 ninth for his 13th save.

"I told myself, 'If he hits it out, I'm OK as long as I get beat on my best pitch,'" Bailey said.

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who entered the day in a 1 for 15 funk, went 4 for 4 and hit his seventh homer of the season, a solo shot in the fourth inning off Jeff Suppan that broke a scoreless tie.

The A's overcame another monster game from Holliday, who homered twice off Trevor Cahill and terrorized his former team for four homers and eight RBIs in the three-game series.

It was 2-2 when the A's pushed ahead in the top of the eighth. With runners on the corners and one out, Geren inserted Mark Ellis to pinch-hit for No. 5 hitter Ryan Sweeney.

Ellis delivered a sacrifice fly against lefty Trever Miller to put the A's in front.

Geren pointed to the A-list of opposing starters the A's faced in helping explain their struggles on the road trip.

"We saw some very tough pitching this trip," Geren said.

But different components of Oakland's team also took turns breaking down. The offense didn't deliver often enough with men on base. The bullpen blew a game against the Cubs, and the starters didn't always pitch deep enough.

On Sunday, the A's overcame at least three baserunning blunders to pull out a victory.

As the A's have struggled, first-place Texas has rattled off eight wins in a row.

"It sucks that they're on fire and we're not on fire," Kouzmanoff said. "But we're just going to have to keep battling and keep winning series."

TODAY: Reds (Mike Leake 5-1) at A's (Gio Gonzalez 6-5),
7:05 p.m.
TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM, 1640-AM

A's update: Trevor Cahill does fine, except against red-hot Matt Holliday

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Aside from Holliday, it's a very good day for Cahill

ST. LOUIS — Right-hander Trevor Cahill generally enjoyed life on the mound Sunday when Matt Holliday wasn't standing in the batter's box.

Cahill limited the St. Louis Cardinals to four hits in six innings, and though he didn't get a victory in the A's 3-2 win, it was another strong effort for the second-year pitcher.

He encountered trouble only against Holliday, who hit two solo homers to account for all of the Cardinals' scoring. Cahill was hardly the only one who couldn't solve Holliday. The former Athletic hit four homers and had eight RBIs in the three-game series.

"He's really starting to swing the bat, and you can't make those kinds of mistakes to a guy that's heating up," Cahill said.

Cahill tied a career high with seven strikeouts, including a dominant first-inning showing when he whiffed three batters in a row, including Holliday and Albert Pujols.

"All the things over the last year that we're trying to get him to do, it's coming to fruition in the last month or so," A's manager Bob Geren said of Cahill.

Geren saw all he needed from Mike Leake in spring training to know the Cincinnati Reds rookie right-hander could be special.

Leake, who takes the mound against Oakland tonight, was drafted last June out of Arizona State and made the Reds rotation this

spring without spending a single day in the minors. Leake did not sign until August, and didn't pitch until spring training.

That made him the first drafted pitcher to bypass the minors completely since the Dodgers' Darren Dreifort in 1994.

And Leake is thriving. He brings a 5-1 record and 3.02 ERA into tonight's series opener at the Coliseum. His 10 quality starts lead the Reds staff.

Leake faced the A's twice in the Cactus League, striking out four in a two-inning stint March 15 and then holding them to two runs over six innings March 31.

"He had good command and he was aggressive," Geren said. "It tells you he must have pretty good command of all his pitches" to jump straight to the big leagues.

Jack Cust didn't start for the third straight game Sunday, but he's likely to resume getting playing time at DH as the A's return to the American League style of ball. They conclude interleague play at the Oakland Coliseum with three games against the Reds and three against the Pittsburgh Pirates. ... The Baltimore Sun reported that the Orioles have interest in acquiring Jake Fox, whom the A's designated for assignment. The A's have until Thursday to trade him, release him or send him to the minors.

Chin Music: Pregame tidbits on steamy afternoon in St. Louis

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/20/2010 11:26am

Just a few tidbits here as the A's try to avoid the sweep in St. Louis. Game time temperature was 90 degrees, but the humidity makes it feel hotter:

—Coco Crisp had yesterday off but is scheduled to play a full nine innings today for Triple-A Sacramento. Crisp went 5-for-5 on Friday, and he's reported feeling great physically. Could the A's scrap that 10-day schedule they've set up and activate

him from the DL early? Manager Bob Geren hasn't acknowledged that yet. This team needs a spark of some kind, although I'd say the struggles on this awful road trip have been in all facets of the game. Based on Crisp's injury history, I'm hesitant to say his return will have any sustained impact.

–Brett Anderson continues throwing, which won't be all that newsworthy until there's a date for him to get on the mound and test his elbow. Geren was asked if he thought Anderson could return to the rotation shortly after the All-Star break (July 12-14). "Hopefully," Geren responded.

–Outfielder Travis Buck remains in Phoenix, but Geren says his oblique injury is getting better. No timetable for him to return.

Here's the lineups, w/Jack Cust sitting for a third straight game ...

A's: Davis CF, Barton 1B, Jackson LF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Sweeney RF, Rosales 2B, Powell C, Pennington SS, Cahill P.

Cards: Schumaker 2B, Holliday LF, Pujols 1B, Ludwick RF, Rasmus CF, Lopez 3B, LaRue C, Suppan P, Ryan SS.

A's beat Cardinals, old friend Holliday 3-2

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

And on the ninth day, the A's exhaled.

Despite a trip that ended 2-7 and further dropped the A's in the American League West, they could finally experience good vibes Sunday and pooh-pooh two more Matt Holliday home runs and some questionable baserunning.

Their 3-2 victory over the Cardinals was decided in the eighth inning, when Mark Ellis (in the top half) hit a tie-breaking sacrifice fly and closer Andrew Bailey (in the bottom half) retired Albert Pujols on a Gateway Arch-high popup, stranding two runners.

"We don't have to worry about Trevor's baserunning anymore," joked manager Bob Geren, realizing Sunday's game was the last for the A's in a National League park.

Yes, Trevor Cahill was one of a few A's who could have run the bases better. But he gets paid for results on the mound, and those were super - except for when Holliday stepped to the plate in the fourth and sixth innings and hit home runs, giving him four in the series.

Cahill, like any American League pitcher, was hoping to take some swings. But in both plate appearances, he was asked to bunt. He sacrificed in the third (after two strikes) but hit into a fielder's choice when trying to bunt in the fifth. At first base when Rajai Davis lined an apparent single to right, Cahill froze too long and was forced at second, saying later he didn't want to get doubled up in case the liner was caught.

No single for Davis. His 11-game hit streak ended. But he got a key RBI because Landon Powell scored on the play.

In the end, the A's were much more appreciative of Cahill's pitching than bummed about his bunting or baserunning. Cahill's starts were the only wins on the trip - he beat the Cubs on Tuesday and started Sunday in grand style, consecutively striking out Skip Schumaker, Holliday and Pujols in the first inning.

But Holliday homered on a changeup and sinker, the second time in his career he has homered in three consecutive games, and as Bailey said, "Going into the series, we thought we knew how to get him out, considering he was in our locker room last year. I guess we need to redo our books."

Bailey held Holliday to a mere single in the eighth after replacing Michael Wuertz, who had issued a two-out walk. Runners were at the corners for Pujols, who saw nothing but heat from Bailey and popped out (and way up) to left on a 97 mph fastball.

Bailey pitched the ninth for a four-out save three days after Geren said he'd try to limit the closer to one inning per outing. Geren later backed off on his comments, saying he'd use Bailey for more than an inning if he is rested.

The A's out-hit the Cardinals 11-5, and Kevin Kouzmanoff had his first four-hit game with the A's, including a home run. In the end, Holliday's hot bat and iffy baserunning by Cliff Pennington, Ryan Sweeney, Daric Barton and Cahill didn't hurt. The A's flew to the Bay Area winners, at least for a day.

Outfield or DH, doesn't matter to Cust

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Jack Cust said he likes playing the outfield. But if returning to American League rules means more playing time, he's all for that, too.

With the addition of **Conor Jackson**, Cust was out of the lineup the entire St. Louis series after starting in the outfield five straight games. He entered Sunday as part of a double switch, a rare scenario in which Cust entered - rather than exited - late in a game as a defender.

Ever happen before?

"Not when we were winning," Cust said.

After hitting a pinch double Saturday, he struck out in the ninth Sunday. Tonight, he's expected to return to his familiar role as designated hitter. He's hitting .333 (8-for-24) in interleague play.

"Yeah, I like interleague," he said, "but you don't know the pitchers as much. I like playing the field. If you're not hitting the ball well, at least you're running around out there and not thinking about your at-bats. As a DH, you tend to think about your at-bats because there's nothing else to do."

Cust recorded the final out of Sunday's game, ranging far to right-center to glove **Felipe Lopez's** drive.

Homer anomaly: With **Trevor Cahill** surrendering two more homers to **Matt Holliday**, the A's have given up 56 road homers compared with 17 at home.

"Obviously, we have more of a pitchers' park but not necessarily to that degree," manager **Bob Geren** said. "It wasn't that way last year to that magnitude."

The 2009 staff gave up 69 homers at home, 87 on the road.

"Collectively, the pitchers know we have a good place to pitch, but that shouldn't change the approach on the road," Geren said. "They should still go after it the same way. Our game-calling is the same at home and on the road."

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Hide the bats: No A's pitcher needs to bat now that the remaining interleague games are at the Coliseum. The final stats: 1-for-16 with nine strikeouts - with the most unlikely guy, Ben Sheets, getting the hit. Since the start of interleague play, A's pitchers are hitting .092, lowest in the AL.

Drumbeat: A win would be nice

John Shea from St. Louis, the Gateway to the West, and the West is where the A's can't get to fast enough . . . 6/20/2010 10:35AM

This troubled trip ends today with the A's trying to improve on their 1-7 record including three losses in San Francisco, two in Chicago and two here.

Dating to June 1, the A's are 5-13, and only Baltimore's 4-13 is worse. The A's were in first place when May ended. Now they're eight back. They dropped nine games in the standings in 18 games.

The pitching has taken a step back with a 4.92 June ERA, third highest in the league. The team batting average actually is .288 for the month, fourth highest. But the 39 walks are the AL's fewest.

Jack Cust is out of the lineup for the third straight day, but he'll get his at-bats when the A's return home Monday to play the Reds. The DH rule will be back in effect.

The craziest split of them all is home runs allowed by the A's pitching staff -- 54 on the road (most in the AL) and 17 at home (fewest in the AL). Likewise, the A's ERA is the highest on the road, lowest at home.

"That's a good question," manager Bob Geren said of the home run splits. "Obviously, we have more of a pitchers' park but not necessarily to that degree. It wasn't that way last year to that magnitude."

Asked if it's an issue of young pitchers being more confident at home, Geren said, "I'm sure it's a question for each guy. Collectively, the pitchers know we have a good place to pitch, but that shouldn't change the approach on the road. They should still go after it the same way. Our game-calling is the same at home and on the road."

The lineup: CF Davis, 1B Barton, LF Jackson, 3B Kouzmanoff, RF Sweeney, 2B Rosales, C Powell, SS Pennington, RHP Cahill.

Cahill's sharp start helps A's snap skid

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ST. LOUIS -- Trevor Cahill's name wasn't even on the A's Opening Day roster.

Rather, he was on the disabled list, where he spent a couple weeks nursing a stress reaction near his left scapula.

Then, Cahill was found on the roster of Triple-A Sacramento, where he made two starts before being called upon by the big boys in Oakland to fill in for the injured Brett Anderson.

Now, it's on manager Bob Geren's short list of A's players worthy of a trip to the All-Star Game.

And on Sunday afternoon, in the club's series finale with the host Cardinals, Cahill backed up his skipper's words by guiding Oakland to a narrow 3-2 victory at Busch Stadium. The young righty tied a career high with seven strikeouts during six impressive innings.

He wasn't awarded the win because he left with the score tied, 2-2, having thrown 91 pitches in 91-degree weather. But his efforts, said Geren, undoubtedly stood out -- along with Kevin Kouzmanoff's 4-for-4 day -- in what was the club's first victory in five days and second in its previous nine games.

Cahill made quick work of the Cardinals in the first ining, striking out the side, a scene that's becoming familiar for a pitcher who boasts aa .088 opponents' average against in the opening frame. Cahill retired six of the next seven batters before offering up the first of two mistakes on the day, a changeup that he left up and former A's teammate Matt Holliday blasted into the left-field stands to lead off the fourth inning.

Holliday's homer tied the game, 1-1, erasing the lead Oakland took on Kouzmanoff's homer in the top half of the inning.

Holliday, who entered the series with hit six home runs in his previous 61 games, added on to the three he had already acquired over the weekend when he launched another ball off Cahill roughly 420 feet into the left-field seats to once again tie the game in the sixth -- which, prior to his at-bat, was a 2-1 A's lead courtesy of an RBI fielder's choice from Rajai Davis in the fifth.

"He's really started swinging the bat, so you can't make mistakes to him," Cahill said. "He sees us and knows what we have. We've obviously seen him, too, but he's on fire right now."

For as much hurt as he put on Cahill, though, Holliday lent a good dose of recognition to his opposing pitcher, who -- aside from the long balls -- gave up just two other hits while walking none on the day.

"He is a young pitcher with a good sinker, and he has got some offspeed pitches," Holliday said. "You know, I got a chance to see him quite a bit last year, and he is a good young pitcher. He has a bright future."

Cahill's line stopped at six innings, at which point he had lowered his ERA to 3.21 -- good for first among the club's current starting staff, which entered Sunday's affair having posted a 5.67 ERA on the road trip. He's still riding a five-game winning streak dating back to May, when he went 4-1 with a 1.96 ERA in six starts. He owns a 2-0 record and a 3.57 ERA in June. Comparably, he finished the 2009 season with a 4.63 ERA attached to his name.

"Trevor's throwing the ball real well," Geren said. "He basically used all of his pitches. He had a good sinker, a good changeup, an effective breaking ball; he threw in on lefties. All the things that we've been trying to have him do over the past year have come into fruition this past month. He's been very consistent, no lapses at all.

"He's been so steady. He's the guy we've been going to, and I'd say he's as good as anybody this past month."

Oakland's destiny was ultimately decided in the eighth, when Conor Jackson got things going with a one-out single and advanced to third on Kouzmanoff's fourth hit of the day, a base hit to right field. Mark Ellis, brought in to hit for Ryan Sweeney, launched the first pitch he saw from left-hander Trever Miller to Holliday in deep left field, scoring Jackson with a sacrifice fly.

"He's solid against left-handed pitchers," Geren said of Ellis.

His out was quickly followed by a flyout to center off the bat of Adam Rosales to end the frame. Craig Breslow forced two Cardinals outs in the bottom of the eighth and was relieved by Michael Wuertz, who subsequently walked David Freese to put the tying run on base -- a move that prompted Geren to call on Andrew Bailey for a four-out save.

The A's closer surrendered a single to Holliday but got Albert Pujols to fly out to left field before closing out the game in the ninth with three immediate outs to St. Louis' four through six hitters, garnering his 13th save of the season.

"Obviously, we haven't been playing well on the road this year," Bailey said, "but hopefully this gives us momentum going back for the homestand."

Breslow picked up the win, his second of the season for Oakland, which finished its Interleague road trip with a 2-7 mark while standing still at eight games behind first-place Texas in the American League West.

"It's good for us to finish the series the right way," said Kouzmanoff, who fell just short of the cycle, needing only a triple to accomplish the feat. "We just have to keep battling and winning series."

A's pitchers have struggled on road

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ST. LOUIS -- The A's entered Sunday with the highest road ERA in the American League (5.26) and the lowest home ERA (2.90).

Much of that statistic correlates with the fact the club has also yielded the most home runs in the AL on the road, 55 after Matt Holliday's blast in the fourth inning on Sunday, and the fewest at home, 17. Those numbers put A's pitchers on track to surrender 39 at home this year and a whopping 125 on the road.

Yet explaining any of it is rather difficult.

"It's hard to understand the extent of that split," manager Bob Geren said. "Our home park is obviously a pitcher's park, but not necessarily to that degree. It wasn't that way last year."

In 2009, Oakland hurlers gave up 69 homers in the confines of the Oakland Coliseum while offering 87 away from their abode.

"Collectively," Geren said, "pitchers know we have a great place to pitch. That shouldn't change their approach. Our game planning doesn't change whether we're home or on the road. And the way our catchers call games doesn't change either."

Cust is odd man out in Interleague lineup

ST. LOUIS -- A handful of pros, along with a good chunk of cons, naturally come with Interleague Play, which has forced A's manager Bob Geren to intermittently use Rajai Davis and Jack Cust in a crowded A's outfield this week.

On Sunday, in the club's three-game series finale against the Cardinals at Busch Stadium, it was Cust's turn to sit out of the lineup for the third day in a row, following five consecutive starts. Davis, meanwhile, received the starting nod in center field with Conor Jackson standing in left field and Ryan Sweeney in right.

In the midst of National League play, Geren has attempted to use the pair in accordance with good performance -- something both have boasted this week despite the team's record on the current road trip, 1-7 entering Sunday.

Davis entered the finale against the Cardinals riding an 11-game hitting streak during which he's hit .367 with five doubles, a triple and a home run, while also boosting his overall average 23 points to .283. He lined out to center field in his first at-bat and popped out to right field in the third inning on Sunday.

Cust's numbers are similarly impressive over his previous 14 games -- .364 average, two home runs and seven RBIs.

Geren likes Davis' speed at the top of the lineup, while Cust has entered late in the past two games in pinch-hit situations. The A's manager said Cust may appear in Sunday's game. More than anything, though, Geren is looking forward to getting the designated hitter spot back when the team returns to Oakland for a six-game homestand beginning Monday.

"It will be nice to get back the DH and nine-man lineup," Geren said Sunday morning. "Luckily, Cust has seen enough action to keep him sharp, and he's done well in the situations we've placed him in."

Worth noting

A's outfielder Coco Crisp (intercostal muscle) received a scheduled day of rest Saturday but is slated to continue his rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday, when he'll play a full nine innings for the first time since the injury. ... The A's current 25-man roster boasts eight fathers. Gabe Gross, Cliff Pennington, Mark Ellis, Ben Sheets, Brad Ziegler, Jack Cust, Landon Powell and Michael Wuertz all were able to celebrate Father's Day as a dad Sunday. Crisp, along with fellow injured teammates Eric Chavez and Justin Duchscherer, are also fathers.

A's, Reds looking for rebound in opener

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

The Reds and A's have both been pleasant surprises this season and have been in first place in their respective divisions this month, but each club has seen its share of struggles recently.

The Reds have lost six of their previous seven games, falling out of first place in the NL Central, and the A's have lost seven of nine and are three games under .500 after last leading the AL West on June 3.

Both teams will try to turn things around when they meet in a three-game series that begins on Monday at the Oakland Coliseum.

In the series opener, the A's turn to left-hander Gio Gonzalez, who has been solid this season with a 6-5 record and a 4.21 ERA.

But he had some trouble in his two most recent starts, allowing 10 runs over his previous 10 1/3 innings against the Giants and Cubs on the road. He was hit especially hard in his most recent outing, when he allowed a season-worst six runs on eight hits over five innings against the Cubs.

"You go out there and try to pound the strike zone," Gonzalez said after facing the Cubs. "I had some tough breaks out there. A couple hits went their way, ones that could have been outs if they were hit a couple inches the other way."

The Reds will counter with rookie sensation Mike Leake, who is 5-1 with a 3.02 ERA this season. Leake, though, is coming off his first career loss when he allowed a season-high five runs against the Dodgers on Wednesday.

But Leake, who made the jump straight to the big leagues without playing in the Minors, said he's happy now that he got that first loss of his young career out of the way.

"I'm not glad we lost, but I'm glad I finally got my first loss, so it's out of the way, and we can move on from there," Leake said.

Leake also said that the loss was a learning experience, and he'll turn the page moving forward.

"I'm fine. Every pitcher tries to think of situations that they got themselves into," Leake said. "First, you think of all the negatives, so you get that out of the way. Once you get down on yourself a little bit, then you think about the positives just to pick yourself back up."

Reds: Hanigan inches closer to return

Catcher Ryan Hanigan, who has been on the disabled list since May 29 with a fractured left thumb, did some catching in the bullpen on Saturday when he warmed up starter Sam LeCure. He said it's an important first step toward his return to the club.

"It's going to be sore, but it's close to tolerable," Hanigan said on Sunday. "It gets a little better every day. We're just trying to keep it from getting blown up now. I'm pretty optimistic I've turned the corner. We'll see how it feels today from catching."

A's: Pitching excels at home

A's pitchers have been lights-out at home this season, with an American League-leading 2.90 ERA, but they have struggled on the road with an AL-worst 5.26 ERA. They return to Oakland for a six-game homestand, but A's manager Bob Geren can't explain why his team has fared so well at home and so poorly on the road.

"It's hard to understand the extent of that split," Geren said. "Our home park is obviously a pitcher's park, but not necessarily to that degree. It wasn't that way last year."

Worth noting

A's outfielder Coco Crisp (intercostal muscle) received a scheduled day of rest on Saturday but continued his rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday, when he played a full nine innings for the first time since the injury. He went 2-for-4 with a run scored. ... Reds third baseman Scott Rolen had two hits on Sunday and is batting .362 (25-for-69) over his previous 18 games. He entered the game mired in a 1-for-14 skid. ... The Reds have scored one run over their past 30 innings, since Thursday, and lost twice to Seattle by 1-0 scores.

Kouzmanoff, Cahill lead A's to 3-2 win over Cards

Associated Press

Kevin Kouzmanoff still has a soft spot in his heart for National League Stadiums.

The Oakland third baseman capped off a strong nine-game road trip through the NL with a 4 for 4 performance on Sunday in leading the Athletics to a 3-2 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals.

Kouzmanoff turned in the fifth four-hit game of his career and his first this season. He had two singles, a double, and also slammed a solo home run in the fourth inning to help Oakland snap a four-game losing streak. The Athletics closed out a difficult nine-game swing through San Francisco, Chicago and St. Louis with a 2-7 mark.

Kouzmanoff, who spent the previous three seasons with the San Diego Padres, was 15 for 36 during the trip and showed he can still flourish in NL cities. His performance helped the A's build some momentum as they head home for a six-game homestand.

"It's good for us to finish the series the right way and carry it going into this week," he said. "It's pretty important."

Oakland used Kouzmanoff's timely hitting and a strong all-around pitching performance to cool off the Cardinals, who went 4-2 on a six-game homestand.

St. Louis outfielder Matt Holliday hit two home runs Sunday and finished 8 for 12 in the series with four home runs and eight RBIs. It was the 14th multi-homer game of his career.

"You feel more confident when you get results," said Holliday. "It's a day-to-day battle. You keep grinding it out."

A's starter Trevor Cahill and relievers Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey held the St. Louis offense in check, except for Holliday. Bailey recorded four outs for his 13th save in 16 opportunities. He got Albert Pujols to fly out with runners on first and third to end the eighth.

"I just wanted to challenge him," Bailey said of his showdown with Pujols. "Any time you can get Pujols to pop up with a runner on third — it's a big out."

Pujols, who was 1 for 4 with two strikeouts, is still hitting a league-best .349 for his career in interleague play.

Oakland manager Bob Geren was impressed with the way Bailey attacked the St. Louis hitters.

"All saves should not be counted equally," Geren said. "That was a tough one. He went through the 3-4-5-6 hitters in the order. And he got it done."

Breslow (2-1) picked up the win with 1 2-3 innings of hitless relief.

Cahill allowed just four hits and two runs in six innings. He tied a career high with seven strikeouts and did not walk a batter, but surrendered home runs to Holliday in the fourth and sixth.

"I was able to throw strikes, that was the biggest thing," Cahill said. "I felt good. But you really can't make mistakes to a guy like that who's heating up."

Kouzmanoff ripped his seventh home run of the season off St. Louis starter Jeff Suppan in the fourth to give Oakland a 1-0 lead.

"Today, I got good pitches to hit and I hit them," said Kouzmanoff. "Yesterday, I got good pitches to hit also but didn't hit them. Baseball is just a weird game like that."

Oakland pinch-hitter Mark Ellis snapped a 2-2 tie with an eighth-inning sacrifice fly that scored Conor Jackson with the game-winning run. Blake Hawksworth (1-4) took the loss in relief for St. Louis.

Jackson and Kouzmanoff started the eighth inning rally with back-to-back singles with one out. Ellis then hit his sacrifice fly to deep left field off reliever Trevor Miller.

St. Louis starter Suppan allowed seven hits and two runs in 4 2-3 innings in his second start for the Cardinals since being signed on June 14.

"There were a few times where I missed — bad location, which was frustrating," Suppan said. "But I felt there was a lot of improvement."

NOTES: St. Louis has won 11 of 12 series at home this season. ... Oakland 1B Daric Barton has played in all 71 games, leading the AL. ... The A's are 17-9 in day games and 17-28 at night. ... Suppan had a seven-game interleague hitting streak snapped with an 0 for 1 performance. He has 13 hits in interleague play, tied for second all-time behind C.C. Sabathia with 14. ... St. Louis C Yadier Molina, who is hitless in his last 19 at-bats, was given the day off. ... A crowd of 42,271, the 10th sellout of the season, watched the game in 90 degree temperatures.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Odd bounce helps end Sacramento winning streak

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

The Sacramento River Cats suffered a bad bee sting Sunday, losing 7-5 to the Salt Lake Bees and ended their six-game winning streak.

The six-game streak matched the longest streak of the season for the Cats and brought the team back up to .500 before the loss.

Sacramento recorded a sellout (14,014 fans) for the second consecutive night, marking the first time the River Cats have sold out back-to-back games since 2001.

The star of the day for the Bees was third baseman Paul McNulty, who went 3-for-4 with two doubles and two runs. McNulty hit a key two-run double in the seventh inning that put the Bees on top.

"The pitchers did well for us today," McNulty said. "We swung the bats fairly decent, especially with runners in scoring position. That's when it counts. The guys did a really great job today."

In the top of the seventh, with the game tied at 5-5, the Bees took the lead, starting with a one-out double off the bat of Michael Ryan. Edwar Ramirez took over on the mound for reliever Fernando Hernandez. Ramirez intentionally walked Mark Trumbo with two outs, which set up McNulty's big hit. He hit a hard ground ball that went down the right-field line, bounced off of first base and over Chris Carter's head, allowing Ryan and Trumbo to score.

"I just wanted to put the ball in play," McNulty said. "A lot of good things happen when you put the ball in play. It just happened to hit off the base and go over his head. It was a really good feeling. I can't really say anything else other than that, it just hit the base."

Salt Lake Manager Bobby Mitchell also added his thoughts on the base knock.

"Big hit for us," he said. "Obviously the base came into play. Paul has been swinging the bat really well for us. He's been hitting the ball the other way a lot and has been starting to use the whole field more. He's a good hitter. He's a veteran hitter that knows the strike zone real well and he's helped us out a lot."

Dallas McPherson had a home run on the night, a huge three-run blast that tied the game 5-5 in the fifth. Overall, McPherson was 2-for-4 with two runs scored and three RBIs.

"Today is obviously a tough loss," McPherson said. "We've been winning. They had a big inning there; we just couldn't quite overcome it. But I don't think it's a big deal. Of course you never want to lose, but hopefully we can stop it more. That's the biggest thing, to bounce back and be confident tomorrow."

Mitchell was very happy with his team's performance. Salt Lake is now 35-33.

"We were kind of in a little bit of a slide," he said. "Today, you know that team was a tough team to beat. They fight until the end, so they came back on us, but we didn't get down. We've been a team like that most of the year, where late in the game we score runs. We were pretty confident in what we could do. It's always a battle for us."

Shawn Haviland made his first career Triple-A start for Sacramento. Haviland got off to a bit of a rocky start, walking Peter Bourjos and Nate Sutton to open the game. But Haviland was able to get out of the jam, getting the 3-4-5 hitters of Salt Lake's lineup out on a pop up, fielder's choice, and weak ground out.

Haviland struggled again in the second, starting with a soft liner off the bat of McAnulty that fell in front of a sliding Coco Crisp in center. Catcher Ryan Budde followed with his own bloop single to left to put runners on first and second. Bourjos singled to right to score the first run for Salt Lake.

In the fourth, McAnulty struck again, hitting the first of back-to-back doubles to lead off the inning. The other double was courtesy of Hank Conger, who drove in his 22nd run of the season.

The Cats fell apart after that, as a Carlos Colmenares infield single put runners on the corner. Haviland became his own enemy, committing a three-base throwing error that brought two more runs home. Bourjos hit a line drive back at Haviland, who knocked it down. He threw to first base, but his throw went wide of first baseman Carter and brought home the extra runs.

Haviland was then replaced by Hernandez. Hernandez gave up one more run on a Nate Sutton sacrifice fly, giving the Bees a 5-0 lead heading into the bottom of the fourth.

Salt Lake starter Daniel Davidson pitched well through the first three innings, allowing just one base hit. But the Cats' bats woke up in the fifth, starting with a McPherson single to right-center.

Michael Taylor got revenge for Salt Lake's bloop singles in the second, hitting his own Texas leaguer to left. Steve Tolleson drove a pitch over left fielder Michael Ryan's head to put Sacramento on board. Anthony Recker collected his own RBI by hitting a hard ground ball to left past the diving shortstop Colmenares. Taylor scored to put the River Cats within three runs.

McPherson's big three-run blast came in the fifth inning, a mammoth shot that flew way over the right-field fence and into a swarm of fans. Crisp singled and Heether walked before the big dinger, which was McPherson's fourth of the season. The home run came on the first pitch of the at-bat.

"He just hung a curveball," McPherson said. "He just hung a breaking ball out over the plate and I just put a good swing on it. When you get that good pitch and give it a good swing, good things happen."

Brad Kilby brought out the Rally Pants in the eighth, but the magic pants didn't have their usual mojo, as a Corey Wimberly bunt single was the only hit they could muster.

River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco gave his thoughts on his team's performance after the game.

"The guys came back," he said. "McPherson had a big hit when we were down early. We had a chance late in the game. We just need to get those timely hits late."

Added center fielder Matt Carson: "We had a good win Friday night, and had some momentum coming into today. We just couldn't capitalize on it. I didn't have a great game (0-for-5 with three strikeouts) and it was really just one of those days. The team in general had a good game, we just couldn't pull it out. They got clutch hitting, and you know you can't win them all."

The River Cats will finish up their series against Salt Lake with a game Monday at 7:05 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.

Cougars Lose 1st-Half Finale

Kane County heads to mid-season break after going 32-37 in 1st half

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars ended the first half of their 2010 season Sunday afternoon, dropping a 3-1 final against the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers in front of 6,563 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars finished the 1st half with a mark of 32-37 and will have to clinch a playoff spot in the 2nd half, which begins Friday night.

Justin Marks (2-8) suffered the loss but turned in his fourth quality start of the season. The Cougars gave him a 1-0 lead in the second when Myrio Richard singled home Max Stassi, but the Rattlers took control with two runs in the fourth and never looked back. Marks got charged with one more run in the seventh and left after 6 1/3 innings. He gave up the three runs on five hits, walked one and fanned five. Connor Hoehn and Max Peterson combined for 2 2/3 of shutout relief.

The Cougars managed just six hits but had a few chances to tie it or take the lead. They stranded two runners in the fourth, eighth and ninth innings, leaving the go-ahead run at the plate as the game ended. Maverick Lasker (5-3) won it for the Rattlers (26-42), and Caleb Thielbar got the final out for his second save.

The Cougars (32-36) now are off until Friday due to the Midwest League all-star break. Rob Gilliam (4-5, 4.16) will start for the Cougars on Friday night at 7 CT when they start the 2nd half against the Quad Cities River Bandits. The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pregame coverage starting at 6:45 p.m. Fans can also listen to coverage of Tuesday night's Midwest League All-Star Game from Fort Wayne, Indiana. The Cougars will be represented by catcher Max Stassi and pitchers Ian Krol and Connor Hoehn, and the broadcast begins at 5:50 p.m. CT with a 6:05 first pitch from Parkview Field.