

No relief in sight for Oakland A's in 10-inning loss to Cincinnati Reds

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Gio Gonzalez recaptured some of the form he showed last month. If the A's hope to become relevant in the American League West again, they'll have no choice but to follow suit.

It didn't happen Monday, as the A's allowed three home runs in an extra inning for the first time in Oakland history to seal a 6-4 loss to the Cincinnati Reds at the Oakland Coliseum. In 1964, Kansas City gave up four homers to Minnesota in the 11th.

Ramon Hernandez, the former A's catcher, Joey Votto and Scott Rolen all went deep in the 10th as the A's fell to 8 1/2 games back of the division-leading Texas Rangers and to 6-14 for the month of June. Oakland pitchers now have given up at least one home run in each of the team's last 10 games (16 total home runs).

"It's a critical time of the season for sure. We were in first place (on June 3)," A's manager Bob Geren said. "The good news is our lineup's better. But we've just given up some big homers."

Gonzalez gave the A's every chance to start their six-game homestand on the right foot, as he had a season-high nine strikeouts in seven innings. But the A's left seven runners on base during that time, and nine for the game.

The A's bullpen, which has been so solid at the Coliseum this season, couldn't put away the Reds. With the game tied 1-1, closer Andrew Bailey got the first two outs of the ninth but walked Drew Stubbs and gave up a two-strike RBI single to Jay Bruce after Stubbs stole second.

Kevin Kouzmanoff tied the game with a solo homer to lead off the ninth, but Michael Wuertz allowed a leadoff home run to Hernandez in the 10th, and Votto and Rolen went deep off Cedrick Bowers later in the inning.

Before Monday, the A's bullpen had a 2.83 ERA in 101 2/3 innings pitched at the Coliseum.

"I threw a changeup" to Rolen, Bowers said. "That's probably where his bat speed is at. I'm not going to second-guess my pitch, but I should have buried the pitch. He's a great hitter and he'll make you pay for making a mistake."

Gonzalez was 3-2 with a 3.46 ERA in May, which was highlighted by eight shutout innings against the Giants at the Coliseum on May 22. He was 1-2 with two no-decisions with a combined 15 walks in the five starts since, but he allowed just one walk to the Reds.

The A's will need more starts like Gonzalez's if they hope to stay in contention in the AL West. After this series, the A's have three-game sets against last-place teams Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Cleveland.

"I think we're going to fight through this," Gonzalez said. "We're going to find our groove again and we're going to go out and battle."

Reds starter Mike Leake allowed just two hits over the first four innings before the A's tied it in the fifth on Conor Jackson's RBI single. With two out in the sixth, Kouzmanoff singled and Jack Cust walked, but Mark Ellis grounded out to end the threat.

Kouzmanoff has hit safely in each of his last 16 games at the Coliseum.

Leake, who was drafted in the seventh round by the A's in 2006 but opted instead to go to Arizona State, suffered his first loss of the season on Wednesday when he gave up five earned runs in a 5-1 loss to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Leake made his professional debut in April for the Reds, becoming the first player since Cal's Xavier Nady in 2000 to go straight from college or high school to the big leagues.

TODAY: Reds (Bronson Arroyo 6-3) at A's (Dallas Braden 4-6),

7:05 p.m.

TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM, 1640-AM

A's update: Dallas Braden expects to have full repertoire of pitches tonight

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Braden expects to have full repertoire of pitches

Manager Bob Geren said Dallas Braden will be able to use all four of his pitches in his start tonight against the Cincinnati Reds at the Oakland Coliseum. But Braden said it's nice to know he still can be effective if his repertoire is limited in any way.

With a tender left elbow, Braden allowed one earned run in six innings against the Chicago Cubs on Thursday while basically using just a fastball and a changeup. By not throwing his slider or cut fastball, Braden greatly reduced the amount of stress on his arm.

"It's definitely a good feeling knowing that I have the ability to kind of tailor a program just to according to how I'm feeling in that moment in time," Braden said, "and still be able to go out and execute a game plan for the most part."

Braden is 0-4 with a 4.29 ERA in seven starts since he threw his perfect game on May 9. But he's received just six runs of support in that time, and his season support of 2.56 runs per game (25 runs in 88 innings) is the lowest in the American League.

Braden said having an extra two days of rest before his start against the Cubs was helpful. With the A's having days off Thursday and Monday, Braden will have extra days before his next scheduled turn in the rotation June 29 in Baltimore.

"You never want to go out there and handicap yourself against a major

league baseball team. I have four pitches, and I'd like to use four pitches," Braden said. "You always game plan accordingly. Maybe that's not going to be the game plan, maybe that will be the game plan."

Coco Crisp (strained right rib cage muscle) was scheduled to play another nine innings for Triple-A Sacramento on Monday, and Geren said the plan remains to have Crisp play at least 10 days in the minor leagues before joining the A's, which could happen Friday. Crisp, who began his rehab assignment June 14, has made six starts for the River Cats.

Geren said Pitcher Brett Anderson (tendinitis) is throwing on flat ground from 140 feet. Anderson still doesn't have a timetable for throwing off a mound. ... Geren said Eric Chavez (neck spasms) is still in Arizona, taking time off to rest his body. "I haven't heard much from Eric," Geren said.

Chin Music: A's-Cincinnati pregame

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune, 6/21/2010 5:38PM

Coco Crisp will play another nine innings tonight for Triple-A Sacramento and it does not appear the A's will deviate from their original plan to have him spend 10 days on a rehab assignment. Brett Anderson is on day five of his rehab assignment and is now throwing from 140 feet. No plan for when he'll start throwing off a mound, but that probably won't be for some time.

The lineups:

A's — Davis CF, Barton 1B, Jackson LF, Suzuki C, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust DH, Ellis 2B, Pennington SS, Gonzalez P.

Reds —Phillips 2B, Janish SS, Votto 1B, Rolen 3B, Gomes LF, Stubbs CF, Heisey RF, Cairo DH, Hernandez C, Leake P

Back-and-forth game ends with Reds winning

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Eight innings at the Coliseum on Monday night went quietly as the Reds and A's managed a run apiece. Each team produced a run in the ninth to send the game to extra innings at 2-2.

Ah, then came the 10th. Nothing quiet about three homers in an inning.

Long balls by former Oakland catcher Ramon Hernandez, Joey Votto and Scott Rolen propelled Cincinnati to a 6-4 victory.

Hernandez led off the 10th by taking Michael Wuertz off the left-field foul pole. With one out and a man aboard, Votto greeted Cedrick Bowers with a bolt to left-center for a 5-2 game.

That was Votto's 15th homer of the season. Rolen followed Votto with his 15th of the season, and Cincinnati owned a four-run edge.

Wuertz (2-1) would take the loss, ending his personal winning streak at seven games. He had not collected an "L" since May of last year.

The first three A's hitters reached base in the bottom of the 10th. Groundouts by Ryan Sweeney and Kevin Kouzmanoff each brought home a run.

Jordan Smith, the Reds' third pitcher of the inning, struck out Jack Cust to end the proceedings. Smith picked up his first major-league save.

In the ninth, pinch-hitter Jay Bruce's two-out, RBI single off Andrew Bailey put the Reds up 2-1.

That lead lasted about as long as it takes public-address announcer Dick Callahan to say Kouzmanoff's name.

The Oakland third baseman led off the bottom of the ninth by driving the first pitch from Francisco Cordero the opposite way. The ball had just enough carry to clear the fence in the right-field corner.

Kouzmanoff's eighth homer of the season got the A's even. He went 2-for-5 and is 33-for-79 (.418) in June. Oakland, though, is 6-14 this month.

Besides Kouzmanoff, the A's other encouraging sign Monday night was the performance of starter Gio Gonzalez.

The left-hander took losses in each of his previous two starts, against the Giants and Cubs, but his line Monday: seven innings, four hits, one unearned run, one walk and nine strikeouts.

The K's were one shy of his career high, set against the Angels on Oct. 2.

"Just trusting my stuff, building my confidence back up," Gonzalez said, "and just believing I could throw my curveball for a strike."

Manager Bob Geren called it "a real good swing-and-miss curveball."

Reds manager Dusty Baker got another solid outing from rookie right-hander Mike Leake. Cincinnati took Leake with the eighth overall pick in last year's draft. Leake, who went to Arizona State, did not pitch an inning in the minors.

Leake worked six innings, allowing one run on five hits. He walked four and struck out two.

Before the game, Baker talked about how Leake (5-1, 2.92 ERA) has been able to thrive without a minor-league education.

"He knows how to make adjustments," Baker said. "The guy studies. He pays attention."

Baker, who managed the Giants for 10 seasons (1993-2002), earned career win No. 1,352, tying him with Chuck Tanner for 26th place.

A'S BEAT

Braden's elbow improving little by little

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Even with a limited pitching repertoire, **Dallas Braden** put together a fine outing at Wrigley Field on Thursday. He's hoping to have at least as much success - and more pitch options - when he takes the mound against the Reds tonight.

Bothered by elbow soreness recently, Braden got a few extra days of rest before he held the Cubs to a run on five hits in six innings. He was essentially a two-pitch (fastball, changeup) pitcher in Chicago.

Braden said he felt better "not throwing as many breaking balls, but you don't ever want to go out there and handicap yourself against a major-league baseball team.

"I'm a guy who throws four pitches. I'd like to use four pitches."

The left-hander has not thrown a bullpen session between starts for a while - and on Monday, he sounded encouraged about how his arm is progressing.

"I feel like we're getting ready to turn a corner," Braden said.

Since his perfect game against Tampa Bay on Mother's Day, Braden has gone 0-4 in seven starts. He hasn't pitched horribly - his ERA in that stretch is 4.29 - but the A's have scored more than two runs in only one of the seven games.

Because Braden's not an overpowering pitcher even on his best days, most fans couldn't tell his arm has been giving him problems lately.

"It's not like you're going to see a tremendous decline in velocity with me," Braden said. "I'm not going to go from 94 (mph) to 88, so it's kind of hard to put your finger on it."

Briefly: Outfielder **Coco Crisp** (rib cage) went 3-for-5 in Triple-A Sacramento's 4-0 win over Salt Lake on Monday night. He's 13-for-22 on his rehab assignment. ... The A's are 17-29 in night games and 17-9 during the day. ... This series is a special one for A's utilityman **Adam Rosales**. He spent the previous five seasons in the Reds' organization before Oakland acquired him in February. ... Cincinnati pitching coach **Bryan Price** turns 48 today. Price, a left-hander, went to Tamalpais High in Mill Valley, then pitched for Cal in the early 1980s.

A's leading off

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle

Red-letter days: The A's have done pretty well against Cincinnati. Oakland is 8-2 in regular-season games against the Reds. The teams twice met in the World Series, with the A's winning in seven games in 1972 and the Reds sweeping in '90.

A's stunned by three Reds homers in 10th

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- With gusto, Gio Gonzalez did away with his recent string of struggles. The same can't be said for the A's, though.

Doomed by a late-inning implosion of the bullpen, Oakland dropped a 6-4 Interleague matchup with the Reds on Monday, falling 8 1/2 games out of first place in the American League West. The A's are now 2-8 in their last 10 contests and have plummeted 6 1/2 games off the pace of first-place Texas during that span.

Asked how he felt after the game, A's manager Bob Geren said, "Not very good, obviously. We had a good outing from Gio. ... We battled a pretty good young pitcher over there and we got in position to take it and had a chance to win in the ninth, but pitching fell apart a little bit at the end."

What looked to be a low-scoring sleeper escalated into a slugfest in the game's final innings. After Craig Breslow pitched a perfect eighth to preserve a 1-1 tie, Geren brought in closer Andrew Bailey to keep the game knotted.

Bailey faltered, though, allowing a pinch-hit RBI single to Reds outfielder Jay Bruce. But A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff bailed out Bailey with a homer to right field to lead off the ninth, sending the game to extra frames.

That's when things fell apart for Oakland.

Former A's catcher Ramon Hernandez hit the first pitch he saw from Oakland reliever Michael Wuertz off the left-field foul pole to lead off the 10th, the precursor to a deadly deluge.

"I was trying to get a good pitch to hit, get on base," Hernandez said. "I got lucky that ball hit the pole."

Cedrick Bowers relieved Wuertz and prolonged the A's misery, as he surrendered fatal back-to-back jacks. Bowers gave up a two-run blast to Joey Votto before allowing a solo shot by Scott Rolen.

"Those were some stupid pitches, man," Bowers said. "Stupid."

It all spoiled a solid outing from Gonzalez. Loser of his previous two contests, Gonzalez said he felt more confident with his stuff on Monday, and it showed. He allowed an unearned run on four hits and a walk over seven innings, while setting a new season-high with nine strikeouts.

After Votto doubled in leadoff man Brandon Phillips, who reached base on a Cliff Pennington error to start the game, the Reds struggled to get any momentum going against Gonzalez. The 24-year-old southpaw retired 16 of the final 18 batters he faced.

"For me, it's a plus, it's a positive," Gonzalez said. "It's a step toward the right direction, and the team showed life. They showed today that we're going to battle all the way to the end, and it was an exciting game all the way to the last out."

Cincinnati starter Mike Leake, meanwhile, struggled with his command but kept the A's damage minimal. He went six innings, allowing five hits and four walks, but limited Oakland to a single run.

Conor Jackson singled in Rajai Davis in the fifth to tie the game at 1 and earn his first home RBI with the A's, but Daric Barton killed the rally by sliding past third base and getting tagged out on the play.

"He's got a lot of movement on his pitches," Jackson said. "He was working us with his sinker and keeping us off balance. He's pitching like a veteran. Normally, you get a young guy who makes a lot of mistakes over the plate, but he just didn't do it tonight."

The A's made a late push in the bottom of the 10th to make it interesting, but Jack Cust struck out to end the game as he represented the game's tying run.

Oakland loaded the bases with no outs but could only manage a pair of RBI groundouts before Cincinnati reliever Jordan Smith closed the door to earn his first career save.

Though the mood was understandably gloomy within the A's clubhouse following the game, Gonzalez shared some optimistic words of encouragement for his team.

"I think we're going to push through this," Gonzalez said. "We're going to find our groove and we're going to go out there and we're going to battle."

Among the bright spots in the Oakland lineup was A's shortstop Cliff Pennington, who went 1-for-2 with a pair of walks. In his past eight games, Pennington is now hitting .480 (12-for-25), with five walks and six runs scored.

"It's a critical time of the season, for sure," Geren said. "We're right there -- we were in first place a couple of weeks ago. We came out and had a little bit of a rough time, but the good news is we're swinging the bats better and our lineup's doing better."

Rhodes' Reds ready for Braden's A's

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

Arthur Rhodes' magical season continues. Dallas Braden is trying to regain some of the magic that he experienced in early May.

When the Reds and A's meet at Oakland-Alameda Coliseum in an Interleague matchup on Tuesday night, these two left-handers have a chance to make the headlines.

Rhodes has been simply untouchable this year, and it continued in Monday's game, when he struck out the only batter he faced to lower his season ERA to 0.29 and, most important, improve his Major League-leading and career-high streak of scoreless innings to 29 (over 32 appearances). How good is that? All-Star good, according to Rhodes' manager, Dusty Baker.

"Yeah, Arthur's an All-Star," Baker said. "Between he and [closer Francisco] Cordero, they're our most consistent guys in our bullpen. It's one of the best years I've seen out of anybody in the bullpen."

"I think he deserves it. Look around at left-handed relievers, it's him and [Dodgers reliever Hong-Chih] Kuo."

As for Braden, the A's left-hander who will start against Cincinnati righty Bronson Arroyo, it's been a struggle since he threw a perfect game on May 9. Braden has gone 0-4 with a 4.29 ERA and .295 opponents' batting average over seven starts since that day, but he's also received only six runs of support during that span.

Braden pitched well enough to win in his last outing, allowing one run in six innings in a no-decision against the Cubs. He retired the last 15 batters he faced.

"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 isn't the only A's pitcher in that boat lately. A's starting pitchers are 2-6 with a 4.93 ERA (36 earned runs in 65 2/3 innings) over the last 11 games, and that figure includes a 2-0 record and 3.20 ERA in three starts by Trevor Cahill and an 0-6 record with a 5.67 ERA by everyone else.

Reds: Comeback kids

The Reds lead the Majors with 24 comeback wins, rank second with 12 wins in their last at-bat (Atlanta has 13) and have 13 wins in one-run games. ... There has been a change in plans in Reds pitcher Edinson Volquez's rehab assignment with Triple-A Louisville. Volquez will pitch on Wednesday vs. Toledo, instead of Tuesday, as was originally planned. He is expected to throw around 90 pitches. The right-hander has not pitched for the Reds since June 1, 2009, and had Tommy John surgery on his elbow in August.

A's: One-run warriors

The A's have lost five of their last seven one-run games after winning 10 of their first 12, but they're still 12-7 in one-run games for the year, which is the second-best such record in the American League behind the White Sox (14-8). Oakland went 15-23 in one-run games last year, which was the second-worst record in the AL. They're 3-3 in extra-inning games and the three wins matches the A's extra-inning win total from last year. ... A's pinch-hitters have nine hits in their last 23 at-bats (.391) with four walks, two homers and seven RBIs and are now batting .295 (13-for-44) with six walks, three homers and nine RBIs this season.

Worth noting

Baker's victory on Monday night was the 1,352nd of his career, tying Chuck Tanner for 26th on the all-time list. ... Reds third baseman Scott Rolen needs two home runs for 300 in his career. ... The A's have a 17-9 record in day games and a 17-29 mark at night. Their day record is the fourth-best in the AL and their night record is the second-worst behind Baltimore (13-35). The A's have a 2.95 ERA during the day and a 4.69 ERA at night.

Injured Crisp could rejoin A's Friday

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's outfielder Coco Crisp was scheduled to play nine innings for Triple-A Sacramento on Monday. Crisp went 2-for-4 with a double and a walk on Sunday, to lower his average to .588 (10-for-17) in five games with the River Cats.

"I'm getting great reports every night with player comments and everything," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Everything's looking good. He's swinging the bat well and getting himself in shape to play."

Crisp, who is recovering from a strained rib cage muscle, started his rehab assignment on June 14 with an intrasquad game in Phoenix and could return to the A's by Friday if all goes well.

A's face former draftee in Reds' Leake

OAKLAND -- When Cincinnati rookie right-hander Mike Leake took the mound at the Oakland Coliseum on Monday, the A's got an up-close look at what could have been.

Leake, who is quietly putting together a fine rookie campaign, was selected by the A's in the seventh round of the 2006 First-Year Player Draft out of Fallbrook (Calif.) High School. Leake passed, though, electing to go to Arizona State, where he enjoyed a prolific college career.

The Reds selected Leake with the No. 8 overall pick in last year's Draft, seven spots behind some kid named Stephen Strasburg and five before the A's picked Southern Cal shortstop Grant Green. Leake skipped the Minor Leagues altogether and was 5-1 with a 3.02 ERA in 13 starts entering his first start at the Coliseum.

"He has a real good side-to-side game," said Oakland manager Bob Geren. "His fastball runs into hitters, and his breaking balls obviously move away from them. When he keeps the ball down in the zone, he has even more movement. He's done that well for a young guy, and he has real good composure and good command of his pitches."

Leake, 22, is listed at 6-foot-1 but said he's really 5-foot-10. He went to ASU partly because of the opportunity to hit, another part of the game where he has excelled.

He had a career .299 average in 97 college at-bats, and his current .385 clip is the National League's second-best for a pitcher, behind Arizona's Dan Haren.

The A's also scouted Leake during his days at ASU, which plays its games about 10 minutes away from Oakland's Spring Training complex in Phoenix. Leake was a unanimous first-team All-American, named the nation's best pitcher and was a finalist for the Golden Spikes Award last year. He went 16-1 with a 1.71 ERA in 2009 and 40-6 with a 2.91 ERA in his three-year college career.

Anderson's return could take four weeks

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Geren said on Monday that lefty Brett Anderson likely won't be returning to the Oakland rotation for three to four weeks.

Anderson threw off flat ground from 140 feet on Monday, the fifth day in his estimated 30-day recovery plan. Anderson hasn't pitched since June 3 and is on the disabled list for the second time this season due to a sore left forearm and elbow.

Oakland starter Dallas Braden is also battling soreness in his left elbow and has been limited on the mound as a result, throwing less sliders and cutters. Geren said Braden will have his full arsenal available on Tuesday against the Reds.

Chavez shuts down rehab to rest

OAKLAND -- Eric Chavez's recovery from two bulging disks in his neck is still on hold, according to manager Bob Geren. The A's skipper said Chavez, who stopped rehabilitating with the A's over a week ago, is still resting at his home in Arizona.

"I haven't heard much from Eric," Geren said. "He's taking some time off to see how his body responds and currently that's where he's at right now."

Chavez, 32, hasn't played since May 20 due to the bulging disks, which led to neck spasms that affected him in the batter's box. Chavez sustained the injury in a Spring Training collision and said it lingered all season before sending him to the 15-day disabled list.

A's linked to trade talks with O's over Fox

OAKLAND -- The Baltimore Orioles have had trade discussions with Oakland about Jake Fox, according to The Baltimore Sun. After designating Fox for assignment on June 14, the A's have 10 days to trade, release or outright Fox to the Minor Leagues. Fox batted .214 with two home runs and 12 RBIs in 39 games as a utility player for the A's this season.

A's open homestand coming off high note

OAKLAND -- After suffering through a 2-7 road swing, the A's are glad to be back at the Oakland Coliseum, where they are 21-13 this season. Manager Bob Geren said it helped to end the trip with a 3-2 win at St. Louis on Sunday, though.

"It made the flight a lot shorter," Geren said before Monday's game. "Tough road trip. We saw some good teams and we saw some real good pitching. ... We expect three more good ones here in this series with Cincinnati."

The Reds feature a trio of righties for the three-game set: Mike Leake, Bronson Arroyo and Johnny Cueto. Heading into the series, the three pitchers were a combined 16-6 with a 3.98 ERA. As Geren also pointed out, the Reds led the National League with their .274 team batting average.

For the first time in 10 games, Geren was able to use a designated hitter on Monday, batting Jack Cust seventh. As for the outfield, it featured Conor Jackson batting third and playing left, Rajai Davis hitting leadoff and playing center and No. 5 hitter Ryan Sweeney in right.

With Coco Crisp's return on the horizon -- he could be back in Oakland by Friday -- it appears the A's crowded outfield could lose a current member.

Since the acquisition of Jackson on Tuesday, Eric Patterson has only had three at-bats, all as a pinch-hitter. Gabe Gross has been used exclusively as a pinch-hitter and defensive replacement, totaling three at-bats. Entering Monday's action, Patterson was batting .204 with four home runs and nine RBIs this season, while Gross was hitting .273 with one home run and 12 RBIs.

"We have a very deep bench right now," Geren said. "It's a good problem to have. ... Let's say it's a good situation to be part of."

Suzuki, Sweeney need big All-Star boost

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A pair of A's players could earn a ticket to this year's All-Star Game, thanks to their roles as the club's most consistent hitters.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki and outfielder Ryan Sweeney have the opportunity to join skipper Bob Geren -- appointed by manager Joe Girardi -- on the American League roster, but they can't get there on their own.

This unassuming and often underrated duo who have helped guide the A's to a respectable start this season needs help to take part in one of baseball's biggest events. Both are in need of votes in order to be included in the top picks among their positions.

"I think Suzuki is an All-Star," said Geren. "I think he should've been last year, without a doubt. He is one of the best all-around catchers in the game, 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."

Fans can cast their votes for starters up to 25 times at MLB.com and all 30 club sites using the 2010 All-Star Game MLB.com Ballot sponsored by Sprint until July 1 at 8:59 p.m. PT.

Starting rosters will be announced during the 2010 All-Star Game Selection Show on TBS on July 4. Baseball fans around the world will then be able to select the final player on each team via the 2010 All-Star Game Final Vote sponsored by Sprint.

And the voting doesn't end there. Fans will have the opportunity to participate in the official voting for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet at the Midsummer Classic via the 2010 All-Star Game MVP Vote sponsored by Sprint.

The All-Star Game, to be played in Anaheim on July 13, will be televised nationally by FOX and around the world by Major League Baseball International. ESPN Radio will provide exclusive national radio play-by-play, while MLB.com will offer extensive online coverage.

Though sidelined for part of the season with an intercostal strain, Suzuki -- deemed by many around the league as one of the game's most underrated catchers -- has given the A's a sturdy middle-of-the-order hitter while also providing several impressive defensive gems. He's batting .273 with a .455 slugging percentage.

"As a player, you definitely like to get recognized by other teams and players," Suzuki said. "I don't think any of us go into a season thinking we want to be in the All-Star Game, but it's a great opportunity if it happens. You want to play with the best of the best around the league."

Sweeney, meanwhile, boasts a .301 batting average to go along with a .390 slugging percentage. The 25 year old, in just his third full big league season, is also part of what manager Bob Geren has called one of the league's best defensive outfielders.

Reds Top A's in the 10th Inning

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 6/22/2010

Oakland, CA – Gio Gonzalez has struggled in his last two starts. Tonight he was in a zone that keep the Oakland A's in the game through seven innings. Looking confident and poised on the mound Gonzalez controlled the tempo of the game.

Beginning a six-game homestand, he retired 16 of the final 18 batters he faced, allowing four hits, 1 run, 1 walk and striking out a season-high nine. Facing the Cincinnati Reds for the first was no pressure for this young pitcher.

"For me, it's a plus, it's a positive," Gonzalez said. "It's a step toward the right direction and the team showed life." "Today they showed they can battle all the way to the end and it's also exciting until the last out."

The A's didn't get off to a good start, in the first frame Cliff Pennington's dropped ball at short stop allowed Brandon Phillips to get on base. Then newly acquired left fielder Conor Jackson ran into the wall, allowed Joey Votto's double to put the Reds up 1-0.

As Gonzalez became more ingenious on the mound, Oakland's defense stepped up. Bottom of the fifth frame Jackson singled and brought in Rajai Davis for his first RBI with the A's and tied the game 1-1. The next four innings was a defensive game until top of the ninth, Drew Stubbs walked and stole 2nd base before Chris Heisey singled to advance their lead 2-1.

Bottom of the ninth, Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a leadoff home run for the tie, sending the game into extra innings. That's when things began to fall apart for the A's. The Reds sealed their victory 6-2 while dominating throughout the 10th frame. Ramon Hernandez belted a homer out of the ball park on the first pitch off Michael Wuertz. Cedrick Bowers relived him shortly after and gave up two back-to-back home runs to Votto and Scott Rolen.

"Those were some stupid pitches," said Bowers. "I had a couple of pitches, made some mistakes and they made us pay for it."

Oakland gave up three home runs in the extra inning for the first time. The bullpen struggled where they are usually solid at home. The A's will need more pitching like Gonzalez displayed early in the game if they want to stay in contention in the American League West.

"Anyone who plays in the AL can pitch and hit," manager Dusty Baker said. "Gonzalez was the difference in this game, we heard about his curve ball." "It was win gained the hard way, the 10th was huge for us so we'll take it anyway we can."

The Reds were just swept three games in Seattle without hitting a single home run. They sit two games behind St. Louis and end their losing streak. In their first road trip to Oakland Cincinnati was not too familiar with the A's other than what they saw in spring training. The Reds were not surprised in how they battled through the game and will expect that for the remainder of the series.

"I think we're going to push through this," Gonzalez said. "We're going to find our groove and we're going to go out there and we're going to battle."

Is A's Suzuki a worthy All-Star?

By Rob Neyer, ESPN.com 6/21/2010

Today's burning question is posed by John Shea (and answered, sort of, by Bob Geren):

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."

--snip--

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.

--snip--

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.

Suzuki's enjoying a solid season and there are few catchers more dynamic behind the plate. But it's hard to make a case for him over Mauer and Posada. Sure, if you throw defense and durability into the mix, maybe Suzuki fights his way into the discussion for No. 2 ... but of course the defense is notoriously hard to quantify, so we can argue about this one forever without reaching any real agreement.

If Girardi needs a third catcher or if he's desperate for one Athletic, Suzuki would be a fine choice. It's silly to consider Ryan Sweeney, a right fielder with one home run this season. And while Cahill has pitched well this season, he's got only six wins and his 3.21 ERA is the most impressive piece of his record ... and this season, 3.21 isn't all that impressive.

In the end, it's going to come down to Suzuki vs. Bailey, the American League's reigning Rookie of the Year. Bailey's strikeout rate is lower this season, but so's his ERA. Which of them gets the All-Star nod will probably have less to do with performance than Girardi's roster considerations.

All of which is just moderately interesting unless you're an A's fan. It was that last line in the post that got me, though: *The A's haven't had a position player make an All-Star team since catcher Ramon Hernandez in 2002.*

Actually, it was 2003. Still that was a long time ago ... and Hernandez wasn't that good! I think six straight All-Star Games without an A's position player -- and this year might make it seven straight -- says a lot about what's been ailing this franchise for the last few years. With the exception of Nick Swisher -- their best hitter in 2006, when they won 93 games and reached the ALCS -- the A's simply haven't developed any high-quality hitters.

And the less said about Andre Ethier, the better.

A's owner grateful for win here

By RICK HUMMEL, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH 6/21/2010

The Oakland Athletics finished on Sunday a nine-game interleague trip in which they faced the following pitchers: Matt Cain, Tim Lincecum, Barry Zito, Carlos Zambrano, Ryan Dempster, Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright. It didn't go well for the A's.

"Nobody takes losing well," said manager Bob Geren, "but it is a fact we saw some pretty good arms."

The A's won just two of those games, including a 3-2 victory over the Cardinals on Sunday when they had to face none of the aforementioned hurlers. This gave the A's something to feel good about as they flew back to California and it made their owner, native St. Louisan Lew Wolff, feel good, too.

"I just sent (general manager) Billy Beane and Bob Geren messages that said, 'Thanks for the Father's Day present,'" said Wolff, as he boarded another plane to return to the Los Angeles area, where he lives.

Wolff had been accommodated with two party room suites in right field for Sunday's series finale at Busch Stadium. More than 100 guests filled the room, encompassing family, friends and the kids and grandkids of the family and friends. Not many of them were A's fans.

"About 90 percent of them were Cardinals fans," said Wolff.

After his team had lost the first two games of the series, Wolff concluded that "the Cardinals have a much better team."

But then he and the A's were able to salvage one game from this set despite losing two runners at second and two others at first on some occasionally slipshod running.

In one particularly ugly inning, the A's pitcher, Trevor Cahill, who rarely bats and even more rarely runs, bunted into a forceout and then was forced at second by Cardinals right fielder Ryan Ludwick on what should have been a hit to right field.

"But," said Geren, aware that his team's interleague road schedule is over, said, "We don't have to worry about Trevor baserunning any more — or any of our pitchers baserunning anymore."

Former Oakland outfielder Matt Holliday, whom the A's traded to St. Louis last July, gave the Athletics plenty of concern over the weekend when he hit four homers in three games, including two off Cahill on Sunday for both Cardinals runs.

Wolff, who texted Cardinals owner Bill DeWitt Jr., noted that "Holliday is killing us.

"I didn't mean to make him mad," said Wolff. "I thought he liked us. I sure like him."

Geren said, "Matt Holliday was just on fire the whole series. If it wasn't for him, Trevor would have tossed a shutout."

A's third-base coach Mike Gallego, a former Cardinals and A's player under Tony La Russa, said Wolff had made it clear to his team before the series how important it was that the A's win at least one contest here.

"He wasn't afraid to let us know where he's from, that's for sure," joked Gallego.

Geren, a former catcher, has his own St. Louis connection. As a minor leaguer, he was the fourth player acquired from San Diego by Cardinals general manager Whitey Herzog in the first trade he made in the winter of 1980 after he had assumed the dual GM-manager job. Geren came along with pitchers Bob Shirley and Rollie Fingers (who was a Cardinal for two days) and catcher Gene Tenace in exchange for promising catcher Terry Kennedy. Herzog also made San Diego GM Jack McKeon

take six other players to get Kennedy — pitchers John Littlefield, Kim Seaman, Al Olmsted and John Urrea, second baseman Mike Phillips and catcher Steve Swisher.

"That was quite a trade," said Geren.

In five seasons in the Cardinals' minor system before he moved on to the New York Yankees, who finally brought him to the big leagues, Geren played at St. Petersburg, Springfield (Ill.), Arkansas and Louisville, with his best year 1983 when he hit 24 homers and batted .265 at Springfield in the Midwest League.

But Geren was blocked in the system by the likes of Tom Nieto, Mike LaValliere and Tom Pagnozzi. "Pagnozzi kind of passed me up," Geren said.

This weekend, more than 25 years later, Geren finally got to Busch Stadium.

But he said, "It's been so long since I've been with the Cardinals. I have great memories of it but it feels like it was a different life.

"The biggest things I remember about this organization were George Kissell, (pitching coach) Hub Kittle and that they had some very good young managers in (current Washington manager) Jim Riggleman and (Toronto coach) Nick Leyva, who are still around in the big leagues," said Geren.

Geren said he felt good that the A's could win a game while Wolff was on hand. "He's been super supportive," said Geren.

Wolff said, "Maybe we sort of broke the slump with this game. "Maybe this is the beginning of a little stretch and perhaps we can help you guys out a little when we play Cincinnati."

Tonight the A's start a three-game series with the Reds, the Cardinals' closest pursuers, in Oakland.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Middleton dominant in River Cats victory

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento starter Kyle Middleton allowed five hits over 8.0 scoreless innings as the River Cats topped the Salt Lake Bees 4-0 at Raley Field on Monday night.

With the win, Sacramento finished its homestand with a 7-1 record.

Middleton held Salt Lake to five hits and no runs while striking out six and lowering his ERA to 2.69. Middleton matched a River Cats season high with 8.0 innings pitched before being relieved by Michael Benacka, who completed the shutout.

"Tonight felt like any other game - it was fun," said Middleton, who has pitched 17.0 consecutive scoreless innings.

The shutout was Sacramento's fourth of the season and second in six games.

Chris Carter's RBI double highlighted Sacramento's three-run first inning, which also featured two Salt Lake errors, two walks and a hit by pitch.

Scoring was halted until the sixth inning, when Steve Tolleson singled to left field to set the stage for a run. Coco Crisp singled, advancing Tolleson to third, and a Sogard bunted single made it a 4-0.

The crack of Crisp's bat continued, as the Oakland A's center fielder continued a splendid rehab going 3-for-5 (all singles) with a stolen base.

A hot River Cats team next heads to Las Vegas where they play the 51s on Tuesday at 7:05.

RockHounds and Riders Light Up The Scoreboard

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The RockHounds and Frisco RoughRiders combined to score 18 runs on 32 hits, with the 'Hounds defeating the first half South Division champs, 11-7, Monday night at Citibank Ballpark.

Remarkably, the clubs did all that "damage" in under three hours (2:58)!

The RockHounds jumped to a 4-0 lead in the last of the first inning on 2-run doubles from Jeff Baisley and Shane Peterson, but could never shake the RoughRiders until the tail end of the ballgame. Frisco drew within 4-2, but the 'Hounds put together another 4-run inning, this time in the fourth, for an 8-2 lead. The RoughRiders again stormed back, scoring five unanswered runs to cut the lead to 8-7.

The game's only home run might have been easily overlooked, but J.C. Holt's solo shot to left-center through a strong wind gave the RockHounds a 2-run (9-7) lead and slowed Frisco's momentum. Corey Brown then led off the eighth with one of baseball's most exciting plays, ripping a triple into deep right-center. "Brownny's" stand-up three bagger turned into an insurance run and Mickey Storey did the rest. Mickey tossed two scoreless innings (no small feat on this night) in the eighth and ninth to earn his third save.

The RockHounds won their third straight game, and have now taken 8-of-their-last-11 and have guaranteed at least a .500 first half after struggling in early June.

The first half concludes Tuesday night at Citibank Ballpark, with the second half beginning Wednesday, when all eight clubs go back to 0-0 and begin a new, 70-game pennant race. The 'Hounds are at home, hosting Frisco, through Thursday.