

A's News Clips, Tuesday, June 29, 2010

A's wonder if trade winds will take Ben Sheets, Coco Crisp

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The hourglass has not emptied yet on the A's, but they're facing an uphill battle to climb back into contention for their first playoff berth in four seasons.

They sit 10 games out in the American League West as they begin a six-game road trip today in Baltimore, and if they don't make up ground quickly, general manager Billy Beane will face a familiar decision: keep the team intact or trade off his marketable veteran players before the July 31 nonwaiver trade deadline.

Right-hander Ben Sheets and center fielder Coco Crisp already are being mentioned as names that could generate interest.

With the division-leading Texas Rangers and second-place Los Angeles Angels playing well — and the possibility that both could get stronger through trades of their own — it appears unlikely the A's would become buyers as the deadline approaches.

In recent seasons, Beane hasn't hesitated to deal his marquee players for prospects, once he deemed the A's out of contention (see: Matt Holliday, Orlando Cabrera, Rich Harden, Joe Blanton). But he said he likes the influence his current cast of veterans is having on the younger players around whom the A's are trying to build. Thus, he claims he won't part easily with anyone.

"The few veterans that we have are instrumental," Beane said. "At this time, I'm not looking at the trade deadline. And once we get there, those points will (be considered). Part of developing a young team is trying to win as many games as you can."

The decision Beane faces is whether the value of that veteran presence outweighs the potential return the A's could get by dealing a player or two.

Sheets, 3-7 with a 5.01 ERA, has been very hittable while coming back from an elbow injury that sidelined him all of last season. But two major league scouts, who requested anonymity, said they believe the four-time All-Star could be attractive to teams.

"I think he looks pretty good actually," one scout said. "Stuff-wise, it's always there. Yeah, he runs deep in counts and his fastball can be straight. But for a contending club looking for a No. 5 guy, there's going to be interest."

It's believed that when, or if, the Seattle Mariners deal highly coveted lefty Cliff Lee, it will stimulate the trade market for other starters. A second scout said he would take Sheets over Baltimore's Kevin Millwood, another trade candidate who's comparable to the A's right-hander.

"I wouldn't be afraid to sprint in August or September with Sheets," the scout said.

Still, a third scout who also spoke on condition of anonymity is skeptical of what the market will be for either Sheets or Crisp.

Acquiring Sheets also means assuming the remainder of the one-year, \$10 million contract the A's gave him. The A's likely would be asked to eat a portion of that, but another team still would be sinking a sizable investment into a pitcher with an expiring contract having a subpar year.

Crisp has played in just seven games because of two lengthy stays on the disabled list. He's making \$4.75 million this season, and the A's hold a \$5.75 million club option for 2011 with a \$500,000 buyout.

Crisp seemingly would have to string together a healthy few weeks to garner interest. He's made an impact in the leadoff spot since coming off the DL on Tuesday, so that's something for the A's to consider before dealing him.

"He brings that veteran leadership and excitement," A's closer Andrew Bailey said. "He can do what Rajai (Davis) does. They're game-changers."

One scout said he thought second baseman Mark Ellis was one of the A's more marketable trade chips. The A's could consider dealing Ellis if they were sold on Adam Rosales as an everyday second baseman. And the team faces a decision anyway on whether to exercise Ellis' \$6 million club option for next season.

But Ellis is known for his terrific work ethic, and if Beane truly values his veterans as mentors for his younger players, that could be incentive to keep Ellis.

TODAY: A's (Dallas Braden 4-7) at Orioles (Brian Matusz 2-8), 4:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM, 1640-AM

Crisp has bat, energy team needs

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

If **Coco Crisp** can stay healthy, the A's clubhouse will have a new, refreshing vibe. It's full of young players lacking postseason-run experience, and Crisp adds something that's appreciated.

"He gives us a different energy in the locker room," closer **Andrew Bailey** said.

On the field, Crisp provides a hot bat atop the lineup. He's 7-for-19 with three RBIs in five games since coming off the disabled list. His value goes beyond the numbers.

"It's Coco, man," Bailey said. "He brings that veteran leadership and excitement on the field. He's a game-changer."

"With a bunch of young guys on the team, having a guy in the clubhouse you can look at as having fun day in, day out, no matter what he's doing at the plate or no matter what injuries he's battled through, coming in the clubhouse every day with a smile on his face, there's a lot to be said about that."

The A's are coming off a three-game sweep of Pittsburgh and play their next six games at Baltimore and Cleveland. That's three straight last-place teams.

Overdue: **Dallas Braden** made history with his perfect game and could make more - unfortunately - if he doesn't beat the Orioles today.

Braden has gone eight straight starts without a victory (0-5, 4.31 ERA), matching **Mark Buehrle** for the longest post-perfecto winless streak in history. One more non-win, and the A's lefty is all alone.

It's not all on Braden. In the eight starts, he has received just eight runs of support. For the season, he has the league's second-lowest run support.

The good news for him: He's an Oriole-beater - 5-1 with a 1.41 ERA, with 28 percent of his 18 career wins coming against Baltimore.

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

That's a wrap: Shortstop Cliff Pennington hit .396 in interleague play, the sixth-highest average among players with at least 50 at-bats. Trevor Cahill tied for second in wins (three). The A's posted an 8-10 interleague record and hit the second-fewest homers (eight).

Competitive AL West clubs show fight

Pitching-heavy division remains anyone's for the taking

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- The Seattle Mariners, so everybody thinks, are on the verge of trading pitcher Cliff Lee. Instead, despite being 14 games out at the time, they decided to do something about their offense by reacquiring first baseman Russell Branyan on Friday as general manager Jack Zduriencik made it clear that part of development is winning baseball games.

In Oakland, the Athletics have tried to do what they could this month to improve their roster, acquiring outfielder Conor Jackson from the D-backs and signing veteran pitcher Jamey Wright to a Minor League contract. They also activated outfielder Coco Crisp from the disabled list last week.

All of this has happened while the Rangers have taken charge of the division by tearing through the bottom half of the National League hierarchy, while the Angels pushed forward after the devastating walk-off celebration injury to first baseman Kendry Morales last month.

That the bottom two teams remain active in looking for immediate help suggests that the American League West -- while not exactly the cut-throat four-team race that many envisioned at the outset -- is still up for grabs and nobody is waving the white flag in the face of the Rangers' rampage.

"No way has it become a two-team race," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "Seattle, they've got pitching, and Oakland, with their young pitching, they can put some games together just like everybody else. Until you get into September and have a huge lead, there's no way you can say it's a two-team race. I was in Oakland one year when we were 11 games back at the All-Star break and we ended up winning it."

All four teams rest on Monday but there is more than a half-season to go and there will be much interest this week in Anaheim, where the Rangers and the Angels square off on Tuesday to begin a three-game series. That's just the latest in a long summer of many intra-divisional games to be played in the AL West.

Here is what you really need to know about the AL West. The division has four of the top eight starting rotations (by ERA) in the AL and that's why there is still lingering hope and a perceptible heartbeat with all four teams. That includes the Mariners, who have had to deal with multiple misfortunes as well as an anemic offense but still have a rotation with the lowest ERA in the league.

How AL West clubs stack up	
Batting average	
Rangers	.283
A's	.263
Angels	.258
Mariners	.239
Runs Score	
Rangers	401
Angels	372
A's	312
Mariners	255
Home Runs	
Angels	80
Rangers	75
A's	50
Mariners	44
ERA	
Mariners	3.90
Rangers	3.90
A's	3.95
Angels	4.44
Rotation ERA	
Mariners	3.63

A's	3.85
Rangers	4.24
Angels	4.27
Bullpen ERA	
Rangers	3.29
A's	4.13
Mariners	4.55
Angels	4.85

"We've been playing first- and second-place teams most of the year, so to be where we're at, we're actually doing pretty good," Mariners second baseman Chone Figgins said. "The numbers don't show that, but in reality we're doing pretty good because of who those other teams are. It's always a tough road to this point. I just think it's starting to be a little more consistent. We're starting to try and find some rhythm will all of us playing together."

The other clubs know that the Mariners still may have the best 1-2 combination with Felix Hernandez and Lee and don't do badly with Jason Vargas and Doug Fister right behind them. Ryan Rowland-Smith (1-7, 6.18 ERA) and Ian Snell (0-5, 6.41) haven't held up their end but what has clobbered the Mariners was having a lead in 50 of their first 75 games and losing 21 of those games.

They're still third among the league leaders in overall pitching, although that has been negated somewhat by having an offense that has scored the fewest runs in the league. But if a team has good starting pitching, an extended winning streak and a second-half surge is possible.

The Athletics, who swept the Pirates over the weekend, believe that as well and they are willing to match their young pitching up with that of any team. Brett Anderson's elbow has him on the disabled list for the second time this season, but in Trevor Cahill, Dallas Braden and Gio Gonzalez, they have three starting pitchers 26 and under who have made at least 12 starts and ERAs under 4.00.

Ben Sheets is also healthy after missing last season. He is 2-4 with a 4.00 ERA and opponents are hitting .239 off him in his past 10 outings after a rough first month.

"Just a month ago we were in first place, and now we've hit a little skid in the season due to a few different factors, but right now I'd say our team is pretty strong," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "We're still battling through some pitching things, but hopefully we can get through the break and get everybody strong for the second half."

Added catcher Kurt Suzuki: "Considering the guys that have been down due to injury, I really don't think we've seen what this team is fully capable of. We're playing good baseball and that may not show in the standings right now, but we're going to keep fighting. We can compete with anybody in the division."

The Angels show the Mariners and Athletics what can happen when the starting rotation gets on a roll. The Angels started off 12-18 because their starters had a 5.32 ERA in the first 30 games. Since then, Angels starters are 26-14 with a 3.72 ERA in 48 games and the Angels are 31-17 since May 6. They are 20-8 since losing Morales for the season on May 29.

The Angels' rotation of Jered Weaver, Joel Pineiro, Ervin Santana, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders is the only one in baseball with five pitchers who have at least 50 career wins in the big leagues.

The Angels' problems -- besides getting almost nothing out of first base since Morales went down -- is an erratic bullpen that can be really good or really bad. The bullpen has been a major strength during a decade-long run of success under manager Mike Scioscia but this season, Angels relievers have a 2.09 ERA in 43 wins and a 7.58 ERA in 26 losses.

Scioscia still likes a bullpen built around Fernando Rodney, Brian Fuentes, Kevin Jepsen, Jason Bulger and Scot Shields, and the Angels are more likely to look for help at first base as the July 31 Trade Deadline approaches. Paul Konerko has been prominently mentioned but seems a far less likely candidate now that the White Sox have jumped back into the AL Central race.

"They're a good club,' third baseman Michael Young said. "We know they are a good team. They are the defending champions so you have to knock them to get to postseason. We have a lot of respect for the success they've had as a team."

The respect is mutual. The Angels have seen what's happened in Texas as the Rangers used an 11-game winning streak to open up at some daylight between themselves and the rest of the division. But the Rangers also had a 4 1/2-game lead last year midway through June and never saw first place after the All-Star break.

One difference may be that they're working with an almost completely revamped rotation with Colby Lewis coming over from Japan, C.J. Wilson coming out of the bullpen and Tommy Hunter coming up from Triple-A. They could use one more starter to help prevent them from overtaxing a lights-out bullpen but still harbor hopes that either Derek Holland or Rich Harden can get off the disabled list and be second-half factors.

The Rangers would still like to trade for more starting pitching but continue to work under financial uncertainty until the sale of the franchise is completed. That means internal improvements are likely the Rangers' best hope. But with Young, Josh Hamilton and Vladimir Guerrero powering their lineup, the Rangers may have more staying power than they've had since their last division title in 1999.

"I see what they're doing -- I've got no choice," Angels outfielder Torii Hunter said. "If they're winning like that in September, then it's a problem. September shows what you're really made of. Their pitching is good, their hitting is good, their defense is good. They look totally different. You can't take these guys lightly."

Right now there is no reason to take any of the four teams lightly. They all have their problems but they all have quality starting pitching. That makes them all dangerous and leaves nobody officially eliminated. At least not yet.

"We're not even in July yet," Young said. "There is a lot of baseball left. In my mind it's still a four-team race."

Klein to rep A's as All-Star Among Us

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's, Major League Baseball and People Magazine on Monday announced Lisa Klein as the Oakland representative in the 2010 All-Stars Among Us competition. Klein, an Oakland resident, will be honored with 29 other community service All-Stars during a pregame ceremony for the 81st Midsummer Classic on July 13 in Anaheim.

In an effort to help out Hurricane Katrina victims in 2005, Klein collected baby clothes from friends in the Bay Area and sent them to New Orleans. Two years later, she established Loved Twice, which gathers "gently used" baby clothes and donates them to those in need.

Since its inception, Klein's non-profit organization has donated more than 20,000 pounds of clothing, helping out more than 3,000 Oakland-area newborns. With Klein's direction, Loved Twice donates clothing to local hospitals, shelters and pre-natal clinics.

All 30 MLB teams will feature a community service All-Star that will be recognized at 5 p.m. PT on July 13. Klein was selected over two other Oakland finalists, thanks to 1.7 million votes at PeopleAllStars.com. The All-Stars Among Us campaign received twice as many online votes this year than in 2009, the initial year of the program.

Prospectus Q&A **Andrew Bailey**

by David Laurila, Baseball Prospectus

Andrew Bailey is the reigning American League Rookie of the Year, and he is also one of the game's most engaging personalities. The Athletics' closer clearly has a talented right arm, as evidenced by his 1.81 ERA and 40 saves in 98 big-league appearances. Based on his responses to questions about several Oakland teammates, he also possesses a keen and calculated wit.

David Laurila: Who is the most interesting person in the A's clubhouse?

Andrew Bailey: Hands down, **Dallas Braden**. He is by far the most comical and energetic teammate that we have in the locker room. He has that swagger about him that our opponents tend to dislike, but I don't really think Dallas cares too much about that. But he's a great guy, a great clubhouse leader. He's always playing pranks and keeping things light around the clubhouse. He's a ball of fun to be around.

DL: It sounds like maybe the A-Rod incident didn't come as much of a surprise?

AB: No, not really. He grew up in a rough neighborhood, and he's a straight shooter, so if he sees something that you're doing wrong, he'll let you know. It doesn't matter who you are, or how much time you have, or what have you. I think that the A-Rod thing kind of got blown up a little more than anyone would have liked, but Dallas is Dallas and that's why we love him. He is who he is.

DL: Clubhouses being as they are, I assume he gets as much as he gives?

AB: Yeah, and I give him crap all the time. He likes to play jokes, and what have you, so he's a guy that we do it to just because we know we'll get a laugh out of him if we do it to him as well. So he's always in for a good time and loves to let it loose.

DL: Who in the clubhouse is funny but maybe doesn't know it?

AB: I think it's Mike Wuertz. He's got a very dry sense of humor. He doesn't really say too much, but I think he's hilarious at points. He likes to rag on people a little bit and just give them a talking to every once in awhile. I just find it kind of funny. He's also got some good jokes to go along with that.

DL: Can you repeat any of his jokes?

AB: Well, he said one about Tiger Woods and Santa, but I think we better keep that one in the clubhouse.

DL: From what I've observed, it looks like **Jack Cust** has quite the personality.

AB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, Cust is a great teammate. He's just like Dallas in that he likes to keep it loose. He always has nicknames for himself. He goes by the self-proclaimed "El Nino." I don't know why; I don't know where it came from, but it's a self-proclaimed nickname, I believe. He walks around the clubhouse, "El Nino! El Nino!" and all that stuff. But he's a good teammate and definitely one of the lighter guys in the clubhouse.

DL: What do his teammates call him?

AB: El Nino.

DL: So, Jack Cust exerts a lot of influence in the A's clubhouse?

AB: Yes, he does. He's a guy that's just always listening to music; he's always putting on the radio, or whatever, and kind of dancing around, or what have you. Of course, when it comes to game time he's pretty serious, but he definitely likes to keep it light in the clubhouse.

DL: Earlier today, he was giving **Mark Ellis** some crap. Was that random, or is Ellis one of his favorite targets?

AB: That's one of his favorite guys and it was probably about his sleeves. Was it about his sleeves being cut off?

DL: It was.

AB: Yeah, Ellis tends to walk around with his sleeves cut off and Cust always likes to give him a couple of words of encouragement about that. It's a good little banter they have going back and forth.

DL: Who has better biceps, Cust or Ellis?

AB: I'd say Ellis, but just because they're always out there. You always see them.

DL: How would you describe **Rajai Davis**?

AB: Rajai? He's a quiet guy, man. He likes to keep to himself, although he brings a lot of energy to the game. He's our sparkplug. He gets on base, he makes things happen. But off the field he spends a lot of time with his family and is a very quiet guy. You really only hear from him when you're at the field. He gets his work in and he's out of the clubhouse. He likes to go about his own business and kind of let everyone else take care of the leadership roles.

DL: What about **Brett Anderson**?

AB: Brett... ah, man, Brett. He's a piece of work. He's funny, but he's a very quiet kid, though. Coming up with him in the minors—we played at a couple different levels together—he's definitely come out of his shell a little bit here in the big leagues and started to open up a bit. He's a guy that sits back and laughs at Dallas' jokes, or at Cust's jokes. He's always in the middle of it, but really doesn't have much to do with it. He's kind of an observer, but he brings a lot of confidence and swagger to our clubhouse and that's what we need.

DL: What is his reputation pitching-wise? Is he a crafty left-hander?

AB: I would say that Dallas is definitely the more crafty guy; he's smart and knows how to pitch. Brett attacks. He has a hard fastball and a good slider, and he knows how to pitch with his two weapons. So he's a dominant pitcher. He's battled an elbow injury, but he can definitely be a No.1 very soon.

DL: **Craig Breslow** has a well-deserved reputation for being smart, but can he actually pitch?

AB: Breslow? Yeah, he can pitch, man. He got into a battle with [Miguel] Cabrera in Detroit, in a series where Cabrera hit four home runs against us, and Breslow went fastball, fastball, fastball, and if it was me, I would have just kept on letting it eat, and he took it back and threw a changeup and struck him out looking. So he knows how to pitch. He's been around for a while and he's always working on his game. He does have that reputation around baseball as being "the smartest," but we like to give Breslow some flak in the clubhouse about **Ross Ohlendorf**, and how he's the smartest guy in baseball, not Craig.

DL: No one in the A's clubhouse is as smart as Breslow?

AB: No, not at all. Not close. We have an ongoing Scrabble game on everyone's phones, or iPod Touches, called "Words with Friends." It's an application you can download and there are about 10 of us who sit there and play on trips, or in the airport, and Bres is No. 2. I'd have to say that [Ben] Sheets is No. 1 in that game.

DL: Does **Brad Ziegler** play?

AB: Yeah, Zeigler is in there. It's me, Braden, Ziegler, Sheets, Breslow, [Jake] Fox; **Tyson Ross** plays. Sheets is No. 1,

Breslow is No. 2, I'd say that I'm No. 3, and then Dallas. So Ziegler is in the bottom half. He's a newbie to the game, though. He's just learning the ropes.

DL: There are a lot of Texas natives in professional baseball. Is there anyone here who just screams "Texas"?

AB: **Gabe Gross** is from Tennessee, but I don't really know if we have too many Texas boys on our team. But with Gross, you know from his accent and the fact that he loves to listen to his country music. He also likes to tuck his polo shirt into his jeans, with the nice belt buckle. I'm from Jersey and we don't dress that way or talk that way. Not in Jersey. You can definitely tell that he's from down south—the Tennessee area—so he definitely has the most stereotypes about him. It's all good, of course, but he's definitely from the South.

DL: How do guys react to him tucking his polo into his jeans?

AB: Well, he just tucks his fleece into his baseball pants—stuff that a lot of guys don't do—so it's funny. Sheets is always riding him about the way he dresses, and what have you. It's funny. I'm sure he's gotten it all the way through his career thus far.

DL: What about **Kurt Suzuki**? He's not from Tennessee, nor from New Jersey.

AB: No, he's from Hawaii. He's got those puka shells. But Zuke is definitely a hard worker; he's a great presence around our clubhouse. He's a leader, a quiet leader. He goes about his business the right way and there's not too much vocally. He likes to have a good time and laugh, and he's very hilarious when he is kind of laid-back, but most of the time he's pretty serious, especially when he's at the field.

DL: What is **Daric Barton** like?

AB: Barton? Barton is funny. He'll tell you how much pop he has, as far as home-run hitting. He's always watching video and saying that he's the stereotypical first baseman with a lot of power and all that stuff. He likes to rag on himself a little bit and we call him "El Bart," because when Cust got sent to Triple-A, he said that we needed another nickname in the clubhouse. So Daric went around the clubhouse calling himself El Bart, for some reason—I don't know why—but he's a very funny guy and very carefree. He goes about his business and gets his work done, but once that's over with he is pretty loose.

DL: **Jerry Blevins** went to the University of Dayton. Is he an Ohio kind of guy?

AB: I haven't really met too many people from Ohio, but I guess I could definitely see where that's coming from. In the bullpen, he likes to speak his mind a little bit and talk to fans, and give them crap back, and it's pretty funny to watch that out there.

DL: What do guys usually talk about in the bullpen?

AB: Everything from baseball to making fun of each other to talking about what we're going to do the next day, or... I don't think there's a conversation that we haven't had in the bullpen. Everyone is always talking about something. Most of the time it's me doing all of the talking, and I'm not sure if anyone is actually listening, but usually I'm the one talking or starting a conversation down there. Or I'm talking to fans, or what have you.

DL: I've asked you about several teammates, but who haven't I mentioned that we need to talk about?

AB: Trevor Cahill. He is a quiet, hilarious kid. Actually, can I change my answer to who is the funniest kid but doesn't know it? That would definitely be Cahill. He has a nickname that is probably the greatest in baseball and it needs to be out there. He's called "The Pterodactyl." It's a nickname that was given to him last year by **Russ Springer**, in spring training. Trevor is the quietest kid you'll ever meet in your life, and he said, "Trevor, if you have one nickname to ever be given to you for the rest of your career, what would it be? Ready, go." He gave him, one, two, three, and Trevor said, "Pterodactyl" and it stuck. Our coaches call him Pterodactyl, or Dactyl. He has it, his nickname, imprinted on his shoes. He's probably the funniest kid. He doesn't know it, but everybody else thinks he's hilarious, with just kind of a mellow, California kind of mentality.

DL: Who on the team is the most "California"?

AB: Oh, man. I'm going to have to say Barton, because of the way he dresses and all that stuff. But Trevor is very San Diego with the whole skater persona. He wears a lot of the skater-type clothing lines and his mentality is very relaxed, kind of like a surfer.

DL: What do most people maybe not know about you?

AB: I'm pretty easygoing. I take baseball pretty seriously, but once the game starts, it's all fun. For me, if you can't have fun playing this game, you shouldn't be playing it. But I don't know if there is too much people don't know about me. People around here call me "Boom Boom" although I don't know why. They called me Boom Boom last year and the nickname has kind of stuck a little bit.

DL: You won the American League Rookie of the Year award last year. Do you think your teammates might have given you a new nickname by now had your 2009 season not been so good?

AB: No, I don't think so. Plus, if I hadn't of had a good rookie year, I probably wouldn't even be here right now. The people I'm playing with now wouldn't have the opportunity to call me that, because I'd be somewhere else. So I'm thankful to have that nickname, I guess you could say.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

McPherson's blast lifts Sacramento past Tacoma

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

It was a nail-biter, 7-5 victory Monday night for a Sacramento team that never led until Dallas McPherson's three-run homer in the eighth inning.

"I was just trying to get a good pitch to hit, get something up in the air, and bring the runs in," said McPherson, who gave Sacramento a 6-5 lead over Tacoma with his blast that cleared the opposing team's bullpen and landed on the right-field lawn.

Josh Donaldson followed McPherson's game-changing blast with a solo shot of his own, the River Cats' fourth home run on the night.

It was the Rainiers who kicked off the scoring early with a Matt Tuiasosopo two-run homer in the first inning, but the River Cats always kept it close.

Matt Carson connected and hit his ninth home run of the season in the second inning to bring the Cats within one run. After Tacoma scored in the third, Steve Tolleson hit his sixth home run of the year down the right-field line in the fourth to make it a 3-2.

The Cats were able to halt the Rainiers' batters and tie the game at 3-3 when Carson singled home Matt Watson in the sixth inning.

In the top of the eighth inning, Tacoma got to Sacramento reliever Jamey Wright for two runs. With the bases loaded and one out, Sacramento manager Tony DeFrancesco turned to reliever Michael Benacka, who struck out the final two batters of the inning to keep the deficit at two.

It was in the bottom of the eighth that the Cats decided to stage their comeback. Tolleson kicked off the rally with a single and Watson reached on an error to set up McPherson's monster blow. Donaldson whacked his 10th home run of the season to secure the River Cats lead 7-5.

"I was just trying to make contact," Donaldson said. "I had been struggling the whole game so far. We felt like we were in the game the whole time, we played hard, and kept it close, and always felt like we could comeback at any time."

Ross Wolf earned the save with two strikeouts to quickly end the ninth.

The River Cats have now won five in a row and will look for a four-game sweep of Tacoma on Tuesday at 11:35 a.m.

'Hounds Drop Rain Shortened Game

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The game between the RockHounds and San Antonio Missions was limited to five-and-a-half innings Monday, but there was plenty of baseball packed into the rain-shortened contest.

San Antonio used a pair of solo home runs to take leads of 1-0 and 2-1, but the RockHounds stormed back (pun intended) with a 4-run fifth inning. Petey Paramore and Val Majewski doubled, back-to-back, tying the game. Majewski then scrambled home on good hustle (and a good third base coaching decision by Darren Bush) when Archie Gilbert's single up the middle was smothered by Missions shortstop Drew Cumberland. The ball rolled slightly out of Cumberland's reach, and "Bushy" sent Majewski home with the go-ahead run. Adrian Cardenas then ripped a 2-run home run, and the 'Hounds led, 5-2.

By that time, rain had begun to fall and fall hard. Fautino De Los Santos came on in the fifth and struck out Brad Chalk, but then loaded the bases on two walks sandwiched around a single. Power hitter Matt Clark then took a De Los Santos pitch the opposite way for his 14th home run, this one a Grand Slam, and a 6-5 San Antonio lead.

The Missions blasted seven home runs in the last two games of the series ... very unusual for Nelson Wolff Stadium and for 'Hounds pitching, which had led the league in fewest homers allowed.

The loss was all the more frustrating, as the RockHounds have been the only Texas League team to have success at the plate against Missions lefty Cory Luebke. The 'Hounds scored five runs on seven hits against the southpaw Monday, after scoring just once but collecting eight hits against him in the previous meeting. In two starts against the RockHounds, Luebke has a 4.15 ERA with 15 hits in 13.0 innings. In his other six appearances, he has a 1.15 ERA, allowing just 15 hits in 31.1 innings.

The game was halted due to rain after the top of the sixth.

The RockHounds now return home to host the 2010 Texas League All-Star Game, followed by a six-game home stand which will include Thirsty Thursday, Cap Night (Friday, July 2) and the Fourth of July Weekend. The All-Star Game will be broadcast "live" beginning at 6:45 Wednesday evening on My Country, 96.1-FM.

Ports Punchless in 2-0 loss to Blaze

STOCKTON, Calif.--After scoring 38 runs on 51 hits in four games in Lancaster, the Ports returned home and struggled to even put runners on base in a 2-0 loss to the Bakersfield Blaze Monday night at Banner Island Ballpark.

Blaze starter Wilfredo Boscan (4-8) baffled hitters all night, striking out a season-high 11 while walking none in 8 innings. Boscan had experienced trouble against Stockton earlier this year, going 0-3 with a 4.79 ERA in four prior starts. He was masterful Monday though, allowing only one base runner to even reach third base.

Bakersfield supplied Boscan with all the run support he would need in the top of the first inning. Ports starter Mike Madsen walked leadoff man David Paisano, who stole second and advanced to third on catcher Ramon Soto's errant throw. With two outs, Johnny Whittleman singled home Paisano for a 1-0 lead.

The game's final tally came the next inning. After quickly recording the first two outs, Madsen hit Doug Hogan with a pitch. Andres James then doubled down the right-field line to score Hogan from first for a 2-0 advantage. It appeared James could have had a triple, but while rounding second base he stumbled to the ground. It turned out to be an important 90 feet, because Paisano followed with a single to right field. Jeremy Barfield came up firing and delivered a perfect strike to Soto who tagged out James attempting to score from second.

Barfield and Soto combined for another dazzling defensive play in the 7th inning. With runners on second and third and one out, Paisano lifted a ball into shallow right field. Barfield came charging in, slid and made the catch while Chris Gradoville tagged up at third base and came barreling home. Barfield's throw home was again perfect and Soto absorbed a tremendous collision from the 220 pound Gradoville and held on for the out. Barfield now has 17 outfield assists, the most in the California League.

Madsen (1-3) took the loss, allowing two runs (one earned) on three hits in four innings. He struck out six and walked one. Scott Deal and Trey Barham combined to throw five shutout innings out of the bullpen. Bakersfield's Corey Young picked up his first save of the year, throwing a scoreless ninth inning.

The Blaze (4-1) and Ports (3-2) resume the three game series Tuesday at 11:05am. Right hander Carlos Pimentel (5-3, 4.52) gets the nod for Bakersfield, while Stockton will hand the ball to lefty Ben Hornbeck (1-2, 4.50). The game can be seen nationally on the MLB Network and regionally on the Comcast Hometown Network. The game can also be heard on KWSX 1280am and online at stocktonports.com.

Cougars Get Back on Track in Clinton

Crumbliss' bat, Smith's arm lead Kane County to road victory

CLINTON, Iowa – After suffering back-to-back walk-off losses in Quad Cities over the weekend and dropping that series, the Kane County Cougars got back on track Monday night in Clinton. They beat the LumberKings, 7-3, at Alliant Energy Field behind three hits and three runs from Conner Crumbliss and 11 strikeouts from starter Murphy Smith. The Cougars are 2-2 so far on their six-game road trip.

The Cougars scored early and often against starter Jon Hesketh. Crumbliss led off the game with a double and scored on a sacrifice fly by Anthony Aliotti, and Rashun Dixon doubled home Tyreace House. Then in the second Crumbliss singled in Myrio Richard, stole third and scored on an error to make it 4-0. House's sacrifice fly and Aliotti's RBI single in the fourth chased Hesketh (3-5) and put the Cougars ahead, 6-0.

That was plenty of support for Smith, who gave up two runs -- both in the fifth -- on five hits, walked one and established a new Cougars season-high with 11 strikeouts. He struck out four straight hitters once and three straight hitters once in the win. Jose Pina yielded an unearned run in two innings, and Bo Schultz logged a scoreless ninth to wrap it up. The Cougars' final run came in the sixth when Aliotti brought in Juan Nunez with another single, part of an 11-hit Cougars attack.

The Cougars (2-2, 34-39) and LumberKings (2-2, 39-34) continue the three-game series Tuesday night at 7 CT. Justin Marks (2-8, 5.55) is scheduled to pitch against Taylor Stanton (6-4, 3.77). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.