

A's News Clips, Friday, July 2, 2010

Oakland A's Trevor Cahill dominates Baltimore Orioles, has look of All-Star

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Trevor Cahill probably can't grow a decent beard, but he's starting to look more and more like Dan Haren did three years ago.

Cahill had another dazzling performance Thursday night, allowing just four hits in seven innings to help the A's secure an 8-1 win over the Baltimore Orioles at Camden Yards and earn their second straight series victory.

Cahill is now 7-0 in his last nine starts, as he continues to have the longest winning streak by an A's pitcher since Haren won 10 in a row from April 18 to July 1 in 2007. Haren was named the American League's starting pitcher for the 2007 All-Star Game, and Cahill may have sewn up his own appearance with Thursday's effort.

"Without a doubt," A's manager Bob Geren said when asked if Cahill is worthy of a spot on the AL team.

Geren recently told New York Yankees manager Joe Girardi who his best candidates were for the game in Anaheim on July 13, "and Trevor was definitely one of them." The All-Star reserves will be announced Sunday, and Girardi will manage the AL team.

Cahill (8-2) allowed a run in the first inning for the first time this season as Nick Markakis' sacrifice fly scored Corey Patterson. But he allowed just four base runners over his final six innings in lowering his ERA to 2.74.

It's the sixth time in his last nine starts that Cahill has allowed one earned run or less. Geren said Cahill is commanding both sides of the plate with a low-to-mid 90s fastball, which makes his changeup more effective.

Cahill and Haren have similar velocity and movement with their pitches, with Cahill having a sinker and changeup and Haren a split-finger fastball. Cahill isn't as experienced as Haren was in 2007, as he started this season in the minor leagues. But he's quickly becoming the most reliable member of the A's starting rotation.

"You have to have confidence in yourself all the time," Cahill said, "and I think this just gives me a little bit more every time I go out there."

Cahill is scheduled to start again Tuesday against the Yankees and, if Dallas Braden's start next week is skipped, will go again July 11 against the Los Angeles Angels. If he pitches on that Sunday, he wouldn't be allowed to play in the All-Star Game, but he still could be named to the roster.

"I'm happy I'm even in contention," Cahill said. "I'm not trying to think about it too much, just trying to go out there and win."

Cliff Pennington and Ryan Sweeney tied season-highs with four hits each Thursday, as the A's finished with 12 singles and three doubles. Designated hitter Jack Cust had a pair of RBI doubles.

Oakland's win was its fifth in six games as it begins another three-game series against a last-place team today in Cleveland. The A's were 10 1/2 games back of AL West-leading Texas after being swept by Cincinnati and haven't been able to gain much ground with the Rangers continuing on their torrid pace.

"Every game counts the same all year long. You play 162 of them," said Pennington, who has raised his batting average 59 points to .259 since June 9. "It's like any other stretch, try to go out and have a good road trip. We did pretty well here, now we have to go to Cleveland and do the same thing."

Daric Barton left the game in the top of the fifth with minor injuries to both legs. He was hurt when he tried to break up a double play in the third inning. Adam Rosales took over at first base. Geren didn't believe Barton's injury was serious.

TODAY: A's (Gio Gonzalez 6-5) at Indians (Mitch Talbot 8-6), 4:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

Oakland A's update: Manager Bob Geren says Dallas Braden is on track to start against Cleveland on Saturday

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune

Braden expected to start at Cleveland on Saturday

BALTIMORE — Dallas Braden said his throwing session Thursday went well, and A's manager Bob Geren said the left-hander remains on track to pitch Saturday against Cleveland.

With his tender left elbow not nearly as tight as it was Tuesday when he was scratched from his scheduled start, Braden threw on flat ground in the outfield and roughly 30 pitches off the bullpen mound. Braden, who last pitched June 22 against Cincinnati, said how he feels today will tell the story.

"I'm not sure what could be the cause of the discomfort and the lack of extension" on Tuesday, Braden said, "but being at 50,000 feet for five hours probably doesn't help."

Braden could be given another long rest after Saturday. The A's are off Thursday, Braden's next scheduled day to pitch after Saturday, and begin the All-Star break after a three-game series with the Los Angeles Angels.

Braden then could be slotted in the back of the rotation, meaning he wouldn't have to start again until the A's host Boston from July 19-21.

"It's a pretty good option," Braden said.

Coco Crisp was given the day off Thursday to rest his legs, not because of his collision with the center field wall at Camden Yards on Wednesday. Geren said Crisp, who has played 13 games in 15 days before Thursday — including six games with Triple-A Sacramento — will be in the lineup today. Crisp collided with the wall on a deep fly hit by the Orioles' Corey Patterson. Crisp's left shoulder made first contact, but "all I felt was my head. Anytime your head gets banged, it takes away from everything else being hit."

Mark Ellis might get his stolen base after all. The A's are appealing Wednesday's official scorer ruling that Ellis scored from third on a fielder's choice in the fourth inning after Orioles catcher Matt Wieters threw to second in an attempt to get a stealing Gabe Gross. But the play occurred on ball four to Cliff Pennington. Ellis left after Wieters released the ball to second. A ruling might not come until after Monday.

Conor Jackson was out of the lineup, as Geren said the outfielder is day-to-day with tightness in his legs. After Wednesday, Jackson had been 2 for 16 in his last five games. Gabe Gross started in left field. "... Geren said outfielder Travis Buck (severe leg fatigue) worked out in Phoenix on Wednesday, doing sprints and taking batting practice. There is no timetable yet for when Buck's rehab assignment will begin.

Chin Music: Braden still on track for Saturday

By Curtis Pashelka, Oakland Tribune, 7/1/2010 3:56P

Dallas Braden said his throwing session, which included flat ground throwing and a roughly 30-pitch bullpen session, went well. His arm feels much better now than it did Tuesday, when it was too tight to pitch. He said tomorrow will "tell the story" but A's manager Bob Geren said the plan remains for Braden to pitch Saturday.

Coco Crisp and Conor Jackson are both out of the lineup. Crisp said he feels fine, so it's just a day off to get his legs some rest. There are no lingering problems from his crash into the center field wall last night, and he should be ready for Friday's opener in Cleveland.

Jackson, though, has some tightness in his legs and Geren said he's day-to-day. Gabe Gross starts in left field, Rajai Davis in center and Ryan Sweeney in right.

Travis Buck went through a workout in Phoenix Wednesday with sprints and BP. He'll obviously need to get in baseball shape before any rehab assignment can begin.

The lineups

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

O's – Patterson LF, Tejada DH, Markakis RF, Wigginton 1B, Jones CF, Wieters C, Bell 3B, Moore 2B, Izturis SS, Arrieta P.

Cahill looking like an All-Star at Camden Yards

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland went back to making hay on the dregs-of-the-majors portion of the schedule, with a hit-parade victory Thursday that was relatively routine in contrast with an oddity-crammed loss the previous night.

Routine for the A's at least, in that Trevor Cahill pitched well again, plus they lost a player to injury in the midst of an 8-1 win over the Orioles at Camden Yards. Daric Barton was hurt while trying to break up a double play in the third inning, and he left with a right knee contusion in the fifth.

Cahill continued to roll along, and, as of Thursday night, he has enough innings to qualify for the league leaders. His 2.74 ERA is sixth best in the AL, and he's allowed more than three runs only twice in 13 starts.

"It's just quality start after quality start," A's manager Bob Geren said.

He's now firmly a candidate for what is likely to be only one A's All-Star spot - except that Cahill is scheduled pitch the final Sunday before the break, which would make him ineligible for the active American League roster. He could still be an All-Star in name.

Geren, who is one of the AL All-Star coaches, said he already has touted Cahill to AL manager Joe Girardi, and, Geren noted, Girardi will get to see Cahill in person next week. He'll pitch against the Yankees on Tuesday.

"That would be great, but it's nice even being mentioned, really," Cahill said of a possible All-Star spot.

With lots of ice, Barton should be OK for today's game, Geren said, but Barton said, "We'll see."

Barton knew he couldn't run well after getting banged up, but he told Geren in the fifth he felt he'd get a hit that inning.

"Great, get a hit and I'll take you out," Geren said, and that's what happened.

The A's already were without outfielders Conor Jackson (right hamstring tightness) and Coco Crisp, the team's hottest player, who got the night off to rest his legs. Geren said that Crisp will be back in the lineup tonight in Cleveland and he called Jackson "day-to-day."

The Orioles were also without a key figure from the wackiness the night before; Luke Scott, who pulled a hamstring during a home-run trot on Wednesday, went on the disabled list, so Baltimore called up a top prospect, Josh Bell, 23. In his major-league debut, Bell played third base and he recorded his first big-league hit, a single in the seventh.

Ryan Sweeney and Cliff Pennington tied their career highs with four hits apiece, and each had two RBIs. Pennington is hitting .466 in the past 18 games, while Sweeney had a .424 average vs. Baltimore this season.

Oakland is 5-1 in this stretch against last-place Pittsburgh and last-place Baltimore, and begins a series at last-place Cleveland tonight.

Braden on track for start

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Dallas Braden threw a bullpen session Thursday and, while he stopped short of declaring himself ready to start Saturday at Cleveland, he did say that throwing on flat ground and on the mound was "ultimately pain-free."

The A's will want to make sure Braden, who was scratched Tuesday with elbow stiffness, comes out of the session well today, but manager **Bob Geren** said that the plan is for Braden to start Saturday.

The plan after that, according to Braden, is to rest the elbow at the back of the post-All-Star-break rotation, meaning his next start could be as late as July 20.

Clayton Mortensen was held out of his scheduled Thursday start for Triple-A Sacramento, presumably in case he's needed in Cleveland. Mortensen was named to the Pacific Coast League All-Star team along with River Cats catcher **Josh Donaldson** on Thursday.

Braden will miss the Yankees series next week.

Monday will be the first time the A's have seen the Yankees since Braden yelled at **Alex Rodriguez** for taking a shortcut across the mound in April. Braden said he's disappointed he won't pitch against them, but, he added, "It's nothing to do with any of the underlying issues you guys (in the media) create. It's because the Yankees are the measuring stick. You want to compete against the best. I want to compete against the Yankees."

Briefly: Eric Chavez (bulging disks, neck) said via text that he believes he'll start baseball activity again in a week or two. ... **Travis Buck** (leg soreness) did a complete workout that included sprinting and batting practice. ... The A's are appealing the scoring decision Wednesday that turned **Mark Ellis'** steal of home into a fielder's choice. ... U.S. Soccer coach **Bob Bradley** threw out the first pitch.

Drumbeat: Geren: 'The plan is for Braden to start;' Crisp, Jackson out

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Baltimore 7/1/2010 3:11PM

Dallas Braden threw 25-35 pitches in a bullpen session this afternoon because playing catch went so well, and he said that the proceedings were "ultimately pain-free."

Manager Bob Geren then said that the "plan is for him to start Saturday" at Cleveland, and I still just don't get the urgency about this; Braden's elbow has been barking at him, it's just one start, bring up Clayton Mortensen and don't risk something else going wrong with Braden, who is already a potential medical liability waiting to happen after his foot fiasco last year. It's Cleveland! It's one start!

Well, anyway, Braden didn't throw any breaking pitches today - he might, though, Saturday - and the A's will check to make sure he comes out of this OK tomorrow. It sounds as if Mortensen will be held out of tonight's start at Sacramento, just in case, which seems prudent. Even more prudent would be to use the fellow, who's been pitching very well - he and Josh Donaldson were just named to the Pacific Coast All-Star team today, in fact.

Coco Crisp is out of the lineup, which would be pretty alarming considering he's been an all-world player since coming off the DL last month and he crashed into the wall in center last night. But Geren said it's just one day to give Crisp's legs a rest; he'll be back in tomorrow. Crisp appears to be fine, and of course he stayed in seven more innings after banging into the wall and he hit a three-run homer.

Conor Jackson is a little bit more of a concern. That right hamstring is tight again, and while Geren said this injury is higher up on the leg than the strain that landed him on Arizona's DL in April, he is considered "day to day," according to Geren. This is a phrase in A's-land that should come with one of those ominous "bum bum BUH" movie noises.

Here's the lineup: Davis cf, Barton 1b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Suzuki c, Sweeney rf, Cust dh, Ellis 2b, Gross lf, Pennington ss

The A's are appealing last night's scoring decision on the non-steal of home by Mark Ellis. It's too long to get into all of it, but Elias Sports Bureau said it's a fielder's choice because of the ball four to Cliff Pennington, which rendered the throw to second base essentially a useless play; Elias reckons the play ends with the ball four. But walks don't typically end plays, and consider this: If the throw to second goes into center, isn't the play still alive? Ellis went on the throw to second, it should be a steal, I believe. And if catcher Matt Wieters hangs onto the ball instead, and Ellis goes home, isn't that a caught stealing? If it's a caught stealing, shouldn't it be a steal? (I know, I know - Ellis wouldn't *go* unless the throw was made, but still you have to consider the other possibility.) Interesting stuff, at least I think so. Maybe not.

Really, in case of doubt (this is not covered in the rule book, which is where all the confusion lies), you should always just award a steal of home, because it's way cooler than a fielder's choice.

Offense catches fire as A's roll past Orioles

Pennington provides early spark and Cahill earns eighth win

By Jeff Seidel / Special to MLB.com

BALTIMORE -- Oakland shortstop Cliff Pennington has to cool off at some point. So does pitcher Trevor Cahill. But both have been on some kind of roll lately, and the Orioles were their latest victims on Thursday night.

Pennington went 4-for-5 with two RBIs for his eighth multihit game in his last 18 and his two-run double in the second gave Cahill an early cushion. The big right-hander took over from there, scattering four hits over seven innings for his seventh straight win as the A's rolled to an 8-1 victory over the Orioles before 15,712 fans at Camden Yards.

For Pennington, his four-hit effort stretched his hot streak to 27-for-59 (.458) over that 18-game period. He has six doubles, two triples and 13 runs scored during that span. What's even more impressive is that it follows a 3-for-46 dry spell.

"Just been ... trying to get back to doing what I do," said Pennington, who raised his average to .259 during this run. "[I] kind of got away from it for a little while, getting back to it now and getting some balls to fall in and getting some base hits."

Pennington's two-run double to left broke a 1-1 tie in the second and gave Oakland (39-41) the lead for good. Jack Cust tied the score earlier in the inning with an RBI double off Baltimore starter Jake Arrieta (2-2), before Pennington sent a shot over the head of left fielder Corey Patterson.

Patterson stumbled and fell while trying to go back on the ball, which sailed over his head and bounced to the wall.

"He's putting together real good at-bats," Oakland manager Bob Geren said of Pennington. "He's bunted, he's pulled balls, he's hitting balls the other way. He's swinging the bat real well."

That gave the A's a 3-1 lead, which proved to be more than enough for Cahill (8-2).

The 6-foot-4 right-hander shut down a Baltimore offense that has been banging out hits in recent games, as the Orioles had won five of their last six. Patterson doubled to start the bottom of the first, but Cahill then retired 10 straight and 15 of the next 16 batters.

Baltimore (24-54) just couldn't do much against Cahill, getting one more runner in scoring position after the first. Cahill needed only 95 pitches to get through his seven-inning stint.

"He's really using all of his pitches effectively," Geren said. "When he has to come with the fastball, he always has good movement on it. He has all the tools. ... It's been fantastic to watch."

Geren said that Cahill definitely should get All-Star consideration, and that he's talked with Yankees skipper Joe Girardi about it. But for now, Cahill said he's working on getting better each time.

"Going out there, you have to have confidence in yourself all the time," Cahill said. "I think this just gives me a little bit more every time I go out there."

The A's also gained some confidence thanks to some balanced offense. Ryan Sweeney also went 4-for-5 and had two RBIs. Cust and Pennington both knocked in two runs, while Mark Ellis and Gabe Gross each had one RBI, as Oakland banged out 15 hits in all.

After the three-run third, the A's added a run on Sweeney's RBI single off Arrieta in the fifth. Two Baltimore errors helped Oakland in that inning, as the A's made it a 4-1 lead.

But the A's removed all doubt with a four-run seventh. Sweeney's RBI single was followed by Cust's RBI double. Ellis and Gross both added RBI singles, as the A's knocked around Baltimore relievers Frank Mata and Matt Albers, stretching the lead to 8-1.

The A's went 7-for-17 with runners in scoring position, but still left 11 on base.

The only real negative of the night for the A's came when first baseman Daric Barton had to leave in the fifth inning, after leading off with a single. Barton suffered a contusion on his left shin and another on his right knee while trying to break up a double play in the third inning.

Geren wasn't too worried about it, though, saying he didn't think it was anything that painful. Even the injuries weren't too bad. Everything seemed to go Oakland's way on this night.

Santana aims to help Tribe roll on vs. A's

By Jonathan Mayo / MLB.com

Over the course of his Minor League career, Indians catcher Carlos Santana hit .290 with .401 on-base and .499 slugging percentages. It was no wonder, then, that he was MLB.com's No. 11 prospect heading into the 2010 season.

It seemed a matter of when, and not if, he'd get the call to make the quick trip from Triple-A Columbus to Cleveland. When he had a 1.044 OPS in 57 games, the Indians felt it was time. Typically, there's a period of adjustment, even for the most talented of prospects. Someone, it seems, forgot to give that memo to the 24-year-old catcher.

As the Indians hope to extend their season-high five-game winning streak, while hosting the A's for three this weekend, Santana will continue to keep things going on his end. The backstop has hit .333 over his first 19 games with a lofty .683 SLG. What might be more impressive is the fact that he's now drawn 15 walks while striking out just nine times. That gives him a .461 OBP and a 1.144 OPS since he joined the big club on June 11.

"He was that kind of hitter in the Minor Leagues, and we knew it would continue when he got up here, and might even get better," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "When you're a patient hitter in the Minors, and then come up here where the umpires are better and the strike zones are tighter, patient hitters can draw even more walks."

It's a small sample size, but thus far, the switch-hitter has shown better skills against right-handers (.395/.489/.816) than against lefties (.227/.414/.455). It does follow a trend from his Triple-A season, where his OPS vs. RHP was 1.161, but just .811 vs. LHP. That could bode well for the A's, who send southpaw Gio Gonzalez to the mound on Friday to face Indians right-hander Mitch Talbot.

Overall, the 24-year-old Gonzalez has been solid, though he struggled with his command in his last start. But he's been particularly tough on left-handed hitters, holding them to a .140 average in 92 plate appearances. He faced the Indians earlier this year, albeit without Santana in the lineup, and shut them out over seven innings.

A's: A tale of two staffs

A fan going to see the Oakland A's in action at home might get a very different impression than one seeing the club play on the road. That's largely because of how the pitching staff has performed, or not, in Oakland and elsewhere.

Heading into the finale of a road series with the Orioles Thursday night, the A's had the best home ERA in the American League (2.88). It's a big reason why the club is 24-16 at the Coliseum. The A's are 15-25 away from their friendly confines, however, and their above-5.00 ERA on the road certainly has contributed to it.

Such statistics contributed to a poor win-loss record for the month of June for Oakland at 10-17. That's the most losses the A's have had in June since 1986 when they were just 7-22.

Indians: Talbot not a fan of home cooking

Clearly, Talbot would not fit in well into the Oakland rotation. Or perhaps he'd be a welcomed change. The rookie right-

hander leads rookie pitchers with eight wins and has a 3.88 ERA. But if he wants to extend the Indians' winning streak, he's going to have to reverse a trend in his performances.

To date, Talbot has a 5.64 ERA in seven starts at Progressive Field. On the road, that number drops to 2.39 in eight starts. He is coming off two straight very strong starts -- he went seven innings in both -- but they were, you guessed it, in Philadelphia and Cincinnati.

Worth noting

Oakland's record in June was the third worst in the American League, ahead of the Blue Jays and Orioles. ... The last time the Indians won five straight was July 23-27, 2009. ... Gonzalez will be making his 17th start in Friday's series opener in Cleveland, which ties him for the most in the AL.

A's appealing ruling on fielder's choice

Club feels Ellis should be credited with steal of home

By Jeff Seidel / Special to MLB.com

BALTIMORE -- Mark Ellis was originally ruled to have stolen home when he scored in the fourth inning of Wednesday's eventual 9-6 loss to the Orioles. However, the official scorer later ruled it as a fielder's choice. Now, the A's would like it changed back.

Oakland is appealing to the American League office on the official scorer's ruling, asking for a review, because the A's feel Ellis should be awarded a steal of home. Team spokesman Bob Rose said he was filing an appeal by the start of Thursday's game, and the A's hoped to receive an answer in the next few days.

The bizarre play happened with Gabe Gross on first and Ellis on third and one out. Gross took off for second on Kevin Millwood's 3-2 pitch to Cliff Pennington, who checked his swing. Baltimore catcher Matt Wieters threw to second, thinking it was called a strike, which it wasn't.

Ellis moved down the line from third, taking off as Wieters threw to second. Official scorer Mark Jacobson first ruled it a steal of home -- and a double steal overall -- but he later changed the call in the top of the sixth. Jacobson said that because Wieters threw to second base on ball four that the play had to be called a fielder's choice, as Ellis didn't try to advance home until after the unnecessary throw.

"It still seems a bit of a gray area," Rose said. "I just don't think any of the explanations that have been given satisfy our stance, that your initial reaction when you see that play is it's a stolen base. And I think our instincts are right."

Rose said Jacobson called the Elias Sports Bureau, and it felt strongly that a fielder's choice was the correct ruling and not a stolen base. But the A's want the league to look at the play again.

"This one, to me, seems like we need to go beyond just taking someone's word," Rose said. "It doesn't seem to make sense to us."

Ellis said, quite frankly, that he doesn't really care if it's changed it or not. But in his mind, there's no doubt that it should be ruled a stolen base.

"You want the guys to get the scoring right," he said. "Just common sense, it's a stolen base."

If the ruling is changed, it would give the A's their first steal of home since June 22, 2008, when Carlos Gonzalez did it against the Marlins.

Barton leaves game with leg injuries

BALTIMORE -- Oakland first baseman Daric Barton left Thursday's 8-1 win over the Orioles in the fifth inning with contusions to his left shin and right knee.

Adam Rosales was inserted as a pinch-runner, after Barton singled to right to start the fifth. Rosales later scored a run and replaced Barton in the field at first base.

Barton suffered the injuries when attempting to break up a double play in the third inning. He finished the game 1-for-2 with a walk.

"He broke up a double play, or tried to, and got banged up on both legs," said Oakland manager Bob Geren. "He was pretty bruised up to the point where he felt like he couldn't really run, and he wouldn't be able to move much on defense."

Geren said he didn't think the injuries were "too painful" and it probably wasn't a bad situation. The first baseman has played in all 80 of Oakland's games so far.

Braden has positive session on Thursday

BALTIMORE -- Dallas Braden had a good throwing session before Thursday's game, and the A's are still hoping the left-hander will start Saturday in Cleveland.

"The plan's for him to pitch Saturday," said Oakland manager Bob Geren.

Braden was a late scratch before Tuesday's game with the Orioles because of tightness in his elbow. But he threw 25-35 pitches Thursday and said he feels much better.

The left-hander said that he's very interested to see how he feels on Friday; specifically how his elbow feels after this session.

"I think if there were any question about what I was able to do today during throwing or the side session that they would have put a halt to it early," Braden said. "But tomorrow's going to tell the story."

Geren said that Braden looked fine in the session. Braden threw a perfect game against the Rays on May 9 but has an 0-5 record in eight starts since then.

Crisp, Jackson out with leg injuries

BALTIMORE -- Leg problems forced A's outfielders Coco Crisp and Conor Jackson out of the starting lineup for Thursday's series finale with the Orioles.

Manager Bob Geren said that Jackson's hamstring has been bothering him for the last several days, so he held him out of Thursday's starting lineup.

"He's day-to-day, [it's] something he's been dealing with for a while, a week or so," Geren said.

Crisp's situation also is a day-to-day one. Geren said that Crisp's legs are "a little spent," and that he needs a day off.

Geren said it's not the result of last night's big crash into the wall at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, but from a bunch of things. The manager expects Crisp back for Friday's series opener in Cleveland

A's defeat Orioles

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE — Oakland Athletics manager Bob Geren is touting Trevor Cahill as a deserving member of the AL All-Star team. A manager pushing to have one of his players in the game is not unusual. In this case, however, the statistics back up Geren's assessment.

Cahill pitched seven innings of four-hit ball to earn his seventh straight win, and Oakland got four hits apiece from Ryan Sweeney and Cliff Pennington in an 8-1 rout of the Baltimore Orioles on Thursday night.

Cahill (8-2) gave up a run, struck out four and walked one in lowering his ERA to 2.74. The right-hander is 7-0 with a 2.12 ERA over his past nine starts.

"He's just thrown quality start after quality start," Geren said. "He's real good. He's commanding both sides of the plate with his fastball, which is really opening up his changeup. He's really using all of his pitches effectively. He has all the tools."

But does he have the stuff to be an All-Star? "Without a doubt," Geren said. "I mentioned it to Joe (Girardi) about our best candidates, and he was definitely one of them."

Cahill would be honored to join the AL squad, but that's not what motivates him when he takes the mound.

"It would be great. I'm really happy I'm in contention," he said. "I don't try to think about it too much. I just try to go out there and win."

It would have been nice to put his first career complete game on the resume, but Cahill was pulled after throwing 95 pitches and with Oakland comfortably up by seven runs.

"I got a little tired there at the end," he said. "Up by that much, there was no point in risking it. I just figured save it for next time."

Sweeney, Pennington and Jack Cust had two RBIs apiece for the A's, who took two of three for their first road series win in five tries since May 29-31 in Detroit. Oakland has won four series away from home, half of them in Baltimore.

Sweeney's four hits (all singles) tied a career high. He was 10 for 56 (.179) in his previous 17 games.

Making his fifth major league start, Baltimore's Jake Arrieta (2-2) allowed four runs, three earned, and seven hits in six innings.

"You know, there's a lot to take out of that outing," he said.

"Although I'm not happy about it, I think it's definitely something to build off."

After Arrieta left, Oakland scored four seventh-inning runs against a bullpen that boasted an 0.77 ERA over the previous six games.

Josh Bell made his major-league debut as Baltimore's starting third baseman after being recalled from Triple-A Norfolk earlier in the day. He went 1 for 4 and started two double plays in the field, but his throwing error in the fifth inning contributed to an unearned run.

"Growing up as a kid, it's your dream to get to the big leagues and have your team win," Bell said. "We didn't get the win, but it felt good to get the first one out of the way."

He kept the ball from his first hit, a sixth-inning single.

The Orioles went up 1-0 in the first when Corey Patterson doubled and scored on a sacrifice fly by Nick Markakis, only his fifth RBI in 20 games. It was the first time this season Cahill allowed a first-inning run.

Oakland answered with three runs in the second. Cust hit an RBI double, and Pennington received credit for a two-run double when Patterson fell down after misjudging his liner to left.

"It was hit right at me. Those are the toughest ones," Patterson said. "I tried to play it the best I could, but that's what happened."

Sweeney hit an RBI single in the fifth, and Oakland sent 10 batters to the plate in seventh against relievers Frank Mata and Matt Albers. Sweeney singled in a run and Cust hit an RBI double before Mark Ellis and Gabe Gross delivered run-scoring singles.

NOTES: Oakland 1B Daric Barton left in fifth inning with a bruised right knee and bruised left shin. ... US soccer coach Bob Bradley threw out the ceremonial first pitch. ... Oakland LHP Dallas Braden experienced no pain in his elbow during a bullpen session and expects to start Saturday vs. Cleveland. ... Despite the loss, Baltimore finished 5-4 on its second winning homestand of the season.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Back-to-back homers lift Sacramento

By Annie Becker / Sacramento River Cats

When Brad Kilby's Rally Pants come out ... so does a River Cats' victory.

Back-to-back home runs by Matt Watson and Chris Carter in the eighth inning broke a 3-3 tie and lifted Sacramento to a 6-3 win over the rival Fresno Grizzlies at Raley Field on Thursday night. With the victory, the River Cats trail Pacific Coast League South Division-leading Fresno by 6.0 games.

"We came out and set the tone for the series," said catcher Josh Donaldson. "We showed them we won't quit yet."

Sacramento has won 11 of its last 13 games at Raley Field. During that stretch, which began June 14, the River Cats have shaved 6.5 games off the Fresno lead.

Corey Wimberly opened the first inning for Sacramento with a single and moved to third on a Steve Tolleson single. Wimberly scored and Tolleson moved to second on a passed ball, before Watson singled home Tolleson for a 2-1 lead.

Early hitting put Sacramento out front, but timely defense preserved the lead.

Matt Carson crashed into the wall making a catch in deep center field, Wimberly ran down a fly in shallow left, and an easy groundout to Eric Sogard ended a quick second inning.

The Cats continued to pour on the heat.

Michael Taylor pounded a double to the left-field wall that scored Josh Donaldson in the second. Donaldson was named to the Pacific Coast League All-Star team earlier Thursday, along with teammate Clayton Mortensen, a starting pitcher.

Wimberly's defense came up big again in the fourth inning when Ryan Rohlinger hit what appeared to be an easy double in the left-field corner. Wimberly never gave up on the play, chasing down the ball in the corner and throwing a fastball to Sogard, who tagged out an arguing Rohlinger.

Big defensive plays kept rolling for the Cats.

Donaldson turned Brock Bond's strikeout looking into a double play as he threw out a stealing Steve Holm in the fifth. The double play marked the fourth consecutive 3-up 3-down inning for River Cats starter Kyle Middleton.

Jamey Wright entered in the eighth inning to relieve Middleton, who had held Fresno to the single run in the first inning - it was the first earned run allowed by Middleton since May 29.

Both teams remained scoreless for five consecutive innings before the Grizzlies broke through in the eighth. Eugenio Velez, a familiar face to San Francisco Giants fans, hit a deep two-run homer over the right-field wall to tie the game, 3-3.

Between the half innings, Kilby dashed back to the clubhouse to jump into his skin-tight Rally Pants.

Watson came up in the bottom half of the inning and smacked a two-run homer for a 5-3 lead. Carter stepped up and added another run to the board with a deep home-run onto the top of the clubhouse's batting cage.

"It was no pressure," Carter said. "We already had the lead so I just kept it going. They have been beating us every time, so it feels good to get them tonight."

The River Cats face off against the Grizzlies again Friday night at 7:05 pm in the short three-game series.

Keough, Thomas Lift Ports Past Rawhide 8-6

VISALIA, Calif. - For the 2010 Stockton Ports, beating the Visalia Rawhide has been a near impossible task. Coming into Thursday night, the Ports had only accomplished the feat four times in 19 tries. On this night, however, a steady diet of clutch hitting lifted Stockton past Visalia by a final of 8-6, snapping a four-game losing streak for the Ports against the Rawhide.

It was the Rawhide that got off to a fast start in the bottom of the first facing Ports starter Fabian Williamson in his Stockton debut. Williamson walked Dan Kaczrowski, then allowed an infield single to Alfredo Marte. With two aboard, Williamson gave up an RBI single to Ryan Wheeler to put the Rawhide up 1-0. Paul Goldschmidt would come up next and reach on a fielder's choice groundout, scoring Marte and making it a 2-0 ballgame. Williamson would escape a bases-loaded, two out jam without further trouble in the first.

Williamson would allow two runs on five hits in two-plus innings while walking three and striking out two in his Ports debut.

For a time, it looked as if the Ports were doomed to not score at all. The Ports loaded the bases with nobody out in the third, but Rawhide starter Taylor Sinclair struck out Jermaine Mitchell and got Grant Green to hit into an inning-ending 5-4-3 double-play.

Stephen Parker led off the fourth with a double, but was thrown out trying to score on a two-out single from Tyler Ladendorf to keep it a 2-0 Rawhide lead.

Stockton finally broke through in the fifth. With the bases loaded and one out, Green hit a sac-fly to left to score David Thomas and cut the Rawhide lead to 2-1.

The Ports would finally get to Sinclair in a big way in the sixth. The Ports loaded the bases on three straight singles to start the frame. Thomas came up and hit into a fielder's choice force at home for the first out. Ryan Ortiz, however, would work his third of four walks on the night to bring in the tying run. Shane Keough came up next and, on Sinclair's first pitch, hit a towering grand-slam to left to give the Ports their first lead at 6-2.

Sinclair would receive a no-decision and has yet to lose on the season versus Stockton, going 5.1 innings and allowing six runs on seven hits while striking out four and walking six.

The Rawhide, now trailing for the first time, got three of the runs back in the last of the sixth off Ports reliever Kenny Smalley. Runs scored on an error made by Mitchell in left, a sac-fly from Marte, and an RBI double from Wheeler. Smalley allowed three runs in 3.2 innings of relief.

Visalia knotted the score in the seventh on a leadoff solo home run from Marc Krauss over the right-field fence. The blast came off Ports reliever Scott Deal (1-4) and was the only hit deal allowed in 2.1 innings of relief. Deal would end up the winning pitcher after working 2.1 innings in the game.

With the score tied at six in the top of the ninth, the Ports got back-to-back one-out singles from Mike Spina and Jeremy Barfield. With two down and runners at second and third, Thomas stepped up and tripled off the wall in straight-away center field, scoring both runs and giving the Ports an 8-6 lead. The triple came off Rawhide reliever Ryan Robowski (1-1) who would take the loss after allowing two runs in 1.2 innings of relief.

Paul Smyth (SV, 12) recorded the save in the last of the ninth, striking out the side to end the ballgame and give Stockton the first of three games in the series.

The Ports and Rawhide will play the second game of their three-game set on Friday night at Recreation Park. Shawn Haviland (6-4, 4.16 ERA) will head to the mound for Stockton, opposed by right-hander Charles Brewer (0-1, 16.20 ERA) for Visalia. First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Fall in Homestand Opener

Kane County opens 6-game home stretch with defeat

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars enjoyed an early 2-0 lead Thursday night at Elfstrom Stadium against the Peoria Chiefs in the opener of a six-game homestand, but the Chiefs rallied for four late runs and beat the Cougars, 4-2. Dan Straily contributed a quality start but suffered the loss, as the Cougars dropped their fifth game out of the last six.

The Cougars stranded the bases loaded in the first against Su-Min Jung, but Conner Crumbliss broke through for the Cougars in the second with a two-out RBI single that plated Leonardo Gil. Then Max Stassi belted a solo homer in the third, his 10th of the season. The Cougars had five hits through three innings but managed only two the rest of the way.

Meanwhile Straily had retired the first 10 batters he faced and seen the minimum through four. But he gave up a solo homer in the fifth to Justin Bour and got tagged for two more in the seventh on a single by Jae-Hoon Ha. Straily (5-5) gave up three runs on four hits over 6 2/3 innings in the loss, A.J. Huttenlocker allowed one run in the eighth, and Bo Schultz tossed 1 1/3 scoreless. Frank Batista (1-0) won it for the Chiefs, and Yohan Gonzalez recorded his third save.

The Cougars (2-5, 34-42) and Chiefs (3-4, 41-35) continue the three-game series Friday night at 7 CT. Ian Krol (5-2, 1.98) will pitch against Robert Whitenack (6-5, 5.94). 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.