

A's News Clips, Thursday, July 8, 2010

Oakland A's give up five two-out runs in fourth inning, get swept by New York Yankees

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The unraveling began innocently enough Wednesday night, as a run-scoring bloop single fell in front of right fielder Ryan Sweeney in the fourth inning.

From there, the wheels came off completely for A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez as the New York Yankees finished off a three-game sweep of Oakland with a 6-2 win before 31,518 fans at the Coliseum.

Gonzalez allowed five runs in the fourth — all scoring with two outs — before finally retiring the side. It was a rare meltdown for a pitcher who has made strides this season in containing such dangerous situations.

"You've got to get ahead of hitters," Gonzalez said. "When you fall behind it just spirals out of control."

The A's dropped 10 games behind the first-place Texas Rangers in the American League West. The Los Angeles Angels, who are 5 1/2 games out, arrive Friday for a three-game series that leads into the All-Star break.

At 41-45, the A's are guaranteed to enter the break with a losing record.

They're 20-29 against teams that were at or above .500 when they played, and 21-16 against those with losing records.

"You never want to get swept, especially when you play at home," second baseman Mark Ellis said. "(The Yankees) are a good team, but we felt like we could have played a lot better."

The A's scored just four runs in the series.

They led 1-0 entering the fourth, and Gonzalez coaxed a 4-6-3 double play from Francisco Cervelli to clear the bases before trouble hit.

After Brett Gardner walked and stole second, Ramiro Pena blooped a ball to right. It appeared Sweeney may have had a diving chance at the ball, but he played it off the hop and Gardner scored to tie the game.

A's manager Bob Geren said he thought Sweeney got a good jump and didn't question Sweeney's decision to pull up.

Things then disintegrated quickly for Gonzalez (7-6).

He uncorked a wild pitch and Derek Jeter went the opposite way with an RBI single that put the Yanks ahead. Nick Swisher walked, and Mark Teixeira drilled the first pitch from Gonzalez for a three-run homer to straightaway center for a 5-1 New York lead.

Gonzalez had given up just one earned run over his previous three starts (192/3 innings) and held opponents to a .183 batting average.

He tied a season high with five walks in four-plus innings.

"His command wasn't there," Geren said. "He was in trouble just about every inning."

Gonzalez deftly avoided damage over the first three frames.

Two walks helped the Yankees load the bases with one out in the first. But Gonzalez struck out Jorge Posada and Marcus Thames to escape trouble.

With a runner on third and one out in the third, he struck out Alex Rodriguez looking and got Posada swinging through a curve to end that threat. A double-play grounder got him out of the second after two men reached.

Former Athletic Nick Swisher, a complementary piece in the Yankees' loaded lineup, went 3 for 4 and fell just a triple short of the cycle.

He did nothing to hurt his chances of winning the fan vote for the final American League All-Star spot.

Swisher held a narrow lead over Boston's Kevin Youkilis as of Wednesday. Voting concludes today at 1 p.m.

The Yankees swept the A's in Oakland in a series of three games or more for just the third time in 31 years.

NEXT GAME:

Friday, vs. Angels, 7:05 p.m.

Oakland A's update: Pitcher Tyson Ross sent to Triple-A Sacramento, where he will be groomed as a starter

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Ross sent to Triple-A, where he'll be a starter

Reliever Tyson Ross was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday, and the A's plan to continue grooming the right-hander as a starter.

The move wasn't unexpected. Ross, who made the opening day roster though he'd never pitched above Double-A, battled control problems after getting off to a good start. He was 1-4 with a 5.49 ERA in 26 appearances.

The A's have had designs on Ross as a starter since drafting him out of Cal in the second round in 2008. The Bishop O'Dowd High grad made a good enough impression in spring training to make the A's bullpen, but he's most comfortable starting.

"They told me coming in that, long-term, they looked at me as a starter," Ross said in a phone interview. "I'm happy. Starting is what I know best. I'm just going to get back to it."

The A's promoted right-handed reliever Ross Wolf from Sacramento to take Ross' spot. To make room for Wolf on the 40-man roster, Eric Chavez was transferred to the 60-day DL.

A's manager Bob Geren said he was impressed with how Ross handled himself in the big league environment.

"He knows if he's pounding the strike zone how good he can be," Geren said before Wednesday's game with the Yankees.

Ross said he's scheduled to start Sunday against Portland.

Wolf, 27, was acquired in the trade that sent Jake Fox to Baltimore. His only big league experience came with Florida in 2007, when he made 14 relief appearances.

He had a 1.99 ERA in 32 Triple-A games this season.

Wolf had just gotten to the ballpark in Reno, where Sacramento was playing Wednesday afternoon, when he learned of his promotion. Before long he was on an Oakland-bound flight, accompanied by his wife, Lynn, and their 6-month-old son, Eli.

"When I was called up I was 24. Now I'm 27," Wolf said. "I've (learned a lot) the last three years."

Minor league updates: Sacramento outfielder Michael Taylor entered Wednesday hitting .317 over his past 11 games. That lifted his average to .252. ... Single-A Stockton shortstop Grant Green was tied for the California League lead with 105 hits.

Chin Music: A's send Tyson Ross down, he'll be groomed to start

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/7/2010 5:29PM

The A's followed through with a move that seemed unavoidable — Tyson Ross was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento, where he will slide into the rotation and go back to being a starter. A's manager Bob Geren said the team sees Ross as a starter long-term, and I know that's certainly the role Ross prefers. Reliever Ross Wolf, acquired from Baltimore for Jake Fox, was promoted. The right-hander will fill a similar bullpen role to Ross. A spot needed to be cleared on the 40-man roster for Wolf, so Eric Chavez was transferred to the 60-day DL.

Ross hit some bumps in the road after starting the season on a strong note, but Geren said he was impressed with how Ross handled himself. Remember, this guy jumped from Double-A to the bigs. "He took it in stride and was not overwhelmed by the competition. He knows if he's pounding the strike zone how good he can be." That's what the A's will have Ross work on — commanding his fastball in order to make his secondary pitches better.

Wolf, 27, flew here from Reno, where the River Cats were playing. His wife Lynn and their 6-month-old son Eli made the trip with him. His only big league action came with 14 relief appearances for Florida in 2007. But he'd been throwing very well recently at Triple-A. He runs his fastball up to 93 mph and generally has good movement in the 88-90 mph range.

Perhaps this bullpen could use a fresh face right now ...

—Matt Watson gets the start in left field for the A's. Tonight marks his first game in the major leagues since 2005, when he was also with Oakland. Think he'll have a few butterflies during that first at-bat? Gotta pull for the guy ...

Tonight's lineups:

A's — Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Cust DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Watson LF, Pennington SS; Gonzalez LHP.

Yanks — Jeter SS, Swisher RF, Teixeira 1B, Rodriguez 3B, Posada DH, Thames LF, Cervelli C, Gardner CF, Pena 2B; Burnett RHP.

Poole: Vida Blue not completely embraced by San Francisco Giants, Oakland A's

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune columnist

He's a six-time All-Star who played for the Giants and now works for them, yet you can't find his name on a jersey or T-shirt in the team store.

He won an MVP award with the A's, still makes appearances on their behalf, yet they seem to consider him a Giant.

Is Vida Blue overlooked or underappreciated?

In 96 seasons of big league baseball in the Bay Area, neither the A's nor the Giants have produced a pitcher who instantly offered a more magnetic combination of innocence, exuberance, spectacle and raw talent — Tim Lincecum included.

At his youthful best, Blue was the most scintillating athlete ever to touch down in these parts. He became an immediate star in 1971, much like Stephen Strasburg this year or Dontrelle Willis in 2003. Like Strasburg and Willis, young Vida became baseball's hottest attraction, boosting attendance at home and on the road. Like Willis and Strasburg, young Vida took the mound and hypnotized a nation of fans.

Blue in '71, however, was appreciably more productive yet considerably less polished than either Willis or Strasburg.

"I was a country bumpkin," Blue, a native of Mansfield, La., recalls with a chuckle. "I had to keep my mouth shut and watch what other people did."

To initiate the 40th anniversary year of arguably the greatest single season by any local athlete, Blue will be honored next Wednesday at Ozumo restaurant in downtown Oakland. This is, like the evening in April

with NFL great Jim Brown, part of the series of Legend's Night tributes arranged by local events coordinator Rich Lieberman.

Blue makes frequent appearances for the A's and Giants, participates in charity events and contributes to numerous local youth causes. Rarely does a day pass without him driving from his home in Tracy to meet an individual or a group.

"A lot of times when I speak to groups, I'll ask if there are any Giants fans and see some hands go up," Blue says. "Then I'll ask if there are any A's fans and watch different hands go up. Then I'll ask if there are any Vida Blue fans, and it seems like all the hands go up."

Whenever an extraordinary young pitcher blazes upon the scene, Blue is on the short list of those who will receive inquiries. With Strasburg making headlines, Vida is sought out because, having won the AL Cy Young Award and MVP in 1971 at age 22, he's one of the precious few to have walked in the shoes of the chosen one.

"There's so much stuff coming at you from so many different directions that you don't have a clue what you're getting into," Blue says. "Unlike Strasburg, or Dontrelle before him, I didn't have the luxury of a spokesperson or a publicist or an agent. I had to do it off the cuff. It was trial and error all the way."

Blue's advice to Strasburg: Enjoy the moment and listen to the veterans.

Even though Blue took advice from A's veterans such as Mudcat Grant and Tommy Davis, some of those trials ended in error. Like the time A's teammate Reggie Jackson introduced him to representatives of the famed William Morris talent agency. The men talked about creating an ad campaign around Vida.

"I didn't know who William Morris was," Blue says now. "I just wanted to play ball. Later on, I found out the William Morris agency was one of the biggest advertising agencies in the world. So I blew off the William Morris agency to do a milk commercial.

"I can laugh at it now, but that was me. Strasburg went to college, so that gave him some exposure. Dontrelle grew up in the Bay Area melting pot, so he learned some things that helped him into the big leagues. My only focus was playing ball."

That he did better than anybody in '71. Blue won his 20th game on July 28, his 22nd birthday. He finished the season 24-8, with a 1.82 ERA, eight shutouts and 24 complete games. He was the youngest MVP winner in the 20th century.

More to the point, Blue was so brilliant he was part myth. A Tuesday start at Yankee Stadium drew the largest evening crowd at the ballpark in three years. His next start, in Washington, was the largest Sunday crowd there in seven years.

For Vida's starts in Oakland, attendance routinely doubled and sometimes tripled.

That's because Blue was that singularly spellbinding presence at the center of the action, orchestrating the rhythm of the game.

Yet it seems we — and certainly the Giants and A's — somehow take him for granted.

Oakland Coliseum scenes for "Moneyball" set to begin filming July 26

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Filming is about to begin on the long-awaited "Moneyball" movie, with scenes scheduled to be shot at the Oakland Coliseum.

Production crews will arrive immediately after the A's finish a July 25 game against the Chicago White Sox and leave for a six-game road trip. Filming will begin July 26 and continue through Aug. 6, according to A's vice president of stadium operations David Rinetti.

Production has been long delayed on "Moneyball" — which is based on Michael Lewis' book of the same title that examined the A's 2002 season and the unique approach used by general manager Billy Beane and his staff to build a winning team.

But the film's hype has been years in the making because of its star-studded cast, which includes Brad Pitt playing Beane. Philip Seymour Hoffman is on board to play former A's manager Art Howe, and Jonah Hill will play Paul DePodesta, Beane's former assistant GM.

All three actors are expected to be on location at the Coliseum.

"They're going to be filming basically the baseball scenes," Rinetti said. "They're going to be doing daylight scenes and night-game scenes. A lot of it will be overnight and into the wee hours of the morning."

Registration has been taking place at www.beinamovie.com for fans hoping to be used as extras for crowd shots.

The film appeared in jeopardy as recently as a year ago. But the script has been rewritten, and Bennett Miller has replaced Steven Soderbergh in the director's chair.

Left-hander Brett Anderson, on the disabled list since June 4 with elbow inflammation, came out of Sunday's simulated game feeling good.

That solidifies him for a rehab start Friday for the A's Phoenix-based rookie league team, according to manager Bob Geren. He would pitch again July 14 and continue throwing every fifth day.

Geren is hopeful of Anderson returning to Oakland's rotation between the All-Star break and the end of the month.

Geren made a pitch to New York Yankees manager Joe Girardi to consider relievers Andrew Bailey or Craig Breslow as replacements for Trevor Cahill on the American League's All-Star roster. Girardi will manage the AL squad.

If Cahill starts Sunday as expected, he's ineligible to pitch in Tuesday's All-Star game in Anaheim. Girardi isn't obligated to choose an Athletic as Cahill's replacement.

Dallas Braden gave Alex Rodriguez a poster commemorating his perfect game with a personalized message and a T-shirt that the A's made to remember the pair's dust-up.

Rodriguez said it was a nice gesture by Braden and that "we opened and closed that window."

Braden accused Rodriguez of breaking an unwritten baseball rule in April when the slugger cut across the mound as he returned to first base after a foul ball.

The A's are selling "Get Off My Mound" T-shirts in reference to that game. Rodriguez signed 10 of the shirts, and Braden is also planning to sign them before they are auctioned for charity.

New York's post: 3-game sweep

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

What the A's learned in a three-game series against New York this week at the Coliseum: The Yankees are awfully good.

On Wednesday night, New York wrapped up a three-game sweep with a 6-2 victory, propelled by a three-run homer by Mark Teixeira. The Yankees have 53 wins, the most in the majors, and they've reeled off five in a row. Their starter Wednesday, A.J. Burnett, earned his first victory in seven starts.

"We'd like to think we're better than we played," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "But they beat us pretty good."

The A's managed four runs in the series. New York had 15.

"Our offense wasn't there, didn't match up with them," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "It was a tough three games."

It seemed as if the Yankees were almost toying with the A's in the early going, putting lots of runners on but failing to score until the fourth. Ellis and shortstop Cliff Pennington turned two smooth double plays to help starter Gio Gonzalez, including one in the fourth, but New York still managed to inflict a lot of damage that inning with two outs.

One definite trend in the series was A's pitchers failing to finish off innings and walking bottom-of-the-order Yankees instead.

"They're a very good team, and the problem is, you have to get the rest of the guys out, because when Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez, Teixeira come up with men on base, they're deadly," Ellis said.

Gonzalez walked No. 8 hitter Brett Gardner, who then stole second, enabling him to score when Ramiro Peña singled to right.

"You've got to get ahead of hitters, especially with this lineup," Gonzalez said.

Peña went to second on a wild pitch, again setting up an RBI single, this time by Jeter. Nick Swisher walked, and Teixeira homered to center on the first pitch he saw.

Swisher, traded to the White Sox in a deal that brought Gonzalez to Oakland after the 2007 season, hit a solo homer off Michael Wuertz in the sixth.

Gonzalez had allowed just one run, total, over his previous three starts. On Wednesday, he seemed to be in constant trouble, loading the bases in the first before striking out Jorge Posada and Marcus Thames.

In the second, Coco Crisp made a nice catch running away from the plate, and with two on and one out, Gonzalez got Jeter to hit into a double play, with Ellis ranging to his left for the ball and firing to second to start things.

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki was struck by a foul ball that bounced up and hit him on the chin while he was batting. He stayed in the game, though he had trouble moving his jaw. He had a bandage on his chin after the game.

Matt Watson got the start in left, his first big-league game since Oct. 2, 2005. He went 0-for-3.

Ross sent down to prepare for starting role

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After working two nice innings against the Yankees the previous night, rookie **Tyson Ross** was sent down to Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday.

Ross, 23, is considered one of Oakland's top prospects as a starter, but he has been working in middle and long relief since making the Opening Day roster unexpectedly. He was not getting regular use, particularly lately, and the decision was made to send him back to Sacramento in order to get stretched back out to start.

"It caught me by surprise a little bit, but I knew it would happen eventually," Ross said as he packed up his car. "I've had a lot of days off recently, but I'd pitched myself out of a (regular) role."

Ross said he was happy to get a chance at the big-league level, and he feels he can pitch here, but he's also happy to be going back to his regular starting role. He'd never pitched in relief before April.

The A's brought up a reliever, **Ross Wolf**, who was obtained from Baltimore for **Jake Fox** on June 22. Wolf, 27, last pitched in the majors with Florida in 2007, and he said he has learned a lot since then, particularly about using film to prepare.

Wolf has had a crazy few weeks, changing organizations and trying to find a place to live. Luckily, he'll lose no deposit or months of rent in Sacramento - he and his wife were still being approved, with the long weekend delaying a credit check.

He'll be used much the way Ross was, according to manager **Bob Geren**. Wolf had a 1.29 ERA at Sacramento and a 1.99 ERA combined between Sacramento and Triple-A Norfolk.

To make room for Wolf on the 60-man roster, **Eric Chavez** was placed on the 60-day disabled list. He's eligible to come off on July 20, but Chavez told the Chronicle via a text on Wednesday that he might not be back until September.

Chavez is out with two bulging disks in his neck.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco chronicle

Feeling better: Reliever Brad Ziegler was so tired in recent weeks that when he became even more fatigued last week, there was thought he had mononucleosis. He did not, but he did have a lesser virus; he now has recovered fully.

Drumbeat: Tyson Ross sent down, Ross Wolf is here

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 7/7/2010 5:17PM

Oakland finally sent Tyson Ross down to Triple-A Sacramento today to stretch him out as a starter; I've been asking Bob Geren and Billy Beane about Ross' status for more than a month, wondering how being little-used in middle relief was helping his development, and in [this morning's Chronicle](#), I had a little note about scouts coming in and asking why Ross was still here. Finally! Well, I don't think being here maybe six weeks too long will set back Ross' development too much (the rest of the year might have), and he can go start at Sacramento for six or seven weeks and come back when rosters expand in September. The experience up here will be good for Ross in many ways, too.

Ross didn't seem upset with the decision, though he was a little surprised. He said he's glad he's going to go get regular work and going to go back to starting, which everyone knows is where his future is. He said he pitched himself out of a more prominent bullpen role a while back, and he's going to Sacramento knowing what he needs to work on to be a successful big-league pitcher. Another nice thing is that he leaves on a good note, two strong innings against the Yankees last night.

And here's a weird thing: There was a [story on Ross in the Wall Street Journal](#) today, and now he's back in the minors.

Ross Wolf, 27, acquired in the Jake Fox deal with Baltimore recently, is here now, and he'll be used basically the way Ross was, according to manager Bob Geren. Wolf has had a wild few weeks, changing organizations and then getting called up from Sacramento while the team was in Reno. Luckily, he and his family hadn't been approved for the place they were looking at in Sacramento, the credit check was still running. So they won't lose any deposits or months of rent. Eric Chavez goes on the 60-day DL to make room for Wolf, which makes sense because Chavez isn't expected back anytime soon.

UPDATE: There seems to be a sense out there that the 60 day DL starts from today. It does not, it starts from the first date of the original DL. Chavz is eligible to come off July 20.

Here's the lineup: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Cust DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Watson LF, Pennington SS, Gonzalez P

A's can't pick up Gonzalez vs. Yankees

Command woes hurt in five-run fourth in series-ending loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A meeting with the Angels probably never sounded so good.

Angel red -- as always -- will likely be bleeding ever so fervently out of the Coliseum this weekend when Halos fans come to town. But that's OK.

After all, red is no Yankee blue.

The latter overstayed its welcome with the A's, who on Wednesday finally sent the Yankees on their way -- only after a 6-2 loss and subsequent series sweep, though.

The broom resulted in just 16 A's hits combined -- representing just one more than the number of runs their counterparts posted.

Meanwhile, Oakland plated just four runs in the three-day affair, which made losing pitchers out of Ben Sheets, Trevor Cahill, and on Wednesday, Gio Gonzalez.

The A's lefty entered the contest having carried an 0.46 ERA and .183 opponents batting average over his three previous starts. But he tied a season high with five walks and fell behind in the count on 15 of 23 batters he faced while struggling with command virtually all of the four-plus innings he endured.

"His command wasn't there," manager Bob Geren said. "He was missing off the plate a lot and fell behind a lot. He was in trouble just about every inning."

After finding his way out of a bases-loaded jam in the first, along with more trouble in the second, Gonzalez fared better in the third before unraveling in the fourth frame, which saw eight Yankees batters come to the plate.

Marcus Thames singled to lead off the inning, and Gonzalez spotted the end of trouble by forcing Francisco Cervelli to ground into a double play. But instead of facing three batters in a scoreless inning, Gonzalez walked Brett Gardner, who stole second base and scored on an RBI single off the bat of Ramiro Pena. A run-scoring hit from Derek Jeter later, and the A's southpaw again offered up a free pass -- this time to Nick Swisher -- before surrendering a three-run homer to Mark Teixeira.

"Just one fastball -- that's all it took," Teixeira said. "He probably didn't want to put me on and mess with me because he'd walked me two at-bats earlier. With the way Alex [Rodriguez] is swinging the bat, I was just going to be aggressive, and I got a good pitch."

Gonzalez closed out the inning by striking out Rodriguez, who buried the A's with five RBIs just 24 hours prior. At that point, though, he knew the damage had been done.

"You got to get ahead of hitters -- especially those guys," Gonzalez said. "You fall behind and they're going to do their job. I obviously fell behind early, and it all spiraled out of control."

"I was trying to do too much instead of trusting myself. I should have gone out there and thrown first-pitch strikes. I should have attacked the zone."

"He was just missing," battery mate Kurt Suzuki said. "Not drastic misses, but just off the plate or just down, and it was one of those nights where his ball was moving a lot. It was tough for him to get control, and I thought he did a great job, but when you only miss by that much, it's tough. When they got hitters like that, you can't really throw anything like that over the plate."

Yankees starter A.J. Burnett didn't have such trouble. Rather, he allowed just two runs on five hits while walking two and fanning three through seven innings. The righty cruised through the first two frames before an RBI single from Coco Crisp in the third got the A's on the board. Oakland's only other run came in the sixth on a run-scoring base hit from Jack Cust.

"He located his fastball really well," Mark Ellis said. "When he does that, he's going to be tough -- he's got a good arm. That's the key to pitching -- locate your fastball -- that's how you're going to get outs."

"He was changing his speeds and pretty much like their other pitchers did -- he didn't leave many balls over the plate," Suzuki said. "They got ahead of us and made good pitches, and sometimes you just got to tip your hat. They did a great job and there's nothing more to say."

Suzuki, in fact, literally couldn't say much, as he sported a bandage over his chin after fouling a ball off the plate that came back toward his face in the second inning. He stayed in the game, though, and isn't too worried about the injury.

"It's a little sore, but it will be fine," he said. "At first, it hurt a little bit, but as the game went on, it went away -- it just got tight. Hopefully it will go away soon."

Hopefully the losses will, too. The A's, having dropped three straight, now face the task of besting the division-rival Angels, who enter for a three-game set beginning Friday before the All-Star break. Thus, Thursday's off-day is exactly what this team needs.

"It was tough," Ellis said. "You don't ever want to get swept, especially when you're playing at home. They're a good team -- they're a very good team -- but we feel like we could play a little bit better. We just didn't score a lot of runs."

"Dropping three against anyone is tough," Geren said. "With the off-day, we get a much-needed physical and mental day off, and we'll come back here ready to play another tough team."

A's Ross to regain starting role -- in Triple-A

Righty sent down; Wolf back in bigs for first time since 2007

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tyson Ross was handed a ticket to Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday, a somewhat surprising invitation that will allow him to regain his role as a starter while also giving callup Ross Wolf a chance to once again prove himself in the big leagues.

The right-handed Ross, who made the club as a non-roster invitee following an impressive Spring Training, will join the River Cats' rotation immediately in an organizational effort to stretch him out as a starter, which is how the A's envisioned the rookie when they selected him in the second round of the 2008 First-Year Player Draft.

"I'm a little bit surprised," Ross said, "but I knew, long term they want to see me as a starter, and that's something I'm more familiar with. It's something I'm comfortable with, and I can get my arm back in shape to go six or seven innings."

Ross, 23, was used rather intermittently after making the Opening Day roster, making 26 appearances, including two spot starts. He was 1-4 with a 5.49 ERA, and had seen action in just two of the club's last 12 games.

"The plan is in place to build him as a starter," manager Bob Geren said. "It was nice to break him in slowly, and when he comes back, he's going to know what to expect."

"The experience you get at this level is something you can't get unless you're at this level. He took it in stride, and he didn't seem overwhelmed at all by the competition."

Ross posted respectable April numbers, surrendering a combined five earned runs in 12 2/3 innings. May, though, saw him struggle with command, as he allowed 12 runs in 14 2/3 frames.

"If he's pounding the strike zone, he knows how successful he can be," Geren said. "That's kind of what we talked about with him as a starter. If he can command his fastball and his secondary game, that will only make him that much more successful. He totally understands what he needs to do to become a big league starter, and he's up to the challenge."

Wolf, meanwhile, will face the challenge of getting outs on a Major League stage, where the right-handed reliever -- acquired June 22 from Baltimore along with cash considerations for Jake Fox -- hasn't appeared since 2007 while with the Marlins.

With Florida, Wolf went 0-1 with an 11.67 ERA in 14 games, offering up 16 runs in just 12 1/3 innings before returning to the Minors and signing with the Orioles as a free agent in November 2008. He was 0-2 with a 2.11 ERA in 25 relief appearances for Triple-A Norfolk, and then posted a 1.29 ERA with three saves in seven outings for the River Cats this year.

"He's been throwing the ball really well for Sacramento," Geren said, "and he'll take Tyson's spot in the bullpen."

Now 27, three years removed from his last Major League appearance, Wolf believes he's a different person, one who will spend more time studying film -- a facet of his preparation missing the last time around.

"I'm ready to do whatever they tell me," said Wolf, who described himself as a groundball pitcher. "I'm ready for them to hand me the ball, and hopefully I can help this team win."

Watson returns to Majors after long hiatus

OAKLAND -- For the first time in nearly five years, Matt Watson stood in a big league batter's box on Wednesday night.

Watson, who was called up from Triple-A Sacramento on Monday, last played in the Majors for Oakland in 2005, but he has played plenty of ball in between. Darting from the Minor Leagues to Japan to South Korea to his hometown of Lancaster, Pa., the outfielder didn't always think he would be returning to The Show.

"When you're playing in the Atlantic League and then you spend three-to-four years in Asia, there's always a doubt," Watson said. "You kind of figure you had your opportunities, but you got to keep plugging away."

Watson signed with the Mets during the 2009 season, playing in 10 Minor League contests, but a back injury forced him to move home to play in the independent Atlantic League. In reality, Watson's decision to play for the Lancaster Barnstormers was the best thing for his career.

"I feel better at 31 than I did at 24, 25, 26," Watson said. "You get to experiment at that Atlantic League with some things that you're too afraid to try here at Triple-A and the big leagues. Things have paid off, I feel better swinging. Who knows what's going to happen, but I feel like I have more power than I ever have."

Lancaster made things a lot better for his family, too. Trying to raise two young children with the language barrier in Asia wasn't easy. Surrounded by players making a low salary, Watson said he rediscovered his love for the game in Lancaster.

Armed with a higher leg kick, Watson batted .317 with four home runs and 14 RBIs in 30 games for the Barnstormers before the A's signed him on May 28. After hitting .313 with eight home runs and 23 RBIs for Sacramento, his journey finally came full circle this week.

"I don't know if I'll get an extended opportunity," Watson said. "But this is already better than what we were expecting."

Worth noting

Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson paid a visit to the Coliseum on Wednesday. He conversed with players during batting practice and pulled aside Dallas Braden to offer congratulations on the A's lefty's perfect game. ... Daric Barton, who was 0-for-3 on Wednesday, is hitless in his last 12 at-bats after going 16-for-43 (.372) over his previous 12 contests. ... Ryan Sweeney is currently riding a 51-game homerless streak, which ties his career high (Aug. 28, 2009-May 3, 2010). ... Top prospect Michael Taylor has hit safely in nine of his past 11 games and is batting .317 with 13 RBIs during that stretch for Triple-A Sacramento. ... Adrian Cardenas, who played alongside Taylor with the A's in Spring Training, has reached base safely in 20 of his past 21 games with Double-A Midland, and he is batting .400 with 14 walks over that stretch.

Pineiro takes streak into Oakland

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com

For the past four seasons, Angels pitcher Jered Weaver has been one of the club's top two starters. After the free-agent departure of John Lackey this offseason, Weaver has shifted to the role of bonafide ace, posting All-Star-caliber numbers.

With Weaver's ascension to the top of the rotation, Los Angeles was in need of a No. 2 pitcher. Look no further than Friday's starter, right-hander Joel Pineiro.

Pineiro (9-6, 3.96 ERA) has posted wins in his past six starts, boasting a 2.08 ERA in 43 1/3 innings during that span. In that time, he's also only walked 12 batters.

While Pineiro has been around the league for a decade, Oakland's Friday starter is a relatively new face, but a pitcher who has been solid this season.

Vin Mazzaro, a 23-year-old right-hander, is 4-2 with a 3.81 ERA in seven starts. Since replacing left-hander Brett Anderson (injury) in the starting rotation on June 8, Mazzaro is 3-2 with a 2.97 ERA.

In his last outing, a 3-1 win against the Indians, Mazzaro won his second straight start, holding Cleveland to one run on seven hits in 7 1/3 innings, striking out seven.

"I'm definitely feeling more comfortable," Mazzaro said after his last start. "I'm cutting down on the walks and getting ground balls when I need to. And the guys behind me are making great plays. Good stuff is happening."

Angels: Big bats need to step up

With the Halos 46-41 and 5 1/2 games behind red-hot Texas, the Angels need production from Bobby Abreu and Hideki Matsui, two of their most important bats. Entering Thursday, Abreu and Matsui have combined for six runs scored (three apiece) and 10 RBIs (five each) in the past 10 games. Abreu has only four hits and a .091 average, while Matsui is batting .206 with seven hits. "Bobby Abreu is a table-setter and a guy we set the table for; guys need to bring it every night," manager Mike Scioscia said. "The last 10 games or so, we've been disappointed with the lack of pressure we've put on teams. I don't think it's one guy. For long stretches, especially early in the season, Hideki was our best offensive player. At times, he's struggled. We're not far away from what we anticipated with him. It's not anything that's totally out of whack with his swing."

A's: Hurlers headed back soon

Oakland's starting rotation will get a post-All-Star break boost, when both Anderson and Dallas Braden are expected to return. Anderson (elbow tendinitis), could be back as early as July 19, while manager Bob Geren said Braden (left elbow stiffness) also is expected back during the first few games of the second half.

Worth noting

Oakland called up right-handed pitcher Ross Wolf from Triple-A Sacramento and optioned right-hander Tyson Ross to Sacramento.

Major Lee-ague: The Taylor/Carter question

As we keep seeing guys from Sacramento getting the call to Oakland, I keep getting more questions wondering about Michael Taylor and Chris Carter. When will their time come? Why aren't they being called up? Why Matt Carson and Matt Watson? I think it's widely expected that the duo of Taylor and Carter will immediately give the A's the power they've been looking for all year. That won't happen, though, until they can prove that power in the PCL, where they're both currently hitting under .260 (Carter, as of Wednesday, is batting .238; Taylor, .252). Meanwhile, upon their promotions, Carson and Watson were both boasting an above-.300 mark. And as many in the organization has said before, there's no sense in rushing Taylor or Carter. Many thought they'd be up by now. To tell you the truth, I did too. But they're simply not performing, and bringing them to an even bigger stage isn't going to do any good, either. Right now, they account for 24 percent of Sacramento's total strikeout number. Carter has 96 through 83 games. And the next highest number? Well, that would come from Taylor, who has fanned 52 times in 69 games. The A's have done right by letting them find their groove in the Minors. At the same time, they're preserving their Major League service clock as well -- the A's have said that's not a priority, but if they can, why not? So don't be holding your breath for either to land in Oakland anytime before September.

Yankees Sweep Series

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 7/8/2010

Oakland, CA – The Yankees were no match for the struggling A's. They won game three 6-2 and swept the series. A.J. Burnett was the winning pitcher and recovered from losing his last five starts in the month of June going 0-5 with a 11.35 ERA.

"Hopefully A.J. will have more confidence tonight than his last start," said Yankees manager Joe Girardi.

Burnett had more than enough confidence, he also got hits from the best lineup in baseball. He pitched seven innings, giving up five hits, two runs (both earned), two walks and struck out three. The past was now behind him as he displayed complete control of the mound.

Much of his success came from watching the Mariner's Felix Hernandez stymie a win on June 30. Burnett restructured his changeup similar to Hernandez because he knew it was tough to hit. He estimated that he threw enough against Oakland for the win.

"We started using it last game against righties," Burnett said. "We got a lot of outs, when I get ahead, they look curveball so it gives me another weapon."

New York dominated in one inning again with both Ramiro Pena and Derek Jeter logging RBI singles in the fourth frame. Then Mark Teixeira belted a three run homer to give the Yankees their biggest lead 5-1. Teixeira connected on the first pitch before A's pitcher Gio Gonzalez was removed after four innings.

Gonzalez pitched four innings, gave up eight hits, five runs (all earned), five walks, struck out five and gave up one home run. Struggling in every inning Gio tied a season high with five walks and fell behind the count of 15 of 23 batters he faced.

"I fell behind and they're going to do their job," said Gonzalez. "I was trying to do too much, I should've attacked the zone but nothing I can do about that now." "You got to get ahead of hitters, especially those guys or it will spiral out of control."

The A's dropped 10 games behind first place Texas in the American League West. They have a much needed day off before facing their division rivals the Los Angeles Angels. Oakland's 20-29 against teams that are or above .500 and 21-16 against teams with losing records.

"Dropping three against anyone is tough" A's manager Bob Geren said. "We get a much needed physical and mental day off and we'll come back here ready to play another tough team."

A's swept by Yankees

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Mark Teixeira hit a three-run homer to help A.J. Burnett win for the first time in more than five weeks, and the New York Yankees completed a sweep of the Oakland Athletics with a 6-2 victory Wednesday night.

Derek Jeter had a go-ahead single and Ramiro Pena also singled in a run in New York's five-run fourth inning. The Yankees won their fifth straight and earned their first road sweep of the season.

Burnett (7-7) pitched seven strong innings to end a six-start winless stretch in which he was 0-5 since beating the Indians on May 30.

Nick Swisher homered and doubled among his three hits against his former team, and he's still doing all he can to be added to the AL All-Star team.

Alex Rodriguez went 0 for 4 with two strikeouts and a walk a night after hitting two home runs, with a grand slam. He has 597 career clouts heading into a four-game series in his old Seattle stomping grounds starting tonight. A-Rod is looking to become only the seventh player to join the 600-club.

The Yankees are a season-best 22 games over .500 at 53-31 and hold a two-game lead in the AL East over Tampa Bay, which swept Boston to send the Red Sox to 4½ back. New York finishes up its final West Coast trip of the year against the Mariners.

The Yankees won their fourth straight road game and 10th in 13 away from Yankee Stadium.

New York swept the A's at the Coliseum in a series of three or more games for just the third time since 1980 and first since taking three in a row here from May 13-15, 2005.

The A's trail the season series 1-5, the third straight year they've come up short to New York. The Yankees are 17-4 against Oakland over the past three campaigns. The A's still must go to Yankee Stadium for a four-game set from Aug. 30-Sept. 2.

Burnett got back on track with this one. He allowed two runs on five hits, struck out three and walked two.

Gio Gonzalez (7-6) was done after equaling his season-low of four innings. He didn't get much support from the offense, either.

The A's took a brief lead on Coco Crisp's RBI single in the third after the Yankees missed chances in each of the first three innings, but that was it until Jack Cust added an RBI single in the sixth.

Coming off a win at Cleveland after going winless in his previous four outings, Gonzalez matched his season high with five walks. He was tagged for five runs and eight hits and he struck out five.

NOTES: Swisher on boosting his chances to win the online voting to be an All-Star: "Keep pushin', keep pushin'." ... Yankees 2B Robinson Cano was held out of the lineup for the first time all season, a chance to rest his tweaked back that he hurt Sunday against Toronto. The team also decided to pull him from Monday's Home Run Derby at the All-Star game in Anaheim. ... The A's called up RHP Ross Wolf from Triple-A Sacramento and optioned RHP Tyson Ross to Sacramento to develop him as a starter. To clear a spot on the 40-man roster, the A's transferred Eric Chavez to the 60-day disabled list. ... It was 58 degrees at first pitch, yet another unseasonably cool summer night in the Bay Area. ... New York's Brett Gardner stole his 25th base in the fourth following a two-out walk.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Four comeback victories spell sweep for Cats

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento rallied from behind for the fourth consecutive game to complete a four-game sweep of the host Reno Aces. Two sets of back-to-back home runs -- first a predictable combo, Chris Carter and Dallas McPherson; and then a not-so-predictable duo in Adam Heether and backup catcher Jared Price -- propelled this hot River Cats team to a 10-7 victory Wednesday afternoon.

With the win, Sacramento has won 12 in a row against Reno, including eight in a row at Aces Ballpark.

Sacramento got the scoring under way in the second inning when two Reno throwing errors allowed Michael Taylor to score. Reno tied it in the second when Brandon Allen hit a solo home run and Carlos Corporan doubled and scored on a Mark Hallberg single for a 2-1 lead.

The lead switched back to Sacramento their next chance at bat. A Steven Tolleson single was followed by a Carter home run that gave the Cats a 3-2 lead. McPherson then sent the ball flying to center field for back-to-back home runs. After the Cats' three hits in succession, Reno pitcher Wes Roemer came back with two strikeouts and a Josh Donaldson groundout.

Reno did some serious slugging of their own in the third inning to take a 7-4 lead. The Aces strung five consecutive hits together before the River Cats defense could slow them down.

Heether and Price both homered in the fourth inning for the River Cats, making the score 7-6 Reno. That score held until the seventh inning, when the River Cats mounted their fourth comeback in as many days.

McPherson walked, Jeff Baisley singled and Taylor singled to score McPherson. Designated hitter Josh Donaldson singled on a line drive to right field to score Baisley. After walking Heether, Reno brought in T. J. Beam from the bullpen. Eric Sogard continued his hitting streak against Reno with a single that scored Donaldson. Tolleson walked, scoring Heether, and then two quick outs capped the inning with Sacramento leading 10-7.

After a rough first three innings, River Cats starter John Halama found his groove to cut off Reno over the next four innings. Halama recorded the win, pitching 7.0 innings for 12 hits, seven runs and one strikeout. Jon Hunton narrowly escaped a bases loaded situation in the eighth inning. Reliever Jamey Wright came in the ninth looking for the save, and with a stellar pitching performance that included one strikeout found it.

A Sacramento team that has won 12 of its last 15 home games are back at Raley Field on Thursday for a four-game series against the Portland Beavers.

Surkamp Dominates Ports in 3-0 Loss

STOCKTON, Calif. - San Jose southpaw Eric Surkamp mystified Ports batters all evening, striking out a season-high 14 batters as the Giants (49-35) shutout the Stockton Ports (37-47), 3-0, on Wednesday night at Banner Island Ballpark.

It was the second time the Giants have blanked the Ports this season, and it was Stockton's seventh shutout loss this summer. Stockton totaled just two hits in the game, matching a season-low set on April 21. Mike Spina and Ryan Ortiz each singled for the Ports. The Ports put just five runners on base in the game, and were struck out 16 total times.

Shawn Haviland picked up his sixth loss, despite turning in a good performance on Wednesday. Haviland struck out seven and allowed two runs on in seven hits in a season-high 7.0 innings. Haviland last tossed 7.0 innings on May 26, also against San Jose. Brett Hunter allowed one run in 2.0 innings. Surkamp collected his fourth win, and Jason Stoffel collected his 13th save for San Jose.

Haviland kept the Giants scoreless until the third inning. Left fielder James Simmons led off the inning with a single, and moved to second on a single by designated hitter Wendell Fairley. Center fielder Francisco Peguero hit an RBI single to center field to give San Jose a 1-0 lead. First baseman Michael Ambort hit into a double play to end the inning.

San Jose took a 2-0 lead on a solo home run by catcher Johnny Monell in the fourth inning.

The Ports collected their first hit on the game in the sixth inning, as Ortiz hit a single to shallow center field. The Ports would put two runners on in the seventh, on a single by Spina and a walk by right fielder Jeremy Barfield, but Surkamp retired the next three batters in order to end the Ports threat.

The Giants posted their third and final run in the eighth inning, as Hunter came into the game to relieve Haviland. After Fairley struck out, Peguero singled to left center field. He stole second base while Ambort was at-bat. Stockton then attempted a pitch-out play, but the throw by Ortiz went wild, and Peguero was safe at third. Ambort then lined the ball directly to Ports first baseman Spina for the second out of the inning. San Jose second baseman Culberson stepped up to the plate and singled. He was caught stealing later to end the inning.

San Jose relievers Brian Anderson and Stoffel retired the Ports in order in the eighth and ninth frames, respectively.

Stockton will look to even the series on Thursday night at 7:05 PM PST at Banner Island Ballpark. RHP Michael Madsen (1-3, 3.63) will take the mound for the Ports, while RHP Justin Fitzgerald (5-2, 3.27) will start for San Jose.

Cougars Fall to Chiefs at Wrigley

Kane County scores first but can't hold lead in "Road to Wrigley" contest

GENEVA, Ill. – In the third-ever minor league game at historic Wrigley Field, the Kane County Cougars scored first but fell to the Peoria Chiefs, 5-2. This was the second time the "Road to Wrigley" game featured the Cougars and Chiefs, as they battled in 2008 in the first minor league at Wrigley.

The Cougars got the game's first run in the top of the third when Tyreace House singled home Mike Gilmartin, but the Chiefs tied it in the bottom half against Ian Krol on an RBI single by Mario Mercedes. Krol (6-3) then gave up a two-out three-run homer in the bottom of the fourth to Jae-Hoon Ha which gave Peoria a lead it did not give back. Krol pitched five innings and gave up four runs -- matching his season-high from April 13. He walked none and fanned two in the loss.

The Cougars fought back with a run in the sixth on a double by Gilmartin, one of his three hits in the game, but Peoria answered in the eighth against Connor Hoehn. The Cougars had six hits and drew six walks but also stranded nine runners. Rob Whitenack (7-6) got the win for the Chiefs, and Jordan Latham recorded his 11th save.

The Cougars (6-7, 38-44) and Peoria (4-8, 42-39) continue the three-game series Thursday night at 7 CT in Peoria. Murphy Smith (3-0, 5.45) will face Su-Min Jung (5-3, 3.74). 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.