

A's News Clips, Monday, July 19, 2010

Oakland A's extend win streak to five games by Kansas City Royals

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Three games against the Kansas City Royals can be enough to boost any team's confidence, but that doesn't take away from the quality of play the A's displayed over the weekend.

A 9-6 victory on Sunday completed a three-game sweep and gave the A's a season-high five-game winning streak.

It also pulled their record to .500 (46-46) for the first time in nearly five weeks. They were 33-33 on June 15.

Most importantly, it gives the A's a shot of momentum as they enter a 12-game stretch that figures to define whether they remain in the hunt in the American League West.

The first stage of that challenge starts tonight at home with a three-game series against the Boston Red Sox, who are 52-40. After that, the AL Central-leading Chicago White Sox arrive for a three-game set.

The A's then hit the road for three against the Texas Rangers, who lead the AL West and hold a seven-game margin over Oakland. The A's finish the sequence with three more against the White Sox in Chicago.

"It's good to go into those series knowing that we've been playing well lately," A's manager Bob Geren said.

The A's put together three well-rounded games over the weekend, though a poor effort from the bullpen made Sunday's final score much closer than it should have been.

Oakland led 9-1 entering the bottom of the ninth before Kansas City scored five runs. Geren burned through four relievers in the inning and resorted

to calling on closer Andrew Bailey, who needed just one pitch to record his 20th save.

But there was plenty for the A's to be encouraged about.

They entered the day with a major league-low 57 homers but went deep three times. Adam Rosales hit a two-run homer during a three-run rally that gave the A's a 3-1 lead in the fourth.

Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a solo homer in the fifth off Royals starter Brian Bannister (7-8). And Jack Cust launched a three-run shot in the top of the ninth that made it 9-1, which seemed meaningless at the time but wound up being important as the Royals rallied.

Kouzmanoff went 5 for 13 in the series with seven RBIs. Cust, who has routinely fielded questions about when his power will arrive in force, has homered in three of his past five games dating back to before the All-Star break. Getting production from both middle-of-the-order hitters is a good sign for the A's, who scored 20 runs in the series.

"When we had guys in scoring position we were able to take advantage," Kouzmanoff said. "... It's good to have this sweep. We swung the bats well, got good pitching, played defense. We have to continue to do that with the tough teams ahead."

That the sweep came against the Royals, who are 39-52 and made five errors in the series, tempers the enthusiasm slightly.

But right-hander Vin Mazzaro (5-2) continues to impress. He allowed one run over a career-high 7²/₃ innings.

"He's got stuff, it's just the confidence behind it," Cust said. "If he has a chance to get out there every five days, I think he'll do more of that."

Kouzmanoff committed a fielding error at third during the Royals' ninth-inning rally. That gives him eight errors this season after he made just three all of last year with San Diego.

But the A's got several nice plays from shortstop Cliff Pennington, who also had two hits and an RBI.

today's game
Red Sox (Daisuke Matsuzaka 6-3) at A's (Ben Sheets 4-8), 7:05 p.m., CSNCA

Oakland A's update: Staying aggressive on the bases

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — As their lead grew on Sunday, so did the A's aggressiveness on the bases.

Hitting three home runs was the offensive highlight in a 9-6 victory over the Kansas City Royals, but the A's also attempted five stolen bases.

They were successful on just two of those against Royals catcher Jason Kendall — Coco Crisp stole second and third in the seventh. But the emphasis on the running game was what stood out.

The A's were 6 for 10 on steals for the series.

"(We were) thrown out a couple times stealing, but we were going to continue to put pressure on them the whole series," manager Bob Geren said.

If the A's power continues to show up as it did Sunday, they won't need to run as much. But it's been apparent since spring training that the A's roster is built more for stealing bases than it is swatting homers.

They ranked fifth in the American League with 71 stolen bases to start the day, and their success rate of 82.1 percent (69 for 84) led the majors.

The A's have stolen a base in exactly half of their 92 games. They are 32-14 when in games with a steal and 14-32 in games without one.

Right fielder Ryan Sweeney missed his third straight game with soreness in his knees. Both Sweeney and manager Bob Geren have avoided speculating on when he might return to the lineup.

Geren was asked if the disabled list was beginning to look like a possibility.

"He'll be re-evaluated when we get home," Geren said.

Sweeney has played with soreness in both knees since last season, but his right knee has given him more problems this season.

Geren said before the game he expected Dallas Braden (left elbow stiffness) to be able to come off the DL and start Tuesday against Boston. Braden was scheduled to throw a side session Sunday. "... First baseman Daric Barton had leg cramping and was generally drained after Saturday night's game, played in humid conditions that were actually worse than Sunday afternoon's. As a result, Adam Rosales started at first Sunday. It was just the second game Barton hasn't started this season.

Chin Music: A day off for some A's regulars, and other pregame tidbits

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/18/2010 10:34AM

Good morning from Kansas City, where I'm hoping thunderstorms hold off until tonight so I can catch my flight back to the Bay Area ...

It's no surprise to see a couple A's regulars getting a rest today considering the heat and the fact it's a day game after a night game. ... First baseman Daric Barton, who has started all but one game this season, is out of the lineup. Last night's game drained Barton pretty good. And he had a great night at the plate, so he was on base a lot and expending a ton of energy. "He got pretty good cramping last night," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It's the right thing to do to recover. He's still available to pinch hit." Adam Rosales, Saturday's late-game hero, starts at first.

Landon Powell gets a start behind the plate to give Kurt Suzuki a day off, and right fielder Ryan Sweeney misses his third straight game with knee soreness. Geren was asked about the possibility of Sweeney joining the DL. "We'll probably re-evaluate him when we get home. He's not available today."

—You might have noticed Andrew Bailey hitting 99 mph on the radar gun last night as he blew a fastball by Jason Kendall to end the game. That raised my eyebrows, being that Bailey usually sits in the 95-96 mph range with his fastball. What did he think of that velocity? "The gun was probably juiced a little bit," Bailey said with a smile. "I've never thrown that hard. But I'll take it and take the outs."

—Dallas Braden was scheduled to throw his side session this morning, but not early enough to get a report on it. "Unless there's a setback, he's pitching Tuesday," Geren said.

Here's your lineups:

A's — Crisp CF, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust DH, Rosales 1B, Gross RF, Powell C, Davis LF, Pennington SS; Mazzaro RHP.

Royals — Podsednik LF, Kendall C, DeJesus CF, Butler 1B, Guillen DH, Callaspo 3B, Maier RF, Betancourt SS, Getz 2B; Bannister RHP.

With sweep complete, A's schedule gets tougher

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Everything is coming together for Oakland, or so it seems. Then again, maybe it's just that the A's are at their best against bad teams.

Whatever the case, a decisive sweep of the Royals has put Oakland back at the .500 mark just in time for the schedule to turn tough again. The usually power-poor A's even got three home runs Sunday in a 9-6 victory at Kauffman Stadium, including a three-run blast by designated hitter Jack Cust.

Oakland has won five in a row heading into a series against the Red Sox that opens tonight at the Coliseum.

"We're putting it all together," said Sunday's starter, Vin Mazzaro, who worked a career high 7 2/3 innings. "We're on a good streak now, we're going to face Boston, and we're going in with a lot of confidence."

That begins a 12-game stretch against contenders.

The A's have fared well lately against sub-.500 clubs, going 10-2 vs. Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cleveland and Kansas City since the final week of June. It's the better teams in both leagues that give the A's trouble. They're 22-36 against clubs that currently have winning records and 24-10 against teams below .500.

Oakland has reason for optimism, with two starters, Dallas Braden and Brett Anderson, nearing returns; Braden will go Tuesday, and Anderson should be back the following week. The team's other starters, especially young ones such as Mazzaro, All-Star Trevor Cahill and left-hander Gio Gonzalez, are pitching well, the defense is solid, and the club is flashing more pop than usual.

Cust, who didn't come up until mid-May, had hit just two homers by July 8, but he has gone deep three times in his past four games.

"You know he's going to run into streaks with the longball, and it would be good if it's right now," A's manager Bob Geren said.

"Hopefully it's one of those hot streaks," Cust said, "but you can't read too much into it."

He crushed a shot toward the fountains in right in the ninth inning even though, Cust said, "I felt terrible," his timing off after the All-Star break and a night off Saturday.

Adam Rosales hit a two-run shot in the fourth, forcing baserunner Cust to trot a little faster, and Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a solo homer in the fifth.

Mazzaro said he'd drawn both inspiration and information from Cahill's start the night before; he studied the tape and spotted a few things that helped him Sunday.

Oakland led 9-1 going into the bottom of the ninth, but relievers Brad Ziegler and Cedric Bowers wobbled, and the A's used four pitchers in all. Andrew Bailey got the final out, needing just one pitch to record his 20th save.

First baseman Daric Barton said he was feeling OK after needing fluids the night before; Rosales started at first, instead.

"It's just smart to give me time to recover," Barton said. "I am definitely dehydrated."

A's Beat: A's pitchers scouted as trade targets

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The trade deadline looms at the end of next week, and even though the A's have indicated that they don't plan any major moves, there are still scouts following the team.

Tonight's starter, **Ben Sheets**, remains a potential target for Philadelphia and Minnesota, among others, and Detroit was checking out reliever **Michael Wuertz** in Kansas City this weekend and in Oakland earlier this month. **Craig Breslow** is on Detroit's radar, too, but like Wuertz last year, Breslow would be extremely difficult to pry away.

The Tigers are forthright about their need for a reliever since **Joel Zumaya's** season-ending injury, and Wuertz has been in their sights before, but it's unlikely the A's would sell low on Wuertz, who is looking as if he's coming around.

Oakland has no desire to move Sheets, but **Vin Mazzaro's** strong performance recently might make Sheets more expendable if the A's are convinced that **Dallas Braden** and **Brett Anderson** are healthy.

Sweeney to DL? **Ryan Sweeney** was unavailable for a third day after a cortisone shot for his right knee and platelet-rich plasma injections in both knees a week ago. Typically, those treatments need three to seven days of recovery time.

With an outfielder, probably **Matt Watson**, being the best bet to get sent out when **Dallas Braden** comes off the disabled list Tuesday, the A's are going to have to consider the DL for Sweeney if he isn't ready to go. They could backdate the move to July 12.

Briefly: Anderson's next rehab start will be for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday at Colorado Springs, though because he's scheduled to pitch on the same day as Braden, he also could be pushed back a day. ... **Travis Buck** (oblique, sore legs) played nine innings in right Saturday in Phoenix and is likely to head out on a rehab assignment elsewhere in the next day or two.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

It takes a thief: The A's were leading the majors in stolen-base percentage before Sunday, then got caught on three of five attempts against the Royals. Still, they're stealing at an 80 percent clip. Oakland is 32-14 when it steals a base, 14-32 otherwise.

Drumbeat: Barton, Suzuki not in lineup, Sweeney still out

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Kauffman Stadium 7/18/2010 9:57AM

Daric Barton, who cramped up several times last night and needed fluid after the game, isn't in the lineup today to give him some time to recover. Barton says he feels OK, but he agrees that a day off is probably in order. Manager Bob Geren said that "it's the right thing to do," and Barton's still a little tight. He's available if needed off the bench, though.

That gives Geren a spot to put Adam Rosales, who relishes the heat - he said last night he'd rather play "1,000 times more" in the heat than the cold. Rosales, like Barton, had three hits last night.

Kurt Suzuki is also out after catching two nights in a row in the high temps and humidity. That said, he was out on the field doing sprints this morning. It's not quite as hot as it was the past two days, but it's still plenty warm. I guess that's how it's done if you want to catch 140 games a year, but a day off really isn't a day off for Suzuki. He just keeps working hard.

Ryan Sweeney remains out after that cortisone shot for his right knee and platelet rich injections for both knees. He's not available again; the procedure can cause soreness for a week or so, and he's coming up on a week tomorrow, so the hope is that he'll be back in action soon. The main idea, of course, is that he'll miss a few games now but the injections will keep him on the field the rest of the season by reducing the chronic soreness he has in both. As I mentioned the other day, the patella tendon in his right knee is the biggest problem, and it's unclear if he will need offseason surgery. There is no doubt he has very bad knees.

Dallas Braden just now finished up his side session, but Geren said he is not at all concerned about Braden's ability to make that Tuesday start. He's set to go barring some unexpected setback, but all signs so far have been excellent.

There's a plan at last for Brett Anderson's next rehab start; it will be Tuesday for Triple-A Sacramento at Colorado Springs.

Here's the lineup: Crisp cf, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Cust dh, Rosales 1b, Gross rf, Powell c, Davis lf, Pennington ss

A's streak reaches season-high five

Mazzaro works solid 7 2/3 innings to earn his fifth victory

By Samuel Zuba / MLB.com

KANSAS CITY -- It's safe to say the Athletics enjoyed their time in Kansas City.

Sunday's 9-6 victory over the Royals sealed a three-game sweep for the A's and stretched their winning streak to a season-high five games. The A's (46-46) also sit at .500 for the first time since June 15.

The victory came behind 7 2/3 innings of one-run ball from starting pitcher Vin Mazzaro, who walked only one and struck out five. Mazzaro picked up his fifth win of the season and lowered his ERA to 3.50 in nine starts this season.

"I just wanted to come out and dominate the zone," Mazzaro said. "[The Royals] are free hackers, so I was just trying to run that two-seamer on them and get some groundball early outs."

Mazzaro didn't do it alone, though, as his offense provided three home runs, including a decisive three-run bomb from designated hitter Jack Cust in the ninth.

Adam Rosales drilled a two-run homer in the fourth and Kevin Kouzmanoff followed with a solo shot in the fifth.

"It was a great series," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Obviously [Friday] night was a solid game, [Saturday] we came from behind and on [Sunday], we scored a lot of runs and hit some homers."

The Athletics' bullpen made things interesting in the ninth by sending four different pitchers to the mound, while giving up a combined five earned runs.

Finally, after the Royals had cut the once eight-run lead to three, Geren reluctantly made the call to closer Andrew Bailey, who threw one pitch to record the final out.

"Being that we had the one out fairly early, I just kept thinking that all we had to do was get a double play," Geren said. "They hit a few balls that, if they were at somebody, would have been a double play, but they just got through."

"You always feel comfortable knowing that you still have your closer, but it's one of those games where you'd like to not have to get him up."

Cust now has three homers in his last four games after struggling with his power in the first half. Even with his offensive production, Cust pointed to Mazzaro's solid effort.

"Vin's been great," Cust said. "He's got the stuff, it's just the confidence behind it and throwing the ball with that confidence. When you're facing pitchers that have confidence, even if they make mistakes, if they're throwing the ball with confidence, you can tell as a hitter."

Royals manager Ned Yost was at a loss for words as to what made Mazzaro so dominant against his Royals.

"I don't know. He threw strikes, I guess," Yost said. "I thought that early in the game that we should have a decent day against him, but at the end of the day, we didn't."

Mazzaro gave up his lone run of the game in the first inning after surrendering singles to Jason Kendall and Billy Butler. From then on, Mazzaro settled into a nice groove.

"I was doing a pretty good job just with my fastball, going in and out," the 23-year-old pitcher said. "It elevated a few times today, but from the slider I got a lot -- a few ground balls and a couple of strikeouts."

As the A's head back to Oakland, high off their sweep, Mazzaro said the team is taking the confidence they earned in Kansas City with them.

"Everyone's hitting and we're putting it all together," he said. "We're doing great, making great plays. We're on a good streak right now going to face Boston. Going in with a lot of confidence and playing good is the key."

A's gearing up for series with beat up Red Sox

By Spencer Fordin / MLB.com

The Red Sox are bruised and battered, but that doesn't mean the A's will be taking them lightly.

Boston staggers into Oakland with four regulars on the disabled list and a 3-8 record in its last 11 games, and it does so at the beginning of a stretch of 20 out of 28 games on the road. The Red Sox are always dangerous, though, and the A's -- winners of five straight games -- have the AL Central-leading White Sox visiting once Boston leaves.

"It's good going into these next series since we've been playing well," said Oakland manager Bob Geren. "They're a little banged up, but they still have a great team. Their second baseman [Dustin Pedroia] is out and both of their catchers are out."

Indeed, Boston is missing Pedroia, Victor Martinez and Jason Varitek, not to mention reserve third baseman Mike Lowell and outfielders Jeremy Hermida and Jacoby Ellsbury. The Red Sox also have starting pitchers Josh Beckett and Clay Buchholz on the mend, but the latter is expected to be back for the series finale.

Veteran starters Daisuke Matsuzaka and Ben Sheets are slated for Monday's opener, and Oakland will try to continue an attack reliant on small ball. Oakland has just 60 home runs, the fewest in the AL, and it needed a rare three-homer outburst in Sunday's win over Kansas City to vault past Houston, the only NL team with fewer.

Before Sunday's three-homer game, Oakland had been on pace for the third-fewest total (101) in franchise history. The A's have compensated by stealing at one of the best percentages (79.8) in baseball, and they're on pace to threaten their team record of 80.7 set in 2008. Oakland is 32-14 when it steals a base, and 14-32 when it doesn't.

Oakland is 7-12 when Sheets starts, but the right-hander has gone 2-1 with a 3.55 ERA in his last four starts. Prior to that recent stretch, he had gone eight straight starts without a victory. Sheets has completed at least six innings in 13 straight starts, and he's allowed three earned runs or fewer in nine of those outings.

Matsuzaka, meanwhile, is just trying to find some consistency. The 29-year-old started the season on the disabled list and then worked to a 5.77 ERA in May. He rebounded to a 2-1 record and a 2.81 ERA in May, but he's had mixed results in two July starts. Matsuzaka has allowed just two home runs in his last 11 outings.

Red Sox: Drew in swing of things

Outfielder J.D. Drew went hitless as a pinch-hitter in Sunday's game, but he's batting .294 (20-for-68) over his last 23 games. Drew has reached base safely in 20 of his last 26 starts and is one of just six players with at least 10 home runs in each of the last 12 seasons. The former first-round draftee has gone deep 11 times this season.

The Red Sox are playing with a catching tandem of Kevin Cash and Dusty Brown -- a duo that has combined for 13 career home runs -- until Varitek and Martinez return. Cash, a career .184 hitter, has 12 of those homers.

Athletics: Pennington red-hot at plate

Shortstop Cliff Pennington is riding a resounding hot streak, hitting .430 (37-for-86) over his last 27 games. Pennington has gone 66 games without a home run, though, and is one of just three A's in the last 21 years to register six triples. Pennington is also representative of his team in his success (14-for-16) in stealing bases.

And while Pennington supplies some heat from the bottom of the order, leadoff man Coco Crisp is struggling to find a hit. Crisp is hitting just .133 (6-for-46) over his last 12 games, but he's scored seven runs in that span.

Worth noting

Boston's bullpen has allowed 41 homers, most in the Majors. ...The Red Sox are just 22-20 on the road this season. Boston is playing through a stretch of 14 straight games against American League West opponents and will travel to Seattle and Anaheim next. ...Oakland has a 14-9 record in one-run games this season. ...Boston is 1-32 when trailing after eight innings. ...The Red Sox have hit 122 home runs this season, second only to the Blue Jays.

Rosales leads A's to 9-6 win

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Adam Rosales, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Jack Cust each went deep, and Vin Mazzaro pitched into the eighth inning to help the A's beat the Kansas City Royals, 9-6, on Sunday and finish a three-game sweep.

The A's have won five straight and 12 of 18 to even their record at 46-46, the first time they have been at .500 since June 15. The Royals have lost six straight, one shy of their longest losing streak this season.

Rosales, who had the winning hit with two-out in the ninth Saturday, homered in the fourth after Jack Cust walked. Rajai Davis doubled home Landon Powell with the third run of the inning.

Kouzmanoff, who had seven RBIs in the series, homered in the fifth. His sacrifice fly in the seventh scored Coco Crisp, who stole two bases in the inning. Cust then hit a three-run homer in the ninth off Victor Marte, making it 9-1.

Mazzaro (5-2) limited the Royals to seven hits — all singles — in a career-high 7 2-3 innings. He's worked at least seven innings in four of his past five starts after going 19 consecutive starts without pitching beyond six.

Mazzaro gave up a run in the first when Billy Butler's two-out single scored Jason Kendall, but nothing after that.

Royals right-hander Brian Bannister (7-8) lost for the first time in five day-game decisions this season. Bannister, who is 0-3 in four starts since a June 23 victory at Washington, tied a career high with six walks, hit a batter and gave up five runs in 6 1-3 innings.

Chris Getz and Scott Podsednik each drove in a pair of runs in Kansas City's five-run ninth off four Oakland relievers. Andrew Bailey was summoned for the final out to log his 20th save in 23 opportunities. Two runs were unearned after a Kouzmanoff error.

Notes: 2B Mike Aviles, who was in a 1-for-16 slide and had just one extra-base and one RBI in his past nine games, was held out of the Royals lineup. Getz replaced him in the lineup. ... The A's have hit 60 home runs, the lowest total in the American League. ...

Oakland swept a three-game series at Kauffman Stadium for the first time since Aug. 5-7, 2005. ... The Royals scored in only four of the 27 innings against the A's.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Cats earn four-game split with host Salt Lake

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

The Sacramento River Cats finished their road series against the Salt Lake Bees with a 5-3 loss, splitting the matchup. Salt Lake managed 14 hits and scored three runs in the fifth inning to take the win.

One highlight of the game was great relief pitching from both sides. Just one run was scored after the fifth. Edwar Ramirez of the Cats allowed only one hit through 1.2 innings. Fernando Hernandez threw 2.0 innings of one-hit baseball. Matt Palmer of Salt Lake collected the win after allowing no hits through 2.1 innings, adding three strikeouts to his season total.

Offensively, Eric Sogard was solid out of the leadoff spot, going 3-for-4 with a double, run scored, RBI and walk. Corey Wimberly also recorded two hits. Four Bees had multi-hit games, including a 4-for-5 game from Peter Bourjos.

Sacramento got a quick run up on the board thanks to a Sogard triple to lead off the game. Sogard's shot to center paved the way for a Michael Taylor RBI groundout, his 51st RBI of the season.

Salt Lake answered immediately in the bottom of the first. Bourjos and Luis Figueroa hit back-to-back singles to left field. Mark Trumbo's fly ball to right field advanced Bourjos to third before he was driven in by a Nate Sutton base knock.

The Salt Lake singles machine kept on rolling against Pacific Coast League All-Star Clayton Mortensen, stringing together three consecutive base hits from Nick Gorneault, Drew Meyer and Bourjos for another run in the second. By the end of the inning the Bees already had six hits in the game.

With one out in the third, Sacramento tied the game when Wimberly and Sogard combined for back-to-back doubles.

Sacramento had another scoring opportunity in the fifth, but could not create any runs with the bases loaded. Bees starting pitcher Daniel Cabrera walked Sogard, struck out pinch-hitter Josh Donaldson, and then walked Michael Taylor and Chris Carter. Reliever Matt Palmer took over for Cabrera and struck out Dallas McPherson to end the frame.

The Bees took the lead back in the fifth. The offense led off the inning with three consecutive hits -- a Luis Figueroa double, Maicer Izturis single to right, and Mark Trumbo RBI single. Nate Sutton hit into a Wimberly error at short, bringing another run home. Trumbo scored on a fielder's choice by Robb Quinlan.

The last run scored was the end of the line for Mortensen, who was replaced by Ramirez. He allowed an uncharacteristic 12 hits in his outing and only struck out two batters.

In the eighth, Sacramento narrowed the gap. Taylor led off with a single to right field. Reliever Bobby Mosebach threw a wild pitch and allowed Taylor to advance to second. On another single to right, Jeff Baisley batted Taylor in.

Sacramento is now 53-42 on the season. The Cats start a four-game road series against the Colorado Springs Sky Sox with a game Monday at 6:05 p.m. Following that series they play four against Tacoma, and then come back home to square off against Colorado Springs again.

Missions score 17 for 2nd straight day, top 'Hounds

By Oscar LeRoy, Midland Telegram Reporter

The San Antonio Missions are not the same team that arrived to Citibank Ballpark on Thursday.

The Missions were struggling with their offense and had scored a total of 13 runs in their previous eight games and had been outscored 47-24 in their last 10. But Citibank Ballpark has been like home away from home for these Missions as their offense has not only come back to life but has really ramped up several notches going against the Midland RockHounds pitchers over the last two night.

On Saturday the Missions again pounded the baseball and the RockHounds with 17 hits in a 17-7 victory in front of 5,180 fans on Saturday night. This comes after the Missions blasted the 'Hounds 17-4 the night before when they equaled a season-high 16 hits.

The last two nights only adds to the success the Missions have had at Citibank Ballpark this season. The Missions are now 9-2 against the RockHounds at Citibank and 2-1 this series. Also, in 11 games against the RockHounds the Missions have scored 78 runs, are hitting .304 and have hit 12 home runs. And consider this: San Antonio came into the game as the worst hitting team in the Texas League with a .239 average and are on pace to score the fewest runs (560) in a season since the 2002 team scored 533.

Brad Chalk led the way by going 4 for 4 with a double, three runs scored and three RBI. James Darnell was 3 for 4 with a home run, two doubles and five RBI. And Blake Tekotte continued his recent tear against the RockHounds by going 3 for 5 with a triple, two runs scored and four RBI.

Once again a RockHounds starter could not give his team a quality start as Carlos Hernandez (8-2) was knocked out of the game after 3 1/3 innings. He gave up 10 runs on nine hits, walked three and struck out three. Hernandez, who has been one of the team's most consistent starters this season, gave up single runs in the second and third innings before things came apart for him in the fourth, when the Missions scored eight runs for a commanding 10-1 lead. After retiring the leadoff hitter, the next eight batters reached against the 23-year-old lefthander. The big hits came from Brad Chalk, who hit a three-run double, and James Darnell, who connected for a two-run double.

While things looked bleak at that point for the RockHounds, there was a ray of hope in the bottom of the fourth when they answered San Antonio's onslaught with a six-spot of their own to pull to within 10-7 against Nathan Culp, who left the game without retiring a batter in the frame. The first six RockHounds to the plate reached, including Matt Sulentic (3 for 5), who had a two-run double, and Petey Paramore (3 for 5), who blasted a two-run homer to left field.

But any hope of a comeback was dashed quickly in the top of the fifth when the Missions added five runs against Midland reliever Mickey Storey. Logan Forsythe had a two-run double and then Darnell added a three-run home run to left field to give the Missions a commanding 15-7 lead.

It also didn't help the RockHounds' cause that the Missions bullpen of Alexis Lara (2-3), Brandon Gomes, Colt Hynes and Evan Scribner combined to shut down the Midland offense. The five hurlers combined to allow seven of the 17 hits the RockHounds had in this game. The RockHounds also left 11 runners stranded after leaving 16 on base the night before.

The Missions will look to win the series at 6 p.m. today, while the RockHounds are not only hoping for a series split but to slow down this resurgent San Antonio offense.

ROCKHOUNDS NOTEBOOK

'HOUND BITES: RockHounds 2B Adrian Cardenas made a great play to get Blake Tekotte out in the first inning. Tekotte got a drag bunt down and the ball rolls to Cardenas, who could only scoop the ball with his glove from the ground to first baseman Shane Peterson to get the out. ...RockHounds hitting coach Webster Garrison got ejected by home plate umpire Seth Buckminster in the sixth inning for arguing balls and strikes from the dugout. ...Backup catcher Gabriel Ortiz made his second relief appearance in as many nights. Ortiz made his Double-A pitching debut on Friday night and went 2/3 of an inning and allowed one hit and had a strikeout. Ortiz pitched the ninth on Saturday, walked two and did not allow a run. His ERA remains at 0.00 in 1 2/3 innings of work this season. ...The Missions (44-47) have pulled within one game of the RockHounds (45-46) in the overall record and the wild card if necessary.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: The RockHounds are likely to send LHP Carlos Hernandez (8-1, 3.89 ERA), while San Antonio is expected to start RHP Simon Castro (5-2 2.74). First pitch is scheduled for 6 p.m. at Citibank Ballpark.

Late Quakes Rally Upends Ports, 5-2

Stockton snaps winning streak at five games

STOCKTON, Calif. – The Rancho Cucamonga Quakes (53-41) scored four runs in the eighth inning off of reliever Paul Smyth to take Game 2 from the Stockton Ports (44-50), by a final of 5-2.

Stockton starter Shawn Haviland tied a season-high by striking out 10 batters in a season-high 7.0 innings. Smyth picked up the blown save and the loss for Stockton. Jose Perez collected the win for Rancho Cucamonga and Eddie McKiernan collected the save.

The Ports took a 1-0 lead in the first inning. Jermaine Mitchell singled to start things off for the Ports. He moved to second as shortstop Grant Green grounded out. Mitchell later stole third while third baseman Stephen Parker was batting. Parker flew out to bring up first baseman Mike Spina. While Spina was batting, Rancho Cucamonga starter Orangel Arenas threw a wild pitch, which allowed Mitchell to score from third.

The Ports added their second and final run in the bottom of the second. Catcher Yusuf Carter slammed a home run over the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch in right field to start the inning. It was his sixth home run in seven games. From there, the Ports managed to put just five runners on base, but two of the runners were caught stealing, while one was picked off.

Quakes center fielder Mike Trout put his club on the board with a solo home run to left field in the third inning. It was his first home run for Rancho Cucamonga. Haviland kept the Quakes on a tight leash, as he allowed just four hits in his outing.

In the eighth inning, lefty Trey Barham took the mound for Stockton, and struck out left fielder Rian Kiniry, to earn his 11th hold on the year. Ports manager then called on Smyth to relieve Barham. Smyth walked Trout, and then gave up a single to catcher Alberto Rosario. Green made a great catch as Luis Jimenez popped out to short for the second out of the inning. First baseman Gabe Jacobo then stepped up to the plate with runners on the corners. During Jacobo's at-bat, Rosario stole second base. Jacobo then struck out swinging, but the pitch from Smyth was wild, and Carter couldn't catch it. Trout came around to score on the play, and Rosario took third, and Jacobo was safe on first, as the game was tied.

Smyth then hit Clay Fuller with a pitch to load the bases with two out. Right fielder Angel Castillo singled to bring home Rosario. Second baseman Kevin Ramos added to the rally with a two-RBI single up the hole at shortstop to make it 5-2. Shortstop Jesus Campos hit a bunt single to keep the bases loaded with two out. Smyth got Kiniry to fly out to end the inning.

Scott Hodsdon tossed a scoreless ninth inning to keep the Quakes at five runs. The Ports went down in order in the eighth and ninth frames, to end the game at 5-2.

The series finale will be at 7:05 PM PST at Banner Island Ballpark. LHP Ben Hornbeck (2-2, 4.74) will take the hill for Stockton, while LHP Patrick Corbin (5-2, 2.66) will start for Rancho Cucamonga. Fans can follow the game live on KWSX 1280 AM.

Cougars Win, Now 7-1 on Homestand

Kane County keeps rolling in July, improving to 13-4 for the month

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars held off the West Michigan Whitecaps, 4-3, Sunday afternoon at Elfstrom Stadium to move their season-high winning streak to six games. They are 7-1 with one game left on a nine-game homestand and 13-4 both in July and against the Eastern Division.

The Whitecaps got one run in the first inning off Ian Krol, putting the Cougars behind in a game for the first time during the win streak. Chris Affinito doubled home Leonardo Gil in the fifth to make it 1-1 against Trevor Feeney (7-10), and Affinito later scored during a double play for a 2-1 game. Krol pitched five innings of one-run ball and gave up one hit, walked none and fanned four. The Cougars' two-run fifth put him in line for a win, but the Whitecaps tied the game in the sixth against Bo Schultz.

In a 2-2 tie, Gil led off the seventh with a homer to center, his ninth of the season and second in as many games. Then Myrio Richard scored on a balk in the eighth against Matt Little to give the Cougars a 4-2 cushion. Schultz (4-1) left after the seventh and got the win, Ryan Doolittle allowed a homer in the ninth for his first earned run of the season and A.J. Huttenlocker recorded the final two outs for his first save.

The Cougars (15-8, 47-45) and Whitecaps (7-16, 33-59) wrap up the series Monday afternoon at 12 CT. Murphy Smith (4-0, 5.48) will take on Jared Wesson (2-0, 2.15). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 11:45 a.m.