

A's News Clips, Wednesday, July 21, 2010

Kevin Kouzmanoff comes through for Oakland A's in 10th

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Kevin Kouzmanoff was the 10th-inning hero Tuesday night, but there was lots of late-inning entertainment leading up to the A's clinching a 5-4 victory over the Boston Red Sox.

Rajai Davis made a nice sliding catch for Oakland in left field to end the top of the ninth. Cliff Pennington and Mark Ellis teamed up for one of the A's prettiest double plays of the season in the top of the 10th.

And thanks to some extracurricular theatrics — including home plate umpire Bob Davidson ejecting two people — a crowd of 20,271 was plenty riled up in the bottom of the 10th when Kouzmanoff lined a game-winning single to right field to score Daric Barton and help the A's even up a three-game series.

The bottom of the 10th began with Davidson ejecting leadoff hitter Coco Crisp after a strikeout. Crisp got in Davidson's ear after getting thumbed and had to be restrained by A's manager Bob Geren. Crisp continued barking at Davidson and gesturing as he walked toward the clubhouse.

After Barton singled, Davidson — nicknamed "Balkin' Bob" — called Boston reliever Ramon Ramirez for a balk that moved Barton to second base with one out.

Davidson then emphatically tossed Red Sox pitching coach John Farrell for arguing from the dugout on an Adam Rosales check-swing that was ruled a ball on appeal.

Rosales, pinch-hitting for Jack Cust, struck out. But Kouzmanoff lined the first pitch from Red Sox reliever Michael Bowden into right

for the game-winner.

The A's scored four runs in the third to tie the game 4-4 before their offense went silent. But they got terrific relief work from five relievers, who held the Red Sox scoreless over the final 5 1/3 innings.

That effort included Michael Wuertz entering a one-out situation and stranding the bases loaded in the top of the sixth.

"When you use your entire bullpen like we did today, it's really necessary to win," Geren said. "It's much tougher if you don't win."

The defensive highlight came in the top of the 10th. Pennington picked a sharp grounder up the middle by Bill Hall and flipped to second, where Ellis barehanded the toss and threw to first to complete a double play.

"That was one of the best plays of the year," Geren said.

A's starter Dallas Braden, coming off the disabled list to make his first start since June 22, allowed four runs on 10 hits in 4 2/3 innings and got a no-decision.

That runs his streak of winless starts to nine since throwing his perfect game on May 9, establishing a new major league record for consecutive starts without a win following a perfect game.

Braden previously was tied with the Chicago White Sox's Mark Buehrle, whose dry spell came after his perfecto last season.

Afterward, Braden said his left elbow felt fine. Braden was on roughly a 90-pitch limit and said he wanted the chance to finish out the fifth. He left at 94 pitches, with two runners on and two outs.

The A's trailed 4-0 but tied the game in the third.

Crisp doubled with one out, and then Tim Wakefield walked Barton and hit Kurt Suzuki to load the bases.

Cust worked a full count and then pulled a two-run double to right. Boston catcher Kevin Cash let a Wakefield knuckler squirt off his glove for a passed ball that scored Suzuki to make it 4-3, and Kouzmanoff's sacrifice fly evened things.

today's game
Boston (Clay Buchholz 10-4) at A's (Gio Gonzalez 8-6), 12:35 p.m. CSNCA

A's update: Henry Rodriguez hopes to stay, have better command

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Henry Rodriguez is quite familiar with the home clubhouse at the Oakland Coliseum.

He's just never had the chance to settle into it.

The hard-throwing reliever was called up Monday for his fourth stint with the A's this season and fifth of his career, but he's never enjoyed an extended stay in the big leagues.

If Rodriguez has any success this time around, perhaps he'll stick around a while.

The A's bullpen, which has been shaky at times this season, isn't stocked with high-velocity relievers. Rodriguez brings a fastball that has cracked 100 mph.

"Anybody with that velocity, (who is) in the strike zone at this level is real special," pitching coach Curt Young said. "It's a matter of him coming up here and doing it. We're going to try to give him as many opportunities as possible."

Rodriguez, 23, has a 3.86 ERA (four earned runs in 91/3 innings) in four appearances with Oakland this season. The longest of his three stints in the majors was 10 days from May 5-14.

Control problems have been Rodriguez's main roadblock, but his numbers with Triple-A Sacramento this season are impressive — a 1.69 ERA with 31 strikeouts and nine walks in 20 appearances (211/3 innings).

"I'm feeling good and working hard every day," Rodriguez said. "I'm just waiting for my opportunity."

Young said Rodriguez has shown better command with his slider in Sacramento (he also throws a changeup). But A's manager Bob Geren said fastball command holds the key.

"When you throw as hard as he does, command of the fastball is going to be the primary thing," Geren said.

The A's optioned reliever Cedrick Bowers to Sacramento to make room for Dallas Braden, who was activated from the disabled list and started Tuesday against Boston.

Brett Anderson (left elbow inflammation) gave up four runs and five hits in the first inning of his rehab start with Sacramento against Colorado Springs but recovered to throw four consecutive shutout innings. He left after throwing 83 pitches in five innings, allowing nine hits with two strikeouts.

The A's haven't indicated for certain whether Anderson will require another rehab outing before he comes off the DL.

Interestingly, the Colorado Springs pitcher who opposed him was Greg Smith, who, along with Anderson, was part of the six-player package the A's received from Arizona in the Dan Haren trade before the 2008 season.

Smith was shipped to the Rockies as part of the Matt Holliday deal of November 2008.

Tim Kawakami: Oakland A's revolving door spins with no end in sight

By Tim Kawakami, San Jose Mercury News

The A's best players come and go, and usually get injured along the way. The fans mostly stay away.

The present is always in flux. The future is undetermined. The roster is a work in progress, stuck in chaos, mixed with complete, dumbfounding uncertainty.

If I can remember correctly: This team was supposedly building toward a new stadium in 2011 in Fremont, then it was 2012, and now it's maybe 2014 or later in San Jose or some other galaxy in some other far away millennium.

Simple as that. Right, Billy Beane?

"I've lost track," the A's general manager said wearily before Tuesday's game against Boston.

You think you're thrown off by the constant churn surrounding this franchise?

Beane will win no book deals, Nobel Prizes or executive-of-the-year nods for his series of sideways moves in the past four years.

But he has had to do all this while dealing with and anticipating the Churn — trying to keep the A's ahead of the salary curve in two- or three-year intervals.

As one of baseball's lowest earners because they play at the Oakland Coliseum, the A's almost never can afford to pay good players once they reach free agency or the later stages of arbitration.

That leads to trading away players before they must be paid the market rate and then doing it again and again, and that means inevitably messing up on some of those trades.

"If we're playing in this stadium in five years, a lot of these players won't be here," Beane said. "Fact. Shouldn't surprise anybody. There's no other way to operate here without doing that."

That's the Churn, and it has neither led to baseball greatness nor large home crowds in the past four seasons, of course.

So, unless and until the A's receive commissioner's clearance to plan a move to San Jose, or they find something in the East Bay that guarantees them higher revenues, they will always be subject to the Churn.

The players have gotten less and less recognizable over the years — from Jason Giambi and Miguel Tejada to Eric Chavez and Bobby Crosby to Kurt Suzuki and Cliff Pennington.

And the cycle is not ending any time soon.

The A's have built the foundation of a good young pitching staff, featuring Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Andrew Bailey. But in a few years, they'll all either be paid or traded or both.

Suzuki will be eligible for arbitration after this season. There are always bills to be paid. Which means the A's will be trading and changing and churning for the foreseeable future.

How exciting.

"It's gone on for a while now," Beane said. "And it has not made things easy, from a fan standpoint or even from a public relations standpoint ..."

"You're not going to make anybody happy. Right now, nobody's happy. And that's why some direction one way or the other is going to help everyone. Not just the people who follow the team, but the people who run the team."

Beane has always been the first one to leap into a rebuilding project before anyone else expected one. And at other times, he has been the first one to decide his roster was good enough to make a run for it for a few seasons.

But the A's started their last major redo in 2006, and four seasons later, it's still not close to complete.

They're caught in neutral, against Beane's will or better judgment. So where does he see this team headed?

"We do need some position players that fill that other side of the diamond for us," Beane said, after pointing out that Suzuki, shortstop Pennington and possibly first baseman Daric Barton are stable spots.

"But the pitching staff I feel great about not only now but long term as well.

"Are we rebuilding? No, but I think we're building right now, and I think we're heading in a good direction."

Maybe. But it's also entirely possible that once the A's get to where they're headed, wherever it is, they'll have to turn around and start all over again.

That's the odd part of this situation: The stadium remains the same, but the team never ever does.

Chin Music: Postgame notes from A's 5-4 win over Red Sox

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/21/2010 12:05AM

Tonight's 5-4 A's victory in 10 innings included lots of compelling stuff and not enough room to write about it in the newspaper, so here's some follow-up from the postgame scene afterward.

—Kevin Kouzmanoff delivered the game-winning single off Michael Bowden in the 10th, but the top of the 10th featured one of the A's best defensive plays of the year. Cliff Pennington made a great stop of Bill Hall's sharp grounder up the middle and flipped to second, where Mark Ellis made a bare-hand grab, wheeled and threw to first to complete a 6-4-3 double play.

Off the top of my head, Gabe Gross' over-the-wall catch in Detroit is the only play by an A's player I can think of in 2010 that's been better.

"That was one of the best plays of the year," manager Bob Geren said. "You can look at all the different things that win or lose a game. People are going to look at Kouz's hit, but that double play could have saved it."

Said Ellis: "First, Penny made a great play to even get that ball. I just got it and threw to first. He hit that ball so hard, I knew we had time. And we won, too, so that made it better."

—Dallas Braden gave up 10 hits and four runs (one earned) in 4 2/3 innings, his first start since coming off the disabled list. He said afterward his elbow felt good, and that he felt his fastball had more zip on it in the fifth inning than in the first. Braden wanted the chance to finish the fifth, but he was on a 90-pitch limit, and he was at 94 when Geren lifted him. "Yeah, I would have (liked a chance to finish the inning), but it was a tight game at that point."

—Nobody came up more clutch for the A's than reliever Michael Wuertz, who relieved Ross Wolf in a bases-loaded, one-out situation in the sixth and didn't let a run score.

The A's didn't gain ground on Texas, but it was a big win in that a loss would have dropped them to 9 games out. Talk about a potential swing game in regards to momentum. After falling behind 4-0 and getting held to three hits for most of the game, the A's pulled one out and have a chance to win the series tomorrow afternoon.

That's all for now ...

Chin Music: Reliever Cedrick Bowers demoted to make room for Dallas Braden

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/20/2010 5:34PM

The sun's out but the breeze is blowing pretty strong right now, so it's shaping up to be a chilly night at the Coliseum for Game 2 of A's-Red Sox ...

—Reliever Cedrick Bowers was sent to Triple-A Sacramento to clear a roster spot for Dallas Braden, who comes off the DL to start tonight. It wasn't too surprising to see Bowers sent down since he'd only had five appearances over the A's past 21 games. ... Speaking of the A's bullpen, I'll be interested to see if Henry Rodriguez gets an extended chance w/the big club after being called up yesterday. I think a power arm is a welcome addition to this relief corps ... if manager Bob Geren has confidence in turning to Rodriguez.

—Kevin Kouzmanoff is back at third base tonight and said his lower back is feeling better.

Not much else to report ... It's obviously a big outing for Braden. All indications are his elbow is feeling good, but you always wonder how a guy will bounce back from any injury to his throwing arm. As for another starter on the mend, Brett Anderson makes a Triple-A rehab start tonight against Colorado Springs, first pitch at 6:05 p.m. (West Coast). I'll try to throw an update on Twitter later on. If you're part of the Twitter world, hit me up at "joestiglich." The more, the merrier ...

Tonight's lineups:

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

Red Sox — Scutaro SS, McDonald LF, Ortiz DH, Youkilis 1B, Beltre 3B, Drew RF, Cameron CF, Hall 2B, Cash C; Wakefield RHP.

A's moving to San Jose? 'Not so fast,' says Oakland

By Bruce Newman, San Jose Mercury News

Jorge Leon has been coming to A's games for nearly two decades, through good years and bad. The team has suffered through many lean seasons since its last World Series championship in 1989, but for this hardscrabble city — which has suffered by comparison to nearby municipal rivals San Francisco and Berkeley — the A's were often a source of pride. In the midst of riots, looting and police layoffs — to name just events of the past few weeks — Leon could count on his team.

But even as the likelihood of Oakland's beloved ballclub bolting for Silicon Valley increased the past two years, many passionate fans have grown more determined than ever to keep the team here. In a state-of-the-art stadium next to Lake Merritt, not near a San Jose rail yard.

"I love my A's," Leon said, Monday before a game with the Boston Red Sox. "But they're not loving me back."

The A's have the third-worst attendance in baseball this season, up from dead last a year ago, but among loyalists like Leon, it is an article of faith — mostly bad faith — that since Lew Wolff took control of the franchise in 2005, he purposely drove it into the ground, hoping to move the club to the South Bay.

Leon is a confirmed bleacher bum, sitting in the rightfield stands where he can make himself heard to the players during the game. He's so passionate about the team that he had "Oakland A's" tattooed on his forearm a few years ago. Leon became so dismayed with Wolff's threats to abandon Oakland, he hung a sign — "Wolff lied. He never tried." — on the outfield stands during a game earlier this year against the New York Yankees. It didn't take long for security to arrive and order him to take the sign down.

"As soon as I did, everybody in the section started yelling, 'Wolff sucks!'" he recalled, as he prepared to unfurl the sign again. "Then suddenly the whole bleachers section was screaming that. So they kicked me out."

This affront did not go unnoticed at City Hall, where Wolff's determination to bolt, first for Fremont and now San Jose, has angered many. City attorney John Russo issued a directive ordering the Oakland Police Department not to assist in ejecting A's fans from the ballpark for putting up anti-ownership signs.

"Obviously, excitable fans are going to say I didn't really try," Wolff said Tuesday. "But we believe we tried very hard."

Waiting for MLB

Wolff insists he spent two years attempting to work with Oakland officials to build a new baseball-only ballpark. In 2005, he held a news conference to outline his plans in Oakland, but according to Wolff's critics, Oakland's inability to package that deal became his excuse for leaving.

Now, as the proposed move to San Jose has run into difficulties of its own, Wolff's impatience with Major League Baseball's process may provide another opening for Oakland. "Baseball appointed a committee 16 months ago to check out if there are opportunities we missed in Oakland or Fremont," he said. "I'm still waiting for the results."

The committee appointed by Commissioner Bud Selig will recommend whether the A's should move to San Jose or stay in Oakland.

As for specific proposals from the city of Oakland, Wolff added, "I have not heard word one of any detailed plan. I was asked to sit back and let them do their work. Well, 16 months later I haven't seen any results. Maybe Oakland has and they're not telling me. I don't know why they're hiding it."

Nothing Wolff says impresses Mo Detrick of Hayward, notwithstanding her mixed loyalties. She showed up at Monday's game in Red Sox jersey and cap, but when the Bosox aren't around, she's devoted to the A's. She thinks Wolff should try harder.

"He needs to try to identify the problem and fix it," Detrick said of Wolff. "Don't just leave. You look around, people here aren't just wearing this year's A's' jersey, they're wearing jerseys from 15 years ago. If he goes, he's going to leave a lot of people hurt and angry."

Let's Go Oakland, a group made up of community and corporate leaders dedicated to keeping the team from leaving, didn't get going very quickly, allowing Wolff to "hammer" the city's supposed lack of support for baseball. But according to Douglas

Boxer, the group's president, 35 local companies recently pledged more than \$500,000 toward luxury suites in a new waterfront stadium to be built on Oakland's Embarcadero.

Aura of inevitability

Boxer believes baseball's blue ribbon committee is taking so long because of the recent turnaround in Oakland's prospects. "I think that Selig expected his committee's work would be wrapped up very quickly," Boxer said, "and that it would find there were no viable sites in Oakland, there was no political will to keep the A's in Oakland, and there was no corporate support."

City Council President Jane Brunner insisted the city had demonstrated the opposite is true, proposing four sites for a baseball-only stadium in an urban village setting. "It would be a devastating blow to the city — economically and personally" if the team left town, Brunner said. "I raised my son going to A's games. While we sat and watched the game, that was the place I would hear all about his life."

City officials released a report in April that estimated the benefit to Oakland if it keeps the A's in a new stadium at \$2.6 billion in total economic activity over the next 30 years.

Wolff's public dalliance with San Jose public officials had imbued the franchise's proposed move to the South Bay with an aura of inevitability. But now Oakland civic groups and die-hard fans have stepped up their efforts to keep the franchise in town, and the timing of a vote by the San Jose City Council that would ask voters to bless a new ballpark is now in doubt. To make the November ballot, the council must act by Aug. 3.

John Corwin, of Mountain View, who was enjoying a solitary platter of nachos before Monday's game, has been driving to Oakland from the South Bay since 1987. He would like to see Wolff move the team to San Jose, and hurry up about it already. "It's still in the Bay Area," he said, "so I wouldn't have any problem with that."

After covering the Coliseum's upper deck with a massive green tarpaulin in 2006 — entombing 10,000 seats under to give the Coliseum what one team official called a "more intimate feeling" — the A's were left with the smallest seating capacity in the major leagues. Since the tarp went up, attendance has steadily gone down.

It didn't improve the mood in the stands when Wolff sent fans an ominous message in 2008. A section of the tarp was removed, altering a sign that declared the stadium HOME OF THE OAKLAND ATHLETICS. "He actually took Oakland out of the name," said Garth Kimball, organizer of BaseballOakland.

Now fans can sit where "Oakland" used to be. But no one knows for sure how long that will last.

Big hits, flashy D lead to A's win in 10

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Unusual things happen when Dallas Braden is on the mound, and anytime a knuckleballer such as Boston's Tim Wakefield is starting, things can go haywire.

The combination led to one of the A's more intriguing victories of the season Tuesday night at the Coliseum. Braden, still searching for his first victory since his May 9 perfect game, came off the disabled list and went 4 2/3 innings and 94 pitches, just about his limit. Braden has made nine starts without a win since his perfect game, the longest such streak in big-league history.

So no W for him, but closer Andrew Bailey got one instead when Kevin Kouzmanoff singled home Daric Barton with two outs in the 10th inning to give the A's a 5-4 win over the Red Sox.

Barton walked and was balked to second, and Kurt Suzuki walked. Kouzmanoff's single to right came off Michael Bowden, just into the game and Boston's seventh pitcher.

The A's exhibited some tremendous defense: Rajai Davis made a sliding grab on a flyball by Adrian Beltre along the left-field line to end the ninth, and Cliff Pennington and Mark Ellis turned a wonderful double play in the 10th.

Pennington went up the middle for a bouncer by Bill Hall, and he flipped sideways to Ellis at second; Ellis made a barehanded catch as he stepped on the bag. He wheeled and threw to first in the same motion.

"He flipped it perfect, but it was on my barehand side - I ran out of arms," Ellis said. "Two very unflashy players make a play like that, especially at an important time, that was fun."

"That was one of the best plays of the year, and at one of the biggest times, to get two in that situation," said A's manager Bob Geren, whose team is back at .500. "When people look at things, everyone will remember Kevin's hit, but that double play was big."

Braden allowed one run in the first, with David Ortiz getting thrown out at the plate to prevent another, and then Braden gave up three in the second - all unearned thanks to a throwing error by Suzuki when Barton and Ellis both fell down while covering first.

In the third, the A's tied the game with a knuckleball-fueled rally that featured a walk, a hit batter and a passed ball, along with Jack Cust's two-run double on a 3-2 pitch.

From there, things remained knotted until Kouzmanoff's hit, despite two bases-loaded threats by Boston: Ross Wolf got Hall to ground out to end the fifth, and in the sixth, Michael Wuertz struck out Kevin Youkilis, then got Beltre to hit into a force.

"A gutsy performance," Geren said of his bullpen.

Braden had made only two starts since June 9 because of elbow tendinitis, and in those two appearances, he was limited in his ability to throw breaking balls. On Tuesday, he got Youkilis with a backdoor slider in the fifth and he also threw several other good ones.

"We won, and my elbow is not out on the mound, it's still on my arm," said Braden, who allowed 10 hits and a walk and struck out six. "All signs positive."

Not much worry about Crisp's slump

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Coco Crisp entered Tuesday night in an 0-for-17 slump, but hitting coach **Jim Skaalen** was not remotely concerned.

"He's been hitting in a lot of bad luck," Skaalen said while standing behind Crisp, watching him spray line drives during batting practice. "He might be trying to do too much, but his swing is fine."

Crisp extended his hitless streak to 18 at-bats with a groundout in the first and then he doubled and stole third to start Oakland's four-run, game-tying rally in the third.

He then was ejected by home-plate umpire **Bob Davidson** in the 10th after he struck out and was leaving the batter's box. Crisp turned back around and had an animated discussion with Davidson until manager **Bob Geren** moved him away.

Boston pitching coach **John Farrell** was thrown out later in the inning when **Adam Rosales** was ruled not to have gone around on a check swing with a 2-2 count.

Deadline doings: Though there were rumblings that the Phillies were nearing a deal for a starter, they don't appear to have major interest in **Ben Sheets**, despite scouting his past several starts.

The Yankees are among those scouting this series, and **Andy Pettitte** went on the disabled list Tuesday. He is expected to be out until late August.

Briefly: Brett Anderson (elbow tendinitis) went five innings for Triple-A Sacramento, and he allowed nine hits and four runs, walked one and struck out two. It's possible he'll make one more rehab start before rejoining the rotation. ... Oakland optioned left-hander **Cedrick Bowers** to Sacramento. In his second stint with the A's this year, Bowers had a 4.50 ERA in 12 outings. He appeared only five times in the past 21 games, but Bowers wouldn't make excuses, saying, "In the big leagues, you have to learn how to overcome situations," he said. ... **Gabe Gross** is in an 0-for-16 skid.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Good day: Today's starter for the A's, Gio Gonzalez, hasn't allowed more than a run in four of his past five starts, and he has a 2.05 ERA in that stretch. He's 4-0 with a 1.30 ERA during the day, the lowest daytime ERA in the majors.

Drumbeat: Quick, late pre-game update from the Coliseum

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Oakland 7/20/2010 6:52PM

Sorry for the lateness; I was on "Chronicle Live" and then grabbed some dinner, so well, there's not a lot happening anyway, at least not until Dallas Braden starts pitching. From an A's standpoint, that's the story of the evening. Is he healthy, and can he win, post-perfect game?

Ryan Sweeney's knee surgery hasn't been scheduled yet and he still has no idea if his left knee also will be getting any procedure. No rehab games yet for Conor Jackson. Brett Anderson is starting for Sacramento tonight. There are no plans to bring up Michael Taylor. No plans to trade Ben Sheets.

So really, not much new at all except that Kevin Kouzmanoff is back in the lineup. And Braden is pitching.

Would anyone else like to see what Matt Watson might be able to do given several starts in a row? He was so hot when he came up from Sacramento, but he's barely even looked at the field since then - doubtful he's still on fire, but when I saw him in Sacramento about six weeks ago, he was hitting everything in sight. Why not give him a little bit of a shot?

It's a little selfish on my part: I'd love to write more about Watson and his crazy past few years - Japan, independent baseball - but it's tough to write a feature on someone who doesn't play ever.

The lineup: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Suzuki c, Cust dh, Kouzmanoff 3b, Ellis 2b, Gross rf, Davis lf, Pennington ss

Oh, and not very surprisingly, Cedric Bowers was sent out to make room for Braden. Bowers wasn't so good at Kansas City over the weekend, but then again, he pitches once every eight days. He didn't want to use that as an excuse today as he was heading out, saying he needs to perform well whatever his role and no matter the circumstances, but no pitcher can be fresh without some regular work. No excuses, though - I like those guys who have every reason to say it was this, it was that and who say, "No, I need to get the job done, period."

DHs a mediocre bunch, so what's the point?

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle

The designated hitter is an old man's tool in a young man's workshop. It's covered with rust and barely works at all. If people would just stop to examine the product, instead of the idea, they might realize that modern-day baseball is at its finest when everyone wears a glove.

There was a time when the DH was a haven for aging, beloved stars — Reggie Jackson, Paul Molitor, Dave Winfield, Carl Yastrzemski, George Brett — and even the hard-line traditionalists appreciated seeing such players extend their careers. But today's game is about youth, not only in terms of talent (more good young ballplayers than the game has seen in years), but in philosophy.

It simply makes more sense for teams to save money, nurture young talent and build for the future, instead of offering exorbitant contracts to players on their way out. Payrolls down, profits up; simple business sense.

The proof glows like a searchlight on the field. In a recent [SI.com](#) column, Tom Verducci noted that the American League's overall OPS (on-base plus slugging percentage) from the DH slot was actually below the league average. "Think about that for a minute," he wrote. "The league gets to use an extra hitter who doesn't have to play defense, and it fills the spot with below-average hitting."

There's no need for this column to recite often-repeated complaints about the DH.

Just check out the actual product:

Worthless

Tampa Bay: Willy Aybar (.248, five homers) is strictly an afterthought on one of the best teams in the game.

Toronto: Nobody's paying to see Adam Lind and his .215 average.

Chicago: Fun, exciting team actually brought down by this position: Mark Kotsay (.227) or Andruw Jones (.210) on most days.

Baltimore: Luke Scott, Lou Montañez, Corey Patterson ... what's the point?

Barely tolerable

A's : The A's feel so good about Jack Cust, they designated him for assignment at the beginning of a year. Only a team devoid of power appreciates the novelty.

Cleveland: Travis Hafner, once a vintage hacker, is strictly old news.

Seattle: Milton Bradley.

They figure he's less likely to lose emotional control when removed from the outfield, and that's sad.

Yankees: Since Nick Johnson found his comfort zone — the disabled list — it has been shared by Jorge Posada (fading as a catcher) and Juan Miranda (.204).

Passable

Kansas City: Jose Guillen is a dangerous man (15 homers), but he sours the clubhouse and makes no difference at the gate.

Minnesota: Jason Kubel and potential Hall of Famer Jim Thome are good hitters but have nothing to do with the team's essence.

Boston: David Ortiz had a big sign on his back — Old and In the Way — after the season's first month. The Boston papers had him traded or released. He has bounced back nicely (18 homers), but Boston's future is all about youth.

Detroit: Good show, but with asterisks: Johnny Damon, because of his piethrowing arm, and Brennan Boesch (the left-handed hitter from Cal who's batting .325), because a 25-year-old outfielder shouldn't be anywhere near the DH slot.

The classic mold

Texas: Vladimir Guerrero is a legend in the game, and every at-bat he takes is a treasure.

Los Angeles: A man of great dignity, and a Hall of Famer if you could combine Japan and America, Hideki Matsui still drills those majestic shots into the right-field seats.

By my count, then, the "pay to see" factor is two out of the league's 14 teams, a whopping 14.3 percent. When Guerrero and Matsui retire, it drops to zero. Time to join the 21st century, everyone. Let me introduce you to Buster Posey.

Kouzmanoff leads A's to walk-off win in 10th

Key double play, solid bullpen set up dramatic victory

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A handful of words could be used to describe Tuesday's extra-inning affair between the A's and Red Sox.

Picturesque probably wouldn't be one of them. Neither would predictable.

Wacky. Weird. That's more like it.

But the A's say, "Whatever." Because in the end, after a bizarre series of events, all that mattered was they came out winners of a 5-4 game for their sixth victory in last seven games.

And, after three hours and 30 minutes, it took a total of 10 innings, 13 pitchers, 19 stranded runners, 19 strikeouts, 10 walks, four hit batters and two ejections to get there.

In the abbreviated version of the seemingly never-ending game, Kevin Kouzmanoff will easily be remembered as the hero after a walk-off RBI single in the bottom of the 10th inning. But, in the lengthier tale, manager Bob Geren will be heard making his case for not just one, but three, of his players to be deemed saviors.

Along with Kouzmanoff, Cliff Pennington and Mark Ellis came up with a game-changing scene of their own thanks to a 10th-inning double play that essentially cleared any type of threat the Red Sox planned to pose against A's closer Andrew Bailey, who walked Mike Cameron to lead off the frame in a 4-4 game. With Eric Patterson in to run for Cameron, Bill Hall hit a sharp ground ball that found its way from Pennington's glove to Ellis' bare hand to Daric Barton's mitt at first base.

"Penny made a great play to even get that ball," Ellis said. "It's a tough play, a tough hop. He flipped it up near the area of my barehand side, and my arm was long enough to grab it, so I threw it to first. He had turned it so fast that I knew we had time to turn the double play. It was fun."

"That was one of the best plays of the year, and not only one of the best plays, but at one of the biggest times in the game," Geren said. "To get one out there would have been nice, but to get two like that right there was huge. Everyone will remember Kouz's hit because it technically won the game. But that double play saved it."

Said play was followed by a hit to Dusty Brown, but Bailey got Marco Scutaro to fly out to right field to end the frame and set up the 10th-inning dramatics. Before Kouzmanoff was brought to the plate, though, Coco Crisp received his fair share of attention by sharing a few choice words with home-plate umpire Bob Davidson after a swinging strikeout that led to his first ejection of the season.

Crisp's removal only proved to fire up a hungry A's team, which entered the frame having recorded just four hits. Thus, Barton tagged Red Sox reliever Ramon Ramirez, who was then charged with a balk. After the Boston righty intentionally walked Kurt Suzuki, Dustin Richardson came in and got pinch-hitter Adam Rosales on strikes, at which point Michael Bowden was called on to face Kouzmanoff.

The Oakland third baseman's hit solidified Bailey's first win of the season. More than anything, though, it rewarded the entire A's bullpen, which witnessed Ross Wolf, Michael Wuertz, Jerry Blevins, Craig Breslow and Bailey combine for 5 1/3 shutout innings.

"When you use your entire bullpen the way we did today," Geren said, "it's really necessary to win. If you don't win, it's a much tougher loss."

"Tonight, the defense really picked me up," Bailey said. "The main thing is we got out of there with the win, and we didn't have to use up the whole bullpen."

All but two relief corps members were put to use in a game that began with Dallas Braden on the mound. The A's lefty, who was activated from the disabled list Tuesday after a monthlong battle with elbow tendinitis, endured a shaky outing from the beginning, and he left having to settle for a no-decision. Braden, still winless since his perfect game May 9, gave up four runs (one earned) and 10 hits while walking one and fanning six in 4 2/3 innings, which forced him to throw 94 pitches.

He wasn't up for a lengthy dose of chatter after the game, simply saying he was satisfied that the team came out with a victory and he came out with his elbow still intact.

"We won," he said. "The elbow is not out on the mound. The elbow is still on the arm, so all signs are positive. It felt good. Just being a gun-watcher, the last fastballs came out clean. I feel pretty confident that it's there."

Not there as much was the sinker, which, in Braden's words, "didn't sink." However, the slider was present, and Braden said he's no longer limited in his pitch selection -- all good news for the A's.

"He wasn't as sharp as we're used to seeing him, but he kept us in the game," Ellis said. "That's all you can ask of people when they come off the DL. He hadn't pitched in a long time, but he kept us in the game and gave us a chance to win."

Boston's four runs against Braden all came within the first two frames, through which the A's were held scoreless by knuckleballer Tim Wakefield. But the Red Sox righty proved rather gracious in the third, giving up two doubles and a walk en route to surrendering four runs, three of them earned.

"I thought his knuckleball was good tonight, but I saw him throw a lot more curveballs and fastballs than I've ever seen," Ellis said. "It seems like he always pitches pretty good here anyways. He really mixed it up, and he was throwing the ball well except for that one inning."

That's all it took, though, for the A's to jump on the comeback wagon.

"It wasn't the best offensive performance," Geren said, "but obviously when the game ended we had enough to win."

Crisp ejected after arguing in 10th

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Coco Crisp was ejected by home-plate umpire Bob Davidson in the 10th inning of Tuesday's 5-4 win over the Red Sox after striking out swinging and presumably sharing some choice words.

The A's outfielder, facing Boston's Ramon Ramirez in a tied game, was walking back to the dugout after recording Oakland's first out when Davidson called for the ejection, at which point Crisp turned back and stood face to face with the umpire before manager Bob Geren pulled him away.

Crisp was seen still yelling at Davidson upon his journey toward the A's clubhouse. It marked his first ejection of the season.

A's activate Braden, option reliever Bowers

OAKLAND -- As expected, the A's activated Tuesday starter Dallas Braden from the disabled list and optioned left-hander Cedrick Bowers to Triple-A Sacramento.

Braden, who has been sidelined for more than three weeks with elbow tendinitis, was looking for his first victory since tossing a perfect game May 9. Bowers, meanwhile, will be looking to improve on his arsenal against lefties with Sacramento.

"He threw the ball well," manager Bob Geren said. "He showed some power with his curveball, his fastball command was decent, and I think he'll go down and work to try to get lefties out. He did a fine job against righties, and it'd be nice to see him do equally well against both."

Bowers gave up four home runs and compiled a 4.50 ERA in 12 outings during his most recent stint with the A's, and he's now 0-1 with a 4.85 mark and .231 opponents average in 13 relief appearances over two stints in Oakland.

Bowers' demotion equaled good news for righty Ross Wolf, who has made just one appearance for the A's since being selected from Sacramento on July 7. Geren also likes what he's seen from Henry Rodriguez, who was recalled Monday for his fourth stint with the club this year. The hard-throwing righty's first three stints called for just four combined appearances.

"We want to keep guys fresh," Geren said, "but our main objective every night is to win. Some guys tend to get more work, but we'll be using all our guys."

Anderson roughed up in third rehab start

OAKLAND -- Brett Anderson endured a rather shaky start in his third Minor League rehab stint on Tuesday, giving up nine hits and four runs in five innings for Triple-A Sacramento in the hitter-friendly confines of Colorado Springs.

Anderson, who has been sidelined with elbow tendinitis, also walked one and struck out two while throwing 83 pitches for the River Cats.

The A's were hoping Tuesday's start would be Anderson's last in a Minor League uniform, but manager Bob Geren said earlier in the week that the southpaw may need another rehab outing before returning to the A's rotation.

Wuertz admires passion Piniella shows

OAKLAND -- Michael Wuertz's young career was very much well groomed.

That much is certain by looking at his first pair of big league managers. The first happened to be Dusty Baker, the second Lou Piniella.

The latter, owner of a World Series ring and three Manager of the Year awards, announced Tuesday he'll be retiring upon completion of the 2010 season with the Cubs.

That news didn't come as shock to Wuertz, who played under Piniella for two years before being dealt to the A's before the 2009 season. At the same time, it allowed him to recall his time spent under the tutelage of the famed skipper.

"He's been around the game a long time, and he's seen a lot," Wuertz said Tuesday. "He's put in a lot of time and effort, so you could kind of see the writing on the wall, with him getting older. This game, it's a long haul. It's kind of weird to hear that he's retiring, but in the end, you knew it was going to come."

In his first season under Piniella in 2007, Wuertz was second on the Cubs with 73 relief appearances and posted a 3.48 ERA. Those numbers, he said, can very much be attributed to the push he received from his manager.

"I definitely learned a lot from him, and it wasn't necessarily just from talking to him," the right-handed reliever said. "He wanted you to throw strikes, and if you didn't, you knew you'd be sitting on the bench the next day and not pitching."

"He strives for perfection. He wants to win. I guess that's the one thing that really stood out for me, the fact that he is the ultimate competitor. I never got to see him play, but I'm sure he was the same way when he played. I think that really holds true in the managing part of it, just the passion that he's brought everywhere he's been. The way Lou manages, it's really something you can't even begin to explain. He's just so passionate."

Red Sox welcome Buchholz back to rotation

By Steve Gartner / MLB.com

Clay Buchholz's return to the Red Sox's pitching rotation on Wednesday vs. the A's has been a long time coming. Buchholz strained his left hamstring June 26 running the bases, costing him a chance to pitch in his first All-Star Game.

"I hope it will be really good," Red Sox manager Terry Francona said recently. "He's a guy that, when he's going good, has the ability to go multiple innings, get lefties, righties. That's been missed a little bit the last couple of weeks."

He had a successful rehab start for Triple-A Pawtucket last Friday when he gave up two runs over 3 2/3 innings.

"I expected to be a little bit rusty," Buchholz said of his rehab start. "I basically went in wanting velocity and everything to be there, and not notice that I was favoring anything, so that's what I went out there to do. Everything felt good."

Countering Buchholz will be A's starter Gio Gonzalez, who has pitched effectively lately. Gonzalez has won two of his last three starts, and in his two wins, he's given up just one earned run over 13 2/3 innings.

Red Sox: Hermida, Lowell on mend

Left fielder Jeremy Hermida, on the 15-day disabled list since June 11 with fractured ribs, had his rehab stint transferred to Triple-A Pawtucket on Monday and went 0-for-4. He is expected to join the Red Sox later this week. Infielder Third baseman Mike Lowell will begin his rehab with Triple-A on Thursday.

A's: Sweeney latest to DL

The A's placed Ryan Sweeney on the disabled list Monday, marking the 18th time this season the A's have placed someone on the DL. The 18 players have combined to miss 741 games this season. Since the start of the 2007 season, the A's have used the DL 82 times.

Worth noting

The A's have a 21-10 record in day games and a 26-37 record in night games. ... The Red Sox have hit 30 home runs in their last 22 games. ... Red Sox second baseman Bill Hall has hit safely in six of his last eight road games.

Major League: 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.

Paul Gutierrez: A's youngsters live All-Star dream

By Paul Gutierrez, Sacramento Bee

OAKLAND – It has already been a week since the Pomp and Circumstance of the Midsummer Classic died down, and yet, the ringing continues in the ears of the A's two young All-Stars.

There's a different air about [Andrew Bailey](#) and [Trevor Cahill](#) these days. And there should be. Say what you want about the All-Star experience being cheapened because of expanding rosters – a ridiculous 82 players could put that title on their résumés this season thanks to injuries and a new rule prohibiting pitchers who threw the Sunday before the game pitching in it – but no one can take it away from the A's pitchers.

They earned it. Even if they had to share a table at the All-Star media access period the day before the game, like two youngsters sequestered at the kids' table on Thanksgiving.

Truth be told, Texas' [Elvis Andrus](#) and Neftali Feliz also shared a dais, and A's manager [Bob Geren](#) was the lone American League coach to dress among the players as the other managers shared a dressing room.

The dual experiences of Bailey, 26, and Cahill, 22, can only help a young and impressionable A's clubhouse in [Oakland's](#) relentless rebuilding project.

"They got an opportunity to see the best of the best and how they prepare," Geren said before the A's fell to the Boston Red Sox 2-1 Monday night at the Coliseum.

"It's a real confidence builder for them. It was nothing but positive for us there."

You could say their confidence from the experience rubbed off on the rest of the A's as they went to [Kansas City](#) and swept the Royals, running their season-best winning streak to five games.

Cahill received a no-decision Saturday, and Bailey saved the A's victory, as well as Sunday's game.

As such, the A's got back to .500 for the first time since June 15.

"Obviously, somebody has to represent the team," Bailey said with a grin. "I've been lucky enough to do it twice now. You get to see how the other guys go about their business."

Of course, with only right-hander [Ben Sheets](#) a fellow former All-Star on the A's active roster – Sheets, a four-time selection for [Milwaukee](#), started for the National League in 2008 – impressionable teammates had plenty of questions.

The standard – *What was it like?* – referred to more than Bailey's seventh-inning appearance at [Angel Stadium](#), when he entered with two outs and [Atlanta's Brian McCann](#) at second following his bases-loaded double.

"His adrenaline level was at an all-time high," Geren said. "He had to corral that."

Geren said he was surprised, since the reigning A.L. Rookie of the Year is used to high-pressure situations as a closer.

Bailey walked the Dodgers' Rafael Furcal before striking out [Cincinnati's Brandon Phillips](#).

Cahill, meanwhile, was not eligible to play since he had started the previous Sunday. But he was afforded the All-Star trappings in [Anaheim](#).

"Hopefully we can keep it going," Cahill said, "and we can all play like All-Stars in the second half."

Bailey and Cahill have as many combined big league All-Star selections (three) for the River Cats' mothership in Oakland as they do combined career appearances for the River Cats.

"It's kind of weird," Bailey said. "Fans are looking at you like you're some kind of superstar, but I'm just going about my job."

Spoken like a true All-Star.

A's beat Red Sox, 5-4, in 10 innings

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a two-out RBI single in the 10th inning and the Oakland Athletics rallied to beat the Boston Red Sox 5-4 on Tuesday night.

The Red Sox took a 4-0 lead in the second inning and the A's tied it in the third. Neither team scored again until the 10th.

Daric Barton singled with one out and advanced to second when plate umpire Bob Davidson called a balk on Ramon Ramirez (0-3). The Red Sox then intentionally walked Kurt Suzuki before Dustin Richardson came in and struck out Adam Rosales.

Kouzmanoff then lined a single to right field off Michael Bowden and Barton slid in safely ahead of J.D. Drew's throw home.

Andrew Bailey (1-3) pitched two innings for the win. A's relievers combined for 5« scoreless innings.

Oakland left-hander Dallas Braden struggled in his first start back from the disabled list and was unable to make it out of the fifth inning.

That kept him winless in nine starts since throwing a perfect game against Tampa Bay on May 9 — the longest such streak ever after a perfect game, according to research by the Elias Sports Bureau. The previous long was eight winless starts by Mark Buehrle last season.

Braden was replaced after hitting J.D. Drew with a pitch to put runners on first and second with two outs in the fifth inning. Ross Wolf came on and walked Mike Cameron to load the bases before getting Bill Hall on a groundout.

Braden allowed four runs — one earned — and 10 hits.

The Red Sox loaded the bases again in the sixth when Wolf intentionally walked David Ortiz with one out. Michael Wuertz made the move pay off when he came in and struck out Kevin Youkilis and got Adrian Beltre on a groundout.

With Clay Buchholz set to come off the disabled list Wednesday and Josh Beckett ready to return two days later, Tim Wakefield's spot in Boston's rotation could be in jeopardy. He was unable to hold onto a 4-0 lead, allowing a two-run double to Jack Cust during Oakland's four-run third inning.

Wakefield lasted six innings, allowing three earned runs, three hits and three walks. At 43 years, 352 days, he was looking to become the oldest pitcher to win a game for the Red Sox, surpassing Dennis Eckersley by three days.

The Red Sox took a 4-0 lead after two innings, getting three unearned runs in the second.

The Athletics overcome a four run deficit to beat the Red Sox in extra innings

Ryan Leong, examiner.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Down 4-0 in the second inning, it looked for certain that Dallas Braden would continue to remain winless following his perfect game back on Mother's Day.

Although Braden is still looking for that elusive victory, the A's came back from that deficit scoring four runs in the third inning and eventually winning the game by the score of 5-4 on a RBI single from Kevin Kouzmanoff in a crazy 10th inning.

"I think anytime you can win an extra inning game, it's nice," Catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "When it's against a team like the Red Sox it's nicer just because of how good they are so it's good going into the series finale. We'll come out ready to play."

In the top of the 10th, Mike Cameron walked and then Bill Hall hit a hard grounder to short. Cliff Pennington made a nice flip to Mark Ellis who then barehanded the relay, turned and sidearmed the ball to first to complete the double play. That was key in keeping the game scoreless setting up the heroics in the bottom of the inning.

"He hit the ball so hard I knew we'd have time to turn the double play," Ellis said. "Two very unflashy players making a play like that. It was a lot of fun. It was a key moment of the game too and that makes it better."

Coco Crisp struck out and then was ejected by home plate umpire Bob Davidson for arguing balls and strikes. Daric Barton singled to center and then advanced on an apparent balk which no one saw except Davidson who long ago earned the nickname "Balking Bob".

That drew the ire of Red Sox pitching coach John Farrell who was ejected. Suzuki was intentionally walked. Jack Cust struck out. Red Sox manager Terry Francona brought in young Michael Bowden to face Kouzmanoff who delivered with a single to right scoring Barton.

"I felt like I had the situation under control," Bowden said. "I knew exactly what my task was and that was to get that hitter out and obviously I didn't do it."

The Red Sox had complete control of this one early. Kevin Youkilis put the Sox on the board with an RBI double scoring Marco Scutaro who singled to left to start the game.

In the second, Mike Cameron doubled and Bill Hall singled. Cameron scored on an errant pickoff throw attempt by Suzuki to first when Hall rounded too far past the bag. The ball went into right field and Hall ended up on second. Scutaro and Darnell McDonald each followed with RBI doubles and all three runs that inning were unearned.

The A's rallied in the third. Coco Crisp doubled to right. Daric Barton walked and then a successful double steal put runners at second and third. After Suzuki was hit by a pitch to load the bases, Jack Cust's RBI double scored the first two runs. With Kouzmanoff at the plate, a passed ball allowed Suzuki to score from third and Cust to advance 90 feet. Kouzmanoff delivered a sac-fly to center field to tie the game.

Although Braden gave up seven hits the first two innings, he scattered only three more and almost made it through five innings. Pitching to J.D. Drew, he threw an inside pitch that appeared to graze Drew but on instant replay, it showed the ball never touched Drew's jersey. Nevertheless, that was the last pitch Braden would throw in the game.

"We won, the elbow's not on the mound, the elbow's on the arm so all signs are positive," Braden said.

The A's relievers though were stellar, 5 1/3 innings allowing only two hits while striking out four. Andrew Bailey (1-3) pitched two innings for his first win of 2010.

"We knew we got out to an early lead and we weren't able to add on to it," Red Sox catcher Kevin Cash said. "We gave up four in that one big inning and we just couldn't get another run on the board. We had some opportunities but their bullpen, tip your hat to them, they did a heck of a job."

Notes: Boston left 12 runners on base including the bases loaded in the fifth and sixth innings. The Red Sox have also dropped 10 of their last 16 road games. ... LHP Dallas Braden is (0-5, 4.10 ERA) in nine starts since his perfect game on May 9. That's the longest streak in Major League history without a win following a perfect game. ... LHP Craig Breslow made his 200th career appearance. ... OF Coco Crisp snapped an 0-for-18 with his double in the third inning. Crisp is just 7-for-54 (.130) over his past 14 games. ... The Athletics have won 14 of their last 20 games against the Red Sox at the Oakland Coliseum

AL West: A's won't go down without a fight

By Mike Castiglione, Sports Network, Miami Herald, 7/20/2010

When it comes to predicting the American League West in recent years, the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim have done their best to eliminate any uncertainty by monopolizing the division for the past few seasons.

Last year, the Halos won the West by a 10-game margin. In 2008, the cushion was a whopping 21 games. The year before, six games. Although a lot can happen over the next couple of months, this year's race is shaking out quite differently.

There are the Texas Rangers (54-39), perched atop the division standings with a five-game cushion, and a newly acquired ace in former Cy Young winner Cliff Lee. The Angels (50-45) have battled some key injuries, but they've captured five of the last six AL West titles and are once again in the hunt.

While the Angels and Rangers currently hold the top two spots, the Oakland Athletics (46-47) have joined the hunt to make it a three-team race. It's worth noting that Oakland is the team that broke up the Angels' string by winning the AL West crown in 2006.

Make no mistake, with an eight-game deficit to make up, the A's have their work cut out for them. But there is certainly hope in the Bay Area, and that hope has been fostered by the team's season-high five-game win streak, which came to a halt Monday night against Boston.

Oakland's recent surge has somewhat changed the landscape in the division -- or at least, sent a message to Texas and L.A. that the A's don't plan on bowing out of contention any time soon. As of Monday, they sat at .500 for the first time since June 15.

"Everyone's hitting and we're putting it all together," said Vin Mazzaro, who pitched 7 2/3 innings of one-run ball in Sunday's 9-6 win over Kansas City. "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."

However, the road is about to get much tougher for the A's. On tap through the next few weeks are series with Boston (53-40), Chicago (51-41), Texas and then Chicago again. Chicago and Texas currently lead their respective divisions, while Boston is in the playoff hunt in the ultra-competitive AL East. That daunting stretch winds through the July 31 trade deadline.

In other words, we'll know by then whether Oakland is a contender or not. How the team navigates these next few series will ultimately impact general manager Billy Beane's decision to be a buyer, seller, or neither at the trade deadline.

The A's need a power hitter like BP needs its oil well cap to work. Their 61 home runs on the season is the second-lowest mark in the American League. Then again, the recipe for run production may be as simple as stealing more bases.

According to the Oakland Tribune, the A's are 32-15 in games when they steal a base, and 14-32 in games when they do not. They rank fifth in the AL with 72 stolen bases, and their 80-percent success rate leads the majors.

ANGELS EYEING TOUGH ROAD AHEAD

The Oakland Athletics aren't alone in their upcoming stretch against some of the toughest opponents the American League has to offer. The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim will play their next dozen games against the Yankees, Red Sox and Rangers.

In addition, they'll be a bit shorthanded with starting pitcher Scott Kazmir being placed on the disabled list with left shoulder fatigue following Sunday's 2-1 loss to Seattle. Granted, Kazmir has struggled mightily in his first season in Anaheim, posting a 6.92 ERA to go along with a 7-9 record. He was in line to start Tuesday night at Yankee Stadium, but that turn will now go to either Sean O'Sullivan or Trevor Bell, both of whom were on their way from Triple-A Salt Lake. As of Tuesday morning, no announcement had been made.

In the meantime, all eyes are on general manager Tony Reagins to swing a deal to improve the ballclub before the trade deadline. Reagins' task is to bridge the five-game gap from the first-place Rangers, who have a payroll of about \$50 million less than the Angels. Ideally, he would like to find another big bat in the middle of the lineup to replace injured first baseman Kendry Morales.

"It would be nice if we could go get another Kendry Morales - get that same stroke - that would be great," All-Star outfielder Torii Hunter told the OC Register. "If nothing happens, then all of us have to do it. I have faith in this team and this franchise. We can still do this."

HUNTER THE UNHERALDED STAR OF THE RANGERS' ROTATION

Over the past couple of weeks, any mention of the Texas Rangers' starting rotation has pretty much started and ended with new addition Cliff Lee. However, right-hander Tommy Hunter has been as big a sparkplug as any to the team's pitching staff.

Hunter, in only his second big league season, is the first Texas starter to begin a season 6-0 since Esteban Loaiza in 1999. He'll try to improve to 7-0 when he takes the hill Tuesday night opposite Tigers' starter Armando Galarraga.

Since being called up from Triple-A Oklahoma City in early-June, Hunter has held opponents to two earned runs or fewer in all but one of his eight starts, with the lone exception being an injury-shortened outing June 14 at Florida. He has already set a team record by winning five straight home starts to begin the season.

"The more opportunities he gets to pitch he just gains more confidence," second baseman Ian Kinsler recently said of his 24-year-old teammate. "He attacks the zone with all his pitches. When he's doing that, he's keeping hitters off-balance. That's basically what it comes down to. He's not scared and he trusts his stuff."

MARINERS HAVEN'T CAPITALIZED ON CLOSE GAMES

At 21 games below .500 entering Tuesday, obviously not a whole lot has gone according to plan for the Seattle Mariners. Most notably, the offense has remained in slumber mode since the very beginning of the season.

However, a closer look at the numbers outlines an ongoing issue: and that is, an inability to come through in tight situations. Entering Tuesday, the Mariners have had 47 of their 93 games -- or, exactly half -- decided by two runs or fewer. Monday's 6-1 setback to the Chicago White Sox broke a string of three straight one-run games for Seattle.

In those 47 games, the Mariners have a record of 20-27. In general, that has been the result of an offense that consistently struggles to come up with timely hits. But lately, an increasing amount of baserunning blunders have further hindered Seattle's run production. For manager Don Wakamatsu, the concern is that veteran players are making mental mistakes. In the 10th inning of Sunday's game, Ichiro Suzuki got himself caught in a rundown between second and third base, taking the potential go-ahead run off the basepath.

"Once it happens, the veteran players know it's a mistake, but yeah, we address it in our pregame meetings," Wakamatsu said. "We know it is something we have talked about for the last couple of months. One mistake can cost us a ballgame, and we don't have any room to do that."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Carter powers up, Cats within 1.0 game of division lead

Sacramento River Cats

Not even July rain can dampen Sacramento's push for another South Division title. In fact, it may have given the River Cats a boost.

Chris Carter hit his third home run in the last two games and the River Cats knocked off host Colorado Springs 11-7 in a rain-shortened, six-inning game Tuesday night.

After collecting only three hits in his last 23 at-bats entering Monday's victory, Carter has gone 6-for-9 with three home runs, a double, five runs and five RBIs over the past two games in Colorado Springs. On Tuesday, Carter homered in the second inning and hit an RBI double in the sixth.

In the third, a Carter walk loaded the bases for a Josh Donaldson grand slam that gave Sacramento a 7-4 lead. The home run was Donaldson's 15th of the season -- trailing only Carter's 22 for the team lead -- and third in four games. Jeff Baisley's bases-clearing double gave Sacramento a 10-4 lead in the fifth before Carter put the River Cats ahead 11-4 with his sixth-inning double.

Colorado Springs battled back in the bottom of the sixth, scoring three runs off River Cats reliever Graham Godfrey. Godfrey, who entered in the sixth for MLB rehab starter Brett Anderson, allowed a two-run triple to Kazuo Matsui, and then allowed Matsui to score on a wild pitch.

But the same Rocky Mountain rain that delayed the game more than an hour before first pitch, returned after the sixth inning forcing the umpires to call the game complete and put a muzzle on any Sky Sox comeback bid.

After a rough first inning in which he gave up four runs all with two outs, Anderson settled down to pitch four scoreless innings. The left-hander, who is expected to start back with the Oakland A's on Sunday, struck out two, walked one and allowed nine hits over 5.0 innings.

In the four-run first inning, Anderson retired the first two batters on groundouts before Jay Payton singled on a soft comebacker to the mound. The next three Sky Sox batters recorded ground ball singles before Mike Paulk connected on a two-run triple to center field.

With Fresno's 9-8 loss in 13 innings at home to Salt Lake -- the Grizzlies' second consecutive extra-inning loss -- Sacramento is only 1.0-game out of the PCL South Division lead. The River Cats haven't been 1.0-game out of first place since April 20, and trailed Fresno by 12.3 games on June 15.

Michael Taylor continued his hot hitting for Sacramento, going 2-for-4 with two runs and an RBI and raising his batting average to .272. The top outfield prospect is hitting .344 in July.

Bullpen Shows Signs of Fatigue in Loss

By Bob Hards, Midland Rockhounds

Archie Gilbert sent the first pitch of Tuesday's game out of Whataburger Field in Corpus Christi, a Rickey Henderson style lead-off home run. That's one way to start a rally, and the 'Hounds would take a 2-0 lead as a result.

In the seventh inning, with his team trailing, 3-2, Corpus Christi's Freddy Parejo struck out. In doing so, he would ignite a 6-run rally and the Hooks would go on to win, 9-5, as a result.

Parejo's inning-opening strikeout came on a wild pitch, and was followed by a Michael Affronti single and a walk to Koby Clemens to load the bases. In the course of the next six pitches, the Hooks put the game away. Jimmy Van Ostrand continued his two-season scorching of the 'Hounds with a bases-clearing, 3-run double, ending Fautino De Los Santos' night on the mound. Jason Ray entered the game and was greeted with back-to-back home runs by J.D. Martinez and Jon Gaston. An inning that began with what should have been a whiff ended, instead, with a 6-run rally and an 8-3 Corpus Christi lead.

The RockHounds did get some welcome news with the return of Jemile Weeks. Oakland's # 7 prospect has been sidelined by a hip flexor since May 6, and has now completed a re-hab program at the A's Arizona facility. He joined the club Tuesday night and, although not in the line-up, was available. Before being sidelined, Jemile was hitting .304 in 26 games as the RockHounds lead-off hitter.

Ports Kick Off San Jose Series With 8-6 Win

SAN JOSE, Calif. - In a ballpark that normally provides for great pitching duels, Tuesday night's contest at San Jose Municipal stadium featured plenty of offense. The Stockton Ports and San Jose Giants combined for 14 runs on 25 hits as the Boys of Banner Island withstood a late-inning rally to reel off their ninth win in 11 games, beating the Giants by a final of 8-6.

Stockton got the scoring started in the top of the first. Grant Green doubled with one out and Stephen Parker followed with a single to left. Giants left-fielder Wendell Fairley bobbled the ball, an error that allowed Green to score and give the Ports a 1-0 lead. Parker would score later in the inning on an RBI double hit by Yusuf Carter to make it 2-0.

San Jose snagged a run back in the bottom of the first on a two-out RBI single from Johnny Monell off Ports starter Justin Murray.

The Giants grabbed their first lead of the night in the second. After Murray retired the first two batters, Jose Flores singled and James Simmons doubled, putting two aboard for Francisco Peguero who hit a three-run homer to left to put the Giants on top 4-2.

The Ports tied it quickly in the top of the third. With the bases loaded and one out, Tyler Ladendorf singled to left to make it 4-3, and Todd Johnson followed with a sac-fly to center to tie the score at four.

Stockton took the lead for good in the fourth. Jermaine Mitchell led off with a double and advanced to third on a ground ball to second hit by Green. Parker followed with a sac-fly to left to score Mitchell and put the Ports up 5-4.

The run in the fourth was the final run allowed by Giants starter Oliver Odle, who took the loss after going five innings and allowing five runs on eight hits while striking out six.

San Jose attempted to rally in the last of the fifth. With one out, Murray yielded back-to-back singles and was removed from the game in favor of Lance Sewell (7-0). Sewell had his streak of 26 batters in a row retired ended when Fairly greeted him with a single that loaded the bases. Sewell, however, escaped the jam by inducing two pop-outs to the infield to preserve the 5-4 lead.

Sewell went on to work 2.2 scoreless innings, allowing two hits while striking out two in picking up the win.

The Ports padded their lead in the eighth with three runs off Giants reliever Ben Wilshire. Johnson provided the key hit in the inning with a two-run triple down the right field line which was followed by a Ryan Ortiz single to left to make it an 8-4 ballgame. Wilshire allowed three runs in his 2.1 innings of relief.

In the bottom of the eighth, the Giants made a final push against Ports reliever Brett Hunter. With one out, Flores doubled to left and Simmons reached on an error made by Parker, putting runners at the corners with one out. Simmons advanced to second on a wild pitch and Peguero singled to right, scoring Flores and putting runners at the corners. While working to Ehire Adrianza, Hunter was called for a balk that allowed Simmons to score and make it 8-6. Hunter, though, would strike out Adrianza and get Juan Perez to fly to left to end the inning.

Trey Barham (SV, 1) came on in the ninth and allowed a two-out single to Fairley, but got Drew Biery to ground to short to end the game. Barham was credited with his first save of the season.

The Ports and Giants will play the second game of their three-game set on Wednesday night at Municipal Stadium. Brett Tomko (0-0, 7.56 ERA) will make his third start for Stockton, opposed by San Jose right-hander Kyle Woodruff (1-0, 2.65 ERA). First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.