

A's News Clips, Thursday, July 22, 2010

Oakland A's continue winning ways, beat Boston Red Sox 6-4

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Lots of A's players had reason to smile individually after Wednesday's 6-4 victory over the visiting Boston Red Sox.

Matt Watson connected for his first major league homer, Jack Cust went deep yet again, and Michael Wuertz continued his return to form in the bullpen.

But the momentum the A's are building is definitely of the team variety. And taking two out of three from the Red Sox was a feather in the cap considering Oakland entered the day 23-31 against clubs with a .500 record or better.

"It's real encouraging," Cust said. "That's a good team over there. We'll try and build off this and take it into the next series."

The A's have won seven of eight and 14 of their past 21, and Wednesday's win pushed them above the .500 mark (48-47) for the first time since June 11, when they were 32-31.

The A's also have won their first two series coming out of the All-Star break for the first time since 2006.

If they keep up their current level of play, they'll give the front office good reason to keep the team intact as the non-waiver trade deadline approaches in nine days.

They're now seven games behind first-place Texas in the American League West but are just two games behind the Los Angeles Angels for second place.

"We're just excited that we're showing life," starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez said.

With a crowd of 30,456 on hand, Watson got the A's offense started with a second-inning homer off Clay Buchholz (10-5) that narrowly cleared the right-field wall.

The trot around the bases was a long time coming. Watson, 31, made his major league debut in 2003. But before Wednesday, the journeyman had played in just 36 major league games compared with 952 in the minors over 12 seasons.

He's also played in Japan and South Korea.

With his head shaved bald, Watson looks like A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff from a distance. But in Japan, Watson said more people asked if he was rock star Chris Daughtry.

At any rate, he was happy the A's retrieved his first home run ball for him as a keepsake.

"When you hit one short enough and it kicks back in (to the field), it makes it easy to get the ball," Watson cracked.

Cust broke a 1-1 tie in the third with a two-run shot that made a beeline over the center field wall.

It came on a 3-1 pitch, after Cust had taken a good cut on 3-0.

The A's entered the game ranked second-to-last in the majors with 61 homers, but they've hit 11 in their past nine games. Cust has homered four times in his past seven.

Boston closed to within 3-2, but the A's increased their lead to 6-2 with a three-run fifth, highlighted by Rajai Davis' two-run single.

With his bullpen depleted after Tuesday's 10-inning victory, A's manager Bob Geren said before the game that he needed Gonzalez (9-6) to go deep into the game.

But Gonzalez left after six innings, having allowed four runs.

Closer Andrew Bailey was unavailable because of mild lower back soreness, and Craig Breslow also needed a rest. So Geren was happy to see Henry Rodriguez, Brad Ziegler and Wuertz combine on three shutout innings.

He's especially been impressed with Wuertz, who earned his second save and has allowed just one run over his past 12 appearances.

"That's probably been the best individual thing (since) the (All-Star) break is how he's throwing the ball," Geren said.

Oakland A's update: Coco Crisp, Cliff Pennington swap spots in lineup

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Coco Crisp and Cliff Pennington swapped spots in the batting order Wednesday, with Crisp dropping down to the No. 9 spot and Pennington assuming the leadoff role.

Manager Bob Geren said he plans to stick with that look for the next several games in order to take pressure off Crisp as he tries to shake his slump.

Crisp is 4 for 31 over his past seven games.

"Coco's been struggling a little bit, so we'll give him a few days down at the bottom," Geren said. "He's (still) our leadoff hitter."

Pennington is hitting .264 overall but entered Wednesday hitting .409 (38 for 93) over his past 29 games.

His best moment Wednesday came at shortstop, where he teamed with second baseman Mark Ellis for a highlight-reel double play for the second straight day.

Ellis ranged up the middle to retrieve Bill Hall's grounder and flipped to Pennington, who had his back to first but turned and made a strong throw.

"It was going to take a lot of arm strength from that angle, and Penny's got one of the strongest arms in the game," Geren said.

With the A's off today and Monday, there's flexibility with the upcoming rotation. Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro will pitch Friday and Saturday, respectively, against the Chicago White Sox, but Geren has yet to announce starters for Sunday and Tuesday.

He considers Brett Anderson a possibility to come off the disabled list to pitch Sunday. That depends on how Anderson's elbow feels in the aftermath of Tuesday's start for Triple-A Sacramento.

Dallas Braden or Ben Sheets will go Sunday if Anderson doesn't.

Sheets is owed roughly \$4.2 million for the remainder of this season. But he has incentives that will pay him an additional \$500,000 if he reaches 165 innings pitched, increasing incrementally up to \$2 million if he eclipses 195 innings, which he's on pace to do.

That's a significant investment for any team considering trading for Sheets. But the point may be moot. If the A's remain in contention, they're likely to hold on to the right-hander.

Closer Andrew Bailey was unavailable because of mild soreness in his lower back, but he's unconcerned and said he should be OK by Friday. ... Henry Rodriguez threw a scoreless seventh and hit 101 mph on the stadium radar gun.

Poole: New Billy Beane is no longer money for Oakland A's

By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune

He introduced himself to baseball's establishment with a defiant idea, a wink and a grin and, in short order, picked up the badge of swagger that comes with engineering eight consecutive winning seasons.

All of which led to A's general manager Billy Beane being feared, respected, detested and envied — and famous beyond baseball. No other fringe-player-turned GM in the history of American sport has been accorded such rock star status.

In the Bay Area, Beane was the most admired non-playing sports figure since Bill Walsh transformed the 49ers into winners in the early 1980s. Though the owners and players and managers in Oakland would come and go, Beane, to the robust cheers of A's fans, stayed behind. He was money. In Billy We Trust.

Whatever happened to that Billy Beane?

Beane actually remains in Oakland, running the A's baseball operation. But as the team slogs through yet another season without any reasonable chance to reach the playoffs — and perhaps its fourth straight losing season — it is apparent his star has lost some of its brilliance.

Moreover, New Billy seems to have lost some of the palpable edge that, in retrospect, was an essential ingredient in keeping the A's as sharp as they once were.

Little argument was offered by Beane on Wednesday at the Oakland Coliseum in the wake of a 6-4 win over Boston that put the A's over .500 (48-47) for the first time in about six weeks.

"I've seen both ends of the spectrum, seen them numerous times," said Beane, who followed a postgame meeting with manager Bob Geren with an interview in the office of equipment manager Steve Vucinich. "When you lose, act like it has happened before. When you win, act like it has happened before."

Original Billy wanted to dominate. He was personified by his agile mind, searing intensity and unquenchable drive, all of which were accentuated by a hyperactive energy level. At once charming and cunning and ruthless, no one was better at walking into baseball's flea market and getting what he wanted. He picked brains as well as pockets. He could swipe talent in broad daylight, right under suspicious noses.

Original Billy could disarm one minute and detonate the next, as was discovered by managers like Art Howe and Ken Macha. With a competitive streak as wide as a battleship warehouse, Billy was demanding and relentless and impatient.

Never more than when the calendar turned to late July. That was when Beane would attach one hand to a computer and the other to a phone and work his unique magic.

New Billy is a milder, calmer dude. His once-sweeping persona has been downsized. His hubris is on mute. It's as if the extremes of his emotions — the characteristics that made him so fascinating — have been surgically removed.

Or maybe, as a 48-year-old father of 2 1/2-year-old twins, he is just weary enough to accept the view through a wider lens.

"Perspective; there's no question," Beane said. "It would be a bit narcissistic if it didn't have an effect, don't you think?"

"But the other thing is, this is my 13th year as GM and before that I was an assistant for a few years. If you've been doing it a long time, you realize there are (highs and lows). There's no sense going (high and low). Good times and bad times end, just like in life. Knowing the history and having the perspective gives you a little more patience."

The result is another relatively quiet July with the A's. The month for which Old Billy lived has become as mundane as May or September. New Billy sells instead of buys. Without a contending team to fortify, he has become an architect more concerned with construction than completion.

In the years since he was the protagonist in the best-selling book "Moneyball," Beane has diversified. He gained a fraction of ownership in 2006. He earns five figures for speaking engagements, during which he focuses more on business principles than ballgames.

Outgrowing the confines of baseball, Billy is a man of the world and a huge fan of the global soccer scene.

"One of the things I've been criticized for when we're losing but not when we're winning is that I have other interests," he said. "But I really don't want to be defined as only (a baseball executive)."

Old Billy was the most influential baseball executive of this generation, a man who by sheer force of personality and ingenuity not only agitated a conservative sport but became a celebrity in the process.

New Billy is another veteran on the job, aligned Billy with a team hoping for a future. But he's not having as much fun as he once did. Neither is anybody else

Chin Music: Coco Crisp and Cliff Pennington swap spots in A's batting order; other pregame notes

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/21/2010 12:15PM

There's a shakeup in the batting order as the A's go for the series victory against the Red Sox. Coco Crisp, mired in a 2 for 27 slump over his past six games, drops down to ninth with Cliff Pennington jumping up to the leadoff spot. It can't hurt, if you ask me. Pennington is hitting .367 (18 for 49) in July, the fifth-highest average in the AL in the month (minimum 3.1 plate appearances per game). He struggled during an extended look in the leadoff role earlier this season, but he's got the speed to make things happen if he can get on base.

"Coco has been struggling a little bit," manager Bob Geren said. "We'll give him a few days down at the bottom. He's our leadoff hitter, I'm just going to give him a little break from that (until he heats up)."

—The outfield shuffle continues as Matt Watson draws a start in left field with Rajai Davis in right. Where's Adam Rosales, some of you might be wondering? Good question. He was decent enough in what little time he's played the outfield this season, and if the A's really want his bat in the lineup, now is an opportunity to do it with both Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson out. Seems they prefer Rosales playing primarily against left-handers.

Speaking of Jackson, Geren says he's 4-5 days away from "pushing it hard" to test his right hamstring. After he can run and maneuver at full speed, he'll begin a rehab assignment. Travis Buck, recovering from his bout w/leg fatigue, will play a minimum of seven games with Triple-A Sacramento, Geren said (he's played two so far). But I'm not sure it's a guarantee Buck gets a call-up even when he's healthy. It will likely depend on which outfielders are (or aren't) producing at the time.

—With days off Thursday and Monday, the A's have flexibility in the rotation. The starters for Sunday and Tuesday are TBA, and Geren said Brett Anderson is a possibility for Sunday against the White Sox. That depends on how Anderson and Dallas Braden both feel. As it stands, that's the next day for both to pitch, so something will have to be altered. If one of them pitches Sunday, that means Ben Sheets will get an unusually long layoff. Time will tell ...

The lineups:

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

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

Baseball survivor hits first big-league homer

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Matt Watson's last shot in the big leagues came in 2005, when he was up with Oakland for 19 games. Since then, he has pursued baseball in some unusual spots - Japan, South Korea and independent baseball in Lancaster, Pa., which explains his old-timey beard.

"It's the Amish look," he said.

On Wednesday, the 31-year-old outfielder, who was drafted in 1999, hit his first major-league home run in the A's 6-4 victory over the Red Sox in Oakland. The A's took the series with Boston and got over the .500 mark for the first time since June 11. Watson, meanwhile, probably earned more playing time.

"We're all very happy for him," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "He's definitely going to get a few more starts, obviously."

Second baseman Mark Ellis said he hadn't realized that when Watson hit his drive off the scoreboard in right that it was his first in the bigs.

"It's really, really cool, but I was surprised because he'd had some good games with us before," Ellis said. "Going to Japan, playing independent ball, it shows how much he loves the game. To get the opportunity, he's had to go all around the world."

"I'd like to count some of my Asian home runs," Watson said with a smile. "But I don't think they count in the major-league record book."

Watson had been called up July 5 and Wednesday was his second start.

"It's just nice to be out there and to be part of a win," he said. "I've been sitting here for two weeks watching, but the other guys have done a good job of welcoming me, making me feel like part of the team."

With one out in the second, Watson hit a 1-0 pitch from Clay Buchholtz just over the line above the scoreboard.

"I wasn't even sure it cleared the line," he said. "I thought I hit it better. ... But when you hit the first one short enough and it kicks back, it makes it easier to" retrieve.

With right fielder Ryan Sweeney out for the season because of knee surgery, which will be performed next week, and with Gabe Gross in an 0-for-16 funk, Watson could have an extended chance to show what he can do, especially if he hits a few out. The A's have lacked power all year.

Jack Cust is trying to change that. After a slow start in the homer category, the A's designated hitter has hit four in seven games, including a two-run blast high up the wall in dead center in the third inning. In the fifth, Ellis contributed an RBI single, and Rajai Davis drove in two with a base hit.

Gio Gonzalez allowed seven hits, two walks and four runs in six innings, but he did a nice job of minimizing damage in the first, holding the Red Sox to one run by getting Mike Cameron to ground out with the bases loaded. Adrian Beltre hit a two-run home off Gonzalez in the sixth.

Oakland's defense turned in more nice work, with a good running catch by Davis on a liner into the gap by Bill Hall in the sixth, and the second slick double play in as many games by Ellis and shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Blevins making his mark

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Andrew Bailey is a two-time All-Star, **Craig Breslow** has earned the set-up job, and **Michael Wuertz** is looking more like himself. But lately, the most effective pitcher in the A's bullpen, which didn't allow a run in the series with Boston this week, has been **Jerry Blevins**.

The left-hander hasn't allowed a run in 12 appearances, and he has allowed five hits and struck out nine in nine innings during that span. Tuesday night, he cruised through a 1-2-3 inning. The night before, he came in with the bases loaded and two outs and he got pinch hitter **Bill Hall** to ground out. The next inning, he struck out **David Ortiz**.

"That's what I love," Blevins said, "those are-you-going-to-beat me, am-I-going-to-beat-you situations."

Oakland's bullpen performed well again Wednesday, though Blevins, Bailey and Breslow weren't available. **Henry Rodriguez** worked an inning, as did **Brad Ziegler**, and Wuertz earned his second save with a 1-2-3 ninth. He has allowed one run in his past 12 games.

Anderson on Sunday? Brett Anderson is a candidate to start Sunday against the White Sox, according to manager **Bob Geren**, but so is **Dallas Braden**. Both started Tuesday, Braden coming off the disabled list to do so in Oakland, and Anderson in a rehab appearance for Triple-A Sacramento.

Geren said both will be evaluated for two days before the team will make its decision. Days off today and Monday also will be taken into consideration.

Briefly: Gio Gonzalez had what he called a charley horse after being struck on the leg by a liner by **Darnell McDonald** in the second. Gonzalez made the play at first, but he was limping after the game. ... The A's appeal of an apparent steal of home by **Mark Ellis** in Baltimore last month, later changed to a fielder's choice, was turned down.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Suzuki heating up: Kurt Suzuki is hitting .409 since the break after hitting .108 in his previous nine games. He's a career .345 hitter against Boston, his second highest average against any AL team. He has a .354 mark against the Yankees.

Crisp gets moved down the order, Watson gets a start

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 7/21/2010 11:53AM

A grab-bag of stuff from pregame:

*Manager Bob Geren says Coco Crisp is down at the bottom of the order while he gets out of his hitting funk but he said "basically" Crisp is still the leadoff man. Cliff Pennington is hitting first today. Crisp looked a little better at the plate last night - but then he got tossed after striking out in the 10th, so maybe some time out of the leadoff spot to clear his head isn't a bad idea. Pennington hasn't fared all that well hitting leadoff, with a .218 average there this year.

*With Gabe Gross 0 for his 16, Matt Watson is getting the start in right today. As I mentioned yesterday, I'd like to see Watson get several starts in a row to see what he can do. I fear the extended time off since he got called up might have cooled his bat, so it might take a few days to get it going - I'm not sure he'll have the luxury of that.

UPDATE: Watson just hit his first big-league homer, slamming a 1-0 pitch off the line above the scoreboard in right. So the bat has not cooled entirely, perhaps. And maybe he gets more than a start or two, which would be good - let's see what the guy can do.

*Brett Anderson might start here on Sunday against the White Sox, but so might Dallas Braden. The two, who are on the same turn, will be evaluated over the next two days to see how they bounce back from their starts last night. The A's have offdays tomorrow and Monday, so there's a lot of wriggle room for Geren to do whatever he likes with the rotation, including tailoring matchups vs. teams going out several weeks. Or if anyone needs an extra day or two (you'd hope not after the All-Star break), they can get a little time.

*Conor Jackson (hamstring) remains at least a week away from rehab games.

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

Gonzalez gets lift from bats in series win

Lefty not sharp, but Watson, Cust lead offense with homers

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Following a night that saw five bullpen mates hit the mound for Oakland in an extra-inning win over the Red Sox, the A's desperately needed starter Gio Gonzalez to go the distance Wednesday afternoon.

The A's lefty went six innings in a rather mediocre performance, one manager Bob Geren classified as "average."

Fortunately, Oakland got that necessary distance in another form.

Enter Matt Watson and Jack Cust, who both went deep to combine with a couple of timely hits from their teammates in a 6-4 victory over Boston, which allowed Oakland to take two out of three and climb one game over the .500 mark for the first time since June 11.

Watson's long ball -- a second-inning solo shot to right-center -- represented the first of his career, which, before being selected from Triple-A Sacramento on July 5, hadn't seen the big leagues since 2005. Darting from the Minor Leagues to Japan to South Korea to the independent Atlantic League over the last five years, the 31-year-old outfielder was handed just his second start with the A's on Wednesday.

"It's just nice to be out there and be part of a win," Watson said. "I've been sitting here for two weeks now, and all the guys have done a great job of making me feel comfortable. I don't have a lot of big league time, but they've made me feel welcome. "

His home run barely cleared the wall, but there happened to be a shade of beauty in not hitting it so far.

"I got the ball," he said with a smile. "I hit the first one short enough to make it a little easier to get.

"I wasn't sure it cleared the line. I thought I hit it better than that. I enjoyed it. It was nice to finally get one. I'd like to count some of my Asian ones as Major League home runs, but I don't think they count in the record books."

Said Geren: "Many of us didn't realize it was his first Major League home run until they announced it. That's when we scrambled to get the ball for him. ... We're all real happy for him. We'll get him a few more starts."

Watson, obviously, was very appreciative of his opportunity Wednesday, but he also mentioned he's "been around long enough to know not to hold my breath" in the Majors, or anywhere else for that matter. At the same time, Gonzalez may have been just as happy for Watson, as the home run erased a tough first for the A's lefty, who gave Boston an early 1-0 lead on a two-out single by Adrian Beltre.

Following some words from the skipper, though, Gonzalez settled down and limited Boston to one run over the next four innings. In that time span, Cust tallied Oakland's second long ball of the day in the third with a two-run homer to dead center off Red Sox hurler Clay Buchholz to make it 3-1. Then, after Boston's Jed Lowrie narrowed Oakland's lead to one with an RBI single in the fifth, Mark Ellis and Rajai Davis came through in the bottom half of the inning with run-scoring hits to hand the A's a 6-2 lead.

"Bob told me, 'We need you in the game. We need you to go as many as you can,'" Gonzalez said. "The offense, the defense, everyone came through today. I did my best and just tried to keep us in the game."

The Oakland southpaw endured a shaky sixth, surrendering a leadoff single to Kevin Youkilis before offering up a two-run homer to Beltre. Gonzalez then allowed J.D. Drew to reach base on a single, but he got Mike Cameron to fly out to right field and forced Bill Hall to ground into a nicely turned double play by Ellis and Cliff Pennington to end the frame.

Gonzalez was credited with his ninth win, allowing four runs on seven hits with two walks and three strikeouts through six frames. Buchholz, meanwhile, took the loss after four-plus innings of five-run ball.

"[Gonzalez] ran his pitch count up in the sixth and didn't pound the strike zone like he can in one of his good starts," Geren said, "but that just shows how good he is to be able to get out of the jams."

The A's have now won seven of eight and 14 of 21 after dropping 10 of the previous 12 contests. The All-Star break has done wonders for this team, especially reliever Michael Wuertz. The righty was not only called upon to make his third straight appearance, but he was also told before the game he'd be the closer with Andrew Bailey unavailable.

After Henry Rodriguez and Brad Ziegler combined for two shutout innings, Wuertz was brought in -- as if on cue -- for the ninth, which saw the Red Sox go down in 1-2-3 fashion.

"When the phone call came in the bullpen," Geren said, "he knew it was him. He's probably been the best individual thing after the break I've seen, how he's throwing the ball. In the first half, I think we saw flashes of his '09 self, but now he's linking some of those together."

For his efforts, Wuertz was awarded his second save of the season as the A's entered Thursday's off-day on quite the high note.

"We're just excited we're showing life again," Gonzalez said. "We're showing we can compete against the best of them. We're in this."

Buehrle, Cahill set to square off in Oakland

By John Barone / MLB.com

If only the White Sox season had started June 9.

Chicago owns a Major League-best 28-9 record since that fateful day, a stretch in which it has flipped a 9 1/2-game deficit in the American League Central standings into a 2 1/2-game lead.

How's that for a turnaround?

"If anyone would have said we were going to be back in it this quickly, I don't think anybody would have believed it," Sox left-hander Mark Buehrle said. "We just want to keep it going."

Manager Ozzie Guillen's team will aim for its 29th win since June 9 on Friday night, when the Sox send Buehrle to the mound opposite All-Star Trevor Cahill in the opener of a three-game series with the Athletics at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

Forgive Buehrle if Oakland doesn't rank among his favorite road cities. The 31-year-old southpaw is 0-6 with a 4.66 ERA in 12 career outings (10 starts) at the Coliseum.

The way Buehrle has pitched lately, though, that trend could prove inconsequential.

Over his past seven starts, the 11-year veteran has registered five wins and a 2.42 ERA, not to mention a 2.63 ERA in his previous six road outings.

"That was vintage Buehrle," former White Sox outfielder Scott Podsednik said after Buehrle tossed seven shutout innings against the Royals on July 9. "He didn't walk anybody and he stayed away from the big inning. We got a couple hits here and there, but we just couldn't get anything going against him."

"He was sharp."

Cahill has been sharp for the better part of two months, going 8-1 with a 2.85 ERA over his past 12 starts while limiting opponents to a .194 batting average. With a victory Friday, the 22-year-old right-hander would join Tim Hudson as the only A's pitchers to earn 10 wins in each of their first two Major League seasons.

"He has all the tools," Oakland skipper Bob Geren said. "It's been fantastic to watch."

White Sox: Pitchers have been clicking

White Sox starters have logged 32 quality starts in their past 38 outings. ... Reliever J.J. Putz has tossed a franchise-record 25 consecutive scoreless appearances, holding opponents to a .140 average during that span.

Athletics: Barton displaying patience

First baseman Daric Barton paces the AL with 59 walks this season. ... Reliever Jerry Blevins has reeled off 12 consecutive scoreless outings dating back to June 25.

Worth noting

Buehrle is 3-12 with a 3.93 ERA in 24 lifetime appearances (20 starts) opposite Oakland. ... Cahill has a 4.30 ERA spanning three career starts against Chicago, all of which came last season.

Anderson could return for Sunday start

Geran, A's to make decision regarding lefty in next 48 hours

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's could see a familiar face in Brett Anderson on the mound Sunday, but manager Bob Geren said the club will take the next 48 hours to determine if the lefty's ready to rejoin the rotation or make another rehab outing.

In his third rehab start, Anderson (elbow tendinitis) pitched five innings for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday night in the hitter-friendly confines of Colorado Springs, giving up four runs -- all in the first inning -- and nine hits while walking one and striking out two. He tossed 83 pitches, and all early reports indicate he came out feeling well.

However, the A's don't want to rush their young ace, who is on the disabled list for the second time this season with recurring elbow issues.

"We'll see how he is today," Geren said Wednesday, "and make a decision within the next 48 hours."

The A's have off-days Thursday and Monday, lending the Oakland skipper flexibility with his rotation for the Sunday and Tuesday spots. Depending on Anderson's readiness, Geren said he could give an extra day of rest to Ben Sheets and Dallas Braden, the latter who pitched Tuesday for the first time since June 22.

"We have multiple options for a couple of days," Geren said.

Slumping Crisp dropped to ninth spot

OAKLAND -- A struggling Coco Crisp found himself at the bottom of the lineup for Wednesday's rubber match with the Red Sox, but A's manager Bob Geren said the move is only temporary until the outfielder can regain his groove at the plate.

Crisp entered Wednesday's contest 7-for-54 (.130) over his last 14 games after posting a .407 mark in his first seven contests after coming off the disabled list June 22. He collected a third-inning double Tuesday, but he also struck out twice -- the second of which resulted in ejection after he argued balls and strikes in a rather animated fashion with home-plate umpire Bob Davidson.

"He's been struggling a little bit," Geren said, "so we'll give him a few days in the ninth spot to give him a chance to get going again."

Back in the leadoff spot for the 26th time this season was Cliff Pennington, who entered Wednesday's game hitting .367 (18-for-49) in July, which represents the fifth-best batting average in the American League.

"Cliff's been swinging the bat well," Geren said, "so we're going to switch it up and give Coco a break from that spot until he picks it up."

The lineup shuffle didn't stop there, as Matt Watson received just his second start in left field since being selected from Triple-A Sacramento on July 5. With the River Cats, he was hitting .313 with eight home runs and 23 RBIs in 28 games -- numbers Geren hopes he can carry over to the big leagues.

"We'll give Watson a chance," the A's skipper said. "He was swinging the bat well when he came up, so he'll get a shot out there."

Watson's start meant a much-needed day of rest for Gabe Gross, who -- like Crisp -- is in the middle of a funk, as evidenced by his recent hitless streak spanning 16 at-bats. The outfielder is just 12-for-77 (.156) over his last 28 games and, as a result, has watched his average drop to .240.

Worth noting

A's manager Bob Geren said Conor Jackson (right hamstring) is still four to five days away from "really pushing hard." Once he reaches that point, the outfielder -- stationed in Arizona -- will play in a handful of Minor League rehab games. ... Fellow outfielder Travis Buck (leg soreness) will play a minimum of seven games with Triple-A Sacramento before being considered to rejoin the team. He's played two with the River Cats, collecting one hit with two strikeouts in seven at-bats. ... Rajai Davis needs one more stolen base to become the fifth player in Oakland history with at least two 30-steal seasons.

A's beat Red Sox, 6-4

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Matt Watson's baseball journey has taken him to Japan, South Korea and all over the minors and independent leagues ever since making his big league debut with the New York Mets.

Nearly seven years later, Watson hit his first major league homer to help the Oakland Athletics win their third straight series with a 6-4 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Wednesday.

"I enjoyed it," Watson said. "It was nice to finally get one.

I'd like to count some of my Asian ones as major league home runs but I don't think they count in the record book."

Watson came up to the big leagues with the Mets in September 2003 and appeared in 15 games. He was claimed by the A's on waivers that offseason and spent most of the next two years at Triple-A, playing 19 games in the majors.

Watson had his contract sold to Chiba Lotte in Japan in 2006 and hit nine homers in parts of two seasons. He spent 2008 in the minors with the Toronto organization, played briefly in South Korea that offseason and returned to the Mets in 2009.

Let go because of a bad back, Watson played for Lancaster of the independent Atlantic League before the A's brought him back on a minor league deal in May.

"The fact that he's here and did a great job today is what counts," A's starter Gio Gonzalez said. "The road is a beautiful road when you're sitting on the major league level. To hit his first major league home run, it's a beautiful day for Matt Watson."

Gonzalez (9-6) pitched six innings for the win, Jack Cust homered and Rajai Davis hit a two-run single for the A's, who have won seven of eight to move above .500 for the first time since June 11.

"We're pointing in the right direction," Gonzalez said. "We have a little streak going on again. We're going to try to keep it going."

The Red Sox are going the opposite direction despite getting Adrian Beltre's second homer of the series. They are 2-5 since the All-Star break and seven games behind the New York Yankees in the AL East.

Clay Buchholz (10-5) was not sharp in his first start for Boston since injuring left hamstring running bases in San Francisco on June 26. He gave up a pair of early homers and was unable to record a single out in the fifth. He allowed five runs and six hits to lose for just the second time in his last 10 starts.

"I thought he looked like he had some rust," manager Terry Francona said. "He left a couple of fastballs over the plate that really did a lot of damage. The game was a little quick for him.

He'll be OK. He's healthy."

Gonzalez allowed RBI singles to Beltre in the first and Jed Lowrie in the fifth before running into more serious trouble in the sixth inning. Kevin Youkilis led off the frame with a single and Beltre followed with his 16th homer.

After J.D. Drew singled, Oakland's defense bailed out Gonzalez.

Davis made a running grab in the gap in right-center to rob Mike Cameron of extra bases. Bill Hall then hit a grounder up the middle that second baseman Mark Ellis tracked down to start a slick double play.

"It's pretty frustrating," Hall said. "We hit it right at people. We have to start pressuring teams earlier. We're not swinging the bat too bad but we're not putting hits together.

Pressing is not the answer to our problems."

That ended the day for Gonzalez, who allowed four runs and seven hits.

Henry Rodriguez pitched around a pair of walks in the seventh with a fastball that reached triple digits on the stadium radar gun. Brad Ziegler got three outs and Michael Wuertz had a perfect ninth for his second save.

Buchholz escaped trouble in the first when he got Kevin Kouzmanoff to bounce into an inning-ending double play with the bases loaded. But then Buchholz gave up homers in consecutive innings to the power-challenged A's after allowing just three all season coming into the start.

Watson connected in the second for a solo shot in just his third game since being brought back to the majors July 5. With Ryan Sweeney out for the season with a knee injury, there could be more chances for Watson to play.

"I know I can do it at this level if given an opportunity," he said. "It's just finding a chance and someone that believes in you to give you the opportunity."

Cust added a two-run shot in the third.

In between the two long balls, there were a couple of oddities that didn't affect the score. After Watson's homer, Davis reached on an error when Youkilis dropped a throw from Beltre following a bunt toward third. Davis advanced to second on a balk and third on a wild pitch before being thrown out at home on a grounder to second because of a perfect block by catcher Dusty Brown.

Then with a man on first in the third inning, Kurt Suzuki hit an infield popup that Beltre dropped. But there was no damage as Beltre easily got the force at second base. Cust followed with his sixth homer to make it 3-1.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento wins; Carter hits fourth bomb in three days

By Abbie Ellis / Sacramento River Cats

Chris Carter hit a home run in his third consecutive game to highlight the River Cats' 8-1 win Wednesday night over Colorado Springs.

It was nothing but zeroes on the scoreboard until Sacramento put up five runs in the fifth inning. A Josh Donaldson single kicked off a string of River Cats hits. An Adam Heether double followed by a Corey Wimberly single scored Donaldson and put the first run on the board. Eric Sogard sent the ball flying into a double that scored Heether and Wimberly. A Carter two-run homer gave the River Cats a 5-0 advantage.

Carter's homer was his 23rd of the season and his fourth in three games against the Sky Sox. Carter hit two home runs in Monday night's 16-3 blowout, and another bomb on Tuesday night.

Sacramento stretched its lead to 8-0 with another three runs in the seventh inning. Steven Tolleson connected for a two-run homer that scored Sogard. The blast gave Tolleson his eighth home run of the season, and only his second away from Raley Field. A Dallas McPherson double scored Michael Taylor.

The Sky Sox avoided the shutout when Chris Frey singled on a fly ball to left fielder Corey Wimberly that scored Chris Nelson in the eighth inning.

The Sky Sox struggled against the River Cats pitching and were unable to string two hits together all night. The win goes to Tyson Ross, his first in the PCL, who pitched 5.0 innings for two hits, two walks and seven strikeouts.

No amount of pitching switch-ups could slow the River Cats. Travis Buck was the only Cat without a hit in Wednesday night's 12-hit affair.

The win gives Sacramento a 30-21 road record, best in the PCL.

Sacramento looks to sweep the Sky Sox in Thursday night's conclusion of this series.

Majewski's Slam Lifts 'Hounds

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Among the major factors Wednesday night at Corpus Christi were (1) the strike zone and (2) Val Majewski's bat.

Almost HALF the outs in the game came via strikeout, with the two clubs combining for 25 whiffs. Jordan Lyles, the Houston Astros' top pitching prospect, accounted for 11 of the strikeouts in 6.2 innings, but also allowed nine base hits, including the game's biggest swing.

With Corpus Christi leading, 1-0, in the third inning, the RockHounds loaded the bases with one out. Majewski took Lyles' first pitch out to left field, clearing the wall past a leaping Freddy Parejo with a high drive for a Grand Slam home run and a lead the 'Hounds would not relinquish.

In the fifth, Majewski singled with two out and Corey Brown drilled an RBI double to deep left-center, capping the RockHounds' scoring.

Jon Gaston ripped a 2-run home run in the sixth inning, his second home run in as many nights, cutting the lead to 5-3. His home run came off Daniel Sattler, who came off the disabled list and pitched for the first time since June 10. The roster spot opened with the promotion of reliever Justin James to Triple-A Sacramento.

Relievers Justin Souza and Mickey Storey combined to shut out the Hooks over the seventh, eighth and ninth, with Storey earning his fourth save with a 1-2-3 ninth.

Starter Jeff Lyman went just 2.0 innings, throwing 63 pitches, but struck out four while walking two and allowing just one solid hit (plus a swinging bunt and blooper). While he didn't go deep in the game, Lyman (who is being converted from reliever back to starter) survived a long first inning (39 pitches), allowing just run run and getting the third out with the bases loaded, denying the Hooks a big inning.

Second baseman Jemile Weeks returned to the 'Hounds, playing for the first time since May 6 after being sidelined by a hip flexor. Weeks played 10 games in the Arizona Rookie League before coming back to the 'Hounds, and went 1-for-5 with a single and a run scored.

The RockHounds open a 7-game homestand versus San Antonio & Frisco Friday at 7 p.m.

Ports Trounced By Giants 17-1

SAN JOSE, Claif. - On Wednesday night, the Stockton Ports suffered their most lopsided loss of the season. After beginning the second half just 2-9 at home, the San Jose Giants exploded for 17 runs on 22 hits en route to a 17-1 drubbing of the Ports at Municipal Stadium. The three-game series is now tied with the rubber match to be played on Thursday.

San Jose started the scoring in the second with a one-out solo home run from Drew Biery off Ports starter Brett Tomko (0-1). Tomko, despite allowing six hits through the first three innings, allowed just the one run over that span.

Stockton let their first real run-scoring opportunity fall by the wayside in the fourth. After Giants starter Kyle Woodruff retired nine of the first 10 he faced through three innings, the Ports managed to load the bases with nobody out in the fourth. Woodruff, however, would get Yusuf Carter to pop to first and Tyler Ladendorf to hit into an inning-ending double-play to escape the jam unscathed.

From that point forward, the game belonged to San Jose. The Giants added a run in the fourth on an RBI double from Francisco Peguero to make it a 2-0 lead. Tomko would be chased from the game in the fifth. With two aboard and one out, Biery launched his second home run of the night-a three-run shot to left to give San Jose a 5-0 advantage.

Tomko would receive his first Cal-League decision, taking the loss after going 4.2 innings and allowing five runs on 10 hits while striking out three.

Woodruff would receive a no-decision, going 4.1 scoreless innings in his first career start. Eric Stolp (5-8) would be credited with the win after tossing 1.2 scoreless innings in relief of Woodruff.

San Jose took complete command in the sixth. With reliever Scott Hodsdon on the hill, Peguero tripled to right and scored on an RBI single that followed from Ehire Adrianza. Run-scoring singles were also added from Johnny Monell and Joel

Weeks. The big blow in the inning came with the bases loaded and two out. Ninth-place hitter James Simmons tripled to right-center to clear off the bases and give the Giants a commanding 11-0 lead. Hodsdon would allow six runs on six hits in 1.1 innings of relief.

The hits kept coming for the Giants in the seventh. Andrew Carignan recorded the first out of the inning, then struck out Juan Perez who reached on a passed ball. After walking Monell, Carignan yielded back-to-back singles to Jose Flores and Wendell Fairly. Carignan was taken out of the game after hitting Biery with a pitch. Jose Pina came on and allowed an RBI double to Weeks, capping off a four-run inning that saw the Giants lead balloon to 15-0. All four runs in the inning were charged to Carignan.

In the eighth, designated hitter Brandon Pinkney was brought in to pitch. After getting Adrianza to fly to right to start the inning, Pinkney gave up a single to Perez, then a two-run homer to Monell to make it a 17-0 score. Pinkney allowed a single to Flores, but then got Fairley to hit into an inning-ending double-play.

The Ports were able to spoil San Jose's shutout bid in the ninth. After being held to just three hits through eight innings, the Ports got three hits in the ninth starting with a leadoff solo home run from Carter, who's now homered in seven of nine games since arriving from Arizona.

Giants reliever Edwin Quirarte (SV, 6) would finish the ninth and be credited with a three-inning save, allowing just the one run on three hits in three frames of relief.

The Ports and Giants will play the rubber match of their three-game set on Thursday at Municipal Stadium. Left-hander Fabian Williamson (1-0, 5.17 ERA) will head to the hill for Stockton, opposed by San Jose right-hander Kyle Nicholson (6-7, 6.22 ERA). First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Fall in Lansing, Snap Streak

Kane County's winning streak ends at 7 with narrow defeat

LANSING, Mich. – The Kane County Cougars saw their season-high seven-game winning streak come to an end Wednesday night with a 2-1 loss against the Lansing Lugnuts at Cooley Stadium. Justin Marks delivered his third quality start in four outings but suffered the loss, as the Cougars opened a nine-game, 10-day road trip in Michigan. Even with the loss, the Cougars have 14 wins in their last 18 games.

Marks (3-11) gave up single runs in the first and fifth innings, both on a sacrifice fly by Lansing's Sean Ochinko, and that became the difference. The southpaw pitched seven innings for the second time this season, gave up seven hits, walked one and fanned six in the hard-luck defeat. Ryan Doolittle worked one relief inning and got out of a bases-loaded no-out jam in the eighth.

The Cougars, who were averaging 6.2 runs per game in July entering play Wednesday, scored once on six hits. They trailed, 2-0, and had runners on second and third with no outs in the eighth when Anthony Aliotti notched a sacrifice fly for what became the team's only run. The Cougars stranded eight, including two in three different innings. Egan Smith (4-0) won it for Lansing, and Nestor Molina posted his third save.

The Cougars (16-9, 48-46) and Lugnuts (13-12, 49-45) battle again Thursday night at 6:05 CT. Kenny Smalley (0-0, 0.00) is scheduled to pitch against Dave Sever (3-6, 4.63). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 5:50 p.m.