

A's News Clips, Monday, July 26, 2010

Dallas Braden ends victory drought, pitches Oakland A's past Chicago White Sox

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

It was hardly perfect, but after nine starts without a victory that included a depressing stint on the disabled list, Dallas Braden was definitely happy to be a winner again Sunday.

Eleven weeks to the day since his May 9 perfect game against the Tampa Bay Rays, Braden delivered 6 1/3 solid innings against the Chicago White Sox, and despite some anxious moments once he departed, the A's preserved his long-overdue 'W' with a 6-4 victory at the Oakland Coliseum.

While Braden maintained he hasn't been dwelling morosely about his long streak without a victory, the left-hander admitted it felt like "eons" since his last one.

"I can finally quit answering calls from the Oakland Zoo looking for their monkey," he said. "He's off my back, and I'll be sending him home."

Braden (5-7) certainly hasn't been awful during his personal drought. As he reminded, he pitched a complete game his first start after the perfecto. In seven of the nine starts he made since May 9, the A's scored two runs or less. His ERA was still a respectable 3.74 coming into Sunday.

"He's pitched well enough to win but hasn't really gotten any wins," said Craig Breslow, who stopped a seventh-inning Sox rally and then pitched a scoreless eighth. "Some of that stuff is pretty circumstantial, but obviously we felt when we had the lead late in the game, it was important to nail it down no matter who was in line to get the win."

The A's actually mounted a 6-1 lead for Braden through the first six innings, and the pitcher certainly did his part. He retired 13 of 14 batters from the end of the first inning through the end of the fifth. He worked out of his own jam in the sixth after walking two hitters but needed help after two of the first three men in the seventh singled. He confessed that he was starting to get a bit tired as his pitch count got up into the 90s (he finished with 98 pitches).

"I expect some fatigue the first three-four starts after coming back, just getting back in the swing of things," said Braden, who gave up five hits with two walks and struck out five. "For the most part, I was able to finish pitches, which is what I was most worried about coming off my last start."

The A's needed some good news on the rotation front after learning Saturday that veteran Ben Sheets might be done for the year with an elbow problem. Braden not only pitched well, but Brett Anderson also threw 5 1/3 innings of scoreless ball in a Triple-A rehab start Sunday in Tacoma and struck out nine. Barring any adverse aftereffects, Anderson should make his next start in the majors.

It couldn't come at a better time for the A's, with six of the next 12 games against AL West leader Texas, along with another three-game set against the AL Central-leading White Sox next weekend.

"We're playing well, but to get to the top of the division you have to beat the guys who are ahead of you," said Breslow. "So we're going to see what we've got coming up."

One of the critical plays for Oakland came in the bottom of the sixth inning. Leadoff man Coco Crisp, who had taken off for second on a steal attempt, scored when Chicago reliever Erick Threets threw wildly to first on a pickoff attempt and the ball rolled all the way to the right-field bullpen area. Crisp had to shift gears when he rounded second and saw third-base coach Mike Gallego already waving him home.

"Gags' arm was feeling good so he decided to use it and wave me around," Crisp said. "It ended up working out, because the throw was off line. If the throw's on target, I'm out, but it's good to take the chance because the guy's moving away from home plate in foul territory. It turned out to be an important run."

A's notes: Oakland broadcaster Ken Korach credits Jon Miller for boosting his career

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

When Giants broadcaster Jon Miller gave his speech in Cooperstown, N.Y., on Sunday as this year's winner of the Ford C. Frick Award, A's lead broadcaster Ken Korach was watching with great interest and pride at the Oakland Coliseum — a place where Miller got his first big break.

Korach, now in his 15th season with the A's, considers Miller a good friend and a profound influence on his career. In the early 1990s, when he was broadcasting San Jose State football and basketball, as well as Triple-A baseball for the Las Vegas Stars, he got a call from Miller one day that Korach said changed his life.

"Jon was with the Orioles then and I didn't even know him," Korach said. "But he told me he had heard my work and was impressed with it and advised me that I should apply for an opening that Baltimore had at the time. It was really a shock. I don't even know how he got my number."

Korach applied for that Orioles job but didn't get an interview. But emboldened by Miller's praise, Korach continued to pursue work at the major league level and in 1992 landed his first assignment with the Chicago White Sox doing mostly weekend games, a job he held for four seasons. He also eventually worked briefly with Miller with the Orioles before becoming a full-time broadcaster in Oakland in 1996.

"He was the first person at the major-league level who showed any interest in my work, and I'll always be indebted to him for that," he said.

It was Brett Anderson replica jersey giveaway day at the Coliseum. But the left-hander was in Tacoma with the Triple-A Sacramento RiverCats making what the A's hope was his last rehab start before rejoining the rotation.

Anderson (left elbow inflammation) threw 5 1/3 innings of four-hit shutout ball and struck out nine, walking one. He threw 87 pitches, 53 strikes. Anderson likely will make his first A's start since June 3 on Friday in Chicago.

White Sox reliever Erick Threets was born in Hayward and raised in Livermore. Threets, 28, was a seventh-round Giants draft pick in 2000 and pitched a total of 10 games for them in 2007 and 2008.

Called up by the White Sox on June 27, Threets has yet to allow an earned run in seven appearances over 8 1/3 innings, but his errant pickoff throw in the sixth inning Sunday allowed Coco Crisp, who was stealing, to score from first.

Peterson: At 31, Oakland A's rookie Matt Watson glad to be in bigs

By Gary Peterson, Contra Costa Times columnist

Matt Watson is one of the first A's in the clubhouse each day. This could have something to do with the fact he was such a late arrival to the major leagues.

His extended career arc wasn't by design. But as a 16th-round draft choice (by the lame-duck Montreal Expos, no less), Watson came to appreciate the value of perseverance. He was a veteran of five minor league seasons before he got his first taste of the bigs as a September call-up with the New York Mets in 2003.

"I never gave myself a chance then," Watson said Sunday, before starting in left field and going 1 for 2 in the A's 6-4 win over the Chicago White Sox. "I grew up such a big Mets fan, and here I'm playing with the Piazzas and Glavines."

"They got me to the big leagues. They're also the only team to release me," he said, smiling, "so I have mixed feelings."

Almost two years passed before Watson got his second shot, with the 2005 A's.

"I was more comfortable, but I still knew the deal," he said. "They had their guys — (Nick) Swisher, (Mark) Kotsay was here, guys were out there who had guaranteed money."

Watson was guaranteed nothing. He appeared in 19 games with Oakland, after which he spanned the globe in pursuit of a roster spot — with the Chiba Lotte Marines of the Japan Pacific League, Lancaster (Pa.) of the independent Atlantic League, Syracuse in the Toronto Blue Jays system, Mets' affiliates Binghamton, Buffalo and St. Lucie, the A's Triple-A team in Sacramento.

Last season went so poorly it resulted in a pair of firsts — the aforementioned release and a long look at the professional horizon.

"I was really contemplating a post-baseball career," he said, "(and) whether I wanted to get into coaching. I heard a lot of times this year, why don't you just come back and play for the independent league team in Lancaster, where I'm from. You can't really (explain to people about) health insurance, financially how much better it is (in organized baseball)."

The A's welcomed him back to Sacramento this spring. On July 5 they recalled him for his first major league engagement in five years. He was 31 — and still a rookie.

Last week he achieved a new, more memorable milestone, hitting his first major league home run off Boston's Clay Buchholz.

"When I was up here a long time ago that was one of the things that was on my mind — gotta get one, gotta get one," he said. "I'm old enough that a lot of things I would have been enamored with at 23 or 24 have kind of lost a little bit of their luster. I've learned to relax and enjoy the moment a little bit more than what I would have."

Thus it wasn't so much an exclamation point on a 12-year odyssey as it was an affirmation of the process. To understand this, you have to understand how unusual it is for someone to bounce around baseball's outback for such an extended period.

Watson gets it. He's aware that every organization preordains a dozen or so prospects it expects to make an impact at the major league level, and that most every other minor leaguer is just there to help play the games.

"That's what I pride myself most on," he said. "I was a 16th-round draft pick. I was the fifth out of five outfielders in the New York-Penn League my first year. I know that's a lot of credit to my family, my wife helping me stay with it. My parents, my upbringing. Never burning any bridges. Have people believe in you and you'd be surprised how long you can stay around this game."

Watson has stuck around long enough to turn his career into a circle-of-life experience. His father played football for Temple in the late 1960s and early '70s and "always loved baseball." His sons, ages 6 and 7, are beginning to realize what a cool job their father has.

"My dad taught me to play the game the right way. He taught me to hustle," he said. His sons are "getting to the age where they're going to be playing in the next year or two. I just want to see hustle. Hit the ball, look like you're having fun."

And don't be afraid to be the first one to the office each day. It makes you look like you love your work.

Braden gets first win since perfect game

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Dallas Braden picked up the victory in the A's 6-4 decision over the White Sox on Sunday. Here's some perspective on how long it had been since his previous win:

-- LeBron James was beloved in Cleveland.

-- Spain not only hadn't won the World Cup, the 32-team tournament had yet to begin.

-- Roy Halladay hadn't pitched a perfect game.

"Eons. Eons," is how Braden described how long his drought had lasted.

Braden's previous victory had been his perfecto against Tampa Bay on May 9. After that, he endured nine winless starts, a major-league record for a pitcher following a no-hitter. He went 0-5 with a 4.10 ERA in that stretch.

On Sunday against Chicago, he allowed three runs on five hits in 6 1/3 innings. He struck out five and walked two.

"I can finally quit answering calls from the Oakland Zoo," Braden deadpanned, "looking for their monkey. He's off my back and I'll be sending him home."

It's doubtful that monkey caused Braden the elbow problem that landed him on the disabled list in late June. Sunday was his second start since coming off the DL. In his first, on Tuesday against Boston, he gave up 10 hits in 4 2/3 innings.

"For the most part, I was able to finish pitches (Sunday)," Braden said, "which is what I was kind of worried about from my last start."

Though Braden hadn't enjoyed personal success lately, the A's have. They've won four of their past five games and nine of their past 11.

Said Braden: "The biggest thing is we just took our fourth series in a row."

That four-series win streak is Oakland's longest since it took five straight, May-June 2007. The A's have taken series from the Angels, Royals, Red Sox and White Sox.

Chicago led 1-0 with two outs in the second inning Sunday. With the bases loaded, Daric Barton's grounder got past second baseman Gordon Beckham and into right field for a two-run single.

Beckham probably should have been able to stop the ball at the very least. His afternoon was particularly ineffective: He struck out in his first three at-bats and popped up trying to bunt for a base hit in his last time up.

Kurt Suzuki's day was considerably better than Beckham's. The A's catcher went 2-for-4 and drove in three runs. He's 14-for-34 (.412) in his past nine games after a 4-for-37 funk in the previous nine.

Suzuki said he simplified his approach at the plate after that nine-game scuffle.

"I just tried to get a good base going and reduce the movement in my whole setup and swing," he said. "I kind of went back to the basics and sometimes that's what you've got to do."

The A's stole four bases Sunday, and one of the steals led directly to their final run. In the sixth, former Giants left-hander Erick Threets had Coco Crisp picked off first. The problem for Threets: His throw went halfway to Oakland International.

Crisp got credit for a steal of second, and he motored all the way home on the two-base error by Threets.

Wuertz is throwing like it's 2009 again

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

With **Andrew Bailey** unavailable because of back spasms, A's manager **Bob Geren** called on **Michael Wuertz** to pitch the ninth with Oakland in front 6-4 on Sunday.

Wuertz set down the White Sox in order to collect his third save of the season and second in four games.

The right-hander went 6-1 with a 2.63 ERA last season. He began this season on the disabled list with shoulder tendinitis and then struggled to regain his form from 2009.

Wuertz seems to have rebounded; he has allowed only one run in his past 13 appearances.

Said Geren of Wuertz: "He physically wasn't feeling all that great consistently in the first half. He had days where he felt great, days where he didn't.

"Now, he feels pretty strong every day - and it's showing in his pitching and it's showing in his confidence and the results."

Geren said there's a good chance Bailey and outfielder **Rajai Davis**, who missed the Chicago series because of a hamstring injury, will be ready to go when the A's open a three-game series at Texas on Tuesday.

Anderson update: Sunday was **Brett Anderson** Jersey Day at the Coliseum, but the left-hander was in Tacoma, Wash., making his third rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento.

Anderson, who has had elbow problems, breezed through 5 1/3 scoreless innings in the River Cats' 3-2 loss. Anderson allowed four hits, struck out nine and walked one.

He is expected to return to the Oakland rotation probably Friday, possibly Saturday, in Chicago.

Briefly: All 10 runs in Sunday's game came with two outs. ... All nine of the A's hits were singles. In fact, **Paul Konerko's** RBI double in the first inning was the only extra-base hit of the afternoon. ... A's left-hander **Jerry Blevins** had his scoreless-appearance streak end at 13. He gave up RBI singles to the two batters (**Juan Pierre** and **Alexei Ramirez**) he faced in the seventh inning. Those runs were charged to **Dallas Braden**. **Alex Rios** then singled against **Craig Breslow** to bring home Pierre, snapping Blevins' run.

A's leading off

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle

Pitching is his bag: After Sunday's game, a reporter mentioned to Dallas Braden that he had thrown some nice changeups. Responded Braden: "If I don't throw any nice changeups, I'll be bagging your groceries."

Braden ends post-perfecto drought

A's lefty snags first win in 10 tries since history-maker

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Dallas Braden held back a smile, his always-entertaining self ready to enter sarcastic mode when asked if he remembered his last win.

"It was a Sunday," Braden said, before pausing a few seconds. "It was a while ago."

Make it exactly 11 weeks ago, when he forever etched his name in the history books by throwing a perfect game against the Rays on May 9.

Until Sunday, that is.

For on Sunday, with the A's looking to take their fourth consecutive series, Braden appeared to regain something of his pre-perfecto self. And in the midst of his efforts, Oakland snagged more than enough runs en route to a 6-4 victory and subsequent series win over the White Sox.

"I can quit answering calls from the Oakland Zoo looking for the monkey on my back," said Braden, who moved to 5-7 on the season.

It marked his second start since coming off the disabled list, where he sat for a few weeks nursing his elbow back to health. His first outing, a rather short 4 2/3-inning appearance, didn't go so well. His sinker was missing, and he never really got in much of a rhythm.

All that changed on Sunday, when Braden recovered from a long first inning that resulted in a Paul Konerko RBI double to put together five straight scoreless frames before being tagged with two after his exit in the seventh.

"He had a good sinker going for him today," batterymate Kurt Suzuki said. "His sinker was down in the zone. He didn't leave very many balls up. And when it was up, it was up and away. His changeup was working, and his changeup and fastball are his bread and butter. But when he can get that sinker going on that outside corner to righties and inside to lefties, it helps him out a lot. It opens up the whole game for him, the whole plate."

Braden's seventh-inning exit -- which came with one out and runners on first and second, both of which Jerry Blevins allowed to score -- was greeted with a standing ovation of more than 17,000 present at the Oakland Coliseum. He, along with just about everyone else in the confines of the stadium, knew the victory had been a long time coming.

"I think it's been bothering him a bit, just because everyone keeps talking about the perfect game, and rightfully so," Suzuki said. "That's the type of thing, you do such a great thing, and you're obviously going to be under the microscope a little bit more. Now it's time for him to get on a roll. We're excited to have him back, and the way he's pitching is awesome."

Chicago manager Ozzie Guillen didn't go so far as deeming Braden "awesome." He didn't even really have all that much to say about the A's lefty. But, seemingly like Braden usually does, he told it like he saw it.

"He's a character," the White Sox skipper said. "Kooky son-of-a-gun. That's all I can say. I don't see anything special -- he beat us. He beat us because he threw strikes, changed speeds and he gave his team a good chance to win. But he's only another guy on the mound. I don't see anything special."

On Sunday, Braden didn't either. But, given his injury-prone past, he's being realistic about his post-DL performance.

"I feel good," he said. "I expect some fatigue the first three or four starts coming back and getting in the swing of things, but for the most part I was finishing pitches, which is what I was worried about coming off my last start."

Meanwhile, Suzuki lent his partner in crime a good dose of support at the plate, where he collected a pair of hits and three RBIs just 24 hours after putting together a three-hit day.

"It's nothing that we don't expect out of Kurt," Braden said. "He's been a stable guy at the plate. He's going to become a perennial All-Star. We're excited for him to get back swinging, get back rolling, get things going."

Suzuki, the A's new \$16 million man by way of a four-year contract agreement reached on Friday, is 14-for-34 (.412) over his last nine games after going 4-for-37 (.108) over his previous nine contests.

"I'm trying to just simplify things a little bit more," he explained. "I'm trying to get a good base going and reduce the movement in my setup and swing. I kind of went back to the basics, and sometimes that's what you have to do instead of over thinking things. You have to keep things simple, use the whole field and not overswing. Just try to find the barrel and hit the ball hard somewhere."

Whatever it is, it's working. And the A's, guided by his ways, are suddenly winners of nine of their past 11 games. They finished the six-game homestand with Boston and Chicago at 4-2 and have now won four consecutive series for the first time since May 27-June 14, 2007, when they won five straight.

The offense can't be handed all the credit, though. On Sunday, the club matched a season high with four stolen bases and now has 16 since the All-Star break, good for most in the Majors. Those efforts paid off big, as an aggressive offense worked its way around the bases against four White Sox hurlers, including starter Dan Hudson, who was tagged with five runs in five innings.

"It's been no mystery that we're not going to hit a lot of homers, so we have to do other things, little things," Suzuki said. "We have to run the bases, get guys over, get guys in, because we know our pitching is going to be there. We feel if we can generate offense somehow, we'll get some wins."

"We're running the bases really well," Braden said. "That's been key for us. We've been able to create some rallies by putting ourselves in good position on the bases. We're not always going to get that big homer, so we're getting runs by way of base running, by way of stealing. We're making things happen. This is the type of baseball we expected in Spring Training. We knew what we were capable of, and now we're starting to show it."

A's get shot at AL West-leading Rangers

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com

It's easy for Athletics manager Bob Geren to say every series is a critical one, but when his club travels to meet the American League West leaders for a late-July set, he admitted there's a bit of extra emphasis.

"It's just another series, but at this stage, every series is a big series," Geren said. "We'll see them again at home soon, so those are six big games right there."

The Rangers, who will play host to the A's on Tuesday, exited Sunday with a seven-game lead in the American League West. The two teams will meet for two three-game sets between Tuesday and the first week of August. Oakland rests a half-game back of the second-place Angels, who lost three of four to the Rangers over the weekend.

The A's -- who have won nine of their last 11 games, including a 6-4 win against the White Sox on Sunday -- have made the playoffs five times in the past 11 years, with AL West titles in 2000, '02, '03 and '06.

They also won the AL Wild Card in 2001. The Rangers, meanwhile, have won the division just three times in club history.

Cliff Lee, fresh off his first win with the Rangers, is 4-2 with a 2.61 career ERA against the A's. But many Oakland hitters have had success against the former Cy Young Award winner. Rajai Davis, Gabe Gross, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Landon Powell, Adam Rosales and Kurt Suzuki all are hitting .333 or better against the left-hander.

On the other side, A's starter Gio Gonzalez, 3-1 in his last four starts, will look to make amends for struggles in his start against the Rangers earlier this year, in which he allowed four runs in four frames on May 12. His 95 strikeouts lead the club, but his 56 walks is the second-highest total in the American League.

Texas lost four straight games going into the All-Star break, but it has come out of the intermission on fire. The Rangers are 8-3 in the second half, and only five of those wins have necessitated a save situation. Closer Neftali Feliz has all of those saves, and he's successfully converted 28 of his first 30 save chances this season.

Rangers: Crucial stretch vs. West

Starting with their weekend series against the Angels -- a series Texas took 3-1 -- the Rangers are playing a stretch of 16 straight vs. the AL West. Thirty-six of the Rangers' final 67 games coming against division foes. Texas is 17-8 against division rivals this season and went 3-3 against Oakland before the All-Star break.

Athletics: Bailey should be back

After not pitching for a week because of an upper back strain, the Athletics expect reliever Andrew Bailey to be available Tuesday. The right-hander is 1-3 with a 1.56 ERA with 20 saves this year. He's allowed just one run in his last ten outings (11 1/3 innings). ... Oakland is playing through a 15-game stretch that includes 12 against first-place teams.

Brett Anderson pitched 5 1/3 scoreless innings for Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday and could be on track for a return to the big-league rotation. Anderson, who struck out nine batters, has been sidelined with an inflamed elbow.

Worth noting

The A's extended their winning streak in day games to six on Sunday and have not lost an afternoon game since June 23. Unfortunately for Oakland, all three games in the series against the Rangers are night games. ... Davis missed his third straight game with a strained left hamstring, but the A's have a day off on Monday. ... The "Moneyball" movie -- based on the 2003 bestseller by Michael Lewis -- begins filming Monday at the Coliseum. ... Saturday's Rangers victory was just the ninth 1-0 game in the 17-year history of Rangers Ballpark in Arlington.

Anderson on target for Friday return

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Brett Anderson's impending return to a rather depleted A's rotation looks all the more likely for Friday after he endured a successful rehab start with Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday.

The A's lefty, who hasn't made a start for Oakland since June 3 due to elbow tendinitis, tossed 5 1/3 innings of shutout ball for the River Cats, giving up just four hits while walking one and striking out nine with 87 pitches in Tacoma, Wash.

"He felt great," manager Bob Geren reported after the A's 6-4 victory over Chicago on Sunday.

Thus, Anderson will make Monday's trip to Texas with the team and is expected to get the call for Friday's start in Chicago, pushing scheduled starter Dallas Braden to Saturday. He'll fill a rotation that's now missing Ben Sheets (elbow) and look to build on a season that -- before his injury -- saw him go 2-1 with a 2.35 ERA in six starts.

Bailey hopes to return to mound in Texas

OAKLAND -- The A's are hoping to enter this week's divisional series with the power-heavy Rangers boasting something that resembles a healthy pitching staff, Andrew Bailey included.

Bailey has been sidelined with an upper back strain since experiencing a muscle spasm on Tuesday, when he gathered a win after tossing two shutout innings against the Red Sox. It marked just the third time all season he's been forced to throw two frames.

The A's closer was unavailable again for Sunday's rubber match with the White Sox, but he, along with manager Bob Geren, is hopeful to be back in action Tuesday, when Oakland is slated to begin a three-game set in Arlington.

"Hopefully with Monday's off-day," Bailey said, "that will give me enough rest for Tuesday. Each and every day it's getting better, but right now it's still a work in progress. This is kind of new to me, so I don't really know what to expect."

Bailey has not allowed a run in 13 of his past 15 appearances, a span in which he's compiled a 1.10 ERA. He has a 1.56 mark for the season, good for sixth lowest among American League relievers.

"We obviously won't be using him today," Geren said on Sunday morning, "but we're real hopeful for Tuesday."

Worth noting

Rajai Davis (left hamstring) endured running drills on Sunday morning, but he was still deemed day-to-day. ... Travis Buck (leg soreness), who Geren said will play a minimum of seven games with Triple-A Sacramento, started his sixth contest with the River Cats on Sunday. He entered the game with a .111 batting average (2-for-18) through five contests. ... Kurt Suzuki's sixth-inning homer on Saturday came on an 0-2 pitch, representing the third time this season he's homered in that count -- a mark that leads the American League.

As San Jose tries to lure A's, team signs catcher Suzuki to \$16M deal

Jorge Ortiz, Daily Pitch, USA Today,

The A's reached agreement Friday on a four-year contract worth \$16.25 million with catcher Kurt Suzuki. The city of San Jose hopes he plays at least part of that time down south.

Defying baseball's timetable, San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed said Thursday he will ask the City Council to put a ballpark measure on the November ballot rather than wait for MLB to complete its report on the A's stadium options.

San Jose has to put the measure on the ballot by Aug. 3 for it to go to voters in the November election.

Reed's decision drew a strong rebuke from Commissioner Bud Selig, who said in a statement:

"We were surprised and disappointed by the news today in San Jose about the stadium referendum. We were not part of the process and had no knowledge that a decision to proceed with the election had been made. A ballot referendum is premature and completely independent of the ongoing work of the committee which has been in place to thoroughly study this situation."

After their plans to move to Fremont fell through, the A's focused their efforts on San Jose, where co-owner Lew Wolff has business interests. The territorial rights to the area, however, are owned by the Giants, who are steadfastly opposed to the A's moving there.

Regardless of where they play, the A's had been looking to sign Suzuki to a long-term deal, and this contract – which kicks in immediately and supersedes his current one-year deal – will buy out his arbitration years. There's also a club option for 2014.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports Suzuki will earn a guaranteed \$16.25 million and could make as much as \$25-26 million if the A's pick up the option.

Suzuki, 26, had a breakout season last year, batting .274 with 15 homers and 88 RBI. This year his average is down to .257 but he ranks first on the team with 10 home runs and second with 37 RBI.

Braden earns first win since perfect game May 9

By JANIE McCAULEY, Associated Press

OAKLAND — Dallas Braden glanced into the stands as he walked off the mound and made eye contact with his grandmother.

Peggy Lindsey gave him a look that told the pitcher he was on track for a long-awaited victory — but don't count it yet.

Braden won for the first time in 10 starts since his perfect game May 9, ending a five-game losing streak as the Oakland Athletics beat the Chicago White Sox 6-4 on Sunday.

"It was a Sunday, a while ago," Braden said, noting it felt like "eons."

Kurt Suzuki drove in three runs two days after receiving a \$16 million, four-year contract, and Daric Barton hit a two-run single in the second before Suzuki followed with one of his own. Suzuki added another RBI single in the fourth.

Afterward, Suzuki had a little fun with the pitcher he's caught from the minors to the majors.

"Finally win one, huh?" Suzuki said.

Paul Konerko gave Chicago an early lead on an RBI double with two outs in the first. After that, Braden (5-7) retired 13 of the next 14 White Sox hitters. This was the lefty's second start since coming off the disabled list July 20 following a bout with tightness in his throwing elbow.

Braden insists the funk didn't frustrate him. He is most thrilled to be back helping the team.

"Wins and losses is what everybody pays attention to. It is so glaring. That's the soup of the day," Braden said. "There's a lot of luck involved winning a big league baseball game."

Braden left in the seventh to a rousing standing ovation, the A's well on their way to a fourth win in five games and ninth in 11. It was Lindsey who helped raise Braden, especially after his mother's death from skin cancer when he was a high school senior.

She was among the first to greet him after his perfecto against Tampa Bay.

While Braden wasn't ready to celebrate Sunday's outing, the outspoken pitcher did seem relieved.

"I can finally quit answering calls from the Oakland Zoo looking for their monkey," he said. "He's off my back and I'll be sending him home."

The nine consecutive starts without a victory after a no-hitter was the longest such streak in major league history, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Chicago's Mark Buehrle — who beat the A's here Friday night — went eight outings without a win last year after his perfect game on July 23, 2009.

Braden showed improved command of his pitches and seemed unfazed when he fell behind early. The offense quickly provided him everything he needed to finally get back in the win column.

Oakland captured its fourth straight series and third since the All-Star break, winning its seventh consecutive day game. The A's relied on small ball a day after hitting three home runs in a 10-2 win.

They added another run on reliever Erick Threets' wild throw past first trying to pick off a stealing Coco Crisp at first base.

Crisp was credited with a stolen base, then easily scored on the two-base error.

Braden allowed two of his five hits in the seventh, giving way to Brad Ziegler. Braden struck out five and walked two in 6 1-3 innings. His sinker was better and his changeup was consistent.

"If I don't throw any nice changeups I'll be bagging groceries," Braden said.

The White Sox got three straight RBI singles in the seventh, from Juan Pierre, Alexei Ramirez and Alex Rios. But they couldn't do enough against Braden.

"He's a character, a goofy son of a gun. That's all I can say.

I don't see anything special," Chicago manager Ozzie Guillen joked. "He throws strikes and changes speeds and he gives his team a good chance to win, but I don't see anything special.

Congratulations on the perfect game but, if Mark Buehrle can throw a perfect game anybody can."

Michael Wuertz finished with a 1-2-3 ninth for his third save.

A's closer Andrew Bailey, the reigning AL Rookie of the Year, was unavailable for the second straight game because of back spasms.

Daniel Hudson (1-1) struggled in his third start since being called up from Triple-A Charlotte on July 11. After winning at Seattle on Monday and going a career-best 6 2-3 innings, he was done after throwing 108 pitches in five innings. Hudson allowed five runs, all earned, on six hits, struck out four and walked four.

NOTES: Oakland OF Rajai Davis missed his third straight game with a strained left hamstring. He tested the leg with some running before the game. ... With an off day Monday, manager Bob Geren hopes Bailey will be ready by Tuesday's game at Texas. ... Oakland LHP Brett Anderson (elbow inflammation) pitched 5 1-3 scoreless innings in a rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento at Tacoma. He allowed four hits, struck out nine and walked one. Anderson threw 87 pitches, 53 strikes. ... The "Moneyball" movie — based on A's GM Billy Beane's innovative approach with Brad Pitt playing Beane — begins filming Monday at the Coliseum. It's being adapted from the 2003 best seller "Moneyball" by Michael Lewis. Some shooting has already taken place in Los Angeles.

Oakland A's MLN: Rodriguez To Get Long Look

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Jul 25, 2010

The Oakland A's window for evaluating the major league future of Henry Rodriguez will narrow next season when the right-hander is out of options. Given that scenario, the uber-talented, but often inconsistent reliever should get a long look with the A's this season. We discuss Rodriguez and go around the A's system with lots of news and notes inside...

Between now and the start of the 2011 regular season, the Oakland A's will have a decision to make regarding one of the top arms in their entire organization. Right-hander [Henry Rodriguez](#) is in his final option year this season, meaning that in 2011 he won't be eligible to be sent to the minor leagues unless the A's expose him to waivers.

Given Rodriguez's talent, there is little chance that he would clear waivers, so realistically, the team has until next April to decide whether to give Rodriguez a permanent spot in the A's bullpen or trade him to another team.

The A's know that Rodriguez has the potential to be special at the big league level.

"He has some things to work on, but he has the talent," Oakland A's manager [Bob Geren](#) said before the A's game on Saturday.

"I was just talking with him this morning about some things he needs to do and one thing I told him was 'how many guys can throw 100 miles per hour in the American League?' Really there is only three, if not four, guys who can do that. That's a

special talent and we have to do everything we can to get the most out of that arm because you can't find arms like that. They are very, very rare."

Control has been an issue for Rodriguez throughout his career. He was signed by the A's out of Santa Barbara, Venezuela, in July 2003 at age 16. He made his US professional debut with the A's Arizona Rookie League team in 2006 and he quickly opened the eyes of scouts around baseball with his triple-digit radar gun readings. Rodriguez struggled with his command that season, walking 50 in 43.2 innings, but he did combine with Trevor Cahill on a no-hitter.

Despite the command issues, Rodriguez was promoted to Low-A Kane County in 2007, where he was part of the Cougars' rotation. He posted an impressive 3.07 ERA and he struck-out 106 in 99.2 innings while holding opposing batters to a .214 clip. He also improved his walk-rate, issuing 58 free passes.

Rodriguez was added to the A's 40-man roster that off-season and pitched in his first big league spring training camp in 2008. He threw well and it was anticipated that he would have a break-out season. Rodriguez joined fellow top prospects Cahill, Brett Anderson and Fautino De Los Santos in the High-A Stockton Ports' rotation, but was moved to Double-A Midland mere weeks into the season. The command issues finally caught-up to Rodriguez with the Rockhounds, as he posted a 7.46 ERA and walked more batters than he struck-out. He was sent back to Stockton during the second half of the season and was subsequently moved into the bullpen.

Rodriguez remained in a bullpen role in 2009. His 2009 season got off to a slow start, as he missed the first few weeks of the season recovering from a sports hernia he sustained during the Venezuelan Winter League season. After three "rehab" appearances with Stockton, Rodriguez spent the remainder of the season with Triple-A Sacramento, but the numbers for Rodriguez with the River Cats were unimpressive. His ERA was 5.77 and he walked 38 in 43.2 innings, although he did strike-out an eye-popping 71 batters. His season ended on a good note when he was given a September call-up and he allowed only one earned run in four innings for Oakland.

This spring, Rodriguez was given the opportunity to pitch in nine spring training games. In 9.1 innings, he struck-out 11, but he walked eight and allowed nine hits and five runs. He turned it around once the season began, however. In 21.1 innings for the River Cats this season, Rodriguez walked only nine, while striking out 31. He allowed only 10 hits and he had a team-leading 11 saves.

Prior to his most recent recall, Rodriguez had been given a couple of opportunities in the big leagues this season, but both of them were short-lived stints. In mid-May he spent more than a week with the team, but made only three appearances. He also had one appearance in mid-June.

He was recalled once again on July 19 and Rodriguez has already made two appearances. It has been an uneven performance for Rodriguez in those two outings. He has struck-out four batters in 2.1 innings and has regularly clocked at 99 MPH or above. But his command, especially of his secondary offerings, has been spotty, and the White Sox ran wild on Rodriguez in his second outing.

Geren has said throughout the season, including on Saturday, that the number one thing he looks for in a reliever is the ability to throw strikes. Rodriguez will have to prove he can command the strike-zone to earn his manager's trust.

Despite the ups-and-downs Rodriguez has had in his brief time in the major leagues this season, his current go-around with Oakland should last a lot longer than the first two stints, as the A's have to have a solid evaluation of the 23-year-old's ability to pitch at the big league level before the season's end.

"He has some things to work on to get that control right and control the running game and things like that," Geren said.

"The talent is there and we are going to give him every opportunity to get the most out of that talent."

Minor League Notes

Sacramento Stories

* Reliever Cedrick Bowers returned to the River Cats this week after nearly two months in the big leagues, but he only made one appearance for Sacramento before he was recalled back to Oakland on Saturday to replace Ben Sheets on the A's 25-man roster. Sheets was placed on the disabled list with right elbow inflammation. Bowers has a 3.05 ERA with 29 strike-outs in 20.2 innings for the River Cats this season and a 4.85 ERA with a 17:5 K:BB ratio in 13 innings for Oakland.

* Sacramento will have A's ace Brett Anderson on the hill for another rehab outing this Sunday in Tacoma. The A's determined on Saturday that Anderson should have one more rehab outing. He has missed more than two months with a

flexor tendon strain in his left elbow. Anderson is expected to throw 85-95 pitches on Sunday and, assuming he comes out of that start fine, he will return to the A's rotation on Friday and will be ready to throw 100 pitches. Dallas Braden will start for the A's on Sunday.

* The River Cats have gone 16-4 in July, which has moved them into a tie with Fresno for the division lead. During the month, Chris Carter (1015 OPS and 8 HR), Steven Tolleson (1002 OPS and 17 runs scored), Josh Donaldson (824 OPS and 6 HR), Michael Taylor (894 OPS and 21 RBIs), Eric Sogard (858 OPS and 4 SB) and Jeff Baisley (852 OPS) have led the way on offense.

* Reliever Michael Benacka has a 1.74 ERA and 13 strike-outs in 10.1 innings this month. He hasn't allowed a run over his last five outings.

Midland Minute

* The Rockhounds moved to 16-12 in the second half with a 2-1 win in 11 innings on Saturday. It was Midland's fourth win in a row and sixth in the last seven games. This streak comes after back-to-back games last week during which the Rockhounds allowed 34 runs and had to have position players pitch in the final innings of both games.

* Since July 17th when he allowed five runs in 1.2 innings, reliever Mickey Storey has appeared in four games and he has allowed one run on three hits and no walks over six innings of work with five strike-outs.

* A's 2008 top pick Jemile Weeks returned to Midland on Wednesday after missing more than two months with a hip strain. Since his return, he has gone six-for-16 with two stolen bases.

* Val Majewski is batting .316 with 11 RBIs over his last 10 games. He has a team-leading 20 RBIs this month. Overall he has a .291 average and an 841 OPS since being signed by the A's out of the independent leagues in late May.

* Corey Brown (932 OPS, 11 RBIs and 5 SB), Adrian Cardenas (890 OPS and a 15:6 BB:K), Josh Horton (3 HR and 13 RBIs), Shane Peterson (885 OPS) and Matt Sulentic (851 OPS) are teaming with Majewski to lead the Rockhounds' offense this month.

* Fautino De Los Santos has allowed six runs in nine innings, but he has struck-out 18 while walking only three in July.

* Justin Souza has a 0.82 ERA and 12 strike-outs in 11 innings this month.

* Matt Wright is 3-0 with a 2.84 ERA in seven starts since joining Midland in late June. He has walked only four in 31.2 innings. Wright was a non-roster invitee to the A's big league camp. After he was sent to minor league camp, Wright signed a deal to play in Korea, but injury prevented him from competing there. Once healthy, he returned to the A's organization.

Ports Points

* Infielder Brandon Pinckney finished up the Ports' 12-4 loss to Visalia on Saturday when Brett Hunter ran into control problems in the late innings. Pinckney tossed 0.2 scoreless frames and stranded all three inherited runners from Hunter, who walked four in 1.1 innings.

* The outing from Hunter was his worst in awhile. He had walked only four over his last 9.1 innings with 15 strike-outs and three earned runs allowed. Hunter has 40 strike-outs and 19 walks in 24.2 innings.

* Michael Spina hit his 19th homerun of the season on Saturday. He is second in the organization in homers behind Chris Carter. Spina also has 76 RBIs on the season.

* After homering in two straight games, Stephen Parker drew three walks on Saturday. He has 61 walks in 99 games this season and is second on the team in homeruns with 14.

* Grant Green has reached base at a .435 clip over his last 10 games and a .420 pace for July. He has improved his batting average every month and is hitting .392 in July and .329 overall.

- * [Yusuf Carter](#) has seven homeruns in 11 games since joining the Ports from a rehab stint with the AZL A's.
 - * Stockton starter [Shawn Haviland](#) is leading the Cal League with 120 strike-outs in 110 innings.
 - * [Lance Sewell](#) has not allowed a run in 15 July innings. He has given up four hits and one walk and he has struck-out 14. Sewell has also picked up five wins in relief.
 - * Paul Smyth (1.46 ERA/ 5 SV) and [Trey Barham](#) (0.93 ERA and 1 SV) have continued to impress out of the bullpen.
 - * Veteran [Brett Tomko](#) has struggled since joining the Ports' rotation. In 13 innings he has allowed 22 hits and 12 runs.
-

Cougars Clips

- * After a hot streak, the Cougars have cooled, losing four straight on their current road trip.
 - * [Ian Krol](#) had his worst start of the season on Saturday. He allowed six runs in three innings and gave-up two homeruns, equaling his season total entering the game.
 - * [Max Stassi](#) hit his 12th homerun on Saturday. He is tied for eighth on the league leader boards.
 - * East Bay native and St. Mary's alum [Anthony Aliotti](#) has a 932 OPS and 13 RBIs this month. He is batting .286 overall with 13 stolen bases and 67 walks in 93 games.
 - * [Michael Gilmartin](#) returned to the field on Saturday after missing nearly a week with a bruised hand. He has been red-hot in July, batting .375 with a 1034 OPS.
 - * Conner Crumbliss has a .450 OBP and five stolen bases in July.
 - * [Ryan Doolittle](#) has allowed a run in 5.2 innings with four strike-outs and no walks since joining Kane County from Vancouver. Overall this season he has 22 strike-outs and one walk in 21.2 innings.
 - * [Justin Marks](#) has turned it around with a 2.14 ERA and a 35:8 K:BB ratio in 24.2 innings this month.
 - * [Connor Hoehn](#) (1.50 ERA and 12 Ks in 12 IP) and [Jose Guzman](#) (5 SV) have anchored the Cougars' bullpen this month.
-

C-Notes

- * [Jeff Bercume](#), who was signed after a tryout during the A's extended spring training camp, is batting .421 with a 990 OPS over his last 10 games. He has a .310 average on the season.
 - * [Douglas Landaeta](#) has been the C's most consistent offensive player. He hit .326 with an 811 OPS in June and is batting .345 with an 836 OPS in July.
 - * [Tony Thompson](#) returned to the line-up on Wednesday after missing a week. He has an 867 OPS in July.
 - * [Matt Thomson](#) hasn't allowed a run over his last 12 innings pitched and he was the NW League's Pitcher of the Week last week.
 - * [Michael Hart](#) got his fifth save on Saturday and he has a 25:5 K:BB ratio in 16 innings this season.
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Desert Doings

- * [Royce Consigli](#) is sixth in the Arizona League with a .371 BA. His 1027 OPS is fifth-best in the league.

* Zhi-Fang Pan, the A's first Taiwanese signee, has a .390 OBP.

* Ramon Soto's two-out single scoring Consigli was the walk-off winner for the A's on Saturday.

* Andres Avila, signed out of Mexico, has made three scoreless appearances in his US debut. The 20-year-old hasn't allowed a base-runner in 2.2 innings.

* Seth Frankoff is fourth in the Arizona League in ERA (2.28), third in WHIP (0.97) and fifth in strike-outs (34).

* Omar Duran has allowed only one earned run over his last 9.1 innings with 12 strike-outs.

Time for baseball's commissioner to make a decision

Editorial, Berkeley Voice, 7/23/2010

Enough time has passed. It's time for Major League Baseball to step up to the plate and determine whether the Athletics are free to move to San Jose or not.

A committee was formed by MLB Commissioner Bud Selig more than 16 months ago to explore the viability of San Jose hosting the A's; whether the San Francisco Giants could be persuaded to abandon their territorial rights over Santa Clara County; whether Fremont, somehow, still had legitimate ideas of building a new stadium; and whether Oakland's ideas for a new waterfront site are serious.

As unbelievable as it sounds, we are still waiting. Some cannot seriously think this is that hard of a decision. Some offers are out there, some are not. Will it hurt the Giants at the gate, or not? Is the bad economy a factor? OK, done.

MLB is acting like this is the first time a franchise has wanted to move into a rival's territory. Maybe it's time to consult the NFL to tell us how the New York teams can pull this off. Anything to get this process to the finish line.

And, by the way, why haven't MLB officials met with the A's and Giants? There's a thought.

This delay is not fair to Oakland, it's not fair to Fremont, it's not fair to San Jose, it's not fair to the Giants or the A's. It's certainly not fair to baseball fans in the East Bay and Silicon Valley. Plans need to be put in place and MLB is literally holding us hostage.

It particularly hurts San Jose. The City Council there set an Aug. 3 deadline for a commitment from MLB. Officials need a decision by then so they can put a stadium referendum on the November ballot, or flail seriously behind in the process.

Selig all but discounted San Jose's agenda during his first real statements on the issue at this year's All Star game in Anaheim.

Selig said his "objective is not to get it done as fast as possible, but to get it done right." Fast as possible? Surely, he jests. Sixteen months is hardly setting any speed record. We shudder to think how long it's going to take to get it right. Will we live that long?

According to Selig, he and MLB President Bob DuPuy have sent for additional information; published reports claim inquiries are being made to Oakland and Fremont. Fine. But, let's say this: If MLB is still waiting for responses, maybe that says something about Oakland and Fremont.

At this point, all we're left with is speculation. Maybe MLB is looking for a way to sweeten the pot for A's owner Lew Wolff to stay in the East Bay fearing such a move will hurt the Giants at the gate; maybe there's concerns that San Jose voters, with a big budget hole, may not be receptive to helping finance a new stadium; maybe Oakland has failed to produce any meaningful stadium plans. Maybe the best idea is for the A's to stay put, until things get better economically.

But we don't know for sure until Selig and company finally, as San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed aptly put it, stop jerking us around and determine the future of Bay Area baseball. It's time to play ball, commissioner.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Tacoma rallies in ninth to beat Sacramento

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

The Tacoma Rainiers came through in the clutch, making the difference in a River Cats 3-2 loss against the Seattle Mariners affiliate. Former No. 2 overall pick Dustin Ackley drove in David Winfree for the game-winner in the bottom of the ninth on a sacrifice fly.

Thanks to good starting pitching and a lack of offense, both teams were tied 2-2 before heading into the bottom of the ninth. River Cats Reliever Travis Banwart was on the hill, and started off poorly by giving up a single to David Winfree and then another base knock to Adam Moore.

A fielding error by Michael Taylor allowed Winfree to advance to third with no outs. River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco made the switch to reliever Michael Benacka in the tight situation. Benacka had posted a 3.90 ERA with 39 strikeouts on the season. He was two for four in save opportunities.

He got off to a great start by striking out Greg Halman, making the double play an escape route for the Cats. Benacka walked Mike Wilson to load the bases for pinch-hitter Ackley. In ten games, Ackley had driven in eight runs.

Despite falling behind 0-2 to Benacka, the former top-five draft pick lofted a fly ball to left field, scoring Winfree from third for the victory.

The loss dropped the Cats down to 57-45 on the season and behind 2-1 in the series against Tacoma. The close play reflects both teams' current standing on the season, both now holding nearly identical records (Tacoma 57-44) and both in close races for first place in their divisions.

It was an interesting pitching matchup between former major league veteran Ian Snell for Tacoma and rehab-assigned Brett Anderson for the River Cats. The game remained scoreless through the fourth before the Cats finally broke the ice in the fifth. With one out Eric Sogard doubled to center field. After Anthony Recker grounded out, Adam Heether came through with a clutch base hit to score Sogard.

Sogard has played in 97 games for the Cats, leading the team this season. His 108 hits also lead the team, while he ranks second in doubles, triples, and total bases.

In the bottom of the sixth, Anderson was taken out after striking out Matt Tuiasosopo. Anderson struck out nine batters, allowing only one walk, four hits, and no runs. After his departure, the Rainiers took advantage and scored two runs to take the lead.

Banwart started his outing with a strike out of Brad Nelson, but then walked David Winfree. Adam Moore smoked a deep fly ball to left-center, going over the fence for a two-run bomb. It was Moore's second home run of the season in 30 games played.

Snell finished after 6.0 innings, racking up four strikeouts and allowing four hits. Joe Nelson relieved him in the seventh and struck out the side. Since getting called down from Seattle, Snell has posted a 4.58 ERA in seven starts for Tacoma.

In the top of the eighth Tacoma went to reliever Anthony Varvaro who failed to hold the Rainiers lead. He walked Adam Heether to start the inning. Heether advanced to second on a Corey Wimberly groundout and then scored on a big Travis Buck triple.

Buck now has four RBIs in six games for the Cats since being sent to Sacramento on a rehab assignment. He has done a solid job of getting on base, walking four times and scoring four runs for the Cats offense.

The Cats will try to finish the series in a split on Monday, starting at 11:30 a.m. at Tacoma. They will come back to Raley Field on Tuesday to square off against Colorado Springs.

Missions Ride Eight Run Inning For Blowout Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

MIDLAND, TX -- A week ago, on "Beach Weekend" at Citibank Ballpark, the San Antonio Missions scored 34 runs in two games. They scored a total of four in the other two games of that 4-game series.

After scoring a total of three runs in the first two games of the current 4-game set, the Missions bused loose for an 8-run sixth inning, en route to a 10-0 win over the RockHounds Sunday evening.

The clubs, thanks to a "creative" Texas League schedule, are playing eight times in 12 days at the RockHounds' diamond. In the first seven of those games, the 'Hounds are 4-3. The wins have been by scores of 3-2, 4-2, 3-2 and 2-1. The Missions three wins have come by scores of 17-4, 17-7 and now, 10-0. If your calculator is low on batteries, that means the Missions have scored Seven runs in four losses and 44 runs in three wins. Go figure.

Corey Kluber was dominating for the third consecutive start for San Antonio. After shutting out Frisco on one hit in 7.0 innings with nine strikeouts in his last start, Kluber went 6.0 shutout innings Sunday, allowing three hits and two walks with eight K's.

Walks were again an issue for RockHounds starter Anthony Capra, who gave up the first four runs in the 8-run sixth. Of the seven walks allowed by the lefty, five would turn into runs. Both clubs struggled with the zone at times, with a combined 16 walks issued in the game (the 'Hounds walked a total of nine).

Perhaps the most revealing (and unusual) hitting "line" of the night was that of San Antonio catcher Luis Martinez: 1-for-2, with three runs, a double, two RBI and three walks.

Parker's Blast Helps Ports Past Rawhide

VISALIA, Calif. - The Visalia Rawhide may have owned the season series with the Stockton Ports in 2010, but the Boys of Banner Island had the last laugh on Sunday at Recreation Park. Avoiding a sweep, the Ports scored five third-inning runs en route to a 6-2 win over the Rawhide heading into Monday's off-day.

For the first time in the three-game set, it was the Ports who scored first and it took only three pitches. On the third pitch of the game throw by Rawhide starter Dan Taylor (4-4), Jermaine Mitchell hit a solo home run to right to put the Ports on the board.

Stockton's lead was shot-lived as the Rawhide tied the contest in the bottom of the first. Dan Kaczrowski led off the inning with a double off Ports starter Justin Murray (7-3) and advanced to third on a wild pitch. With one out, Marc Krauss tied the game with a ground-out to shortstop. Paul Goldschmidt would double with two outs and Ryan Wheeler followed with a single to right. Goldschmidt rounded third and attempted to score but was thrown out at the plate by Ports right-fielder Jeremy Barfield, his league-leading 21st outfield assist of the year.

With the game knotted at one in the fifth, the Ports were able to parlay Visalia's only miscue of the night into a five-run inning. Barfield led off the inning and reached on an error made by shortstop Niko Gallego. Kent Walton, attempting to sacrifice, reached on a bunt-single and Brandon Pinkney advanced both runners into scoring position with a sac-bunt to third. Mitchell, who fell a triple shy of the cycle on the night, broke the tie with an RBI single to right that scored Barfield. Grant Green followed with an RBI single that scored Walton and made it 3-1. Two batters later, with two on and two out, Stephen Parker hit a 3-2 pitch from Taylor over the right field fence-his second three-run homer of the series and his 15th jack of the season-to give Stockton a 6-1 edge.

Taylor would take the loss on the night, going 3.2 innings and allowing six runs (two earned) on eight hits while walking two and striking out two.

Murray, meanwhile, went five full innings and allowed just the one run on four hits while striking out five in a winning effort.

Visalia's bullpen, a combination of Victor Capellan and Justin Mace, combined to keep the Ports off the scoreboard over the final 4.1 innings.

Visalia would have one last gasp. With two down and the bases empty in the eighth, Ports reliever Scott Deal surrendered a solo home run to Krauss to make it a 6-2 game. It was the only run and only hit allowed by Deal in an otherwise strong 2.2 innings of relief.

Paul Smyth recorded the final out of the eighth and had to dodge a bullet in the ninth. Wheeler kicked off the inning with a double to left and scored two batters later on a single from Kyle Greene to bring the Rawhide within three runs. A single from Rossmel Perez brought the possible tying run to the plate with one out in the person of pinch-hitter Josh Ford. Ford, however, would hit into a game-ending 5-4-3 double-play. Smyth allowed three hits, but didn't allow a run in his 1.1 innings of relief.

Following an off-day on Monday, the Ports return home on Tuesday to kick off a six-game homestand with a three-game series versus the Lake Elsinore Storm. Brett Tomko (0-1, 8.31 ERA) will make his fourth start for Stockton, opposed by Storm left-hander Nick Schmidt (6-7, 4.43 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Get Even with Great Lakes

Kane County snaps 4-game skid with wild victory over Loons

MIDLAND, Mich. – Anthony Aliotti and Rashun Dixon each homered, Murphy Smith posted a seven-inning quality start and Connor Hoehn picked up his sixth win Sunday afternoon as the Kane County Cougars won a wild one, 7-3, over the Great Lakes Loons at Dow Diamond. The Cougars scored four runs in the top of the ninth to break a 3-3 tie and evened the three-game set at one win apiece. They also snapped a four-game losing streak.

The Cougars trailed, 1-0, in the fifth when Aliotti launched a two-run homer off Josh Wall for a 2-1 advantage. Then Jose Crisotomo singled home Mike Gilmartin in the sixth to make it 3-1. Smith, who had allowed an unearned run in the first, got touched for single runs in the sixth and seventh for a 3-3 score. He left after seven solid frames and gave up the three runs -- two earned -- on six hits, walked none and fanned five in a no-decision.

The 3-3 tie remained until the ninth inning. With Tyreace House and Aliotti on base, Max Stassi put down a sacrifice bunt, and Loons third baseman Brian Ruggiano tried to get House at third and threw away the ball for a 4-3 game. Then Dixon hammered a three-run homer to right-center off Steve Smith (3-3) to break it open, 7-3. Hoehn (6-3) pitched two scoreless innings to grab the victory.

The Cougars (17-12, 49-49) and Loons (23-6, 66-32) wrap up the series Monday night at 6:05 CT. Justin Marks (3-11, 4.81) is scheduled to work against Brett Wallach (5-0, 4.00). 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.