

A's News Clips, Friday the 13th, August, 2010

Errors come with catch for Oakland A's infield

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's shortstop Cliff Pennington is susceptible to flubbing a routine play on occasion, and he is just as likely to dazzle with a play worthy of the highlight reel.

Indeed, the defensive work of Pennington and his infield teammates has been a mixed bag this season.

Whatever judgments you cast on the A's infield defense depend largely on the numbers you emphasize.

Pennington entered Thursday's play leading American League shortstops with 17 errors. Daric Barton was tied for most among AL first basemen with 10, and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff had 10 errors, more than tripling his total from last season. Sure-handed second baseman Mark Ellis has stood out in that category, having committed just one error.

But although errors are the most basic and easily understood statistic available to critique defensive play, they tell only part of the story.

"I'm not overly concerned with the errors," A's infield coach Mike Gallego said. "The big errors to me are the ones that produce a run. When you go over them, I know there's been a few, but I don't recall that happening too often."

The A's allowed 76 unearned runs in 2009, second most in the AL. So far this year they've allowed just 38, putting them on pace to lower that total significantly.

Pennington is making his share of mistakes in his first full season as the starting shortstop. But a deeper look at his numbers shows his value with the glove.

According to STATS, Inc., he leads AL shortstops with an .866 zone rating, which measures the percentage of balls hit into a fielder's "zone" that he turns into outs.

Basically, Pennington is turning more balls into outs than any other shortstop in the league.

Yet the jury is still out on Pennington among major league scouts.

"I'm up in the air on Pennington," said one scout who wished to remain anonymous. "I've seen him play good, and I've seen him play bad. If he leads the league in errors, he's not making all the routine plays."

Another scout said Pennington struggles with his footwork at times, which could help explain his nine throwing errors. But the same scout attributed Pennington's high number of errors partly to his good range, saying he simply gets to more balls than other shortstops and has more opportunities to make mistakes.

"He grows on you the more you watch him," said the scout, who also requested anonymity. "You think he's not going to be able to get to certain balls and he does."

Eight of Kouzmanoff's 10 errors have come on throws.

Interestingly, one scout said he thinks Kouzmanoff has improved defensively over last season, when he made just three errors while playing for San Diego and set a National League record for fielding percentage by a third baseman (.990).

But the above scout also believes Kouzmanoff's errors were low partly because his range is limited.

"There's a lot of balls he's not getting to."

Kouzmanoff's zone rating of .814 ranks fifth among AL third basemen.

Like Pennington, Barton often follows up a miscue with a gem at first base.

He allowed a bouncer to skip under his glove last week against Kansas City, ultimately leading to the Royals' winning run. But the next day he made a diving stop to rob Kansas City's Chris Getz.

The A's are taking the good with the bad.

"Sometimes you get some (errors) on tough plays," Pennington said. "It's the routine ones you really can't have. You've got to eliminate all of them if you can help it."

Note: Utility man Adam Rosales returned to Oakland to have his injured right ankle examined, and the disabled list might be a possibility. He left Wednesday's game at Seattle in the second inning.

A's brace for stadium envy in the Twin Cities

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Earlier this decade, when the A's and Twins were regular playoff visitors, they were often compared for their successes on relatively small payrolls.

Now, the Twins remain in first place - and they have a brand-new downtown stadium, precisely the item that the A's believe would allow them to remain contenders year in and year out.

And for Oakland players used to playing in a less-than-ideal building, the thought of a sparkling new stadium is pretty nice.

"Without a doubt," A's second baseman **Mark Ellis** said. "That stadium allowed them to keep guys like **Joe Mauer** and **Justin Morneau**. It's a good situation. But it will happen eventually for this team (the A's)." As far as Ellis is concerned, "anything is better than the Metrodome. There was nothing good about that place. You couldn't see pop-ups."

Many of his friends and relatives from South Dakota are using the A's series this weekend as an excuse to see new Target Field, Ellis said.

"People are really happy they'll be outside," he said. "They're cooped up enough all winter."

Michael Wuertz is from Austin, Minn., south of Minneapolis. "I'm excited," he said of Target Field. "A lot of my friends and family have told me how nice it is.

A's reliever **Craig Breslow** played for the Twins, and he said he enjoyed some of the unique aspects of the Metrodome - especially how loud it got - but as a baseball fan, he's looking forward to seeing a new stadium.

Briefly: Infielder **Adam Rosales** was scheduled to see a foot specialist on Thursday afternoon in the Bay Area. ... Outfielder **Conor Jackson** (hamstring) was scheduled to play nine innings for Class-A Stockton on Thursday night, and he likely will play at Triple-A Sacramento over the weekend before coming off the DL early next week.

Powerful Carter always had a single focus

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

For many years, Major League Baseball has bemoaned the fact that it is losing top athletes to other sports, especially basketball and football.

Chris Carter is just the kind of athlete that baseball has feared will go elsewhere. He's 6-foot-5, broad-shouldered and stronger than most of his peers. It would be logical to assume that Carter, 23, played on the defensive line in high school, or maybe power forward.

Carter, however, never played a down for his high school, Sierra Vista in Las Vegas. He didn't play a quarter of basketball, despite the fact his father, Vernon, had been a good player at Rancho High School in the same city.

"When he was about 6, Chris said he wanted to be a baseball player," Vernon Carter recalled. "I was like, 'Huh?' Everyone thought he'd be a basketball player. But his passion was baseball."

Carter simply didn't want to play anything else. He only played basketball to have fun with his friends, but when it came to concentrating on a pursuit, it was baseball from a young age and with the kind of absolute focus that is unusual in a child.

"The other kids would show up without their cleats, or they'd forgotten their glove," said Bill Seifman, Carter's travel-team coach from the ages of 12 to 15. "Not Chris. He was always prepared. He was ready."

"Chris was just a pleasure to coach - if you'd ask him to do something, or try something, he'd just go to work."

Carter recalls first playing baseball during grade school, in a PE class. He took to it immediately, and went home that day and asked his mother, Renita, to sign him up for the sport.

He was so eager, he practiced all the time. Seifman recalls driving by a nearby field, and always seeing Vernon and Chris.

"They'd be out there hitting, hitting and hitting," Seifman said. "Chris would hit every day if he could."

Vernon Carter, who played softball, taught his son how to hit for power, but he soon realized that maybe his son was too good - they spent all their time retrieving balls hit over the fence.

"Chris was knocking it out of the park right away, so the deal was, 'OK, if you hit it out, *you* have to get 'em,'" the elder Carter said. "I thought that would make him ease up, but no. He just kept hitting them out."

At that point, Chris hadn't hit the growth spurt that took him over 6-foot, that didn't happen until later in middle school. That explained some of baseball's appeal.

"I was smaller than most of the kids, but I could hit the ball farther than most of them, and I'd just started playing," he said. "I loved it."

A's director of player personnel Billy Owens remembers seeing Carter during the Arizona Fall League when Carter was still in the White Sox organization, and Carter hit a mammoth homer over what the A's refer to as the Green Monster at Papago Park. Longtime employees could only remember two balls being hit there.

"Chris has such easy power, it's special," Owens said. "What he does is that his power is majestic and thunderous - and it will happen in the big leagues."

Whenever Vernon and Renita hear scouts or executives or announcers marvel at their son's power, they get a little chuckle out of it.

"The thing is that for us, we've watched Chris hit so many home runs," Vernon Carter said. "It's new to everybody else, but to us, it's just what he does. Chris hits home runs."

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Not much pop: The A's top home-run hitter is catcher Kurt Suzuki, with 12. There have been only two seasons in which Oakland did not have a 20-home-run hitter: 1978 (Mitchell Page led the team with 17) and 1983 (Dwayne Murphy and Davey Lopes tied for the lead with 17).

Chavez not ready to call it a career

Third baseman working out, hoping to return to A's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Eric Chavez remembers it well, that June weekend in San Francisco when he told himself he was ready for a Minor League rehab assignment.

It was a Saturday, about three weeks after being placed on the disabled list with neck spasms as a result of two bulging disks. He dressed in the visitors' clubhouse, headed for the cages, watched his teammates drop an Interleague matchup and went on his way.

The next day, his locker was empty.

Chavez never embarked on that rehab assignment. He went home -- to Arizona.

"That day in San Francisco," he says, "I was the one who was kind of pushing that rehab assignment, and it was probably a little bit too soon. But I wanted to give it a shot. Once I was there at the ballpark, I thought, 'Wow, this is not going to work out right now.' I literally couldn't swing a bat. "

Before the season even started, many -- Chavez included -- thought maybe it wasn't going to work out at all, that his playing days were well past him, that taking part in the 2010 season was something of a pipe dream.

So when news spread of Chavez's trip to Arizona, rather than to the club's Triple-A ballpark in Sacramento, those same thoughts returned. He's done, most figured.

"With my neck, just the way I felt," he said, "I thought, 'This is it.' I definitely, at that point, thought I might have played my last game in a baseball uniform."

Two months have passed, and Chavez still admits retirement may be in his near future. After all, he's still in Arizona, where 108-degree weather shines over his family's home on a daily basis.

"I wasn't supposed to be here during this time of year," he says with a laugh.

A week ago, he watched his eldest son, Diego, march into kindergarten. And back at the house, he and his wife, Alex, keep plenty busy with the tireless duo of Dolce, 2, and Cruz, 1.

"It's been pretty peaceful," he says. "I always cherish all those family moments I get to have while I'm here."

As Chavez speaks via phone, his kids can be heard in the background. They're splashing around in the pool, he says. Such is another day for the 32-year-old father of three in Paradise Valley, Ariz., where, for the past two months, the A's have said Chavez is simply "resting."

He is, but he's also been working out feverishly, and he's days away from swinging a bat again. That's right, retirement can wait for now -- at least until he knows, one final time, his body can do no more.

"I don't know if I'll every play again, I really don't," Chavez says. "But I'm going to try. I'm not going to get on any type of official schedule. My goal is to be back in Oakland by September. It may be in uniform, it may be out of uniform. I'm not really sure yet. But I've been working out and, physically, I'm feeling really good. I'm just going to start trying to do some baseball activities and see what happens. But, I'm literally going to take it day by day and not put a stamp on a plan."

He's done with plans, at least the type involving scheduled rehab assignments and a potential return date. His only plan, for the time being, is going about his daily routine without a plan -- something the A's organization, he insists, has "been very cool about."

"Oakland has just made it as easy as possible for me, and it's really helped out," he says. "They've given me the time and space to get healthy, really. That's their main concern for me. They told me, 'You've been through so much, so just do what you've got to do to live a normal life and be healthy.' They put no pressure on me whatsoever."

LEAVING HIS MARK

Not only does Eric Chavez rank second behind Rickey Henderson among players to spend the most seasons in an Oakland uniform with 13, but he ranks in nearly every category on Oakland's career lists.

Stat	Chavez's career numbers	Oakland rank
Home runs	230	4th
RBI's	787	4th
Runs	730	4th
Hits	1,276	5th
Doubles	282	2nd
Extra-base hits	532	2nd
Walks	565	7th
Slugging percentage	0.478	7th

Chavez, indeed, has been through a lot. Sure, despite playing in just 33 games this year and a combined 154 games over the past four injury-plagued seasons, he's still the team's highest-paid player, bringing home \$12 million this year. But the green stuff doesn't take away from the five surgeries his body's endured, or the helplessness that comes with not being able to reward the A's for their six-year, \$66-million investment.

He was once the golden boy of the franchise, literally, by racking up Gold Gloves at third base while providing a large dose of pop now missing in a rather lackluster A's lineup. He knows he can't be that guy anymore, but he's also not willing to hang up No. 3 just yet.

"I'm going to start doing baseball activity with the hope of returning, but that can get squashed at any second when I take a swing," he said. "If I feel the way I felt in San Francisco, I'm probably not going to be back in Oakland. But, if it goes well and things progress, if they have a spot, I'll try to be back on the team."

"If, along the road, it doesn't work out, nobody's going to be disappointed. Nobody expects me to play. Still, for me, I'm not ready to call it a career yet. There's a part of me that wants to give it a chance and see what's there."

Much of that mindset has come from reaching out to guys like former teammate Mark Mulder, who also wrestled back and forth on the retirement front before finally deciding he could no longer take to the mound at the Major League level.

"Every single one of them has said to keep going, to keep going until you know that it's completely over," Chavez said. "That's really helped out. I think Mark got to the point where he said, 'I can't do this anymore. It's not worth it.' It's a tough decision to make. Retiring might be the smart thing for me to do, but I'm just not ready to decide."

Only time will tell if Chavez's career takes a small step forward or a permanently large step back. Both prospects obviously present outcomes on two very different spectrums, but this 12-year veteran is ready to finally know which direction he needs to take.

"I hope to be back there one way or another pretty soon here, either in uniform or just for moral support," he said. "I'm really looking forward to that."

If in uniform, he'll know right away whether -- again -- he's up for the challenge.

"Even when I was playing earlier this year," he said, "I felt like I was just wrestling with a 400-pound gorilla the whole time I was hitting. It just wasn't happening."

"I've really worked hard on stabilizing and rehabbing my shoulder and my trap area, and I'm kind of hoping that when I pick up a bat and start to face live pitching, I can see a huge improvement. But, until I do that, I don't want to say I'm coming back to play or I'm not coming back to play."

Either way, he'll continue keeping tabs on the team that drafted him in the first round out of high school in 1996, the team that groomed him into one of Oakland's finest, the team that watched him climb the ranks among the top 10 in nearly every offensive category on Oakland's career lists.

"I'm a baseball junkie," he said, laughing. "I'm watching a baseball game right now. That's just what I do. I love watching baseball. Being on the outside looking in right now, I've become more of a fan of it."

There's a sense of calmness abounding Chavez, who is admittedly ready to take the retirement route if need be.

"Obviously, I've been home for the past two years, so it's definitely changed my perspective," he said. "As difficult as it is being away from the game, being able to see some of the things I know a lot of guys are missing in their families' lives, I'm thankful for the second-best situation I can have."

At the same time, despite the possibility of soon facing that next step in his life, he still eagerly wants to fulfill his current one.

"If I feel like things aren't working out, I guess I'll have to think about things then," Chavez said. "But, I'm really not sure. I've definitely thought about retirement, but I'm not ready to commit to that yet. When I can't physically get any work done on the baseball field, I know I'm going to have to really consider it, but I'm going to try to play to the end and give myself every chance to play baseball.

"I'm at that point where I'm not ready to make that decision, so that tells me I'm going to keep going."

Back by the Bay: A's building another stellar rotation

Stan McNeal, *The Sporting News*, 8/11/2010

The Giants have Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain and Barry Zito. The A's have a bunch of young starters who rarely are mentioned on *SportsCenter* unless they pitch a perfect game.

The Giants' starters have won three Cy Young Awards and made seven All-Star teams. The A's have zero and one. The Giants' rotation will pull in \$33.25 million as a group this season. A's starters will be paid \$2.385 million. Total, including bonuses.

But the A's rotation has been just as successful as the Giants' in 2010. The numbers for the starters that each team will use down the stretch are practically a wash. The A's are a combined 37-26 with a 3.32 ERA; the Giants 40-32 with a 3.33 ERA.

Maybe it is time to learn why Trevor Cahill has been the most difficult pitcher to hit in the American League this season. And how Gio Gonzalez has earned more wins than any Giant except Lincecum. And just who are Brett Anderson and Vin Mazzaro. And what has happened to Dallas Braden since his perfect game.

First, a group study: Oakland's starters are younger than you might think: 22, 22, 23, 24 and 26. Three were drafted by the A's and all pretty much came through the minors together. They hail from all across America: New Jersey, Oklahoma, Miami, San Diego and Stockton, Calif. Stuff-wise, they probably aren't on the Giants' level. San Francisco's rotation has a trio with 95-plus mph fastballs. The A's have one, maybe.

To help demonstrate that the A's starters are making the most out of what they do throw, we consulted two sources who have seen plenty of them: Oakland closer Andrew Bailey and a veteran major league scout. Their reports, ranked in order of where each starter best fits into the rotation:

Brett Anderson, 22. The lefthander from Stillwater, Okla., was a second-round draft pick by the Diamondbacks in 2006 and came to the A's in the 2007 Dan Haren trade. He made 30 starts as a rookie in 2009 and has had two stints on the disabled list this season.

This season: 2.88 ERA, 34 strikeouts to seven walks, zero homers allowed in 50 innings.

Scout says: "He has a power fastball, power slider. Clearly has the best stuff and is the one guy on this staff who could be a No. 1, but that depends on his health."

Bailey says: "The quiet killer. Big power arm, and he's not afraid to pitch inside."

Trevor Cahill, 22. A second-round pick out in 2006, Cahill started the season on the disabled list but has emerged as a Cy Young candidate.

This season: 12-4, 2.56 ERA, an AL-best .192 batting average against.

Scout says: "He doesn't have eye-popping stuff but has been one of the best starters in baseball because of his ability to keep the ball down. I'd compare him to Carl Pavano or a Derek Lowe, but with a little better stuff."

Bailey says: "Has a Brandon Webb-type sinker. The big difference for him this season has been throwing his curve for a strike. When we were first in the minors, he never talked to anybody, almost like he was scared because he'd never been out of his corner of the world in San Diego. But now he's really come into his own, as a pitcher and a person."

Gio Gonzalez, 24. One of the rotation's three lefthanders, he is the A's only starter to not miss a turn this season.

Gonzalez, out of Miami, was a first-round pick by the White Sox in 2004, was traded to the Phillies in 2005 and back to Chicago a year later before coming to Oakland in the 2008 Nick Swisher deal.

This season: 3.51 ERA, 10-7 record, a .183 batting average allowed against lefthanders. He also ranks among AL leaders in walks (62 in 141 innings).

Vin Mazzaro has allowed 12 homers in 88 2/3 innings.

Scout says: "Very good fastball and curve, good changeup. He has trouble pitching down in the zone. He struggles with command, which leads to high pitch counts."

Bailey says: "Power arm with a big, loopy curve. From Miami, he's the always outgoing type."

Vin Mazzaro, 23. He was a third-round pick in 2005 out of New Jersey. Mazzaro wasn't called up for good this season until late May but is coming on. Seven of his past eight starts have been strong.

This season: 6-4 record, 3.86 ERA, but 12 homers allowed in 88 2/3 innings.

Scout says: "A good sinking fastball but he also can have trouble with his command."

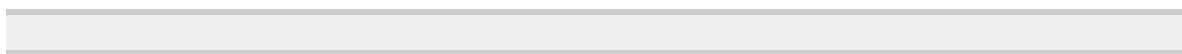
Bailey says: "A 94-mph fastball and strong slider. He's like me. We're both from New Jersey and can talk all day."

Dallas Braden, 26. He is the only member of the rotation not drafted in the first three rounds. Braden was a 24th-round pick in 2004 out of Stockton, the town he proudly calls home. Section 209 -- the area code in his hometown -- was packed for a promotion when Braden pitched his perfect game on Mother's Day.

This season: 6-8 record, 3.75 ERA.

Scout says: "He has the least amount of stuff but probably the best idea of how to pitch. He commands well and really knows how to change speeds."

Bailey says: "He throws probably the most changeups per start in the league. He can throw one 74 (mph), he can throw one 64. He's not eligible for arbitration yet, but he's still our veteran leader."



Team	Giants	A's
Record	40-32	37-26
ERA	3.33	3.32
Average age	26.2	23.4
Combined salary	\$33.25M	\$2.385M
Cy Young awards	3	0
All-Star appearances	7	1
No-hitters	1	1

Taylor's Tales: Mind Over Matter

Michael Taylor, OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 12, 2010

It has been a rollercoaster season for top Oakland A's prospect Michael Taylor. On his way back with the River Cats to Sacramento, Taylor blogs about overcoming bad streaks, the thrill of a big comeback and how he has grown as a player this season.

Hey again, I thought it would be appropriate to write at least one blog at 35,000 feet because it feels like I spend most of my free time flying somewhere else.

With this being our only day off after the All-Star break, it's a good time to recoup, get unpacked, have a nice dinner and enjoy a baseball-free evening for the first time in six weeks. Austin, Texas, was incredibly warm and the amount of crickets and grasshoppers was egregious, but we survived thanks to an incredible comeback on the final day of the trip. Baseball can be a funny game. Just a few days earlier, we blew an 11-run lead and we erased the same deficit to salvage a tough road trip.

It was a personal salvage day as well because I had been struggling, but that final day makes the off-day that much sweeter as I can rest on the heels of a few good swings mixed with some good old fashioned baseball luck.

We have a little under a month left and we are right in the thick of a playoff race. It should be exciting all the way to the end especially that huge five-game series versus Fresno at the end of the month. I'm definitely looking forward to how the season finishes up for us.

I received one question from Joe S. in San Leandro, California, after my last entry and it had to do with how I felt I've grown as a player during the course of this season.

I would say I've probably grown more mentally this year than any other full season. What's great about baseball is how difficult it can be, the time and effort it takes to play and the mental fortitude you need to have to survive long-term.

My favorite quote of the year from our manager was "this game makes it so easy to quit" and that's very true. If you are not strong enough the game can beat you down but if you can persevere then your character develops not only on the field but off. I would definitely say that having to analyze myself, probably over analyzing, and fighting has helped me learn about my game, but more so has fortified my ability to deal with difficulties underneath a magnified scrutiny. It's nice to know you can still smile when that happens.

Thank you for reading.

Michael Taylor

As Rangers are resolved, A's linger

Buster Olney, espn.com

Now that the ownership group led by Chuck Greenberg and Nolan Ryan is in place for the Texas Rangers, the next franchise presumably moving to the front burner for Major League Baseball will be the Oakland Athletics.

The Athletics' current lease in Oakland runs out in three years and the team thinks it has no future in the city, but on the other hand, its preferred destination of San Jose is currently unavailable, because the San Francisco Giants possess the territorial rights.

So the Athletics aren't moving forward. They aren't moving backward. They're just kind of rotting, as they sit and wait for a directive from the commissioner's office, which has a committee studying the situation (i.e., buying time for a resolution).

Lew Wolff, Oakland's owner and a longtime friend of Bud Selig, chuckled as he chatted over the phone the other day and compared the Athletics' situation to going to a doctor's office and asking for a diagnosis -- and getting a shrug of the shoulders from the physician.

"That's the worst thing you can get," he said.

Wolff feels like the Athletics are set up well to move forward if the territorial rights are re-drawn or negotiated and the A's are permitted to move into San Jose -- set up well for construction of a park, and set up well in its team management. But he must wait.

He talks to Selig regularly, and he wishes he had some sense of his friend's timetable -- but he doesn't. "He tends to move at his own pace, which I'm finding out," Wolff said. "Basically we believe that the sooner we get a decision, the better it is for us."

Chuck Greenberg, meanwhile, thinks the Rangers have great days ahead. The Rangers' new ownership has been approved, writes Jeff Wilson. This was a happy ending, says the commissioner.

Buster's new book

Buster Olney is the author of the forthcoming book "How Lucky You Can Be" about basketball coach Don Meyer, whose life changed dramatically -- and who made life changes -- after a horrific accident on Sept. 5, 2008. Meyer was the subject of an "E:60" piece in April 2009 and was honored at last year's ESPYS. "How Lucky You Can Be" is due for release in September.

The future of Matt Kemp

Matt Kemp's agent says he's almost to the point where he thinks the relationship between the Dodgers and the young star is not going to work, Bill Plaschke writes. This was before the Dodgers had their guts ripped out.

The NL East now

Chipper Jones is out for the rest of the year and the immediate question for the Braves is how they will fill the void created by this injury. Some advance scouts believe that the injury to Jones won't hurt the Braves in the way that it would have two or three years ago, because Jones isn't as consistent offensively as he was a couple of years ago and because Omar Infante probably is better defensively. But here's the thing about Jones: You know he would not have been affected by the pressure of the pennant race. You know in a big spot against a Brad Lidge, he would have taken good swings -- and over the last quarter of the season, he has played and hit well. The injury could not have come at a worse time for the Braves, said GM Frank Wren.

The secondary issue for the moment is whether Jones comes back, and that all depends on how devoted he wants to be in his rehabilitation. Because if he's healthy, he has shown this summer he is fully capable of helping the Braves win. In order to walk away from the last two years of his contract, he and the Braves would have to reach a settlement on the \$28 million still owed to him.

The Braves won't move Troy Glaus off first base, writes David O'Brien. Martin Prado will take batting practice today, and Jason Heyward expects to return to the lineup Friday, when Tim Hudson faces the Dodgers.

Meanwhile, the Phillies put together an epic comeback, coming back from a seven-run deficit and again beating L.A. closer Jonathan Broxton.

Shane Victorino was activated from the disabled list, and Ryan Howard has started to take some swings.

The AL Central

Francisco Liriano pitched out of some jams and the Twins wound up taking two of three from the White Sox, writes Joe Christensen. They moved into sole possession of first place, Kelsie Smith writes.

The White Sox could not get hits in big spots, writes Mark Gonzales. Ozzie Guillen wasn't willing to trust a rookie in a big spot, writes Phil Rogers. The Cell had a lot of empty seats in this series, and Rick Morrissey couldn't believe it. There is a huge disparity between how many White Sox batters have been hit and how many times the White Sox have hit other batters, and Guillen is not happy about it, writes Joe Cowley.

The White Sox will be getting Mark Teahen back from the disabled list, after playing without him the past two and a half months.

The NL Central

Johnny Cueto got the worst of the suspensions from the fight the other day. There is still plenty of season left for the Reds, writes Hal McCoy. No question about that; the Reds' deficit in the NL Central is only one game, and remember that 19 of their final 22 games are against sub-.500 teams.

Rick Hummel writes.

The AL East

The Red Sox had their guts ripped out by blowing a big lead in the bottom of the ninth Thursday afternoon. I bumped into Globe columnist Bob Ryan at the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame and what he said was dead on -- after a loss like that, a series win like the Red Sox just had seems lost, because Boston was so close to a sweep and let it get away just before the team got on a plane. This blown opportunity is worrisome, writes Nick Cafardo. John Lackey was solid, but failed to get a win. This one could prove costly, writes Michael Silverman.

Lackey and Salty looked comfortable together, writes Brian MacPherson.

Meanwhile, CC Sabathia picked up his 15th victory and the Yankees extended their lead over Tampa Bay to two games, Ben Shpigel writes.

From Michael Trainor of ESPN Stats & Information, how Sabathia won again:

A. He was economical. Sabathia allowed 10 hits over 8 2/3 innings but he walked only two batters. Plus, he averaged 3.1 pitches/plate appearance -- his second-best number of the season. Of the 35 batters he faced, only four saw a three-ball count (11 percent; the MLB average is 19 percent). Also, 23 of the 35 Royals hitters saw three or fewer pitches.

B. He had a good fastball. Sabathia's average pitch velocity was 92.6 mph, his highest of 2010 (season average is 89.9). He also threw 70 percent fastballs (average is 65.2 in '10).

As for the Rays, they need better play from Evan Longoria, writes John Romano. James Shields starts Friday for the first time since he got lit up for six homers, Joe Smith writes. Chad Qualls has come up big for the Rays.

The NL West

ESPN.com's MLB page will be focusing on them today, and as that decision is made, the Padres continued to separate themselves from the Dodgers and Rockies by sweeping the Pirates this week, Bill Center writes. The Giants frolicked after a walk-off win, writes Henry Schulman. And now the Padres and Giants will face off in a big weekend series.

Miguel Tejada threw in some serious defense.

Jonathan Sanchez's bold prediction means nothing, writes Tim Sullivan. The Giants are looking forward to their weekend series with the Padres, writes Andrew Baggaly. Tim Kawakami wonders if all the pitches have taken a toll on Tim Lincecum.

The Francisco Rodriguez situation

K-Rod did a perp walk on Thursday, at a time when the Mets were playing a game, and he was ordered to undergo anger management. K-Rod and Johan Santana have brought legal baggage to the Mets, writes Mike Lupica. The Mets always find ways to self-destruct, writes Mike Vaccaro. The Mets showed a lack of backbone, writes Bob Klapisch. The Mets have to support K-Rod, says Carlos Beltran -- but, then again, what else is he going to say?

Trading K-Rod won't be easy, because his \$11.5 million salary in 2011 is outpriced in the market, and because he has a real chance of achieving his \$17.5 million option for 2012 -- if he finishes a total of 100 games combined in 2010 and 2011, or 55 games in 2011, then that option kicks in. He's already got 45 games finished this year, which means he's almost halfway toward reaching that option -- and you can bet the idea of paying a closer \$17.5 million in 2012 would scare away a whole lot of teams.

The Pirates' rise?

Jose Tabata, who celebrated his 22nd birthday on Thursday, has had a great start to his career. Going into Thursday's game, Tabata was tied for seventh overall in the majors and ranks second among all National League players with 66 hits since making his big league debut on June 9 (Texas' Josh Hamilton leads the way with 84 hits in that span while Colorado's Carlos Gonzalez has 72 hits to pace all National League players).

From the Elias Sports Bureau: Since 1920, only two Pirates collected more hits before their 22nd birthday in fewer than 385 at bats -- Dick Groat with 109 hits in 95 games in 1952 and Fred Brickell with 90 hits in 137 games from 1926 to 1928.

Dings and dents

1. Andy Pettitte felt some pain in his hip flexor and pushed back his simulated game.
2. LaTroy Hawkins went back to the disabled list, Tom Haudricourt writes.
3. Gregor Blanco left Thursday's game with heat exhaustion.

Moves, deals and decisions

1. The Nationals need to sign Bryce Harper and Adam Dunn.

2. The Mariners' managerial job has plenty of appeal, writes Larry Stone. The Mariners are looking for a leader, writes Ryan Divish.

3. The Twins promoted one of the top pitching prospects in baseball to Triple-A, but that's probably as far as he's going to go this year.

4. The Orioles signed their third-round pick, Jeff Zrebiec writes.

5. There are no indications that the D-backs are going to sign their first-round pick, writes Nick Picoro.

Thursday's games

1. Jose Bautista mashed another homer in the midst of the Jays' wild comeback victory.

2. Mike Stanton helped the Marlins complete a sweep, writes Ted Hutton.

3. The Rockies got shut down again, and this makes the upcoming weekend series against Milwaukee very, very important, Troy Renck writes.

4. Randy Wells had a terrible outing, as he says.

5. Casey McGehee is really, really hot, running his streak of consecutive hits to nine.

6. The Nats had a frustrating night.

7. The Orioles' offense sputtered, writes Jeff Zrebiec.

8. The Pirates' offensive trouble continues.

9. Rodrigo Lopez ran out of gas early.

10. The Indians had a good day.

Other stuff

- Bud Selig gushed over Target Field, Sid Hartman writes.

- The Reds are drawing more, as they contend for the NL Central title.

- Jordan Lyles is rising through the ranks in the Houston farm system.

- Chris Carter has always had a single focus, writes Susan Slusser.

- Jim Leyland is not sure why Brennan Boesch has slumped.

- Richard Justice imagines himself as Ed Wade in shaping the 2011 Astros.

- Brian Fuentes has silenced Angels fans.

- Roger Clemens' appeal was denied. I can't imagine the amount of legal fees being spent on all sides of Clemens' case -- and really, so needlessly. If only he had said: *I don't agree with what is in the Mitchell report, but I can't change it, and I'm moving on*.

- The Cardinals and Cubs lead the majors in coffin sales, Dave Seminara writes.

- The primary editor of this blog, Chris Sprow, gets married tomorrow in Cleveland. I'm told several from the wedding are attending Sunday's Mariners vs. Indians game; when they got engaged, that matchup at least looked to have one first-place team in it. Good luck Chris and Brooke.

And today will be better than yesterday.

This date in baseball: August 13

1906: Jack Taylor of the Chicago Cubs was knocked out by Brooklyn in the third inning, ending a streak of 187 complete games and 15 relief games that Taylor had finished without relief help.

1910: The Brooklyn Dodgers and the Pittsburgh Pirates played to an 8-8 tie. Each team had 38 at-bats, 13 hits, 12 assists, two errors, five strikeouts, three walks, one hit batsman and one passed ball.

1931: Tony Cuccinello of the Cincinnati Reds had six hits in six at-bats in the first game of a doubleheader at Boston. Cuccinello had a triple, two doubles and three singles, knocking in five runs as the Reds won 17-3.

1948: Satchel Paige, 42, pitched his first major-league complete game against the Chicago White Sox. Paige gave up five hits on the way to 5-0 Cleveland victory.

1969: Jim Palmer of the Orioles, plagued by arm trouble the year before, threw an 8-0 no-hitter against the Oakland A's in Baltimore.

1978: The Baltimore Orioles benefited from the rainout rule. The Orioles were leading New York 3-0 after six innings, but the Yankees scored five runs in the top half of the seventh. Heavy rains ended the game in the bottom half of the inning, and the score reverted to the end of the last completed inning, giving the Orioles the triumph. This rule was changed in 1980.

1979: St. Louis' Lou Brock reached the 3,000-hit plateau with an infield hit off Chicago Cubs pitcher Dennis Lamp. St. Louis won the game 3-2.

2004: J.T. Snow of the Giants hit three home runs, had four RBIs and scored five runs in powering San Francisco to a 16-6 rout of Philadelphia.

2004: Kansas City rookies Abraham Nunez and John Buck both hit grand slams, leading the Royals past the Oakland Athletics 10-3. It was the first time in club history the Royals had hit two grand slams in one game. Buck and Nunez were the first rookie teammates to hit grand slams in the same game since the rookie rule went into effect in 1957.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Oakland A's MLN: 'Cats Mount Huge Comeback

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 12, 2010

The Sacramento River Cats atoned for blowing an 11-run lead on Saturday by staging an epic 11-run comeback versus the Round Rock Express on Wednesday. We have the details of that game and other news and notes inside...

Sacramento Storms Back From 11-0 Deficit

It has been a crazy few days for the Sacramento River Cats, who found themselves on both sides of 11-run comebacks. On Saturday, Sacramento blew an 11-run lead to Albuquerque, but on Wednesday, the River Cats turned the tables and beat the Round Rock Express 13-11 after being down 11-0 after just two innings.

Veteran [Brett Tomko](#) continued his struggles in his first start with Sacramento. The right-hander had a 6.23 ERA in 8.2 innings in Rookie ball and a 7.52 ERA in 26.1 innings with the High-A Stockton Ports before his start with Sacramento on Wednesday.

Tomko, who is rehabbing from a nerve problem in his pitching arm that ended his 2009 season early, didn't escape the first inning on Wednesday. He allowed seven runs on six hits and two walks in two-thirds of an inning before giving way to [Graham Godfrey](#). Godfrey also struggled, allowing four runs in 1.1 innings.

The Sacramento bullpen stopped the bleeding after the second inning, however. [Jared Lansford](#) tossed three scoreless innings and was followed by [Cedrick Bowers](#), who threw two scoreless frames. During those five innings, the River Cats began to mount their comeback.

The red-hot [Dallas McPherson](#) began a five-run fourth-inning rally with a double. [Matt Carson](#) doubled McPherson home and then [Adrian Cardenas](#) singled to put runners on the corners. [Michael Taylor](#) and [Jeff Baisley](#) then followed with RBIs doubles

and [Anthony Recker](#) finished the scoring with an RBI single.

Sacramento drew even closer in the sixth when [Corey Wimberly](#) hit his third homerun of the season, a two-run shot. In the seventh, the River Cats manufactured a run when Taylor singled, stole second, advanced to third on a wild pitch and then scored on Baisley's sacrifice fly.

The score remained 11-8 going into the top of the ninth inning after [Jonathan Hunton](#) pitched a scoreless bottom of the eighth. Carson grounded out to start the inning, but consecutive singles by Cardenas and Taylor put the River Cats in business. Then Baisley tied the game with a three-run blast, his fifth of the season for Sacramento.

The game wouldn't stay tied for long, as Recker doubled and Wimberly followed with an infield single. [Eric Sogard](#) then broke the tie with a double scoring Recker. During a [Travis Buck](#) at-bat, [Casey Daigle](#) uncorked a wild pitch, scoring Wimberly and giving the River Cats a 13-11 cushion.

[Michael Benacka](#) came on in the bottom of the ninth and retired the side in order with two strike-outs to earn the save. The River Cats now return home two games behind the first-place Fresno Grizzlies.

There were a number of big offensive nights for Sacramento. Baisley had six RBIs. Between Sacramento and Midland, he has driven-in 59 runs and has an 861 OPS in 80 games this season. Recker had four hits. He is 11-for-his-last-15 and he has raised his average to .260 and his OPS to 733. Taylor and Cardenas each had three hits. Cardenas is 6-for-14 since his promotion to Triple-A on Monday.

Other News And Notes

* Tomko was making his first start with Sacramento because [Tyson Ross](#) was placed on the DL with a sore right elbow.

* The AZL A's cruised to an 11-1 win over the AZL Padres on Wednesday. [Miguel Marte](#) hit his fourth homer of the season and he also had a double. Zhi-Fang Pan had two hits and two RBIs to raise his average to .276. [Chris Affinito](#) also added a three-run homer, his second for the A's.

* [Argenis Paez](#) earned the win with five scoreless innings. He allowed only four hits and he struck-out five to lower his ERA to 2.90. [Charles Mye](#) had five strike-outs in two innings of work.

* [Michael Choice](#) had two hits, a walk and his first professional RBI, but it wasn't enough for Vancouver, who lost to Everett on Wednesday by a score of 7-1. Choice has four hits in his last seven at-bats for Vancouver.

* Kane County collected 17 hits and 11 runs to rout the Cedar Rapids Kernals, 11-2. [Anthony Aliotti](#) had three hits and two doubles in six at-bats. He also drove-in three. [Leonardo Gil](#) had a five-hit game and [Jason Christian](#) hit his third homer of the season. [Conner Crumbliss](#), [Rashun Dixon](#), [Mitchell LeVier](#) and [Juan Nunez](#) all had two-hit games and [Tyreace House](#) walked three times. Dixon is batting .425 with a 1031 OPS in 10 August games.

* The Midland Rockhounds' losing streak reached four with a 9-4 loss to Tulsa on Wednesday. Jeff Lyman's struggles continued, as he allowed four runs and seven hits in four innings. He has a 7.94 ERA in 22.2 innings for Midland since joining the A's organization in a waiver claim. [Alexander Valdez](#) hit his 12th homer of the season and [Val Majewski](#) had two hits to lead the 'Hounds offense.

* Two rehabbing veterans helped the Stockton Ports defeat Inland Empire, 5-2, on Wednesday. [Conor Jackson](#), on a rehab assignment for the A's, had two hits, including a double, and [Travis Blackley](#) allowed a run in two innings in his first outing since having bone chips removed from his left elbow while pitching with Sacramento. [Justin Murray](#) earned the win in relief of Blackley, allowing only an unearned run in 4.2 innings. [Jeremy Barfield](#) had a double and is slugging .552 in August after posting a .225 slugging percentage in July.

* [Jose Sayegh](#) put together his first two-hit game for the DSL A's in awhile. The Venezuelan outfielder is batting only .135 with a 480 OPS against right-handers this season, but he has a .353 average and a 921 OPS versus left-handers.

'Hounds Manufacture Comeback To Snap Skid

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The 'Hounds erased an early, 3-0, deficit and went on to snap a 4-4 tie with three runs in the eighth inning for the win. Those big swings came from both usual and UN-usual suspects. Josh Horton had three hits (plus a walk), scoring one and driving in two ... Corey Brown also had a 3-hit game, including a towering home run to right field leading off the sixth, drawing the 'Hounds to within 4-3 (Horton's second RBI of the night would tie the game later in the inning) ... and Alex Valdez was the third 'Hound to collect three hits, and scored two runs (including the game-winner).

In the eighth, with the bases loaded and one out, pinch-hitter Shane Peterson lifted a fly ball just deep enough into left-center to break the 4-4 tie.

The UN-usual suspect? J.C. Holt. Coming off the disabled list, and playing in his first game since July 15, J.C. went 2-for-5. His second hit was a 2-run single, capping the 3-run eighth inning and adding a pair of insurance runs.

Mickey Storey pitched two innings, allowing no runs on one hit and striking out four, for the win.

In addition to a big night at the plate, Valdez made a play that doesn't show up in the box score, but may have been the biggest single play of the game. With a runner at third and one out in the fifth, Tulsa had taken a 4-2 lead. Valdez made a diving deflection of a line shot down the third base line off the bat of Jordan Pacheco. While the play was an infield single, Valdez kept the ball within reach, not allowing the runner to score from third. Neil Wagner came in from the 'Hounds bullpen and got the next two batters to end the threat with the game still at 4-2.

The pennant race & the wild card: The RockHounds and San Antonio were winners Thursday, while Corpus Christi and Frisco fell, all in cross-division play. The RockHounds lead San Antonio by one game ... Frisco by three and Corpus by five.

In the wild card race (which takes effect if Frisco wins the second half), San Antonio is one behind the 'Hounds (that's a corrected number) and Corpus Christi is four games back.

Sweet Six-cess As Ports Sweep 66ers

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. - The Stockton Ports are riding a season-long six-game winning streak after completing a three-game sweep of the Inland Empire 66ers on Thursday night at Arrowhead Credit Union Park. Stockton, on the strength of two first-inning home runs, earned a 4-1 win over the 66ers; their season-best sixth straight victory. With Bakersfield and Visalia both winning, the Ports remain two games back of the Rawhide in the race for the Wild Card and three games back of the Blaze in the North Division.

The Ports wasted no time in getting off on the right foot, and Jermaine Mitchell wasted no time in extending his hitting streak to 14 games by hitting a home run off 66ers starter Josh Walter (1-7) to open the ballgame. Grant Green followed with a single, and two batters later Stephen Parker connected on his 17th home run of the year, a two-run blast to give the Ports an early 3-0 lead.

Meanwhile, Inland Empire's offense squandered prime scoring chances. The 66ers loaded the bases on three straight one-out singles in the first. Ports starter Ben Hornbeck (5-3) was able to bear down and strike out Pedro Baez, then get Tony Delmonico to fly to center to end the threat.

The 66ers had another big chance in the fourth. With one out, Hornbeck walked Dustin Yount, then allowed a single to Johan Garcia and hit Ramon Jean to load the bases. Again the 66ers would come up empty as Alfredo Silverio popped to second and Chris Gutierrez struck out to end the frame.

Stockton added a run in the fifth. With runners at the corners and one out, Conor Jackson-on his second day of Major League rehab-drove in Mitchell with a sac-fly to center to make it a 4-0 game.

66ers starter Josh Walter allowed all four runs on six hits in six full innings of work while striking out five and walking two.

Inland Empire scored their only run of the contest in the last of the fifth. With Scott Van Slyke at second and two down, Delmonico singled to left to drive in the run. Delmonico was subsequently thrown out at second as the throw to the plate was cut off to end the inning.

Hornbeck would toss a season-high 6.2 innings in picking up his fifth win of the season, allowing just the one run on seven hits while walking one and striking out eight.

The Ports would be shut down the remainder of the night by Inland Empire's bullpen. Miguel Sanfler and Matt Sartor combined to retire 11 of the last 12 Ports hitters to end the night.

Scott Deal came on in relief of Hornbeck with two out in the seventh and retired all four batters he faced to get through the eighth. Trey Barham started the ninth and after giving up a leadoff single to Yount, retired the next two batters. Jose Pina (SV, 1) was brought in to close the game. Pina yielded an infield single to Silverio to bring the tying run to the plate in the person of Gutierrez, who'd hit into a fielder's choice groundout to end the ballgame. Pina, in recording the game's final out, earned his first save of the season.

After back-to-back series sweeps, the Ports will head to Rancho Cucamonga on Friday for a three-game set with the Quakes to close out their South Division road trip. Left-hander Justin Marks (1-1, 7.00 ERA) will head to the bump for Stockton, opposed by Quakes right-hander Matt Shoemaker (7-8, 4.93 ERA). First pitch from The Epicenter is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Cooled Off by Kernels

Kane County win streak ends in frustrating loss at Cedar Rapids

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa – The Kane County Cougars snapped a four-game winning streak Thursday night as they were unable to hold a 3-0 lead in an 8-3 loss against the Cedar Rapids Kernels at Veterans Stadium. The series is even at one win apiece and concludes Friday night.

The Cougars led, 3-0, early. Conner Crumbliss walked to lead off the game and later took third on an error and scored on a wild pitch. Then in the top of the third Anthony Aliotti ripped a two-run double to score Jose Crisotomo and Crumbliss and make it 3-0. The Cougars left the bases loaded in that third and also in the fifth and never scored again.

Jonathan Joseph balked home Terrell Alliman in the third on a controversial call to give the Kernels their first run. Then Joseph was touched for two unearned runs in the bottom of the fifth, as the Kernels came up with a pair of two-out hits after an error. Joseph gave up three runs -- one earned -- on six hits over 4 2/3 innings in the no-decision. Connor Hoehn (6-4) suffered the loss, allowing four runs in the sixth inning and leaving before it was over, and Josh Lansford yielded one in the seventh to account for the 8-3 final. Carson Andrew (1-0) got the relief win for Cedar Rapids.

The Cougars (27-18, 59-55), 4-1 so far, conclude the road trip Friday night at 6:35 CT. Chris Mederos (4-4, 2.76) will take the mound, and Stephen Locke (6-5, 4.48) will go for the Kernels (25-19, 69-44). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:20 p.m.