

A's News Clips, Sunday, August 15, 2010

Oakland A's waste another sterling pitching effort

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's got another stellar effort from one of their young starting pitchers Saturday night, which leads to an interesting question.

What might their season look like with some consistent offense to back up that pitching?

The A's were held to three hits by Minnesota Twins left-hander Brian Duensing and advanced just one runner as far as second base in a 2-0 loss before 40,830 fans at Target Field.

Duensing faced just two batters over the minimum in a game that wrapped in 2 hours, 15 minutes.

Duensing's first career shutout saddled A's right-hander Trevor Cahill with a hard-luck defeat. Cahill (12-5) allowed just one run on six hits over seven innings and did some nifty work to avoid more damage.

Over the past seven games, Oakland's starting rotation has posted a 1.41 ERA but has a 3-4 record to show for it. The A's have averaged just 2.6 runs over that span and have been shut out twice on a six-game trip that ends today.

Their overall staff entered Saturday leading the American League with a 3.61 ERA.

Conversely, they rank 12th out of 14 AL teams in runs scored and 13th in slugging percentage after Saturday's defeat.

"We've got to start getting runs for all those guys," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We have the best young rotation in baseball, and it continues to improve. You look back at where they were a year ago and think to where they'll be a year from now."

The A's (57-58) faint hopes in the AL West are flickering out with each defeat. They remained nine games behind Texas after the Rangers lost to Boston on Saturday night, but there are just 47 games left to play.

The A's had 14 hits Friday, only to go 2 for 20 with runners in scoring position. On Saturday, they didn't record an official at-bat with runners in scoring position.

Rajai Davis was their only batter to reach second base, and Duensing (6-1) promptly picked him off in the second inning.

Cahill did achieve a nice slice of history in defeat. He notched his 20th straight start in which he lasted at least five innings and allowed six hits or fewer.

That ties Nolan Ryan for the longest such streak in major league history since 1900.

"If you're tied for a record with Nolan Ryan, that's something special," Cahill said. "I didn't realize it, but if I share a record with Nolan Ryan, I'll take it."

The Twins scored the only run they needed in the third, when Alexi Casilla led off with a double and scored on Orlando Hudson's sacrifice fly.

They added an insurance run against Craig Breslow in the eighth on Joe Mauer's RBI single over Chris Carter's head in left field.

Geren said he'd decide this morning whether to shuffle his lineup, but he's not likely to hit on a magic combination.

He dropped Jack Cust -- who has no homers, one RBI and 28 strikeouts over his past 16 games -- from cleanup to seventh in the order with an opposing lefty on the mound.

Kevin Kouzmanoff, who took his place at cleanup, is hitting .136 this month.

Carter, the A's top prospect, is 0 for 16 in five games, and the A's might consider sending him back to the minors if outfielder Conor Jackson is ready to come off the DL in the next few days.

Oakland A's are not using their entire seven-man bullpen

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS -- Boof Bonser and Ross Wolf face the same challenge in the A's bullpen: Being ready when called upon but having no idea when that time might come.

Bonser has made just one appearance since being called up from Triple-A Sacramento on July 31 -- he threw a scoreless inning against the Texas Rangers on Aug. 6. Wolf has allowed one run in four appearances since being promoted from Sacramento on July 7, but he hasn't pitched since July 29.

"I've just got to be ready when called upon," Wolf said before Saturday's game against Minnesota. "I understand we've played close games and we've been using the back end of the bullpen."

Even with closer Andrew Bailey on the disabled list, there are three right-handers ahead of Wolf in the A's seven-man relief corps -- Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and Henry Rodriguez.

Bonser was promoted to be a long reliever, but with the starting pitchers regularly pitching deep into games, there hasn't been an opportunity for him.

Like Wolf, Bonser said he's trying to keep himself mentally sharp and ready. An ex-Twin, he said he'd love the opportunity to face his former team this weekend.

Bailey (rib cage strain) is scheduled to throw off the mound today for the first time since going on the DL July 30.

The A's will wait to see how he feels after that session before determining his next step, manager Bob Geren said. Considering he hasn't pitched in a game since July 20, Bailey might require a brief minor league rehab assignment once he's ready to face hitters.

"It's been a long time," Bailey said. "It's frustrating not being able to go out there and help the team. I've also got to realize it's important that I'm healthy before I do that."

Wuertz was a big Twins fan while growing up in Austin, Minn., about 100 miles south of Minneapolis. He had a poster on his wall of left-hander Frank Viola, so Wuertz was excited to meet the 1988 AL Cy Young Award winner. "It's always a thrill when you get to see guys you grew up watching," Wuertz said.

Chin Music: The "contact" play — good or bad for the A's?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/14/2010 3:22PM

Leftover thoughts from last night as the A's try to even this three-game series with the Twins ...

--You might have noticed the A's have had quite a few runners at third base thrown out on the "contact" play. Basically, when the A's have a runner on third and one out, the runner breaks for home on a ground ball immediately on contact. It's a gamble the A's think is worth it. By going on contact, there's a good chance the runner scores if the infielder has to move laterally at all to field a ball. Problem is, we've seen lots of instances where balls have been hit directly at defenders, leaving the runner a dead duck between third and home. It happened last night, when Daric Barton got caught in a rundown on a sharp grounder that Kurt Suzuki hit to Twins third baseman Danny Valencia.

A's manager Bob Geren pointed out last night that many teams around the majors run the "contact" play with one out. (It wouldn't make sense to do it with no outs because if a runner holds at third on a groundout, the next batter can still score him with a sacrifice fly.) ... But considering how many runners the A's have lost in this situation, you have to wonder if they're better off holding a runner on a grounder and seeing if someone can follow up with a two-out base hit.

Hopefully I didn't lose you with that whole discussion, but the "contact" play seems to be doing the A's more harm than good this year ...

–The plan is for Andrew Bailey to throw off the mound Sunday for the first time since he went on the disabled list July 30. Bailey (rib cage strain) says he's eager to give it a go and see how he feels. Even if he feels terrific, I would think it could be another week or so before he's activated. He'll need to throw multiple bullpen sessions or perhaps in a minor league game or two to get his arm in shape. Geren said that how Bailey feels after Sunday's session would help dictate the plan ...

–Lost in the details of Friday's game: Barton hit the ball hard in four of his at-bats, including two liners right at outfielders. He said before tonight's game that he sees the ball well here at Target Field ...

The lineups:

A's — Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Kouzmanoff 3B, Ellis 2B, Davis RF, Cust DH, Carter LF, Tolleson SS; Cahill RHP.

Twins — Span CF, Hudson 2B, Mauer C, Kubel RF, Cuddyer 1B, Thome DH, Young LF, Valencia 3B, Casilla SS; Duensing LHP.

A's find their days sunny and their nights dark

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The sunlight-powered A's are happy that today's game at Target Field is during the daytime. The only win on this road trip came during the day, the team is 28-11 in day games, tops in the majors, and the A's have won 11 of their past 12 day games.

After Saturday's 2-0 loss to the Twins, Oakland is 29-47 in night games, quite a contrast. That's second worst in the league.

Is the A's daytime record anything more than coincidence? Randomness? Or could there be a solid reason for a .718 winning percentage with the lights off?

Oakland's offense is much the same, day or night. The one major factor in the A's day record is that the starting pitchers have a 2.77 ERA in the day, compared with 4.06 at night. The current rotation of Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden, Gio Gonzalez, Trevor Cahill and Vin Mazzaro is a combined 22-6 during the daytime.

The five average 23.4 years of age, so perhaps they have more energy.

"We're more youthful," Anderson said. "We're more ready to play in the morning than the salty vets."

Gonzalez, 6-1 with a 2.10 ERA during the day, said sometimes he feels more comfortable during the day because he has less time to over-analyze.

"I just don't have time to think when I go out there in the day," Gonzalez said with a grin. "You just go out there, boom. I remember saying after a game against Texas, 'I'm glad I didn't have to wait until 7 and think about it too long.' Pitching in the day, it's just show and go. A little breakfast, get warmed up fast, ready to rock and roll."

Mazzaro said he feels as if he starts every day game (five of his 13 starts, actually), but he should like that; his ERA is more than two runs lower - 2.84 compared with 4.87.

"I guess we just have a lot of morning people," he said.

He's starting today's game, and he's got a second plus to consider: Mazzaro is 3-0 with a 1.85 ERA against AL Central teams and 3-4 with a 5.10 ERA against everyone else. A day game against the Twins should be nirvana for Mazzaro, if the numbers hold.

Many would argue that there's not much behind such stats. The team doesn't have killer day numbers each season, the young starters haven't shown these types of day/night splits in other years.

Reliever Craig Breslow, the Yale graduate dubbed "the smartest man in baseball," said he doesn't have any theories. "Statistical variance?" he suggested. "I don't know at what point you attach statistical significance."

The A's day winning percentage would qualify as the fifth-best all-time in the American League; the all-time best day winning percentage belongs to the 1975 Reds, who went 41-13 (.759). The AL's top mark is held by the 2008 Angels, 32-11 (.744).

A's like the rays

The merits of tarping off the Coliseum's upper deck might be debatable, but there's no question the A's should cover the stadium lights and play only under the sun:

A'S PITCHERS

	Day	Night
Gonzalez	6-1, 2.10	4-7, 4.34
Cahill	5-1, 1.33	7-4, 3.09
Braden	5-1, 2.79	2-7, 4.02
Mazzaro	4-2, 2.84	2-2, 4.87

-- As a whole, the team's offense doesn't care either way - .259 and 4.2 runs/game by day, .258 and 4.0 runs/game by night.

A'S WINS-LOSSES

	W-L	Pct.
Day	28-11	.718
Night	29-47	.381

-- The last team that was at least .300 better by day was the 1945 Chicago Cubs (93-45 days; 5-11 nights). Night games were a rarity for all teams back then.

Sources: David Feldman, Elias Sports Bureau

Cahill looks impressive, even in defeat

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Trevor Cahill's string of innings without allowing an earned run came to an end in the third inning Saturday after a double by Minnesota's **Alexi Casilla**, a bunt and a sacrifice fly.

Cahill's roll ended at 28 innings, the longest by an A's pitcher since **Esteban Loaiza's** 28 2/3 innings in August 2006. Cahill still tied **Nolan Ryan's** modern-day record, 20 consecutive starts in which he has allowed no more than six hits and worked five innings or more.

"If you tie a record with Nolan Ryan, I think that's kind of special," Cahill said.

"It's one of those records that's hard to imagine, it's so rare," manager **Bob Geren** said.

That one run was all Cahill allowed, and he lowered his ERA to 2.50, second best in the league. Opponents are batting a league-low .189 against him.

After going 2-for-20 with runners in scoring position on Friday, Oakland could barely get into scoring position Saturday. The only man who made it past first was **Rajai Davis**, who stole second in the second inning and was picked off three pitches later.

Over the past seven games, Oakland starters are 3-4 ... with a 1.41 ERA.

"We've got to get the offense going," Geren said. "All those guys are throwing the ball exceptionally well."

Before the game, left fielder **Chris Carter** said he doesn't believe he's pressing and he's had plenty of longer slumps in his career; he went 0-for-3 and is hitless in 16 career at-bats, with seven strikeouts.

Steve Tolleson, recalled Friday, started at shortstop and had one of the A's three hits.

Briefly: Closer **Andrew Bailey** (right ribcage strain) will throw a side session today, and he could come off the disabled list within the next week or so. ... **Conor Jackson** (hamstring) was 0-for-5 Saturday night in Triple-A Sacramento's 5-4 10-inning win over Omaha. ... Ex-Twin **Craig Breslow** gave up a run in the eighth.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Deadline nears: With Monday's signing deadline looming, scouting director Eric Kubota reported nothing new on unsigned draftees shortstop Yordy Cabrera (second round), outfielder Aaron Shipman (third) and third baseman Chad Lewis (fourth).

Drumbeat: Lineup stuff, Bailey update

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Target Field 8/14/2010 2:32PM

A slow news day for the A's - no one placed on the DL! - but Andrew Bailey is a go for a side session tomorrow. Manager Bob Geren said there's no decision yet on whether Bailey will need just a simulated game or if he'll make an appearance in a rehab game before returning; as I speculated yesterday, if all goes really well, he might be looking at coming off the DL on the homestand.

Here's the lineup, and it looks a little different from last night's, which went a miserable 2-for-20 with men in scoring position: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Suzuki c, Kouzmanoff 3b, Ellis 2b, Davis rf, Cust dh, Carter lf, Tolleson ss

I asked about Jack Cust being shuffled down three spots but Geren said it's because the A's are facing a left-hander, Brian Duensing. I followed up with questions about Cust's recent lack of production - one RBI in the past 15 games - but Geren definitely wasn't going to say anything that might be construed as negative. He mostly focused on the fact that Cust had two hits last night and drove in a run, and not the Cust strikeout looking with men at second and third and one out in the seventh. I asked about Cust's approach; Geren seems fine with it.

But there's no question Cust is struggling to get runners in, I don't think there's anything wrong with acknowledging that, it reflects reality. He's batting .194 with runners in scoring position and less than two outs.

Anyway, Cliff Pennington is just getting a day off. Geren said he'd wanted to get Pennington the day on Wednesday, but Adam Rosales had to come out after an inning. I'd imagine that Pennington's days off come against lefties because he's hitting 20 points lower against them. Geren said Pennington will be in there tomorrow.

Steve Tolleson, who's playing shortstop tonight, told me yesterday that after 90 games at Triple-A last year and all of this year, he's starting to figure some things out, which is how he's been able to be so consistent this year. He has more experienced, he's learned a lot, he's putting them into practice. And it's good to see him not sit too long after coming up.

Chris Carter is 0-for-13 so far in his big-league career, but he said this afternoon that he's not pressing at all, he's had worse slumps. He looks confident, too. Geren said tonight's the night Carter gets that first hit out of the way.

Cahill's historic start not enough vs. Twins

Righty matches Ryan's record, but takes loss in duel

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- There's only so much to say about Trevor Cahill.

Ditto the A's offense, but for very different reasons.

Cahill, Oakland's ace in the making, has dominated all season.

The A's offense has struggled all season.

The two units combined Saturday for an evening affair with the Twins. And, per usual, Cahill posted another masterful performance, giving up just one run over seven innings. The offense, meanwhile, failed to put a man in scoring position all night.

Thus, Cahill's one run was enough to leave him and the A's on the losing end of a 2-0 game at Target Field, where the A's righty tied a modern-day Major League record with Nolan Ryan, despite falling to 12-5 on the season.

Cahill surrendered six hits Saturday night, and he's now allowed six hits or fewer in each start since his first outing of the season April 30, when he surrendered seven. His streak of 20 consecutive starts with six hits or fewer and five innings pitched or more tied Ryan for the longest such streak in Major League history.

"To tie a record with Nolan Ryan, that's something special," Cahill said. "I didn't realize it, but to have a record, I'm glad to share it with him."

"That's one of those records that's hard to imagine doing," manager Bob Geren said. "It's so rare, and he keeps getting better. We've got to get him some runs. We have the best young rotation in baseball, and they continue to improve and keep pitching well. They're only going to get better. You think back to where they were a year ago, imagine where they'll be a year from now."

But unless the offense can start scoring runs, Cahill won't be making many splashes in the win column. Just one night after posting 14 hits but going 2-for-20 with runners in scoring position, the A's ran into Brian Duensing, who tossed a three-hit shutout.

They went down in order in seven innings and never advanced a runner past second base. In fact, their only runner of the night at second base -- Rajai Davis -- was picked off by Duensing.

"We didn't swing the bats well at all," Geren said. "Their guy had pretty good stuff, and he had great movement on the outside corner of the plate. We just didn't hit the ball hard. It wasn't a good offensive performance."

Coco Crisp, though, merely thought it was a matter of unlucky hitting. The A's outfielder went 1-for-4, joining Davis and Steve Tolleson as the only three to collect a hit.

"We hit the ball well, just at people," Crisp said. "The directions in which we made contact were poor, but you can't do anything about that."

"That seemed to be their game plan, was to just get on me early," Duensing said. "They put some good swings on the ball and hit it hard, it was just right at guys."

With the loss, the A's fell one game below the .500 mark, where they haven't been since July 19. They're 3-4 over their past seven games, a time during which their starters have posted a 1.41 ERA. The A's entire staff has allowed three runs or fewer in nine of the past 11 games.

Cahill, obviously, is a big part of that pitching trend. The 22-year-old righty entered the contest having not surrendered an earned run since the sixth inning of his start July 23. That streak ended at 28 1/3 innings in the third frame Saturday, when Minnesota's Alexi Casilla led off with a double before advancing to third on a sacrifice bunt and scoring on a sacrifice fly from Orlando Hudson.

That's all he would allow, though, teaming with Duensing for quite the pitcher's duel.

"He was outstanding," Geren said of Cahill. "He kept the ball down and had real good movement. The dugouts are so close to the field here that you can really see his power sinker up close. It's really something special."

Cahill lowered his ERA to 2.50, which ranks second in the American League to Boston's Clay Buchholz (2.49). He also now owns a .189 opponents batting average, which is tops in the AL. Cahill modestly offered an honest opinion of his outing, which marked his first loss since July 23.

"I felt all right," he said. "My fastball wasn't as good as it's been, so I had to rely on my breaking ball a lot. You're going to have those days when the other guy's pitching better. I was just trying not to walk anyone and to throw strikes, and he was doing the same thing."

Minnesota's final run came off lefty Craig Breslow in the eighth, courtesy of a run-scoring single off the bat of Joe Mauer, who had a three-hit night, matching Oakland's output.

"Cahill had a great night, but regardless if he's pitching poorly or well, you'd just like the outcome of a hard-hit ball to be a good one," Crisp said. "It just hasn't been going that way for us right now."

Twins thinking sweep in finale vs. A's

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

As Oakland has gotten its first look at Target Field this weekend, the Twins haven't exactly been hospitable. On Saturday, lefty Brian Duensing tossed his first career shutout to pace the Twins to a 2-0 victory, as the A's offense fell flat again.

Not even the addition of top power-hitting prospect Chris Carter has helped the A's, now 1-4 on this road trip through Seattle and Minnesota.

Since his promotion from Triple-A Sacramento at the beginning of the road swing, Carter is 0-for-16 with a walk and seven strikeouts. But throughout his career, Carter has always been slow to start at each new level.

"It just kind of happens," Carter said. "Every time, for some reason, it seems to go that way. I think I'll be alright."

In all, the A's have scored nine runs on the trip and been dreadful with men in scoring position.

On the other hand, Minnesota is humming along, having won eight of its past 10 contests. The Twins will turn to Kevin Slowey with a shot at the series sweep on Sunday.

Slowey, who has turned in double-digit win seasons in each of the past three years, is 2-0 with a 2.63 ERA over his past four starts. Slowey skipped his last scheduled start due to elbow tendinitis, but threw a bullpen session Thursday with no setbacks.

"Everything went really good with Slowey," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He felt great."

Oakland will counter with 23-year-old righty Vin Mazzaro to stop the bleeding. Mazzaro has been fairly consistent over his past nine starts, going 4-3 with a 3.19 ERA.

A's: Bailey working his way back

Closer Andrew Bailey is scheduled to throw off the mound Sunday for the first time since July 20, when he went down with a

rib cage muscle strain. Right-hander Michael Wuertz has proved to be an effective closer in Bailey's stead, going 4-for-4 in save opportunities with a 2.70 ERA in seven appearances.

Twins: Weather delays Punto's return

Nick Punto's recovery from a strained left hamstring was delayed by inclement weather Saturday, as rain prevented him from working out at Target Field. Punto could return to the Twins for Tuesday's series opener against the second-place White Sox.

"We'll take another full day of taking ground balls out there and then we'll work out again tomorrow and then after the game," Gardenhire said before Saturday's game. "We'll be ready for Tuesday."

Worth noting

After Saturday's 2-0 victory, Minnesota holds a 4-1 advantage in the season series against Oakland. ... Minnesota lefty Glen Perkins will now be used out of the bullpen after being a starter all season. ... Oakland's staff has a 2.20 ERA on the current road trip.

Twins take no-hitter into eighth, down Oakland 4-2

By DAVE CAMPBELL , The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Kevin Slowey held Oakland without a hit for seven innings and Minnesota took a team no-hitter into the eighth as the Twins defeated the Athletics 4-2 on Sunday.

Slowey combined with Jon Rauch, Jesse Crain and Matt Capps to limit Oakland to three hits, completing the Twins' fifth series sweep this season and third since the All-Star break.

Jason Kubel drove in the first run for the Twins and Jim Thome homered for a Minnesota team that will open a key AL Central series against the Chicago White Sox on Tuesday. The Twins (68-50) also moved 18 games over .500, their best record in nearly two years.

Slowey, who missed his last start because of a sore elbow, was congratulated by teammates, coaches and manager Ron Gardenhire when he finished the seventh inning. At that point, Slowey (11-5) had thrown 106 pitches, his second-highest total of the season.

Rauch entered the game to start the eighth inning and quickly struck out Chris Carter. Cliff Pennington broke up the no-hitter with a double to right, and Coco Crisp followed with an RBI double that ended the shutout. Rauch walked Daric Barton and was replaced by Jesse Crain, who got Kurt Suzuki to ground into an RBI fielder's choice before escaping the inning.

Capps gave up a single to Kevin Kouzmanoff to lead off the ninth inning, but got Mark Ellis to ground into a double play and Rajai Davis to ground out to end the game. It was Capps' fourth save in five chances since being traded from Washington.

Vin Mazarro (6-5) was effective for Oakland, limiting the Twins to two runs — one earned — on seven hits in six-plus innings. He's now thrown at least six innings in nine of 10 starts.

The Athletics have lost five of their past six games and 10 of 16.

Slowey allowed only five baserunners, including three walks, and struck out five during his masterful performance. He got out of a jam in the top of the seventh, when he put runners on first and second with one out. Gardenhire made a visit to the mound, but Slowey got Davis to ground into a double play that ended the inning.

Leading off the top of the fifth, Ellis hit what appeared to be a routine ground ball to Twins shortstop Alexi Casilla. He handled the ball cleanly, but his throw sailed well over the head of Minnesota first baseman Michael Cuddyer and into the Twins dugout. The error allowed Ellis to reach second, but Slowey struck out three straight batters to end the inning.

Crisp hit two balls early in the game that looked like they might be hits. Leading off, he hit a ball to right that Jason Kubel made a nice catch on. In the top of the sixth, Crisp hit a ball that looked headed for the left-field wall that Jason Repko caught at a full sprint.

The Twins took a 1-0 lead by stringing together three consecutive hits in the third. With two outs, Orlando Hudson singled up the middle and moved to third on Joe Mauer's single. Hudson then scored when Kubel's hit down the left-field line bounced into the seats for a double.

Thome added to the lead in the seventh, when he hit his 16th homer of the season into the right-field seats. The home run off of Oakland reliever Jerry Blevins — which was caught by a fan in a Thome T-shirt — was the 580th of Thome's career.

NOTES: Delmon Young wasn't in the starting lineup for the Twins for only the second time since May 27. Gardenhire wanted to get him some rest before playing the White Sox. ... Oakland reliever Andrew Bailey threw 20 pitches off of the mound, something A's manager Bob Geren called "a big step" in his rehab. Bailey (rib cage) hasn't pitched since July 20. ... Geren said OF Connor Jackson (hamstring) could also be activated in the next week.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento all shook up against Omaha

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

Entering Friday, Sacramento had outscored opponents 93-80 in the second inning this season. But in the series opener against Omaha, Sacramento was better off just skipping that period.

The Royals scored six runs in the second, their only production for the night and the only runs they needed to come away with a 6-2 victory before 11,010 Raley Field faithful. After a Travis Buck homer in the first, Omaha answered in the second against River Cats starting pitcher Clayton Mortensen. Mortensen gave up a leadoff double to short stop Ed Lucas, and then watched his first pitch to Scott Thorman sail over the right field fence.

Mortensen gave up a third consecutive hit to the catcher Lucas May, a single up the middle, and then walked Jai Miller before getting a visit from pitching coach Rick Rodriguez on the mound. Irving Falu's sacrifice bunt barely made it into fair territory, and allowed catcher Anthony Recker to gun down May at third.

Nine spot hitter Marc Maddox singled to right field, loading the bases for Jarrod Dyson. Dyson capitalized on the situation, sending the first pitch from Mortensen deep to center field, and over the fence for a grand slam. It was Dyson's first professional home run in nearly 1,000 at-bats. Mortensen worked out of the inning despite allowing another hit, giving Omaha six runs on six hits through the first two innings.

"I think (Mortensen) just left too many pitches up in the zone," said Omaha manager Mike Jirschele. "We hit them. You still have to hit them, but I think he left too many balls up. The rest of the game he settled down."

Having a great outing for Omaha was starting right-hander Luis Mendoza, who pitched seven innings of two-hit baseball.

"I thought he changed speeds well," Jirschele said. "He had the hitters off stride. He was effectively wild. He threw a lot of pitches around the plate, but threw enough strikes to get through."

Mendoza's only mistakes were the Buck jack in the first, and a leadoff double to Matt Carson in the fifth.

"We had an off day yesterday, which was the first time in a while," Carson said. "The guys got to relax a little bit, but sometimes you lose that edge. He came out throwing strikes and was throwing a two-seamer that was running pretty good. We hit some balls hard, but it just didn't go our way tonight."

It was Sacramento's eighth loss in their last 12 games. This sudden skid comes out at a bad time for the Cats, who are in the middle of a divisional chase against the Fresno Grizzlies. The River Cats have given up 88 runs in that span.

"I tip my hat to Mendoza," Carson said. "They got up on the board early, and we've had our share of comebacks lately, but after a while it kind of wears on you a little bit. It's just one of those games. Tomorrow we'll come back and swing the bat better."

Sacramento got off to a great start with the Buck home run in the first. Mendoza's 3-1 pitch was sent over the fence in right-center, giving the Cats the early lead. For the season Sacramento has actually been outscored 82-64 in the first inning, so it was a good sign to see them get off to a hot start.

The Royals continued to grind out at-bats. May worked a 3-2 walk, followed by a Jai Miller 3-2 single to put runners on the corners. Mortensen managed to work out of trouble, getting Falu out on a fly ball and getting Maddox out on a pop-up into shallow right. But the disciplined approach was paying off, as Mortensen had thrown 76 pitches in just three innings.

Through the first four innings, Buck's solo shot was the only blemish on Mendoza's record. But Carson showed some fight in the fifth, smoking a bullet into the right-center gap for a leadoff double. An Eric Sogard ground ball moved Carson to third. Carson scored on a pass ball against the catcher May, closing the gap for the Cats.

"I think it was something that he did rather than what I did," Carson said of his double. "He left a ball over the plate. Before that I hadn't seen anything over the plate, but that time he made a mistake."

Despite the disappointing start, Mortensen collected himself and finished through six innings without giving up another run. He allowed seven hits and three walks in the outing to go with two strikeouts. Ranking fourth in the PCL in innings pitched, the right-handed workhorse threw 107 pitches. He was not his usual sinkerballing, ground-ball machine self, getting nine outs through the air and seven on the ground.

Edwar Ramirez replaced Mortensen on the mound in the seventh. Ramirez collected two quick outs, but then gave up a two-out walk to Lucas. Thorman singled up the middle, putting runners on the corner. May pounded a deep fly ball to the warning track in center, finishing the inning up without any harm.

Ramirez and Fernando Hernandez finished the final innings without any further damage from the Omaha offense. Sidewinder Louis Coleman pitched two shutout innings to end the game for the Royals, cleaning up an excellent pitching performance against a team that ranks third in the PCL in runs scored.

Conor Jackson, a midseason acquisition this year by the Oakland Athletics, played his first game as a River Cat tonight as part of a rehab appearance. He was the only batter in the River Cats lineup to draw a walk against Mendoza, showcasing what he believes is his greatest strength as a player.

"I think that my biggest attribute is my ability to see pitches," he said. "I want to control the strike zone. I've never been much of a big power guy, but I pride myself on walking more than I strike out, and that's what I bring to the table."

The River Cats will take on Omaha again Saturday at 7:05 p.m. Sacramento remains 2.0 games behind the Fresno Grizzlies in the South Division race.

"Any time you're playing for something it brings a little more excitement and little more intensity to the game," Jackson said. "It's going to be a lot of fun."

Hounds Follow Brown's Hot Bat To Series Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Triskaidekaphobia is the fear of the number 13 so, on any Friday the 13th, triskaidekaphobiacs are everywhere. Not at Citibank Ballpark on THIS Friday the 13th... at least not on the diamond.

The RockHounds picked up where they left off Thursday, scoring in seven-of-eight innings in which they stepped to the plate, building a 6-0 lead and going on to an 11-5 win over Tulsa.

Thursday night, the 'Hounds snapped a 4-game home losing streak, breaking a 4-4 tie with some big swings of the bat in the last of the eighth inning. They didn't wait that long Friday. A 19-hit attack, combined with some very aggressive base-running early in the game and the pitching of Ryan Edell, propelled the 'Hounds from the get-go.

Every RockHounds batter scored at least one run drove one in ... or both. Jemile Weeks was outstanding at the top of the order, with base hits in each of his first four trips to the plate, and Shane Peterson went 3-for-5 with a single, double, triple and three RBI. Corey Brown and Josh Horton each had three hits ... each for the second night in-a-row ... and each drove in two runs.

Brown's 3-hit night pushed his average to .339, making him the Texas League's top hitter.

Ryan Edell went 7.0 strong innings, allowing three runs on six hits and one walk, striking out six. Released by Cleveland early in the season, the lefty now has an 8-4 record with a 3.20 ERA for the RockHounds, and is among the league's top 10 pitchers.

The RockHounds will have to "bring their A game" to the ballpark the next three nights, as the Texas League's top team, Northwest Arkansas, comes to town. The Naturals have, far and away, the league's best record at 71-46. They won the North Division first half title after winning the North Division pennant a year ago and facing the RockHounds in the Texas League Championship Series.

The Naturals are, again, in the North Division lead in the second half (see above) and will send one of Minor League Baseball's top pitching prospects, Mike Montgomery, to the mound in Saturday's series opener at Citibank Ballpark. The 21-year-old left-hander is rated the Kansas City Royals' # 1 prospect.

The pennant race & the wild card: The RockHounds and Frisco were winners Friday, while Corpus Christi and San Antonio fell, all in cross-division play. The RockHounds lead San Antonio by two games ... Frisco by three and Corpus by six.

In the wild card race (which takes effect if Frisco wins the second half), San Antonio is two behind the 'Hounds and Corpus Christi is five games back.

Eight Is Great As Ports Best Quakes 7-5

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, Calif. - The Stockton Ports matched their longest winning streak since becoming an Oakland A's affiliate on Saturday night at The Epicenter. The Boys of Banner Island garnered their eight straight win by besting the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes by a final of 7-5. The Ports have set themselves up to try for their third consecutive series sweep in their road trip finale on Sunday.

For just the second time on the road trip, the Ports fell behind in a game. The Quakes scored a pair of runs in the bottom of the first off Ports starter Fabian Williamson (4-0) on an RBI triple from Luis Jiminez and a sac-fly from Gabe Jacobo to put the Quakes on top 2-0.

The Ports answered back in the second with two runs of their own. Mike Spina started the frame with a double to left and two batters later, Tyler Ladendorf tripled down the right-field line to cut the Quakes lead to a run. Ladendorf scored when Barfield followed with a sac-fly to tie the game at two.

With the game knotted 2-2, Quakes starter Garrett Richards (1-1) fell apart in the fourth. Back-to-back singles from Stephen Parker and Spina started the inning. With one out, Landedorf, who drove in three runs on the night, singled to right-center to break the tie and give the Ports a 3-2 edge. Two batters later with two out, Kent Walton drove in a run with an infield single to third. It was followed by a David Thomas two-run double to right to make it a 6-2 Ports advantage.

Richards would take the loss, going four innings and allowing six runs on seven hits while striking out six and not walking a batter.

Rancho Cucamonga got a run back in the bottom half of the inning. With one out, Jon Townsend singled to center and advanced to second on a bobble of the ball made by Jermaine Mitchell. Townsend advanced to third on a ground ball and scored with two outs on a passed ball charged to Yusuf Carter to make it a 6-3 contest.

Stockton countered in the fifth with what would be their final run of the night. With two outs, Spina reached on a fielding error made by Townsend at second. Carter and Ladendorf followed with back-to-back singles, Ladendorf's plating Spina to make it a 7-3 advantage. The run was unearned and the only one allowed by Baudillio Lopez in his two innings of relief.

Stockton's offense was shut down the rest of the night by the Quakes' bullpen. Jose Perez and Eddie McKiernan combined for three scoreless innings to end the night.

The Quakes offense, however, would take a final stand. Williamson started the sixth inning by walking Dillon Baird and allowing a single to Angel Castillo. Williamson was replaced at that point by Jose Pina. After a sac-bunt from Townsend, Pina yielded a two-run single to Richard Cates to make it a 7-5 game. It was the only hit allowed by Pina in his three innings of work.

The runs were charged to Williamson, who earned the win after going five-plus innings, allowing five runs (four earned) on six hits while striking out two and walking four.

Pina retired the final five batters he faced, striking out four of the five to finish his outing.

In the ninth, the Ports summoned closer Paul Smyth (SV, 22) from the bullpen. Smyth allowed a single to Cates with one out. Two batters later with two down, Mike Trout singled to left to extend the game and bring the possible winning run to the plate. After a wild pitch advanced both Cates and Trout into scoring position, Smyth struck out Alberto Rosario to end the ballgame and preserve Stockton's eighth straight win.

The Ports will try and remain perfect on their road trip as they wrap it up on Sunday at The Epicenter. Southpaw Travis Blackley (0-0, 4.50 ERA) will make his second start on rehab for the Ports, opposed by Quakes left-hander Manny Flores (5-7, 4.70 ERA). First pitch is set for 5:05 p.m. PDT.

Cougars' Rally Doesn't Hold **Kane County has lost 4 straight**

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars led only briefly Sunday afternoon in an 8-4 loss against the Peoria Chiefs at Elfstrom Stadium. They rallied from a 3-0 deficit to take a 4-3 lead, but it lasted for less than an inning, as the Cougars suffered their fourth straight loss. Their lead for the top playoff spot in the Western Division is down to one game.

Starter Ian Krol gave up single runs in the third, fourth and fifth innings to put the Cougars down, 3-0. In the bottom of the fifth, Leonardo Gil belted a two-run homer to cut it to, 3-2. Then Juan Nunez delivered an RBI single in the seventh against Daniel Keefe (1-0), and Anthony Aliotti poked a sacrifice fly to make it 4-3. Krol gave up three runs on eight hits over five innings, walked one and fanned five in the no-decision.

Max Peterson (4-3) had retired all six batters he faced through two relief innings but got tagged for two runs in the eighth and suffered the loss. Ryan Doolittle yielded three in the ninth on five straight two-out hits to account for the 8-4 final. The Cougars' offense went 1-for-8 with runners in scoring position and has gone 7-for-46 (.152) during the four-game skid.

The Cougars (27-21, 59-58) and Chiefs (22-24, 60-55) conclude the series Monday night at 6:30 CT. Murphy Smith (7-0, 3.87) is set to face Jeff Antigua (3-5, 4.40). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:15 p.m.