

A'S News Clips, Monday, August 16, 2010

Oakland A's held hitless for 7 1/3 innings, finish with just three hits in loss to Minnesota Twins

Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Given their recent hitting struggles, the A's seemed ripe to have history made at their expense Sunday.

They avoided the indignity of being no-hit against the Minnesota Twins when Cliff Pennington doubled with one out in the top of the eighth at Target Field.

Such is the state of the A's offense that avoiding the no-no seemed reason to celebrate in a 4-2 defeat that capped a three-game sweep by Minnesota.

The A's were held to three hits against four Twins pitchers, giving them a total of six hits over the final two games of the series.

That was a microcosm of a 1-5 road trip in which the A's averaged just 1.8 runs per game.

"There were a lot of similarities in all the losses," manager Bob Geren said. "... We've got a lot of guys struggling at the same time, and it's tough to overcome. It's difficult to link something together."

The A's are two games under .500 and fell 10 games behind first-place Texas in the American League West, their largest deficit since July 7.

Geren was asked if he still holds realistic hopes of contending in the division with 46 games left.

"We're trying to (think) short-term right now," he said. "With the way we're pitching, we don't have to be the best offensive team around. (The road trip) set us back, but we can't look at it that way."

Twins starter Kevin Slowey (11-5) kept the A's hitless through seven innings by pounding his fastball inside and consistently dropping in his curve for strikes.

But he walked three and hit a batter to run up his pitch count to 106. Considering his start was pushed back four days because of a recent bout of elbow tendinitis, it wasn't a shock that Minnesota manager Ron Gardenhire called on reliever Jon Rauch to start the eighth with the Twins leading 4-0.

With one out in the eighth, Pennington drilled a 2-1 pitch for a double off the right-field wall. Coco Crisp followed with a double that got the A's on the board, and they added another run to cut their deficit to 4-2.

That turn of events didn't sit well with the sellout crowd of 40,602. Fans booed Gardenhire when he made a trip to the mound in the eighth, then booed again when his mug appeared on the stadium Jumbotron to deliver a prerecorded public service announcement between innings.

Slowey told reporters afterward that it was natural to feel some disappointment at being pulled, but that he appreciated that Gardenhire had his health in mind.

"I'd be booing too," Gardenhire said. "I want to see a no-hitter myself. But I also know that I'm responsible for this young man's arm ..."

The A's talked after the game of their weekend-long misfortune of knocking hard-hit balls right at Twins fielders. Minnesota made some nice plays Sunday, but there was little in the way of solid contact for Oakland most of the afternoon.

Starting pitcher Vin Mazzaro (6-5) was charged with two runs (one earned) over six-plus innings, though the A's trailed just 1-0 when he left with a runner on second and no outs in the seventh.

Jerry Blevins came on and walked a batter before getting the first two outs of the inning. But Jim Thome hammered a 3-0 pitch over the right field wall for the 580th homer of his career. The three-run shot made it 4-0.

Oakland A's notebook: Conor Jackson close to return, but will he still be the everyday left fielder?

Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS -- Outfielder Conor Jackson appears close to coming off the disabled list, which leaves the A's with a decision on how to work him back into the playing mix.

Manager Bob Geren acknowledged that Jackson could be activated during the upcoming seven-game homestand but didn't say that Jackson will immediately return to being the everyday left fielder.

"He'll play a lot," Geren said before Sunday's 4-2 loss to the Minnesota Twins. "Whether that's every day or not is hard to say. How he feels (will play a part). He's been off for a while, and you want to make sure he's healthy day to day."

Jackson has missed 37 games with a strained right hamstring. He's played two full games in left with Triple-A Sacramento, going 0-for-8.

Jackson's playing time appears tied in to how the A's want to proceed with rookie Chris Carter, who has started the past six games in left. Carter went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts Sunday, leaving him hitless in 19 at-bats with nine strikeouts since his call-up.

Geren had a brief chat with the A's top prospect Sunday morning.

"His confidence is not shaken," Geren said.

Carter, who has spent most of his professional career at first base, has made all the routine plays in left since his promotion from Sacramento.

But he had Orlando Hudson's fly ball to the left-center gap glance off his glove in the seventh, getting charged with a two-base error on what would have been a tough catch.

"He's got a lot of learning to do, but that comes with experience and hard work," A's outfield coach Todd Steverson said.

Andrew Bailey (rib cage strain) threw 20 pitches in his first session off the mound since going on the disabled list July 30. He came out of it well, and Geren counted it as a big step in the closer's recovery. Geren said he thinks it's possible Bailey could be activated sometime during this homestand.

The deadline is 9 p.m. today for teams to sign draft picks before losing their rights. Among the A's unsigned picks are second-rounder Yordy Cabrera (infielder); third-rounder Aaron Shipman (outfielder); and fourth-rounder Chad Lewis (infielder).

Chin Music: Random notes and thoughts as A's try to avoid a sweep

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/15/2010 10:26AM

Last game of the series here at Target Field, and the stadium generally has gotten a thumbs-up from everyone in the A's traveling party. One of the nice touches I haven't mentioned yet: Behind the center field fence, there's a huge Twins logo on display. This is [the classic logo](#) from the Twins' early days and it's recently been resurrected. It features two ballplayers shaking hands — one wearing a Minnesota patch and the other wearing a St. Paul patch. The Twin Cities co-existing in harmony ... get it???

—There's no big shakeup with today's A's lineup. Perhaps Bob Geren is playing the percentages. The A's are 28-11 in day games this year, best mark in the majors. They're also 23-11 in the final game of a series, which makes sense in that many series finales are played during the day.

The lineups:

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

Twins — Span CF, Hudson 2B, Mauer C, Kubel RF, Cuddyer 1B, Thome DH, Valencia 3B, Repko LF, Casilla SS; Slowey RHP.

Among the topics Geren covered in his morning media chat:

–He said Rajai Davis definitely should not have gotten picked off second base last night. “He wasn’t going anywhere. If you’re not stealing on that particular pitch, you don’t want to get picked off.” But Geren also is aware that a player with a base stealer’s mentality is going to be more aggressive and take more chances, so he wasn’t too ticked at Davis. “If you have the ability to steal 100 bases, you’re going to get picked off every now and then.”

–Conor Jackson could be activated from the disabled list during the upcoming homestand, but Geren didn’t get more specific on a timetable. He did not come out and say that Jackson will be the full-time left fielder. “He’ll play a lot, whether it’s every day or not is hard to say. (Much will depend) on how he feels. He’s been off for a while and we want to make sure he’s healthy day to day.”

Does that mean Chris Carter stays with the big league club and continues getting time in left field when Jackson returns? “When Conor comes back, we’ll talk about the rest of the guys,” Geren said. ... He also said he saw Carter in the video room this morning and chatted with him for a few minutes. “He just hasn’t gotten a lot to hit yet,” Geren said. “They’ve made some good pitches on him. His confidence is not shaken.”

–Andrew Bailey threw 20 pitches off the mound — mixing in his fastball, curve and cutter — and by all accounts it was a positive step in the closer’s rehab from a rib cage injury. Geren said it’s still being decided what Bailey’s next step will be. “He probably needs a couple more times off the mound, whether (in a) simulated (game) or rehab (game). Obviously it was a big step throwing at that effort level and throwing all of his pitches. It was a positive thing.”

–This morning in the clubhouse, I heard Gabe Gross singing the chorus to “When I See You Smile” by Bad English. It’s not my favorite ‘80s power ballad, but you’ve gotta respect a man’s right to belt it out ... Check out [the video](#) if you want to see some sweet hair ...

Slowey dominates, Minnesota completes sweep

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

If there was any way for the A’s offense to get worse after two very different but equally poor performances the first two nights at Minnesota, they found it Sunday.

Twins starter Kevin Slowey was removed from the game with a no-hitter after seven innings, and while Oakland broke through in the eighth against reliever Jon Rauch, Minnesota still came away with a 4-2 victory at Target Field and a sweep of the series.

On Friday night, the A’s had 14 hits but went 2-for-20 with men in scoring position in a one-run loss. On Saturday night, they had three hits and never had an at-bat with a man in scoring position: Rajai Davis stole second but was picked off.

The A’s went 14 consecutive innings without recording a hit, from Davis’ second-inning single Saturday to Cliff Pennington’s one-out double in the eighth Sunday.

“We were just trying to get something going,” Pennington said of the A’s two-run rally in the eighth. “We had good at-bats, but that’s the way the series went - lots of hard outs. That’s the way baseball goes. We’ve got to start finding some holes.”

Oakland was feeling good when it left for Seattle a week ago. The A’s had taken two of three from Texas and hoped to keep inching upward.

Instead, Oakland whiffed at the chance to gain ground. And whiffed is the word: The signature action of the trip was a strikeout, looking, with men in scoring position. The team had 41 strikeouts on the trip, versus 40 hits and 11 runs. The A’s hit .135 with runners in scoring position.

Even so, the A’s starting pitching is so good that they might not be out of it entirely. Manager Bob Geren said if the team can get some offense to match its pitching, “The sky’s the limit.” And catcher Kurt Suzuki said, “It sucks we didn’t do more

for the pitchers this trip, but we've got to keep our heads up and keep moving forward. We feel like we can get the ball rolling anytime."

Twins manager Ron Gardenhire took Slowey out after 106 pitches. Slowey's previous start had been skipped because of elbow tendinitis.

"I'd boo me too, if I took a pitcher out with a no-hitter going," Gardenhire said, "but I would do it a thousand times the same way, because Slowey's just come off an elbow injury, and we're not even going to come close to risking this guy."

Slowey said he was disappointed, but he also was pleased that the Twins care about his health more than one potential accomplishment.

Suzuki caught Slowey with Team USA in 2006 and said with a smile, "I hate him. ... I know exactly what he does, and he did it today: He throws strikes, keeps you on your heels."

Chris Carter is 0-for-19 overall with nine strikeouts, the fourth longest hitless streak at the start of a career in Oakland history. He was charged with an error when a drive into the gap glanced off his glove, but it wasn't an easy play.

Road trip

Oakland's hitters didn't do any favors for the pitching staff during the just-completed 1-5 road trip. By the numbers:

.209 average

.135 average with runners in scoring position

11 runs

0 homers

2.02 ERA

1.93 starters' ERA

Options abound for A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Among the decisions the A's will have to make this offseason are whether to pick up the options on four notable names:

Coco Crisp, Mark Ellis, Eric Chavez and manager **Bob Geren**.

It's unlikely the A's would pick up Chavez's option, considering how little he has been able to play the past several seasons. From every indication, Geren will be back.

"I don't concern myself with things like that," Geren said before Sunday's game. "I'm a day-to-day kind of guy."

Crisp is a good bet to return, at \$5.75 million, despite his injury history. He is an excellent defensive player, and he can handle hitting in the leadoff spot.

"He makes a difference in center field, especially with this young pitching staff," Ellis said.

Ellis, at \$6 million, might be the biggest question mark, though he has been with the team for nine years and is a front-office favorite. Like Crisp, Ellis is a superior defensive player and a valuable presence on a young team.

"Obviously, I'd like to stay here," Ellis said, "but I'm not even going to think about it until they do something. Last time, I thought about it, and it didn't do me any good."

Last time, the A's picked up Ellis and Geren's options on the same day with less than a week left in the 2007 season.

Chavez's buyout is \$3 million; Ellis and Crisp's are each \$500,000.

Bailey close: Andrew Bailey (right ribcage strain) could be back in the A's bullpen in a handful of days. "Later in the week," said Bailey, who threw 20 pitches in a side session on Sunday morning and reported that it went well.

The two-time All-Star said that he needs to throw one more side session and/or a simulated inning before coming off the disabled list.

Jackson expects to be activated: In a text to The Chronicle, **Conor Jackson** (hamstring) said he expects the team to activate him today.

A's leading off

[Susan Slusser](#), San Francisco Chronicle

Stingy: Brett Anderson, tonight's starter, hasn't allowed a homer in 50 innings, the longest such streak in the majors this season. He is the only A's pitcher to go nine consecutive starts without giving up a homer in the past three years.

Drumbeat: Bailey moves closer to coming off DL; Jackson decision looms

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Minneapolis 8/15/2010 8:26AM

Andrew Bailey threw a 20-pitch side session and said it "felt great." He threw all his pitches, and he believes he needs another side session and/or a simulated game before coming off the DL. Manager Bob Geren had said "it's possible" that Bailey is coming off the DL on the homestand, Bailey makes it sound as if there's little question about that. As I'd speculated the other day, it could be later this week.

Conor Jackson could come off the DL as early as tomorrow; he's played several nine-inning games, and while he hasn't gotten a lot of hits, Geren said he doesn't necessarily have to be swinging a hot bat as long as he's feeling OK.

The big question, naturally, is what move the team makes when Jackson returns. I asked Geren this morning if Jackson will be the everyday left fielder upon his return and he said, "He'll play a lot. Whether it's every day or not is hard to say. It depends on how he feels. He's been off for a while."

Geren did stress that Jackson, when fully healthy and ready to go, is an everyday player.

That points, naturally, to Chris Carter returning to Sacramento, which wouldn't be for very long, anyway; September is right around the corner. But it's not a given; the team could work Jackson back in slowly and perhaps send someone such as Jeff Larish - unused since playing on Monday, when he was called up - back to Sacramento for a time. I doubt they're thinking anything earth-shattering, like designating Gabe Gross. It's two weeks until rosters expand, and this isn't a team that just jettisons players when there is some flexibility on the horizon.

I think the Carter decision will be based on one simple thing: Will it be better for him to stay here and take his lumps before he gets on track, or will it be better for him to get his swing going again at Sacramento and continue to learn to play left? There are good arguments on both sides, and everyone agrees Carter is a player who is always slow to get going every time he moves to a new level. Many people believe that now that he's here, the A's should leave him in place and let him get settled.

In that case, what happens in left field? Is it Carter, still learning the spot on the fly? Or Jackson, whom the A's believe to be a very good piece for next season? And if it's Jackson, and Carter stays, would he then....DH? Jack Cust is in a dreadful slump.

This is all pure speculation. No decisions have been made and I'm sure conversations are ongoing. It's one of the more interesting personnel issues the team has had, though, since designating Cust before Opening Day after Coco Crisp broke his finger.

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

Is there anyone else who would have liked to see more of Larish? He was super hot when he came up, now he's sat all week. What, there are too many other guys doing well in the lineup to get the guy another shot or two? I'd have thought this might have been a good opportunity to give Kouzmanoff a breather; he's slumping, it's a long season. Maybe Larish could provide a little spark. This team needs one. Instead, it's the same names, pretty much every day, and no one seems to be doing much of anything. Nothing wrong with mixing it up when a group is in this kind of funk. Although Larish's bat might have cooled entirely by this point.

Larish, by the way, is 3-for-4 lifetime with a homer against Kevin Slowey, the Twins' starter today.

Offense slowed down as A's drop finale

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- Not even a day game could save the A's, who were held hitless through seven frames by Minnesota's Kevin Slowey en route to eventually falling, 4-2, to the Twins at Target Field.

The A's, who entered the matchup a Major-League best 28-11 in day games, subsequently suffered their first sweep since the beginning of July, when the Yankees collected three wins in Oakland. It marked their 10th loss in last 16 games, and they finished a six-game road swing through Seattle and Minnesota a combined 1-5.

Oakland watched Slowey toss seven innings of no-hit ball before being removed at the 106-pitch mark as a precaution due to a recent dose of elbow tendinitis. The Twins rightly put just five men on base all day -- three via walk, one due to an error and one on a hit-by-pitch.

Slowey received a helpful hand from his defense, including an impressive catch by right fielder Jason Kubel to rob Coco Crisp of a hit in the first. Crisp suffered another helping of tough luck in the sixth, when left fielder Jason Repko made a leaping catch toward the wall to rob him of at least a double.

The A's entered the matchup having put together six consecutive hitless innings the night before, and they ran that number up to 13 before tagging Twins reliever Jon Rauch for back-to-back doubles in the eighth. Chris Carter led off the frame with a strikeout -- his second of the day -- before Pennington and Crisp each notched two-base hits, the latter which scored a run.

Oakland's final run of the day came two batters later against Jesse Crain, who reliever Rauch following a walk to Daric Barton to put runners on first and second. Crain issued a wild pitch to advance the runners to second and third, and he then allowed an RBI fielder's choice to Kurt Suzuki that scored Crisp. The run was charged to Rauch, who allowed two runs on two hits and a walk in just 1/3 of an inning.

The A's two runs, however, weren't enough to pass Minnesota's four, three of which came in the seventh courtesy of a three-run homer from Jim Thome off A's lefty Jerry Blevins. Righty Vin Mazzaro began the inning on the mound and watched Orlando Hudson reach second base on a two-base fielding error by Carter before being lifted.

Mazzaro' six-plus innings of work resulted in two runs -- one earned -- on seven hits with three walks and three strikeouts. He allowed Minnesota's first run in the third on an RBI double to Kubel.

Bailey tosses successful bullpen session

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- Andrew Bailey underwent a successful bullpen session Sunday morning and could possibly be activated from the disabled list on the A's homestand this week, manager Bob Geren said.

Bailey, nursing a strained rib cage muscle back to health, played catch from a distance of 120 feet before throwing all of his pitches in a bullpen he deemed he "dominated."

"No hits allowed," Bailey said with a smile.

That's good news for the A's, who hope to have their closer back on the upcoming seven-game homestand against Toronto and Tampa Bay that begins Monday. If Bailey experiences no ill effects from Sunday's session, he said he'd likely throw one more bullpen before potentially pitching in a simulated game and being activated thereafter.

"He needs a couple more times off the mound," Geren said. "But, today, obviously was a big step. Him throwing off the mound at that kind of effort level, that's a real positive step.

"We're optimistic based on how he feels right now."

Bailey hasn't pitched since July 20, a time when he had not allowed a run in 13 of his past 15 appearances.

A's look forward to Jackson's return

MINNEAPOLIS -- A's manager Bob Geren may be facing quite the decision this week upon returning to Oakland for a seven-game homestand, when rehabbing outfielder Conor Jackson could potentially return from the disabled list.

Jackson (right hamstring) was slated to play in his third rehab game with Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday, when Geren said "it's possible" he could be activated this week. In his previous two contests with the River Cats, he went 0-for-8 with a walk and strikeout as the starting left fielder. He also appeared in two games with Class-A Stockton and three with the A's Arizona Rookie League team.

Once activated, Jackson will likely be inserted back in left field, where the newly promoted Chris Carter has been playing this week. Geren wouldn't go so far as naming Jackson his everyday left fielder, but he did say Jackson is "an everyday player, a good player."

Before his DL stint, Jackson was batting .267 (12-for-45) with four RBIs in 14 games for the A's.

"He'll play a lot," Geren said. "Whether it's every day or not, we don't know. He's been off for a while, and we want to make sure he's healthy.

"When Conor comes back, we'll talk about the rest of the guys."

Carter, Oakland's highly touted power prospect, has started all six games since his Monday callup and entered Sunday's contest against the host Twins hitless in 16 at-bats with seven strikeouts and a walk.

"He hasn't got a lot to hit," said Geren, who spoke to Carter in passing Sunday morning. "His confidence is not shaken in any way. He's a very confident young man. He's had success at every level in his career, and I'm sure he'll continue that here."

Bloom: New stadiums burnish Selig's legacy

By Barry Bloom, mlb.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- With Major League owners, general managers and officials here for meetings this week, the Twins were able to showcase their new ballpark even though the team was out of town.

The Twins hosted a dinner for the group on Wednesday night in a Target Field restaurant called the Met Club and were awarded all the appropriate accolades.

"It was a fabulous evening," Commissioner Bud Selig said. "It was a beautiful night in a beautiful setting at a sensational ballpark."

From first suggestion to first game this past April, downtown Target Field was 15 years in the making, which is not uncommon for the funding and construction of new ballparks. Meanwhile, Selig is approaching one of his major objectives: new or refurbished ballparks for each of Major League Baseball's 30 franchises.

"As far as the renaissance of baseball and what new facilities meant to that period, it's a huge part [of his legacy], a huge part," Dave St. Peter, the Twins president, told MLB.com on Friday night. "In certain communities, it has been a struggle. But Commissioner Selig's stick-to-itiveness and his passion to make sure that baseball is thriving in each community is a big part of his contribution to making the game better over the long term."

Struggle? A ballpark that took 19 years to develop in Miami is well under construction and is expected to debut for the Marlins in time for the 2012 season. The Ricketts family is planning a significant renovation of Wrigley Field.

That leaves Oakland and Tampa Bay as the only clubs without a new or revamped facility. Officials from both teams and MLB are working on it. An MLB committee analyzing the A's situation is ongoing, Selig said on Thursday as the meetings concluded. But as he so often says, quoting his late father, "Don't get it done quickly, just get it done right."

Such were the herculean political efforts that produced new ballparks here, in New York and Washington, all of them fraught with potholes and problems.

"It was worth it," Selig said about the fight. "It's always worth it in the end. Look, nobody ever said that life is easy. Nobody ever said that some of these processes were ever easy. You can look back in retrospect and say there were a lot of difficulties, but here we are."

There's no disputing that fact. On a beautiful 75-degree Friday evening, the Twins came home from a 10-game trip, defeated the A's, 4-3, and played baseball under the stars in front of another sellout, their 52nd of the season. In this new Twins era, they have significantly increased revenue, increased player payroll and kept a home-grown player like Joe Mauer, who was signed for eight years at \$184 million.

That would have never happened playing in the Metrodome, where the Twins subsisted as a major revenue-sharing collector. In 2002, they were earmarked for contraction. Now, they are a thriving middle-market team.

"It doesn't seem like that could have been the same franchise," St. Peter said. "We certainly understand it was, having gone through some of the struggles we went through as an organization. It keeps us grounded, and frankly, I think we all really appreciate the success we're having right now. I can assure you no one in this organization takes it for granted."

To get there, the Pohlad family, which owns the team, made a \$195 million contribution to the ballpark, which in the end cost \$535.5 million. The community financed its portion of construction with an 0.15 percent sales tax in Hennepin County.

The public-private model is not so unusual. The Yankees, Mets, Cardinals and Giants all paid the entire freight of their ballpark construction with infrastructure help from their communities. The Padres paid \$150 million toward the building of San Diego's PETCO Park.

And if naysayers wonder if these ballparks have a direct impact on city development, just travel to San Diego, Washington or Denver to see what has sprouted in once-moribund warehouse districts. Talk about a tree growing in Brooklyn, condos, high rises, restaurants and hotels now abound around these recently built ballparks.

In Minneapolis, the parcel of land behind the Target Center basketball arena was once a parking lot bifurcated by a freeway overpass. Now, it's a go-to destination at least 81 times a year for 40,000-plus people.

"Clearly, if you take a look out here and see what Target Field means to downtown Minneapolis and the warehouse district, compared to what the Twins meant when we played in the Metrodome, this is an apples-to-oranges comparison," St. Peter said. "There is no comparison."

Thriving communities, thriving franchises, happy fans. It's a win-win situation for everybody. And as St. Peter concluded, none of it might have happened without Selig's help and behind-the-scenes perseverance.

Twins take no-hitter into eighth, down A's, 4-2

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 bats quiet in loss to Omaha

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

It would have been easier to find the needle in the haystack than runs in the Omaha Royals-Sacramento River Cats game Sunday. In the end, Omaha took advantage of some sloppy Sacramento play for a 2-1 victory and 2-1 lead in the four-game series.

Throwing 8.0 shutout innings for Omaha was starting pitcher Andrew Lerew, who allowed six hits and two walks while striking out seven.

"He had an excellent pace and great awareness on the mound of what he was doing," outfielder Corey Wimberly said. "He had a good plan coming into the game and he executed excellent pitches."

Added first baseman Dallas McPherson: "He did pretty much everything well. He had the two-seamer working and kept the ball down, he threw changeups in fastball counts, he pretty much did everything he could to stay away from our strengths."

Lerew's ERA went down to 3.01 and the outing gave him his seventh victory of the season.

"He changed speeds real well," Royals manager Mike Jirschele said after the game. "He kept the ball down in the zone and threw a lot of strikes."

One of Sacramento's few bright spots was Wimberly, who went 2-for-3 with a walk, raising his average to .292.

"I was just swinging at good pitches," he said. "I wasn't swinging at balls and I stayed disciplined at the plate."

The game began with three scoreless innings thanks to good pitching performances from Travis Banwart of the Cats and Lerew. Lerew had to work out of some trouble, giving up five hits and two walks to go along with a two-base error.

But a pickoff and clutch hold in the third, when the Cats stranded runners on second and third with one out, helped Lerew keep the Cats scoreless. Banwart had an even distribution of outs, four flyouts and four groundouts, to go with just one hit, one walk, and one strikeout. After another scoreless inning in the fourth, Banwart had thrown 59 pitches, 34 of them strikes.

In the sixth, still a scoreless tie, Omaha had the most convincing rally yet. Jarrod Dyson led off the inning with a single to right. David Lough hit into a fielder's choice, leaving Dyson out to dry at second. No. 3 hitter and .313 batter Mike Moustakas singled to center field, putting runners at the corners with just one out.

Banwart helped seal his own fate, not with a play on the mound, but in the field. Michael Taylor caught a fly ball in right, and then gunned the ball to home with Lough looking to score on a sacrifice. Taylor's throw went past catcher Anthony Recker, and it looked like Lough would score. But sitting behind home plate and there to back up was Banwart, who stopped Lough in his tracks and saved a run. Jai Miller struck out and Banwart exited the game unharmed.

Lerew and Banwart had very similar performances, with Banwart giving up four hits to Lerew's five. Both pitchers walked two batters and Lerew struck out five as opposed to Banwart's three. Lerew threw 90 pitches and 58 strikes, Banwart 96 and 53.

Banwart was replaced by Jared Lansford in the seventh. Overall, the right-hander got eight outs through the air and seven through the ground. It was his most consecutive shutout innings thrown in an outing, beating his 4.0 innings against Colorado on July 30.

The scoreless tie was finally broken after Banwart's departure. Lansford didn't get any help from an Eric Sogard throwing error at short that allowed Kurt Mertins to reach second base. Mertins stole third, putting a runner in scoring position with one out. Clark capitalized on the opportunity, singling to center field. Lansford was taken out in favor of Edwar Ramirez.

Ramirez finished out the seventh without any further damage, but then endured a brutal eighth. Moustakas doubled into the right field corner before two consecutive walks issued to Ed Lucas and Scott Thorman ended Ramirez's outing early in favor of right-hander Fernando Hernandez, who inherited a bases-loaded situation with nobody out.

In what is usually a reliever's nightmare, Hernandez flourished and got out of the inning without any runs on the board. A strikeout of Miller with a full count gave the Cats defense some hope, and then a 6-4-3 double play off the bat of Marc Maddox ended Omaha's hopes of getting some insurance runs.

"Today we didn't hit well with runners in scoring position," Jirschele said. "We had bases loaded with nobody out, we had bases loaded with two out in the last inning and we couldn't get that big hit. Those are the things we need to do."

Despite Hernandez's hold in the eighth, Omaha would come away with another run in the ninth. Dyson singled to left and then stole second base before Lough was hit by a pitch. Moustakas brought Dyson home with a single to center, giving the Royals some breathing room.

Omaha carried a 2-0 lead heading into the bottom of the ninth inning, putting in reliever Victor Marte to seal the deal. But Marte's inning did not get off to a fabulous start, allowing a leadoff home run to Dallas McPherson on a 2-1 pitch. But Marte managed to get the next three batters out, forcing a Jeff Baisley flyout, Adrian Cardenas popup, and a Michael Taylor flyout to shallow right.

"In my earlier at-bats I just went up there and swung at some pitcher's pitches," McPherson said. "That at-bat I went up there to zone in on a good pitch to drive. I laid off a couple of pitches and then fouled one off, and then I got a good one. It was an aggressive swing, not a defensive swing like I had in the first three at-bats."

Sacramento will play for the series split Monday at 7:05 p.m.

Wright Shuts Down Naturals As Hounds Extend Win Streak To Three

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

"Team A" entered Saturday's games with the best record in the league (best, by far) and sent one of the top prospects in all of minor league baseball to the mound as its starting pitcher. "Team B," meanwhile, lost its clean-up hitter (the league's leading hitter), who was a late scratch from the line-up. The result? Just about as you'd expect ... or NOT. Team B 8, Team A 1.

The RockHounds, playing the role of Team B, won their third straight, defeating the Northwest Arkansas Naturals, 8-1, Saturday night at Citibank Ballpark. Not only did the 'Hounds chase Mike Montgomery, the Kansas City Royals' # 1 prospect, after just 4.0 innings, they did it front of a fireworks night crowd in excess of six thousand (6,051). AND ... the two teams chasing the RockHounds in the second half pennant race each lost. It doesn't get much better than that.

In the top of the first, Matt Wright escaped a jam, striking out Nick Van Stratten with two on and two out. Wright would go 6.0 innings of shutout baseball to earn his fifth win. After opening the season in big league camp with Oakland, Matt accepted an opportunity to pitch in Korea. He was sidelined by a hamstring strain after just two starts and released. Returning to the A's organization, he was assigned to the RockHounds in late June and is now 3-2, 1.53 in his last five starts. He also spent three seasons in the Kansas City organization (NW Arkansas' parent club), so the win was all the sweeter.

Montgomery retired the first two batters before Shane Peterson reached on an infield single off the pitcher's glove. Alex Valdez doubled to left-center, scoring "Pete" and Val Majewski drove a 2-0 pitch into the short porch in right for a 2-run home run and a 3-0 lead.

The 'Hounds never let their collective "foot off the gas," building an 8-0 lead.

Josh Horton continued a torrid stretch, going 2-for-3 and scoring three runs. In his last three games, the RockHounds' shortstop is 8-for-10, scoring six runs and driving in four more. He has added three walks, reaching base in 11-of-13 trips to the plate.

The 'Hounds scored in four of the first five innings. At that point, the club had put at least run on the board in 12-of-14 innings.

Corey Brown was the late scratch from the line-up. Corey had just moved into the Texas League lead with a .339 average. No word was available on his status at this time.

The pennant race & the wild card: The RockHounds and Corpus Christi were winners in Saturday's cross-division play, while both Frisco and San Antonio fell. The RockHounds lead San Antonio by three games ... Frisco by four and Corpus by six.

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

Nine To Shine: Ports Edge Quakes For 9th Straight Win

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, Calif. - And the beat goes on.

On Sunday at The Epicenter in Rancho Cucamonga, the Stockton Ports earned their third consecutive series sweep, their ninth straight victory, and extended their winning streak where no streak has gone since the team became an Oakland A's affiliate in 2005. The Ports defeated the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes by a final of 3-1. Combined with Visalia's win over Bakersfield, the Ports remain a game out in the wild card standings and move to within a game of the first place Blaze in the North Division.

The bottom of the first inning set the tone for a frustrating night of offense for the Quakes. Mike Trout doubled to open the inning of Ports starter Travis Blackley, and then advanced to third on a wild pitch with nobody out. Blackley, however, would get Darwin Perez to ground to third, Luis Jimenez to fly out to second, and strike out Gabe Jacobo to end the inning and prevent the run from scoring.

Blackley, in his second rehab start with the Ports, went three scoreless innings and allowed just the one hit while striking out two.

Stockton's offense was hardly explosive, but timely nonetheless. David Thomas doubled to start the third inning off Quakes starter Manny Flores (5-8). Joel Galarraga came up next and drew a walk. Two batters later with two on and one out, Grant Green provided the game's first run with an RBI single to left. Galarraga advanced to third on the hit and Stephen Parker drove him home with a sac-fly to center, giving the Ports a 2-0 lead.

The Ports made it 3-0 in the fourth by adding an unearned run. Tyler Ladendorf and Jeremy Barfield hit back-to-back singles to start the inning. With runners at first and second, Flores attempted a pickoff throw to second and the ball went into center field which allowed Ladendorf to take third. With runners at the corners and one down, Thomas reached on a fielder's choice force-out at second with Ladendorf scoring on the play.

Flores went a season-high eight innings in a strong effort but lacked support and was tagged with the loss, allowing three runs (two earned) on seven hits while striking out two.

After Blackley's three-inning start, Justin Murray (9-4) entered the game in the fourth. Murray was nearly flawless, allowing two hits in his first inning of work but no hits over his final three frames.

The Quakes' lone run was unearned and came in the seventh. Jacobo started the inning with a deep fly ball to center that Thomas tracked but dropped on the warning track, putting Jacobo at third on a three-base fielding error. He scored when the next batter, Dillon Baird, grounded out to second to make it a 3-1 ballgame.

Murray would earn the win, going four innings and allowing just the unearned run on two hits while striking out three and not walking a batter.

The Quakes attempted a rally in the ninth. With Scott Hodsdon (SV, 1) on the hill to try for the save, Jimenez hit a one-out single to left and Jacobo followed with a single to center to put runners at the corners with one out. Hodsdon, with the

possible winning run at the plate, induced a game-ending 6-4-3 double-play ball off the bat of Baird to earn his first save of the season.

Following an off-day on Monday, the Ports will seek out their 10th straight victory as they open a four-game series with the Lancaster JetHawks on Tuesday at Banner Island Ballpark. Shawn Haviland (7-6, 3.82 ERA) will head to the hill for Stockton, opposed by left-hander Patrick Urckfitz (4-7, 4.26 ERA) for Lancaster. First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

COUGARS' RALLY DOESN'T HOLD

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.