

A's News Clips, Friday, August 20, 2010

Oakland A's use unusual formula to beat Tampa Bay Rays

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Their offensive hero from each of the past two games resides in the No. 9 spot in the order.

They preserved a one-run lead in the ninth inning Thursday with a reliever who had never recorded a major league save.

The A's hardly are using a conventional blueprint for victory, but it's working right now.

They notched a come-from-behind 4-3 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday night at the Oakland Coliseum, taking the first of a four-game series against the team that was tied for the major leagues' best record.

The A's broke through with a three-run sixth that erased a 3-1 deficit and rewarded Trevor Cahill with his 13th victory.

Rajai Davis' bases-loaded ground out in the sixth scored Kurt Suzuki and brought Oakland to within 3-2. Then No. 9 hitter Cliff Pennington drilled a two-out, two-run double off the base of the wall in the right-field corner against Dan Wheeler (2-1) to put the A's ahead 4-3, paving the way for their third straight victory.

A day earlier, Pennington delivered a walk-off single against the Toronto Blue Jays.

"Getting two-out hits is what this team has to do to win ballgames," Pennington said.

Coupled with Texas' 4-0 loss to Baltimore, the A's gained a game in the American League West for the third straight day. They're seven games behind the first-place Rangers, the closest they've been since July 21.

A paltry crowd of 10,118 was on hand, but those who showed had reason to get charged up even before the A's go-ahead rally.

Momentum shifted to the A's while they were playing defense in the top of the sixth.

After Evan Longoria had homered to stretch Tampa Bay's lead to 3-1, center fielder Coco Crisp robbed Matt Joyce of a two-run shot later in the inning, leaping high to snatch a ball that was headed over the center field wall.

"He's really good out there, everybody knows that," Cahill said of Crisp.

"A ball that's hardly going over the fence, I feel like he's got a chance to make the catch."

Despite struggling with his fastball command, Cahill (13-5) lasted eight innings and allowed three runs on seven hits. It was the fourth time in his past five starts he's gone at least eight innings.

He paid for his two mistake pitches.

Carlos Pena crushed a 1-1 pitch deep to right-center for a two-run homer in the fourth to give the Rays a 2-1 lead. Before that, Cahill had allowed just one earned run over his previous 36 innings.

Longoria's sixth-inning blast made it 3-1.

Cahill fell just shy of carving his own spot in the record books. In allowing seven hits, Cahill snapped his string of 20 consecutive starts of pitching at least five innings and giving up six hits or less.

He wound up tied with Nolan Ryan for the longest such streak in major league history dating back to 1900.

"(The record) was in the back of my head, but I didn't worry too much about it," Cahill said.

He's 8-2 with a 1.84 ERA at home and has allowed just four earned runs in his last 40 innings overall.

With closer Andrew Bailey on the disabled list, Craig Breslow nursing a bruised forearm and Michael Wuertz having pitched three of the past four days, A's manager Bob Geren called on lefty Jerry Blevins in the ninth to protect a 4-3 lead.

Blevins set the Rays down in order to notch his first career save.

Oakland A's update: Dan Johnson glad to be back with Tampa Bay Rays

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

After Japan stint, Johnson glad to be back with Rays

It's been quite a ride for Dan Johnson since the first baseman/designated hitter was waived by the A's in April 2008.

He was claimed by the Tampa Bay Rays and hit a crucial pinch-hit homer against Boston in September 2008, one of the lasting memories of the Rays' drive to their first American League pennant.

He spent 2009 playing with the Yokohama Bay Stars of Japan's Central League.

Now he's back with Tampa Bay, having re-signed last winter and getting promoted from Triple-A Durham on Aug. 3.

The left-handed hitting Johnson is platooning at designated hitter and batted second Thursday, his first game against the A's since leaving the team.

Johnson said he had offers from other major league clubs but jumped at the chance of reuniting with Tampa Bay.

"When it came down to it, there was a good chance this team was going to win again," Johnson said.

Johnson enjoys the game better on this side of the Pacific Ocean. He hit just .215 in 117 games for Yokohama.

"It was a little too much for me to handle," Johnson said of his time in Japan. "Off-day workouts, ground balls for 25 to 40 minutes, spring training starting in January "..."

From 2005-07, when Johnson saw the bulk of his time with the A's, he hit .249 and averaged 14 homers and 52 RBIs.

Though Johnson hit for a higher average at home in two of his three full seasons with the A's, he said he never mastered hitting at the Coliseum. "I just never got it going at home," Johnson said. "There are other guys that have figured it out, I just wasn't one of those guys."

Reliever Michael Wuertz, a Vikings fan, has a purple Brett Favre jersey hanging in his locker. Wuertz ordered the jersey long ago, but it was conveniently delivered to the Coliseum on Thursday, one day after Favre announced he was returning for a 20th NFL season. He also owns a Packers jersey autographed by Favre. "... Closer Andrew Bailey (rib cage strain) will pitch one inning tonight for Triple-A Sacramento. He could come off the disabled list after that. "... Amaury Pi-Gonzalez, part of the play-by-play team for the A's Spanish radio broadcasts, has been elected to the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame.

Chin Music: Bullpen updates before A's-Rays series opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/19/2010 6:22PM

We're going with a brief roundup of items as the A's and Tampa Bay Rays get ready to start a four-game series. I'm so used to Thursday home games being played during the day. Feels like a Friday night to me ...

-For anyone interested in checking out Andrew Bailey's outing with Triple-A Sacramento, he's likely to start tomorrow night's game and throw just the first inning. Don't get caught in traffic ... The A's will determine afterward whether he's ready to be activated from the DL. The indication I've gotten is that Bailey will need just one appearance before rejoining the A's.

As for tonight, it's tough to say who will be summoned from the bullpen in the late innings. When manager Bob Geren met with the media before BP, he wasn't sure if Craig Breslow (bruised forearm) or Michael Wuertz would be available. Wuertz has thrown three of the past four games. Geren usually gets a report on which relievers are available between batting practice and game time. Breslow was hopeful yesterday of being ready tonight.

-Lost in the discussion of yesterday's ninth-inning meltdown by the bullpen: Henry Rodriguez turned in a very solid eighth inning. Rodriguez is gradually being used in more late-inning, pressure situations. He allowed a leadoff walk to Toronto's Fred Lewis, but got Yunel Escobar swinging and Jose Bautista looking (both on 99 mph fastballs), then retired Vernon Wells on a groundout to end the eighth and protect a 4-1 lead. Geren stresses the importance of Rodriguez controlling the running game. "He's been great," Geren said. "He's used to (pitching in the late innings) at the Triple-A level. He obviously has the stuff to perform late in the game at this level. It's just building confidence ..."

-Kevin Kouzmanoff, 2 for 28 over his last nine games, is hitting seventh tonight, the lowest he's hit all season. As for the rest of the lineups ...

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

Rays: Jaso C, Johnson DH, Crawford LF, Longoria 3B, Pena 1B, Joyce RF, Rodriguez 2B, Upton CF, Brignac SS; Sonnanstine RHP.

Oakland comeback beats its alter ego

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Did you know the A's are just like the Rays?

"If you look at their numbers, they're scarily similar," Rays manager Joe Maddon said.

Come again?

"Look at their offensive numbers compared to ours, their pitching numbers compared to ours and their defensive numbers compared to ours," Maddon said. "And look what they're doing on the bases now."

For one day, at least, Maddon had a point.

The A's beat the Rays 4-3 in the opener of a four-game series Thursday night, knocking Tampa Bay (74-47) one game out of first place in the American League East. The A's, with three straight wins, moved to .500 for the 21st time (60-60) and closed to seven games behind division-leading Texas.

"They're a good team," A's shortstop Cliff Pennington said, "but so are we."

One day after Pennington hit a game-ending single to defeat the Blue Jays, he helped beat the Rays by turning a 3-2 deficit into a 4-3 lead with a sixth-inning double. Trevor Cahill earned his 13th win, Jerry Blevins earned his first career save and center fielder Coco Crisp stole a home run from Matt Joyce.

But how could Maddon compare the A's with his mighty club? He was reminded of Oakland's offensive troubles.

"Look at us," said Maddon, implying his offense has its own issues.

The A's have a .257 average to the Rays' .253, a 3.55 ERA to the Rays' 3.62 and a .984 fielding percentage to the Rays' .986.

Of course, those are on-the-surface numbers. The disparity is more evident when considering the Rays are well ahead in runs (608-483), homers (112-72) and walks (506-372).

Only one team has a better ERA than Tampa Bay, and Cahill was exhibit A for the A's. His ERA over his past five starts is 0.90, and his home ERA through 11 starts is 1.84.

He's pitching like a legitimate Cy Young Award candidate. He gave up seven hits - including homers to Carlos Peña and Evan Longoria - his most in 21 starts. Cahill entered with a streak of 20 games in which he lasted at least five innings while surrendering fewer than seven hits, tying Nolan Ryan for the longest such streak in modern baseball history (since 1900).

The streak ended on B.J. Upton's seventh-inning single. It would have ended on Joyce's sixth-inning home run, but Crisp didn't let it happen. He raced to right-center, leaped and extended his glove above the wall to prevent a two-run homer, and Joyce called it "one of the greatest catches I've ever seen in person, and it totally changed the whole game."

"It feels good to save some runs," Crisp said. "Saving the negative stats for a pitcher is a great feeling."

Cahill is among the league leaders in several categories but isn't about to rank himself among the top pitchers, saying, "Those other guys have been so good for so long. I don't really like comparing myself to other pitchers."

Cahill threw eight innings, and lefty Blevins was summoned in the ninth because Michael Wuertz pitched three of four games and Craig Breslow had a bruised forearm. Blevins had a perfect inning.

Johnson back in the big-leagues

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Dan Johnson was having another spectacular Triple-A season and is trying to make it translate in the big leagues again.

The former A's first baseman is with the Rays for a second go-round (after a stint in Japan), having been recalled Aug. 2 from Triple-A Durham, where he was leading the minors with 95 RBIs and the International League with 30 homers, batting .332 with a .430 on-base percentage.

"Now I've got to get it going here, get that same swing back," said Johnson, who is batting .114 but with a .360 on-base percentage in 12 games. "It seems whenever I start out, I put myself in a huge hole."

Johnson, 31, put up big numbers with Triple-A Sacramento from 2004-06 but hit .249 in 318 games for the A's. OBP was less of an issue: .344.

What if the Rays hadn't claimed him off waivers in April 2008 and he stayed with the A's?

"I'll never know," Johnson said. "I was in this organization all the way up, and they gave me a shot. I had a hard time at this place and at this field. I never really got it going."

Playing for the Yokohama BayStars last year wasn't a great experience - "the strike zone was so big" - and Johnson rejoined the Rays' organization.

"When it came down to it, there was a good chance this team was going to win," Johnson said. "Having a chance to come back to an organization that's set up to win, that's the main motivator. It's great being on a winning team, especially being in the AL East against two empires holding our own."

Johnson, who has been playing against right-handed pitchers, was in Thursday's lineup.

Briefly: Closer **Andrew Bailey** (ribcage strain) will pitch the first inning tonight at Sacramento. Whether he joins the A's afterward will be dictated by how it goes. ... For the 16th time in 25 games, the A's played a team that started the day in first place or tied for first. They are 7-9 in those games.

A's leading off

John Shea

Hall call: Amaury Pi-Gonzalez, long-time Spanish play-by-play man, was elected into the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame and will be honored (along with Jon Miller and Gary Radnich) at a Sept. 25 ceremony at the Doubletree Hotel in Berkeley. Pi-Gonzalez also has called games for the Giants and Warriors.

Drumbeat: Dan Johnson and his Rays

John Shea from the Coliseum, where the mighty Rays are visiting for the first time since Dallas Braden's perfect game on Mother's Day -- and guess who's pitching for the A's on Sunday . . . 8/19/2010 6:42PM

The Yankees' biggest nightmare is here. The Rays are in Oakland for four games, beginning tonight, and look who's batting second as the DH.

It's old friend Dan Johnson.

The former A's first baseman was recalled from Triple-A Durham on Aug. 2, largely because of Carlos Pena's foot injury, and is making his 11th start, third as the DH. Man has some crazy numbers -- a .129 batting average and .391 on-base percentage. He's 4-for-31 with 14 walks.

This, after hitting a ton with Durham. He was leading the minors with 95 RBIs and the International League with 30 homers while batting .332 with a .430 OBP.

"Now I've got to get it going here, get that same swing back," Johnson said. "Everything was rolling there."

The Rays claimed Johnson off waivers from Oakland on April 18, 2008, and he played 10 games for the AL champs. Last year, he played in Japan. In January, he re-signed with Tampa Bay.

"When it came down to it, there was a good chance this team was going to win," Johnson said. "Playoff baseball in the big leagues is something you play this game for. I've been a part of (pennant races) twice now ('06 A's, '08 Rays, but no postseason appearances). It makes everything worth it. Having a chance to come back to an organization that's set up to win, that's the main motivator."

The A's lineup: CF Crisp, 1B Barton, LF Jackson, C Suzuki, DH Cust, 2B Ellis, 3B Kouzmanoff, RF Davis, SS Pennington. Cahill on the mound.

Pennington delivers again to lift A's

Oakland wins third straight, Cahill notches 13th victory

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Playoff talks have slowly diminished within the confines of the home that surrounds the green and gold, but that doesn't mean the A's are about ready to throw away the season.

They've got too much talent to play that card.

And, with a 4-3 home victory over the Rays on Thursday, they climbed right back to the .500 mark and remained in a second place tie with the Angels in the American League West, both trailing Texas by seven.

The A's have won three straight after dropping four in a row, and they have no plans of stopping now.

"We've proven that we can play well against some of the top teams all year," said Cliff Pennington, whose two-run double in the sixth proved to be the game-winner. "We're going out there trying to win every series, no matter the opponent."

On Thursday, their opponent happened to be one of baseball's best. The Rays, who entered the contest owners of a five-game winning streak, not only watched the A's stop that train, but also forced them a game behind the first-place Yankees in the entertaining AL East race.

And it was Pennington, for the second day in a row, who delivered what turned out to be the winning hit. The A's shortstop, a career .333 hitter against Tampa Bay, delivered the go-ahead hit that erased a 3-2 Rays lead.

"He drove that ball hard," manager Bob Geren said of Pennington's ball to right off Tampa's Dan Wheeler. "That was a key part of the game. He's been pretty tough against lefties out there."

"Those are the type of hits we need to get to win ballgames," Pennington said. "We went from being behind to taking the lead, and if we're going to get the lead, we're going to keep it."

Oakland's got the numbers to back it up, too. Following Pennington's game-changing hit, A's starter Trevor Cahill and reliever Jerry Blevins combined to shut out the Rays in the final three innings and keep intact a perfect 52-0 season record when leading after eight frames.

Cahill, per usual, kept the A's in the game for eight innings, surrendering three runs on seven hits -- two of them homers -- with two walks and five strikeouts. The seven hits, his most since matching that number in his first outing of the season April 30, snapped a streak of 20 consecutive starts with six hits or fewer and five innings pitched or more -- a modern-day Major League record shared with Nolan Ryan.

But Geren insists he'll take eight innings of seven-hit ball any day of the week.

"What he did is even better," the skipper said.

Cahill has seemingly only gotten better since his beginning days of 2009, when he surrendered an Oakland rookie-record 27 home runs. And while he did allow two long balls Thursday -- a two-run shot to Carlos Pena in the fourth and a solo homer to Evan Longoria in the sixth -- they marked the first homers off the righty since July 17.

Down 3-1 following Longoria's blast, Cahill almost watched Matt Joyce hit a two-run homer just two batters later with a runner on first. But Coco Crisp had other plans for the long ball sailing toward center field, as he made a leaping catch over the wall to rob Joyce and the Rays of what would have been the difference in the game.

"I just got a good jump on the ball," Crisp said. "He put some good wood on it, and it was just low enough where I could jump and catch it. Fortunate for me, I was able to come down with it and end up being a part of the reason why we won tonight."

"Coco just brought it back," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "That ball was well struck and could have given us five runs at that point. I thought overall we did a pretty nice job against [Cahill]. We could have had five runs against him after six innings. But their guy made a great play and prevented that from happening."

Cahill, though, never assumed the ball was a goner. After all, it was headed in Crisp's direction.

"Everyone knows he's really good out there," the A's righty said. "If it barely gets over the fence, he has a good chance of bringing it back."

Crisp's gem of an effort, along with Pennington's two-bagger, ultimately allowed Cahill to notch his 13th win of the season. However, it goes without saying Cahill normally earns a 'W' all on his own, as evidenced by the fact he's given up just four earned runs over his last five starts combined.

"I was just trying to throw strikes out there," he said. "Baseball's kind of a streaky game, and I just happen to be on the positive side of things right now."

Cahill's eight-inning night was followed by a quick 1-2-3 ninth captained by Blevins, who was called upon due to Michael Wuertz and Craig Breslow's unavailability. Geren said he also had lefty Henry Rodriguez ready in the bullpen to face right-handed hitter B.J. Upton, but Blevins' ability to notch two speedy outs against Pena and pinch-hitter Ben Zobrist changed his mind.

Thus, Blevins was plated against Sean Rodriguez, who flied out to Crisp to put an end to it all and hand the A's left-handed reliever his first career save.

"I was just gonna mix and match," Geren said. "I was without Breslow and Wuertz, so I just treated it like it was the seventh or eighth inning. I had Blevins up, I had Henry ready, they pinch-hit a switch-hitter, and then when he got two outs and no one on, I thought about making a move there, but I figured I'd give him one more. If someone gets on, I was gonna let Henry face Upton, but Blevins didn't give me that chance."

A's ready for anything against versatile Rays

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com

As the Rays meet the Athletics for the second game in a four-game set, Oakland manager Bob Geren made a keen observation about his team's weekend opponent.

"Tampa's just another team that has a little of everything," the skipper said. "They have some power, they have some speed, they can play some small ball, they can do a little bit of everything."

Yes, the Rays -- in a see-saw battle with the Yankees for the best record in baseball over the last few days -- have a lot of weapons. Before the series in Oakland, the Rays recorded a resounding sweep of the Rangers, who lead the American League West.

Both the A's and Rays are strong in the pitching department as both clubs own the best ERAs in the American League -- Oakland with a 3.55 mark and Tampa Bay at 3.61.

The A's will get a good look at some of Tampa Bay's best young pitching firsthand on Friday, when right-hander Jeremy Hellickson takes the hill for the Rays. He'll be looking for his fourth win in as many decisions.

Though he's made quite an impression already, Hellickson said he's not too concerned with opponents studying his game.

"They've seen tape, but they haven't seen me in person, and I think that's a big difference," he said.

As for Rays manager Joe Maddon, he has faith the hurler -- who has a 1.35 ERA -- will be able to make any necessary adjustments should teams start to figure him out.

"For a young man, Maddon said, "he really has a remarkable feel."

Rays: Tampa Bay tough on AL West

Even with Thursday's 4-3 loss in the series opener, the Rays are 14-7 against the AL West, particularly with the help of the sweep against the Rangers earlier in the week. The Rays were just 12-21 against the AL West last year.

Thursday's loss also snapped a five-game winning streak and dropped the Rays a game behind the first-place Yankees for the first time in four days.

Athletics: Mazzaro enjoying success

Vin Mazzaro, who is among Oakland's young crop of promising pitchers, gets the start on Friday. He hasn't won a game since July 24, but owns a 2.37 ERA in his last three starts.

The A's have hit only four home runs this month and have gone yard just 72 times this season, the lowest total in the big leagues.

Worth noting

The A's are 52-0 when leading after the eighth inning. ... Oakland starters have allowed one earned run or fewer in eight of the club's last 12 games. ... The Rays know the power of the A's pitching staff, having fallen victim to Dallas Braden's perfect game on May 9.

Rodriguez answering the call in A's 'pen

Right-hander gives Geren another late-innings option

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- With a fastball that routinely reaches triple digits on the speed gun, Henry Rodriguez is a unique commodity in the A's bullpen.

For only the second time this season on Wednesday, the 23-year-old Venezuelan entered the game with the A's leading. Rodriguez took the mound against the Blue Jays with a 4-1 lead in the eighth and tossed a scoreless frame, striking out two while walking one.

The only other time Rodriguez entered with the A's leading was on June 21, when he tossed a scoreless seventh inning against the Red Sox to preserve a 6-4 advantage. In his other nine appearances, Rodriguez has pitched while trailing, but manager Bob Geren said he's liked what he's seen from the young righty.

"He's been great," Geren said. "He's used to that at the Triple-A level, he's been a closer at the Triple-A level. Obviously, he has the stuff to perform late in the game at this level, it's just a matter of having success and continuing to build his confidence."

Since he was recalled on July 19 for his fourth stint with Oakland this year, Rodriguez has a 3.00 ERA in nine appearances, seven of which are scoreless, including each of the last five. The only team to score on Rodriguez during that span is the White Sox, who have done it twice by exploiting Rodriguez's Achilles' heel: his lack of an effective pickoff move.

Rodriguez gave up two runs on July 23, when the White Sox stole three bases, one of which came from A.J. Pierzynski, who has 12 steals in his 13-year career. Seven days later, White Sox shortstop Alexei Ramirez stole second before eventually scoring on a sacrifice fly.

Geren said the team has been working with Rodriguez on his pickoff move.

"It's part of a Major League pitcher's game," Geren said. "They have to be well-rounded, not only have good stuff but have good command, and they also have to have an idea of the game itself -- who runs, who doesn't, who to keep close to the base. That's part of finishing the product off."

In all, Rodriguez has a 3.77 ERA in 13 appearances with Oakland this season. He had 11 saves and a 1.69 ERA in 20 appearances with Triple-A Sacramento.

Wolf waiting for his opportunities

OAKLAND -- It was nearly three weeks since A's reliever Ross Wolf has seen game action entering Thursday, but the right-hander said he's keeping ready and staying positive about the situation.

"I've been here before," Wolf said. "It's just staying mentally ready and doing your work when you go out, and play catch and after you play catch. I'm just staying mentally prepared."

Wolf, who was acquired from Baltimore for Jake Fox on June 22, has appeared in four of 32 games since he was promoted to Oakland on July 7. He had a 2.45 ERA in those four outings but hadn't appeared in a game since July 29.

"It's kind of the life of a reliever," manager Bob Geren said. "It's a little unusual, but sometimes relievers get to a point where they need days off, and there's other times where it's difficult to get them in the game. The fortunate thing about him is that he has a great attitude about it."

It's been so long since Wolf went full-bore that the A's had him throw a simulated game recently.

"It gets frustrating because you're a competitor and from a competitive standpoint," Wolf said. "But I totally understand. I'm not going to complain about it because you watch these guys play every day and you learn more and more just like you did in Triple-A."

Worth noting

Slumping third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who is usually the team's fourth or fifth hitter, was dropped to the seventh spot in the order on Thursday. Kouzmanoff was batting .071 (2-for-28) over his last nine contests. ... Closer Andrew Bailey, on the 15-day disabled list with a rib cage muscle strain, will start for Triple-A Sacramento on Friday and is expected to complete one inning of work. ... Lefty reliever Craig Breslow, who exited Tuesday's game after being hit with a ball on the left forearm, played catch on Thursday.

Major Lee-ague: 'Wrath' of an injury

Jane Lee, mlb.com

I got to spend some time around the cages with a hobbling **Adam Rosales** today. He's obviously bummed about his ankle, and rightfully so. But he's been keeping himself plenty busy with books and movies. Right now he's currently reading Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" to help pass the time in his San Ramon abode, and he said there are about 10 more books that have been recommended to him. His buddy's trying to get him into "Lost" too, but he knows that six seasons is quite a commitment, as I've also come to learn (I started the series at the beginning of the baseball season, and I JUST finished season one). Rosales will head back east tomorrow to spend some time with his family and girlfriend, and he also said he'd likely meet up with the team in Cleveland just for kicks. He's been out here in street clothes with his teammates every day this week, which shows the type of team guy he is. He's got one week down and three more to go, but he's hoping to maybe return before then. In the meantime, though, he's been ordered to simply "mobilize" the ankle.

In Rosales' stead, you've got to like what we're seeing from **Steve Tolleson**, who has a chance of turning into an everyday Major League infielder if he continually shows a consistent bat and steady defensive presence. He's 5-for-10 since his callup, and he and was essentially responsible for starting yesterday's ninth-inning rally, so I would have liked to see him in the lineup again tonight. You really don't want to mess with a guy who's on a hot streak, especially when confidence is also a big thing for a guy straddling the line between the Majors and Minors.

On a different note, the A's were mentioned in a Las Vegas Sun article today titled, "Mayor: American League baseball team looking at Las Vegas." Mayor Oscar Goodman wouldn't comment on which franchise was looking at Las Vegas as a possible place to build a stadium, but it's no secret that the A's are one of just a few teams in need of a new home, and they've also been linked to Vegas before. Can't say I'm a fan of a potential stadium in Vegas, where a dome would be required. Are you? Leave your thoughts here...

Bullpen blows lead, but A's recover to win in last at-bat, 5-4

- [Sam McPherson](#), Oakland A's Examiner

On a day when the offense and the pitching were clicking, it was the defense and the bullpen that almost gave the game away for the Oakland Athletics.

But the hitters saved the day for once, and it was good.

Michael Wuertz and some shoddy defense conspired to give up a three-run lead to the Toronto Blue Jays in the top of the ninth inning, before the offense won the game in the bottom of the inning with a walk-off single.

With [the 5-4 win](#), the A's took their sixth straight home series, improved their major-league best day game record to 29-12 and somewhat righted their ship after a disastrous week of lackluster hitting.

A win is a win, but it's a shame Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez didn't get credit for it. He went seven innings and gave up only two hits while striking out six. He gave up one run -- which only scored when the defense couldn't catch a two-out pop-up that landed between home plate and the mound -- and with the A's offense playing solidly, the team took a 4-1 lead into the ninth inning.

Current closer Wuertz got into immediate trouble, though, giving up a leadoff double. After retiring the second batter, Wuertz proceeded to lose the strike zone -- throwing eight straight balls to load the bases.

At this point, the defense once again blew it -- letting a pop fly to right field drop to let another run score. After Jerry Blevins "relieved" Wuertz, another Blue Jays hit tied the game. The third A's pitcher of the inning, Brad Ziegler, got a double-play ball to end the inning, but the damage was done.

Thankfully, the Oakland offense saved the bullpen's bacon by delivering two straight hits, with a passed ball in between. Cliff Pennington drove in Steve Tolleson with the winning run, and the A's had the victory they mostly deserved -- a few minutes delayed.

All's well that ends well, of course, and Oakland can put this one behind them.

Barely.

A's rally past Rays, 4-3

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Cliff Pennington hit a go-ahead two-run double in the sixth inning, right-hander Trevor Cahill shook off an unusually rough start to record his team-leading 13th win and the Oakland Athletics beat the Tampa Bay Rays 4-3 on Thursday night.

Cahill, who allowed just one earned run in his previous 33 innings, gave up a pair of home runs and was in trouble until Pennington's two-out hit off reliever Dan Wheeler.

He got plenty of help from Oakland's defense, which turned two double plays. Center fielder Coco Crisp also made a leaping catch at the wall to rob Matt Joyce of a home run in the sixth.

Carlos Pena and Evan Longoria homered for the Rays, who snapped a five-game winning streak and fell one game behind the Yankees in the AL East.

It was the third straight win for Oakland after being held to one hit by Toronto's Shaun Marcum on Monday. The A's also made it back to .500 for the 21st time this season, two shy of the franchise most set in 1947 by the Philadelphia A's.

It wasn't easy.

Tampa Bay starter Andy Sonnanstine stymied Oakland's offense for five innings despite pitching with runners on base in every inning but one, while his teammates muscled up in a rare show of power against Cahill.

Oakland's right-hander had not allowed a home run since July 17 before giving up a two-run shot to Pena in the fourth and a solo shot to Longoria in the sixth.

Cahill (13-5) entered the game on a roll, carrying a 0.27 ERA over his last five starts. He settled down after Longoria's homer and retired seven of the final eight batters he faced.

Jerry Blevins pitched the ninth for his first career save.

Sonnanstine scattered five hits over 5 1-3 innings in just his third start of the season. The right-hander, who began the season in the Rays' bullpen, walked three and struck out three before leaving with two runners on and out in the sixth.

Wheeler (2-1) relieved Sonnanstine and walked Kevin Kouzmanoff to load the bases then gave up an RBI grounder to Rajai Davis that made it 3-2. Pennington followed with a line drive double down the right field line to give the A's the lead.

Tampa Bay had been cruising until then with a 3-1 lead.

Pena, who had missed 14 games on the disabled list until being activated Monday, went just 2 for 14 in the Rays' three-game sweep of Texas before collecting a pair of hits off Cahill, including his team-leading 24th homer.

Longoria's homer with one out in the sixth made it 3-1. Joyce nearly added to the Rays lead two batters later until Crisp jumped at the wall and caught the ball to rob Joyce of a home run.

Notes: A's closer Andrew Bailey will pitch one inning for Triple-A Sacramento on Friday, the latest step in his recovery from a rib cage strain. ... Tampa Bay's Carl Crawford had a nine-game hitting streak snapped. ... Pena, who broke into the majors with Oakland in 2002, has hit 13 career home runs at the Oakland Coliseum.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Late Iowa rally costs Sacramento

By Annie Becker / Sacramento River Cats

The terrible twos continue.

Sacramento has yet to win three consecutive games in August, and the streak continued Thursday night as Iowa won a see-saw battle by scoring two runs in the ninth to beat Sacramento 7-5.

Iowa opened the game with an early run in the first, but the clawing Cats answered with a Matt Carson two-run homer deep to the right field bullpen, which claimed the lead. Michael Taylor's one-run single in the third scored Chris Carter to put Sacramento ahead 3-1.

Brian LaHair and Robinson Chirinos opened the fifth with back-to-back singles and were followed with by a Marquez Smith line-drive double to left field, scoring LaHair. Matt Camp's ground out scoring Chirinos tied the game and James Adduci's sacrifice fly scored Smith for a 4-3 lead.

But Sacramento regained the lead with two outs in the sixth with a Jeff Larish two-run homer, scoring Carson, who had been walked.

Iowa answered with a game-tying run scored by Bryan LaHair, who had reached on a Sacramento error. Iowa continued to shine in the ninth, taking the out-right lead after a costly Larish throwing error to first, advancing Smith to second and Chirinos to third. Matt Camp's double scored both base runners for a two-run lead.

With runners on first and second, Anthony Recker's deep fly ball to center field left hope in the River Cats fans' eyes until Jim Adduci's catch at the wall ended the game.

With both Sacramento and Fresno both losing Thursday, the Cats remain 1.0 game back. Sacramento and Iowa will face off in the last matchup of the series on Friday night at 7:05 p.m.

Drillers take down RockHounds again

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

TULSA, Okla. -- The Tulsa Drillers scored two runs in the eighth inning to beat the Midland RockHounds 4-3 Thursday night at ONEOK Field.

The Drillers have taken the first two games in this series and have a chance to sweep the three-game set tonight. The good news for the RockHounds is that they stayed three games ahead of San Antonio and Frisco for the lead in the Texas League South Division. San Antonio lost 4-3 to Arkansas, while the RoughRiders defeated Northwest Arkansas 5-4 to pull into a second place tie with the Missions.

The teams were tied at 2 in the eighth when the Drillers got to Midland reliever Fautino De Los Santos (1-3) for the go-ahead runs. Warren Schaeffer had an RBI double to score Kiel Rolingl Schaeffer then scored on a single by Radames Nazario.

Early on this was a good pitching duel between Midland's Ryan Edell and Tulsa's Brandon Durden. Edell went six innings and allowed two runs on seven hits. He also struck out three and walked three. Durden went seven innings and gave up two runs on six hits and added four strikeouts.

Corey Brown gave Edell an early 1-0 lead when he hit a solo home runs to right field.

The RockHounds made it 2-0 in the fifth when Josh Horton singled and later scored on a double by Jemile Weeks.

The Drillers answered in the bottom of the fifth when Charles Blackmon (4 for 4) and later scored on a single by Jordan Pacheco.

Tulsa tied it at 2 in the sixth when Schaeffer's second double scored Jason Van Kooten.

Midland attempted a rally in the ninth as Alex Valdez doubled and then scored on a one-out single by Horton, but Stu Pomeranz struck out Matt Sulentic and Petey Paramore to end the game.

Thomson Terrific in Twelfth Straight Triumph

Right-hander superb in Stockton debut

STOCKTON, Calif. – Matt Thomson is no stranger to helping his team keep a winning streak alive. Thomson was a part of the 2008 University of San Diego club that won 16 consecutive games, and he helped the Stockton Ports (63-59) win their 12th straight game on Thursday night, striking out 10 batters in 5.0 shutout innings in his California League debut.

The Ports defeated the Lancaster JetHawks (48-74) by a 6-2 final to extend their streak. The win, combined with a Bakersfield loss, now give the Ports a 2.0 game lead in the Second Half standings.

After walking the leadoff batter, Thomson settled in and struck out the next six batters he faced. He didn't give up a hit until the third inning. Thomson, the 12th round draft pick by the A's in the 2010 First-Year Player Draft, allowed just two hits and two walks in his 5.0 innings, and picked up the win. He joined the Ports on Thursday after starting the season with the Vancouver Canadians.

The Ports jumped to a quick 2-0 lead in the bottom of the first. Left fielder Jermaine Mitchell tripled to center field to start the game. With third baseman Stephen Parker at the plate, JetHawks starter Ross Seaton threw a wild pitch, which allowed Mitchell to score. Parker walked, and moved to second on a single by first baseman Mike Spina. Catcher Yusuf Carter slammed an RBI double to right field to make it a 2-0 ballgame.

The Ports went down in order in the second and third innings, but added their third run in the fourth. Carter doubled to lead off the inning, and advanced to third on a single by second baseman Tyler Ladendorf. Right fielder Jeremy Barfield grounded into a double play, but Carter scored from third to make it 3-0.

Lancaster scored their two runs in the top of the seventh to pull within one of Stockton. With A.J. Huttenlocker on the mound in his Ports debut, designated hitter Brian Pellegrini singled to start the inning. He was put out a batter later as right fielder Brandon Barnes hit into a fielder's choice. Catcher Jordan Comadena then singled to right field to put two on with one out. The Ports then called on right handed pitcher Scott Hodsdon to face the JetHawks.

Hodsdon struck out left fielder Andy Simunic for the second out of the frame. But then Mark Ori stepped up to the plate and hit a two RBI single to right field. Barfield threw the ball to Carter to try to get Comadena out at the plate, but Carter dropped the ball as Comadena collided with him at home. Comadena was safe, and Ori was safe at second on the play. Second baseman Brandon Wikoff then flew out to end the inning.

But the Ports answered right back by scoring three in the bottom of the seventh to make it 6-2. Mitchell led off with a double, and scored as Grant Green doubled to left field. Parker slammed his 18th home run of the year to deep center field to bring home two more runs. The Ports loaded the bases in the inning, but designated hitter Kent Walton grounded out to leave the runners stranded. Stockton left 10 runners on base in the game.

Hodsdon retired the last six batters he faced, striking out two, to collect his second save on the year.

The Ports will look to sweep the JetHawks on Friday night at 7:05 PM PST at Banner Island Ballpark. RHP Justin Murray (9-4, 3.63) will start for Stockton, while LHP Edwin Walker (0-0, 4.11) will take the hill for Lancaster. Fans can tune into the game live on Comcast Hometown Network (Channel 104 for Comcast customers in Northern & Central California) or on KWSX 1280 AM.

Aliotti, Mederos Lead Cougars to Win **Kane County severs losing streak at 6**

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa – With a pair of RBI doubles from Anthony Aliotti and seven shutout innings from Chris Mederos, the Kane County Cougars edged the Cedar Rapids Kernels, 2-1, Thursday night at Veterans Stadium and snapped a six-game losing streak. Now with 18 games remaining in the regular season, the Cougars still are tied with Clinton for the top playoff spot in the Western Division.

The Cougars were hitting .117 with runners in scoring position during the six-game skid, but Aliotti delivered in the top of the first off Stephen Locke with a run-scoring double to plate Tyreace House from second. Then in the third, Aliotti doubled home Conner Crumbliss, who had singled to advance his hitting streak to 18 games. The Cougars' offense had several other chances to tack on runs, including in the eighth and ninth innings, but this time the early-game work held up.

Mederos gave up three hits -- all singles, including one infield hit -- over seven strong frames. He walked one and struck out two, tossing the first seven-inning outing by a Cougar since July 25. Connor Hoehn yielded the Kernels' lone run in the eighth, and Jose Guzman converted his 16th save --- and first since August 3 -- with a scoreless ninth.

The Cougars (28-23, 60-60) and Kernels (29-22, 72-47) wrap up the series Friday night at 6:35 CT. Dan Straily (8-7, 4.72) will face Buddy Boshers (2-0, 5.40). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:20 p.m.