

A's News Clips, Monday, August 23, 2010

Up-and-down Oakland A's facing a tough road

By Ben Enos, Oakland Tribune

After gaining some momentum with a four-game winning streak last week, the A's finished their seven-game homestand with a bit of a backpedal. A 3-2 loss to Matt Garza and the Tampa Bay Rays on Sunday was their second in succession after the brief warm spell, and left the A's eight games behind the Texas Rangers in the American League West.

The good news: The A's were 10 back when their 4-3 homestand started.

"Everybody's going to have their missteps, and we're going to falter but by no means do we feel like we're ready to roll over," losing pitcher Dallas Braden said.

Now comes a three-city, 10-day road trip that begins Tuesday in Cleveland and includes the A's final three games in Texas this season, as well as four contests at Yankee Stadium.

Braden was on the mound for another Sunday afternoon against the Rays. The last such time, the left-hander was magical in pitching a perfect game on May 9. No such scenario this time.

Braden didn't pitch poorly, working six innings and allowing three runs. But a two-run double down the left field line by Evan Longoria that scored Jason Bartlett and Carl Crawford in the sixth proved to be the game-winner. Braden finished the inning but didn't go back out for the seventh, departing after 88 pitches.

"He threw the same game he always does, very consistent," A's catcher Landon Powell said. "Every outing he goes out there and gives us a chance to stay in the game and win."

Garza also has a no-hitter to his credit this season, pitching the first one in Rays history on July 26 against the Detroit Tigers. And he handcuffed the A's into the eighth inning with a low- to mid-90s fastball and a sharp curve. The A's lone run came courtesy of a balk, with Powell scoring on Garza's miscue in the fifth. But with runners on second and third, Coco Crisp lined out to first baseman Carlos Pena, and Garza's strikeout of Daric Barton prevented further damage.

"He does a good job with his fastball commanding the zone," Powell said of Garza. "He threw a no-hitter this year. He's got great stuff. You try to have good at-bats, and luckily I got a couple knocks. But we needed some more to win the game."

One of Powell's two hits came off Rays closer Rafael Soriano in the ninth. Kurt Suzuki pinch-ran for Powell and scored on a double by Gabe Gross. But Soriano ended the game by striking out Cliff Pennington for his 37th save.

"Just more hits. It wasn't situational," said A's manager Bob Geren when asked what the A's need to improve offensively. "We had guys on second and third (in the fifth) and Coco hit the ball as hard as you can possibly hit it. That ball's a couple feet higher and that's two runs."

The A's did shine defensively. Pennington made a full-length dive up the middle to spear Longoria's grounder in the second, then popped up quickly to retire him with a powerful throw. "Our defense, I'm not sure what people see it as, but it's definitely one of the best in baseball. They should get a lot of credit for that," Geren said. "People that watch us play every day know how good our defense is."

Oakland A's update: Andrew Bailey off disabled list

By Ben Enos, Oakland Tribune

Bailey back from the DL, lauds his bullpen mates

A's closer Andrew Bailey returned to the active list Sunday, hoping to bolster a bullpen that filled in well in his absence. Bailey, a two-time All-Star, had been on the disabled list since July 30 with a right intercostal (rib cage) strain.

"They've done a great job. A lot of guys picked up some saves, and it's nice that they got that experience and it'll help us out down the road," Bailey said before the A's 3-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays. "Anyone in our bullpen is capable of getting

saves and I've said that for a long time. We're a unit down there and it doesn't matter what role you're in. Just go out and do your job and there'll be good results."

Right-hander Ross Wolf was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to make room for Bailey. Wolf appeared in four games, compiling a 2.45 ERA. He hadn't pitched since July 29.

Bailey worked the ninth inning and looked sharp, striking out two of the three he faced. Of the 10 pitches he threw, nine were strikes.

Manager Bob Geren said after the game that he made a point to get both Bailey and Michael Wuertz into the contest to avoid a long layoff before Tuesday's road-trip opener at Cleveland.

The pitching matchup between Dallas Braden and Matt Garza marked the second meeting this year between pitchers who have each thrown a no-hitter. Philadelphia's Roy Halladay (who pitched a perfect game May 29 at Florida) squared off against Arizona's Edwin Jackson (who threw one at Tampa Bay on June 25).

Before Halladay and Jackson met, the last time two pitchers with no-hitters in the same season squared off in that season was 1991, when the Chicago White Sox's Wilson Alvarez faced the Texas Rangers' Nolan Ryan.

Reliever Henry Rodriguez gave the stadium radar gun a workout in the seventh inning. In a three-pitch strikeout of Kelly Shoppach, the right-hander threw pitches of 101, 100 and 102 mph. ... Sunday was Fiesta Day at the Oakland Coliseum, with pregame festivities in the parking lot, Latin music featuring prominently over the public address system and an on-field dance exhibition before the game. ... The Rays headed for Los Angeles after the game with the entire team clad in matching blue and white plaid blazers. Manager Joe Maddon introduced the colorful jackets, which he nicknamed "Braysers", before the team's current West Coast swing.

Chin Music: Bailey returns, Sunday lineups

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/22/2010 11:52PM

Good morning/afternoon from the Oakland Coliseum. Ben Enos filling in for Joe Stiglich.

News of the day is Andrew Bailey is back from the disabled list, with Ross Wolf heading back to Sacramento to make room. The closer said he's excited to be back, having thrown just one rehab appearance for the Rivercats earlier this week to shake the rust off a little.

It's Fiesta Day at the Coliseum, with a Latin American theme playing heavily in the pregame PA music mix. I'm resisting the temptation to get up and dance (yeah, right).

Here are today's lineups.

A's — Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Ellis 2B, Cust DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Davis LF, Powell C, Gross RF, Pennington SS; Braden LHP

Rays — Upton CF, Bartlett SS, Crawford LF, Longoria 3B, Pena 1B, Zobrist RF, Aybar DH, Rodriguez 2B, Shoppach C; Garza RHP

No perfection for Braden this time around

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Dallas Braden had no Mother's Day flashbacks when pitching against Tampa Bay on Sunday. His outing was distinctly different from that May 9 perfect game.

Braden lost any hope of perfection when he hit Carlos Peña in the second inning, and his no-hit chances ended in the third, along with the shutout. Finally, Braden took the loss when Oakland fell 3-2 to the Rays at the Coliseum.

"We didn't win, so I wasn't good enough. Period," Braden said.

Braden called the odds of matching his earlier effort "pretty insurmountable," and he said that he wasn't thinking rueful thoughts after plunking Peña or giving up a single to Sean Rodriguez.

"If you're thinking about that, you're not doing the team a favor," Braden said. "You might as well be out there daydreaming."

The Rays weren't focused on the previous game, either.

"If he'd have gone through the lineup once, maybe, yeah, we'd have probably started to think about it," Rodriguez said. "But not the first inning or two."

Kelly Shoppach drove in Rodriguez in the third with a double, and in the sixth, Evan Longoria provided a two-run double down the line in left.

"I think we just needed to get that first hit out of the way against Braden today," Longoria said. "He pitched a heck of a game and gave his team a chance to win."

Tampa Bay's Matt Garza, who'd thrown a no-hitter July 26, was the better pitcher Sunday. The A's only run against the right-hander came on a disputed balk with the bases loaded in the fifth.

"He didn't leave a lot of pitches to hit," Oakland manager Bob Geren said, praising Garza's sinker.

Braden exited after six innings, having thrown only 88 pitches, but Geren said that it was because he had relievers he wanted to have work, with a day off today.

He would like to keep Henry Rodriguez sharp, he didn't want Michael Wuertz to go five days between outings, and he planned to get Andrew Bailey into the game no matter what. Oakland's All-Star closer had missed more than a month with a rib-cage strain, but he came off the disabled list to work a perfect ninth inning Sunday, striking out two.

"Great, normal, completely normal," A's catcher Landon Powell said. "Like he never skipped a beat."

"It felt good to get out there in a game," said Bailey, who hadn't worked since July 20. "I'm moving in the right direction, trying to get my feet under me. I wasn't trying to do too much, and that's the best location I've had in a while."

Bailey said he isn't sure whether he'll be used in back-to-back situations immediately, but that won't be a consideration until Wednesday at the earliest.

Oakland put together a mini-rally with two outs in the ninth. Powell singled off Rafael Soriano and pinch-runner Kurt Suzuki scored on Gabe Gross' double to right. Cliff Pennington struck out to end the game.

A's hit make-or-break stretch on road

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's last road trip proved no fun for the team, and this one is sure to have its share of obstacles, too.

The A's leave today for a three-game series at Cleveland that opens Tuesday, followed by three games at AL West-leading Texas, and then four at Yankee Stadium against baseball's top team.

Closer **Andrew Bailey** leaned into his locker to check his magnet schedule and said, "And then we come back and play the Angels, Seattle and Boston. Obviously, this is a stretch that is going to make or break us. We know how many games we're out (eight), and that our season might come down to this part of the schedule."

Catcher **Landon Powell** added, "It's obviously a big couple of weeks, with a lot of games against teams in our division. It's a tough part of the schedule, but that's how it's supposed to be down the stretch - you either make the playoffs or you don't."

Surgery likely for Jackson: **Conor Jackson** told The Chronicle via text Sunday that he was in South Carolina this weekend to get his lower abdominal strain examined by Dr. **William Meyers**, and it appears "99 percent sure" that he has a sports hernia. Meyers, who saw Jackson on Saturday while on vacation, is the nation's pre-eminent sports-hernia specialist and has treated quarterback **Donovan McNabb**, among others.

A sports hernia would require season-ending surgery. Jackson believes the injury - which has lingered since spring training - is the underlying cause of the other problems he has had this year, and that surgery would resolve all of that. He'd be fully recovered well before spring training begins.

Briefly: **Gabe Gross** made his first start since July 30 and had two hits, including a two-out RBI double in the ninth. ...

Brett Tomko, working his way back from last year's nerve problem in his right arm, worked six scoreless innings at Triple-A Sacramento.

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Narrow margins: The A's past five games have been decided by one run, and a 3-2 record in those games means a lost opportunity to gain more than the game they did on Texas. Oakland went 4-3 on the homestand, but its next 10 games are on the road, where it has lost eight of 10.

Drumbeat: Bailey's back from the DL; Powell's behind the plate

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 8/22/2010 12:01PM

It's perfect game vs. no hitter today, Dallas Braden vs. Matt Garza, and Marc Topkin of the St. Petersburg Times was just noting that not only was the Braden perfect game against Tampa Bay also on a Sunday day game series finale, but the Rays also were heading to Anaheim after the game that day, too.

Landon Powell, who caught Braden that day, is behind the plate today. He and Braden have worked together since Class-A ball and they have a good rapport. Manager Bob Geren said that it was coincidence that Powell's catching Braden today - he emphasized that Powell works well with everyone and that Braden does well with Kurt Suzuki behind the plate. He's not a "personal catcher" kind of manager.

Andrew Bailey came off the DL, as expected, and Ross Wolf, barely used, was sent back to Triple-A Sacramento - he hadn't worked since July 29. That's the longest stretch I can recall an A's reliever going without an appearance, though I'd guess there were some Rule 5 guys (Mike Neu? Jay Marshall?) who had similar stretches.

Bailey is definitely going to pitch today if the situation warrants; he's unsure about back-to-back appearances initially, after missing a month, but it won't matter right now - the A's are off tomorrow.

Conor Jackson texted me this morning that he's been in South Carolina getting that abdominal strain checked out, and he believes surgery will be required. It's largely been expected that he'd miss the remainder of the season, and that would clinch it, but Jackson would be fully recovered well before spring training and he believes the abdominal strain led to his other physical issues this year. Fixing that should eliminate the other problems, like that lingering right hamstring strain, or that's the plan, anyway.

Today's lineup: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Ellis 2b, Cust dh, Kouzmanoff 3b, Davis lf, Powell c, Gross rf, Pennington ss

I asked about Ellis hitting third, and Geren said it's because Suzuki isn't playing today, with no further explanation. It's only the second time this year Ellis has hit there, but I guess with Conor Jackson on the DL, Geren might feel his options are fewer. Kouzmanoff has hit third, as has Barton.

Braden toppled in battle of no-hit kings

Rays' Garza just a bit better as A's get only four hits off him

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- If the storyline that has come to be known as "The Year of the Pitcher" were ever to make its way to the big screen, Oakland's Dallas Braden and Tampa Bay's Matt Garza would pretty much be guaranteed a starring role.

On Sunday, though, they were simply two pitchers -- two who happened to throw no-hitters this year -- facing off in an afternoon affair at the Oakland Coliseum.

Braden's no-hitter, a May perfect game, brought about many of the same elements present Sunday -- the Rays and the sun, included.

Garza, though, was in the dugout that May day -- not on the mound, as he was this time around.

The Tampa Bay righty found his own way into the record books by way of a no-hitter against the Tigers on July 26. And, on Sunday, he found a way into the win column, outdueling Braden in the highly anticipated matchup, as the A's fell, 3-2, to the Rays and settled on a four-game series split.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Sunday marked just the second time in the past 20 years two pitchers faced each other after throwing no-hitters earlier in the season. The other time also came this season, when then-D-backs starter Edwin Jackson faced Philadelphia's Roy Halladay.

But an always honest Braden, taking the realistic route, admitted he didn't exactly expect to copy his last performance against the Rays. In fact, he deemed his chances of such a thing "pretty insurmountable."

"I'm not a math major, but I can pretty much add that up, and I was definitely not in favor there," Braden said.

The A's lefty garnered one perfect inning before hitting Carlos Pena with a pitch with one out in the second to lend the Rays their first base runner. Braden quickly ended the frame, but he was struck for not only his first hit but also a run in the third, when Kelly Shoppach's double easily plated Sean Rodriguez from first base.

Saying an early goodbye to another no-hit bid didn't really faze Braden, who understands that the Rays, despite being no-hit twice this year, are still one of baseball's best teams with a 76-48 mark.

"I'm not somebody who really reads into things of that nature too much," the southpaw said. "There's a lot of [lore] and a lot of history that goes into all that stuff, and if you're thinking about that, you're really not doing yourself or your team a favor. You might as well go out there and daydream.

"They're the same potent lineup that they are. They have been for a few years now. I don't see any need to try to stray from their approach. It's obviously been working for the past few years, as well, so just a little different hits today."

Garza, meanwhile, cruised through the first four frames before giving up a one-out single to Landon Powell and walking Gabe Gross to put runners on first and second with one out for Cliff Pennington. The A's shortstop grounded a ball toward second baseman Jason Bartlett, who chose to go to second base, throwing wide to make all three runners safe. With Coco Crisp at the plate looking to capitalize on the error, Garza was charged with a balk that tied the game at 1.

"He called it," Garza said, referring to home-plate umpire James Hoye. "I didn't think I did. I never came set, never touched the ball to hand or anything. So, it is what it is. I didn't totally agree with it, but he saw something, so he called it."

Nevertheless, the A's proceeded to leave runners on second and third and managed just one hit against Garza over his final innings of work. The Rays' hurler went 7 2/3 innings, giving up one run and four hits with three walks and three strikeouts en route to improving to 13-7.

His counterpart, following Tampa Bay's third-inning run, allowed one walk and no hits in the fourth and fifth innings combined, but Braden surrendered a two-run double to Evan Longoria in the sixth that changed everything.

"As a pitcher, you try to make adjustments against hitters," A's manager Bob Geren said. "And as a hitter, you make adjustments against pitchers. They tried to lay off some pitches from him, and they certainly didn't hit him hard."

However, it was enough for Geren to take Braden out after just 88 pitches, his line spanning six innings with three runs, four hits, two walks and three strikeouts.

"Same thing Dallas always gives us," Powell. "Pitches to contact early in the count, lets our defense play and gets outs. He had a couple quick innings and then a couple balls fell in there, they get a run or two. But when a guy pitches six innings and gives up three runs, we always feel like we're going to be in the game, so it was a good outing for him."

Said Braden: "We didn't win, so it wasn't good enough. Period."

The lefty's outing was followed by three solid frames from a combined one-hit effort from Henry Rodriguez, Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey -- the last of whom was activated from the 15-day disabled list Sunday and managed to garner two strikeouts in a quick 1-2-3 ninth.

"I felt good," the A's closer said. "It was nice to get back into some game action, and unfortunately it just didn't come out on our side today."

The A's rallied for a run in the ninth off closer Rafael Soriano courtesy of an RBI double from Gabe Gross, but that's all they could muster as Pennington then struck out to end the game.

With the loss, the club's second in a row, the A's fell one game under the .500 mark again. They face a 10-game road swing through Cleveland, Texas and New York beginning Tuesday and really only have one thing on their minds, according to Braden.

"Attack, attack, attack," Braden said. "Play the baseball we've been playing, really. Everybody's going to have their mishaps, but by no means do we feel like we're ready to roll over."

Bailey's activation from DL bolsters 'pen

Wolf optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to make room for righty

By Jane Lee and Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- After throwing 18 pitches with Triple-A Sacramento on Friday in a rehab appearance, A's closer Andrew Bailey was reinstated from the 15-day disabled list for Sunday's series finale with the Tampa Bay Rays.

To make room for Bailey on the roster, the A's optioned right-hander Ross Wolf to Triple-A Sacramento. Wolf, who was acquired from Baltimore earlier this season, made four appearances with Oakland, posting a 2.45 ERA. He hasn't worked since July 29, however.

"When he was on the DL, we got by without him," manager Bob Geren said. "But it's nice to have him back and give [Craig] Breslow and [Michael] Wuertz a chance to help us in other roles. It makes our whole bullpen stronger."

Bailey faced five batters on Friday, getting two outs while allowing two earned runs on three hits and striking out one.

"Obviously, not playing in a month, you're not going to be as sharp as you'd like to be," Bailey said Saturday. "I think right now, based on how I felt [Friday], it's more of a baseball thing than a health issue."

Bailey hasn't pitched with the A's since July 20 due to an intercostal muscle strain in his rib cage. In 38 appearances this season, Bailey has converted 20 of 23 save opportunities and posted a 1.56 ERA. But with Bailey out, Geren relied on relievers like Wuertz, Breslow and Jerry Blevins to close out games, and the trio filled in nicely.

"These guys definitely picked me up while I was gone," Bailey said. "It's been a group effort. It's always been like that down there. It's not easy closing out games, but it just shows that a lot of guys on our team can do it."

Wolf last pitched for Oakland on July 29, making it 21 games since his previous appearance. With the emergence of Henry Rodriguez and the recent string of close games, Geren rarely turned to Wolf, who had a 2.45 ERA in four appearances.

Larish adds to A's Arizona State pipeline

OAKLAND -- With the promotion of Jeff Larish on Friday, the A's welcomed their second Arizona State baseball alum into the clubhouse as Larish joined outfielder Travis Buck.

Larish and Buck played together for three seasons at ASU under coach Pat Murphy, who holds a front-office position with the San Diego Padres after a messy divorce with the university in late 2009.

Larish and Buck were part of the 2005 team that were knocked out of the College World Series in the semifinal round.

"With him, the experience that we had in 2005 going to Omaha, that was a pretty special year," Larish said.

The A's have an extensive Draft history with ASU, dating to baseball's first selection in the inaugural First-Year Player Draft, Rick Monday, who was picked by the Kansas City A's in 1965. Other notable alumni include Reggie Jackson, who was drafted by the franchise in 1966, and Sal Bando, who was selected by the A's in 1965.

Recent ASU alums picked by the A's include Dodgers outfielder Andre Ethier, whom Oakland selected in the first round of the 2003 Draft, and Buck, who the A's picked in the second round of the 2005 Draft. Larish, Buck, Ethier and Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia were teammates on the 2003 ASU squad.

"That was a big part of my life," Larish said. "It's definitely cool seeing guys that you played with that went to your college having success at this level."

Eric Sogard, an infielder with Triple-A Sacramento, played with ASU from 2005-07. Class A catcher Petey Paramore played at ASU from 2006-08 and was picked by Oakland in the third round of the '08 Draft.

Sogard and Paramore played with three current MLB rookies who are making impacts on their respective teams: Reds pitcher Mike Leake, Mets first baseman Ike Davis and Astros first baseman Brett Wallace.

The A's drafted Leake in the seventh round of the '06 Draft, but he elected to go to ASU instead, where he became one of the nation's top pitchers. Oakland owned Wallace's rights for part of the 2009 season before shipping him to Toronto for Triple-A outfielder Michael Taylor.

Larish said he still talks to Murphy on occasion and that he thinks it's inevitable Murphy will rejoin the college ranks as a head coach.

"He's doing good," Larish said. "I have to think he's itching to get back into coaching. I think that's where his heart's at, back in the college game. Hopefully things will work out where he will get that opportunity again, which I think he will."

Gross starts again with football on mind

OAKLAND -- A's outfielder Gabe Gross returned to the starting lineup for the first time in 21 games Sunday, batting eighth as the right fielder.

Gross played the outfield in the Oakland Coliseum for the last time before it will be affected by the temporary bleachers, which will grace the field during the A's upcoming road trip.

Alas, the Oakland Raiders are coming. The NFL franchise will transform the Coliseum into a football field for two preseason games, one on Aug. 28 and one on Sept. 2, just 24 hours before the A's will host the Angels.

Head groundskeeper Clay Wood said the bleachers will remain on the field for the six days between games.

"It's better for the field to leave [the bleachers] there," Wood said. "The process to move them is what's so hard on the field."

With football season just around the corner, Gross offered his prediction for the Southeastern Conference, college football's premier conference. Gross played parts of two seasons as Auburn University's quarterback and still makes his offseason home in Auburn, Ala.

Gross said he has been impressed with University of Florida quarterback John Brantley, who will try to replace Tim Tebow this season.

"It's hard not to keep up with [the SEC] being right there," Gross said. "I can't say that Auburn's not going to the win the West [Division] or I couldn't go home. So you can throw Auburn and Florida in the SEC Championship game for me."

Worth noting

The A's wore jerseys with "Atleticos" emblazoned across the front on Sunday to celebrate Fiesta Day at the ballpark. ... With Dallas Braden's six-inning, three-run performance in Sunday's 3-2 loss to the Rays, he extended the club's streak of quality starts to a record 15 straight. ... Daric Barton went 1-for-3 on Sunday to extend his hitting streak to six games. He is batting .500 (10-for-20) in that span. ... The A's haven't had a multi-homer game in 26 contests, the second-longest such streak in Oakland history.

Indians aim to reverse fortune vs. Gonzalez, A's

By John Barone / MLB.com

Gio Gonzalez has pitched pretty well against the Indians this season.

So well, in fact, that the Athletics' 24-year-old left-hander hasn't yielded a run in two starts -- both victories -- opposite the Tribe.

Whether they like it or not, manager Manny Acta's Indians will have a third crack at Gonzalez on Tuesday night, when they host the A's in the opener of a three-game series at Progressive Field.

Gonzalez has surrendered 10 hits, walked six and struck out eight over 13 2/3 innings of masterful work versus the Tribe, which owns a collective .200 batting average against the former first-round Draft pick.

The A's will also oppose a familiar face Tuesday, Fausto Carmona. Cleveland's All-Star righty has performed admirably in two outings opposite Oakland this year, registering a 2.51 ERA across 14 1/3 frames.

One year removed from his demotion to the Tribe's Rookie-level Arizona League affiliate, Carmona has logged a team-leading 156 1/3 innings for an Indians team that views the 26-year-old Dominican Republic native as its workhorse.

"I think it's been a tremendous turnaround," Acta said. "At the beginning of Spring Training, we asked him to be a better Fausto than the one in 2008 and '09. He's responded very well, and he deserves all the credit.

"He's given us an opportunity to win every five days. He's had a lack of run support at times, but he's gone about his business the best way possible. I'm thrilled that he could go from the years he had in 2008 and 2009 to being an All-Star for us."

Athletics: Starters going strong

A's starters have worked six innings and allowed three or fewer earned runs in 15 consecutive games, the longest streak in club history. ... Left fielder Travis Buck has not committed an error in 162 straight contests, three shy of Jermaine Dye's franchise record for an outfielder. ... Center fielder Coco Crisp, who has 16 steals since the All-Star break, has converted each of his past 13 stolen-base attempts.

Indians: Hafner showing muscle

The Indians have won three of 42 games in which they score two or fewer runs. ... Designated hitter Travis Hafner is hitting .315 (39-for-124) with six home runs and 21 RBIs in 42 contests dating to June 8. ... Reliever Rafael Perez has surrendered five earned runs in 33 1/3 innings since June 1, lowering his ERA from 7.20 to 3.17.

Worth noting

Gonzalez is 2-0 with a 1.42 ERA in two starts at Progressive Field. ... Carmona has registered a 5.56 ERA over nine appearances against Oakland.

Garza outpitches A's Braden

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Matt Garza is so focused on getting Tampa Bay back into the postseason that even a questionable balk call couldn't knock the Rays' righty out of his groove.

Garza shrugged off his lone mistake of the afternoon that led to Oakland's only run against him and pitched into the eighth inning for his career-high 13th win, leading Tampa Bay to a 3-2 victory over the Athletics on Sunday.

Garza (13-7) scattered four hits over 7 2/3 innings and came out on top in a matchup between pitchers who threw no-hitters this season. Oakland's Dallas Braden, who threw a perfect game against the Rays on May 9, allowed only four hits — but three runs.

"You're going to get upset (but) I didn't think I was in the wrong," said Garza, who had three strikeouts and three walks. "I had to keep going and couldn't let that bother me. I really had to go after guys."

Evan Longoria hit a tiebreaking two-run double in the sixth as the Rays secured a split of the four-game series. Carl Crawford singled twice and scored for the Rays, who remained one game behind the New York Yankees in the AL East.

Garza went into a mini-tailspin after no-hitting Detroit on July 26 and lost two of his next three starts. He's rebounded nicely since, pitching seven scoreless innings to beat Texas on Tuesday then handcuffing Oakland on Sunday.

The right-hander cruised through the first four innings, allowing only a pair of singles, before briefly losing control and composure in the fifth.

After the A's loaded the bases with one out on a single, walk and error, home plate umpire James Hoyer called a balk on Garza, forcing in Landon Powell with the tying run. A visibly frustrated Garza walked to home plate with his arms wide apart and talked briefly with Hoyer before going back to the mound where he was met by Jason Bartlett, who tried to calm his teammate down.

It worked.

Garza retired the next two batters to get out of the jam then settled into another groove before leaving with a runner on and two outs in the eighth.

"That was a big moment," Tampa Bay manager Joe Maddon said.

"Garza is emotional and I thought he held it together pretty well because I ran out there quickly. I was impressed with his ability to be able get a strikeout against a good hitter."

This marked the second time this season and the third time in 20 years that two pitchers have faced each other after throwing no-hitters earlier in the year. Arizona's Edwin Jackson and Roy Halladay of Philadelphia pitched against each other July 28.

Braden (8-9) lost for only the second time in six starts.

"They're still the potent lineup they've been," Braden said.

"I don't see any need for them to stray from their approach. We didn't win so (I) wasn't good enough, period."

Joaquin Benoit recorded one out while Rafael Soriano struck out Cliff Pennington with the tying run on second in the ninth for his 37th save in 39 tries. The 37 saves ties Soriano with San Diego's Heath Bell for most in the majors.

Braden didn't get much support from his teammates. The A's, who were held to one hit by Toronto's Shaun Marcum on Monday before going on a four-game winning streak, didn't get a runner to second base after the fifth inning.

Kelly Shopach's RBI double in the third gave the Rays a 1-0 lead. After Garza's balk tied the score, Tampa Bay scored twice off Braden in the sixth. Bartlett walked and Crawford singled before Longoria's two-run double.

Tampa Bay scored its first run in the second after Sean Rodriguez hit a leadoff single and scored on Kelly Shoppach's double to right-center.

Powell and Gabe Gross had two hits apiece for the A's.

NOTES

*All-Star closer Andrew Bailey pitched the ninth inning after being reinstated from the disabled list. Bailey had been sidelined with a right intercostal strain. RHP Ross Wolf was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to make room.

*The only other time two pitchers faced one another after throwing no-hitters was on Sept. 6, 1991, when Texas' Nolan Ryan and Wilson Alvarez from the Chicago White Sox squared off.

*Crawford has hit safely in 12 of 13 games since moving into the No. 3 spot in Tampa Bay's lineup.

*A's pitchers have allowed five runs or fewer in each of their last 21 games, the longest streak in the AL since Baltimore in 1997.

Trade To A's Provides Wolf With Shot At Redemption

By Casey Tefertiller, Baseball America 8/18/2010

OAKLAND—Righthander Ross Wolf grew up listening to his grandfather's stories of past baseball adventures.

Grandpa Howard told of how, as a boy, he was shagging balls for a traveling team and had the opportunity to sit next to Babe Ruth in the dugout.

Years later, he played for a company team in Joliet, Ill., that played an exhibition against a barnstorming team that included Jackie Robinson, who took Howard deep.

"He loved baseball, so we grew up playing," said Ross, who along with brothers Blake and Adam would play catch and take batting practice with their grandfather on the family's rural Illinois farm. "He had one of those old-time baseball gloves, the flat kind."

Wolf earned a late-season callup to the Marlins in 2007, five years after being drafted by Florida in the 18th round out of Wabash Valley (Ill.) JC. He allowed 16 runs in 12 innings, however, and did not return to the majors until this July.

"There was a time this offseason when I didn't know if I'd ever get another chance or what would happen to me," Wolf, 27, said.

He signed with the Orioles as a minor league free agent for the 2009 season, and then re-signed with them for '10. But Baltimore traded him to the Athletics for first baseman/catcher Jake Fox on June 22.

Pitching for both Triple-A Norfolk and Sacramento this season, Wolf went a combined 0-2, 1.99 in 32 appearances, while striking out 34 and walking 17 in 45 innings. He saved three games in three chances for the River Cats prior to his callup.

Wolf began his A's career in style, contributing four scoreless appearances. He throws strikes with an average fastball, a plus changeup and a usable slider.

"I think it's better than the first time when I got called up to Florida," Wolf said. "It was a new start. As soon as I walked into this clubhouse, I felt comfortable. The first time I got called up, I was 24, and I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what to do, and I didn't talk to anybody."

A's ACORNS

- Righthander Michael Ynoa was scheduled to have Tommy John surgery on Aug. 24. The 18-year-old second-year pro has thrown just nine career innings, all in the Rookie-level Arizona League this season. He signed out of the Dominican two years ago for \$4.25 million.

- Chris Carter made his big league debut on Aug. 9 as a left fielder, the position he'll play the rest of the season. The first baseman made the shift while at Sacramento, where he batted .262/.368/.531 with 27 homers in 424 at-bats. Carter played 48 games on an outfield corner in his six-year minor league career.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

McPherson swats two home runs in Sacramento victory

Sacramento River Cats

Dallas McPherson hit two home runs in the first three innings and Sacramento beat host Salt Lake 10-2 on Sunday afternoon.

The River Cats have now won the first two games of this series, allowing a combined two runs, and trail the first place Fresno Grizzlies by 1.0 game in the PCL South Division standings.

McPherson opened the scoring with a two-run home run in the first inning and helped blow the game open with a two-run blast as part of a six-run third inning that gave Sacramento a 9-0 lead. The first baseman has hit six home runs in his last eight games and 10 in August.

Sacramento starter Brett Tomko, who allowed 10 earned runs over 5.2 innings in his first two River Cats starts, pitched 6.0 scoreless innings Sunday for his first victory.

Matt Carson hit his 12th home run of the season and Chris Carter hit his 29th for Sacramento. Eric Sogard had a triple and four RBIs.

6-run sixth sends Naturals over 'Hounds

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

SPRINGDALE, Ark. -- One rough inning can lead to defeat.

For the Midland RockHounds on Sunday, that inning came in the sixth when the Northwest Arkansas Naturals posted six runs on their way to a 7-3 victory at Arvest Ballpark.

The RockHounds went into the bottom of the sixth with a 3-0 advantage courtesy of a three-RBI triple to center by first baseman Shane Peterson in the third inning. RockHounds starter Graham Godfrey had pitched five shutout innings, allowing six hits and a walk along with three strikeouts.

However, Godfrey was replaced by Fautino De Los Santos in the sixth. De Los Santos went into the inning with a 5.68 ERA. By the time the Naturals were done with him, that number ballooned to 7.27.

Third baseman Josh Fields scored the first run of the six-run rally, scoring on a throwing error by Midland second baseman J.C. Holt. Former Midland College Chap Tim Smith then hit a line-drive single to score Pina, bringing the Naturals within a run.

After a Chris McConnell double and a walk by Derrick Robinson, De Los Santos was removed from the game with the bases loaded and two outs. Unfortunately, Lance Sewell couldn't repair the damage.

Second baseman Johnny Giavotella doubled to right, scoring Smith and McConnell. First baseman Eric Hosmer followed with triple to center, plating Robinson and Giavotella and giving the Naturals a 6-3 lead.

Despite throwing his last pitch with his team behind 3-0, Everett Teaford picked up the win for Northwest Arkansas -- his 12th of the season.

Peterson shined at the plate for the RockHounds, going 4 for 4 and hitting a double to go with his three-RBI triple.

Midland wraps up their three-game series with the Naturals at 7 p.m. today at Arvest Ballpark.

Ports Streak Snapped In 7-1 Loss To Giants

SAN JOSE, Calif. - Perhaps the Stockton Ports' astounding 14-game winning streak came to an end in the first inning of Sunday's game against the San Jose Giants. Stockton, primed to take command of the contest in the early going, loaded the bases with one out and failed to score. From that point forward, the Ports lacked momentum and the Giants scored in bunches as San Jose handed the Ports their first loss in over two weeks by a final of 7-1.

Stockton had their best sustained scoring chance of the night in the first. On three singles, the Ports loaded the bases with one out facing Giants starter Jorge Bucardo (2-1). Bucardo, however, would strike out Yusuf Carter and get Tyler Ladendorf to ground to third to end the threat.

San Jose came to bat for the first time in their half of the first and did score the game's first run. San Jose loaded the bases with nobody out and Michael Sandoval drove in Francisco Peguero with a sac-fly to give the Giants a 1-0 lead.

San Jose added a run in the second on a one-out solo homer from Ehire Adrianza to make it a 2-0 lead.

The Ports scored their lone run of the contest in the third. Grant Green led off the inning with a solo home run to make it a 2-1 game. It was the only run allowed by Bucardo, who picked up the win after going five innings and allowing eight hits while striking out two.

The Giants kept building the lead for Bucardo and the bullpen, beginning in the fourth. With two on and two out, Peguero hit a ball into the gap in right-center field that scored two runs and made it a 4-1 game. Peguero was thrown out trying to stretch the hit to a triple.

Ports starter Fabian Williamson (4-1) would allow a leadoff home run to Johnny Monell in the sixth inning before being taken out of the game. Williamson was charged with his first Cal-League loss, going five-plus innings and allowing five runs on seven hits while striking out one and walking a season-high six.

Scott Hodsdon took over for Williamson in the sixth and after getting the first out, allowed a single to Drew Biery and a double to James Simmons. The two would score on an ensuing two-run single from Peguero to make it a 7-1 game. Peguero went 3-for-4 and drove in four runs on the night.

Hodsdon would go two innings and allow two runs on three hits. Trey Barham would pitch a perfect eighth for Stockton.

San Jose's bullpen, a combination of Brian Anderson, Ryan Verdugo and Jason Stoffel, combined for four scoreless innings of relief.

Stockton suffers the loss despite getting the leadoff man aboard in seven of the nine innings on the night.

The Ports and Giants will play the rubber match of their three-game set on Monday night at San Jose Municipal Stadium. Shawn Haviland (8-6, 3.65 ERA) takes the ball for the Ports, opposed by Giants right-hander Oliver Odle (11-6, 5.50 ERA). First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

Cougars' Rally Falls Short in Ninth **Kane County drops 2nd straight to Quad Cities**

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars never enjoyed a lead Sunday afternoon. They tied the game in the third, fell behind again and rallied to within one in the ninth but lost to the Quad Cities River Bandits, 3-2, in front of 6,510 at Elfstrom Stadium.

Starter Murphy Smith (7-2) suffered his second straight loss. He gave up a first-inning run on a two-out single to Matt Adams and was charged with another tally in the sixth on a bases-loaded walk from reliever Rob Gilliam. Smith gave up two runs on five hits, walked three and struck out two in five-plus innings. Gilliam logged two frames, Josh Lansford yielded a two-out solo homer to Adams in the eighth and Ryan Doolittle worked a perfect ninth.

The Cougars had numerous scoring chances but managed the two runs. Jose Crisotomo doubled home Conner Crumbliss in the third to make it, 1-1, and Tyreece House singled in Mike Gilmartin in the ninth to cut a 3-1 game to 3-2. House and Crumbliss were both on base in the ninth when Aaron Terry got Crisotomo to bounce into a fielder's choice to end the game.

The Cougars had seven hits, stranded nine, drew five walks and went 1-for-12 with runners in scoring position. Chris Corrigan (2-0) won it for the Bandits, and Terry's save was his 15th.

The Cougars (29-25, 61-62) and River Bandits (34-19, 74-48) play Game 3 of the four-game series Monday night 6:30 CT. Jonathan Joseph (1-5, 3.79) is scheduled to pitch against Michael Blazek (7-3, 3.21). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and at www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:15 p.m.