

A's News Clips, Saturday, August 28, 2010

Oakland A's dealt a knockdown blow in opener of crucial series

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's came in looking to set a tone in their series opener Friday against the Texas Rangers. This wasn't the kind they had in mind.

A 7-3 defeat at Rangers Ballpark was the result on a night that started out bad and quickly got worse for Oakland.

Left-hander Brett Anderson gave up three runs in a rocky first inning, then left after the second with what was announced as a mild hyperextension in his right knee.

His short night ended a streak of 18 straight games in which the A's starter had pitched at least six innings and allowed three runs or fewer, tying the 1927 Philadelphia A's for the longest such streak in franchise history going back to 1913.

The A's want to use this series as a springboard to catch first-place Texas in the American League West. But the loss dropped them 9 1/2 games behind the Rangers.

"We've still got a chance to win the series," second baseman Mark Ellis said. "If we win the series, we're not out of it."

The A's immediate concern is Anderson's health. His right foot landed in a hole in delivering a second-inning pitch to Julio Borbon. Anderson's knee buckled slightly, and he fell awkwardly.

"My heel landed first, and my knee locked up," Anderson explained. "I hyperextended it. I just didn't feel real comfortable after that."

Manager Bob Geren and head trainer Steve Sayles came out. After a long discussion and Anderson throwing a few practice pitches, he felt good enough to stay in. He allowed a run that inning as Texas went up 4-0, and Geren said he then made the call to remove Anderson.

"We talked about it in the dugout," Anderson said. "It's better to be safe than sorry."

Geren said the lefty's status would be clearer today.

Asked if he expected to make his next start Wednesday vs. the New York Yankees, Anderson responded: "All signs point to go."

Even without the injury, Anderson wasn't long for the game at the rate things were going. He threw 29 pitches in the first inning and was up to 50 after the second.

The Rangers benefited from six infield hits. But Anderson (3-4) allowed three runs in the first after retiring the first two batters.

The last time an A's starter had surrendered as many as three runs was May 2 in Toronto by Ben Sheets.

The pitching staff also snapped a streak of 24 straight games in which it allowed five or fewer runs, the second-longest streak by an American League team since 1974. The 1980 Kansas City Royals had 25-game streak.

Anderson's rough night came a day after the A's asked him to remove a photo he posted to his Twitter account, showing him in a Cleveland nightspot with his arms around two women and clutching money in both hands.

That incident prompted Anderson to take down his Twitter page.

The Rangers led 7-0 after four innings.

Josh Hamilton, serenaded by chants of "MVP" from the home crowd, registered his majors-leading 24th three-hit game of the season. His double in the first jump-started Texas' first inning rally along with his aggressive baserunning in scoring

from second on an infield hit. He also singled home a run in Texas' three-run fourth. He also made an outstanding running catch on the warning track in left-center to rob Ellis in the ninth.

Kevin Kouzmanoff's two-run homer in the sixth got the A's on the board, and Daric Barton's solo shot in the eighth made it 7-3.

A's update: Ben Sheets is philosophical about his pitching future

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Veteran right-hander Ben Sheets has rejoined the A's for the remainder of their current trip, 2½ weeks removed from right elbow surgery that's put his pitching career in jeopardy.

Sheets went into his Aug. 9 procedure believing he'd simply need the flexor tendon in his elbow repaired. It turned out he also required a ligament replacement (Tommy John surgery) and repair work to his pronator tendon.

That was OK with Sheets, who said his triple procedure has no bearing on his time frame for recovery. He figures to be sidelined the entire 2011 season and knows there's no guarantee he'll pitch again.

"If my arm heals and feels great, I'm going to give it a shot. But that's up in the air, it really is," he said.

Sheets made his last start July 19 against the Los Angeles Angels, but he says he knew something was wrong with his elbow as early as his June 2 start at Boston. He particularly remembers laboring during an at-bat that ended with a David Ortiz home run.

"That whole at-bat, I remember it being a grind," he said. "I didn't want to throw any breaking balls. I just wanted to throw fastballs."

He had been rehabbing at home in Louisiana but also said he'll spend as much time as possible with the A's.

"I'm sure my family thinks it's good," he quipped. "I get on my own nerves."

Sheets has enjoyed watching the A's young rotation develop. He added that he believes Trevor Cahill should get strong consideration for the American League Cy Young Award.

Infielder Eric Chavez, on the disabled list since May 21, confirmed he'll return to Oakland on the next homestand to discuss his future with the organization. Two bulging disks in his neck have forced the six-time Gold Glover to at least consider retirement. Chavez has appeared in one rehab game in the Arizona Rookie League, going 1 for 3 on Aug. 23. He's in the final season of a six-year, \$66 million contract.

Two stolen bases Thursday against Cleveland gave Rajai Davis 105 for his A's career, moving him past Mitchell Page for eighth on the Oakland list.

Chin Music: A's pregame update from Texas: Jack Cust back in left field; Ben Sheets pays visit

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 8/27/2010 4:55PM

There wasn't a lot of pregame news coming out of the A's clubhouse before the start of this important series with Texas. Jack Cust is getting another start in left field with Jeff Larish serving as DH again (Bob Geren likes having Larish's bat in there). A couple changes from last night: Kevin Kouzmanoff is back in the fifth spot after showing some life with the bat in the Cleveland series, and Rajai Davis is playing right field in place of Gabe Gross ...

A's – Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Suzuki C, Cust LF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Larish DH, Ellis 2B, Davis RF, Pennington SS; Anderson LHP.

Rangers – Andrus SS, Young 3B, Hamilton LF, Guerrero DH, Cantu 1B, Murphy RF, Treanor C, Blanco 2B, Borbon CF; Hunter RHP.

–Ben Sheets has joined the team for the rest of the road trip, bringing the wackiness (and volume) to the clubhouse like only he can. He's about 2½ weeks removed from having triple-surgery on his right elbow (ligament replacement, flexor tendon repair, pronator tendon repair). He just had his splint removed today and now he's wearing a black contraption on his arm that looks like some sort of space-age cast.

Sheets' stance on his future hasn't changed: He'll try pitching again if his arm completely heals, but he's going to make sure it feels better than it did after his first surgery that sidelined him in 2009. Some highlights from his chat w/reporters:

–He first knew something was seriously wrong with his elbow during a June 2 start at Fenway Park, and he specifically remembers laboring during an at-bat that ended with a David Ortiz two-run homer. “That whole at-bat, I remember it being a grind. I didn't want to throw any breaking balls. I just wanted to throw fastballs.”

–Doctors took a portion of his left hamstring tendon and used it to replace the ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow (the “Tommy John” part of the procedure). Generally, a tendon near the wrist is used, but that tendon was too small, Sheets said. As it is, doctors told him the key to any possible return to pitching hinges on how well his flexor tendon heals. It's very likely Sheets will miss all of the 2011 season, as he had said prior to surgery.

–Sheets is very excited about how well the A's young starting pitchers are performing, and he believes Trevor Cahill should earn strong consideration for the AL Cy Young Award. “I'm like y'all, I just like watching it,” he said. “They're getting deep into games and (Geren) is letting them pitch. For me, that's fun to watch. Their stuff's so good.”

That's all for now ...

A's starters' streak ends with a whimper

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

If this was a statement game, the Rangers stated their case loudly and clearly. The A's barely chirped.

Any whispers of the A's moving into contention were hushed in the early innings Friday night when the Rangers jumped to a 7-0 lead and Brett Anderson exited with a hyperextended right knee.

In sort of a must-win game in sort of a must-win series, the A's were bullied 7-3 by a Rangers team that increased its first-place lead in the AL West to 9 1/2 games over Oakland.

“We've still got a chance to win the series,” Mark Ellis said. “If we win the series, we won't be out of it. We play them four at home and have another month to play. It would be nice to win the series. We feel we can compete with them. We're definitely not going to give up just because we lost tonight.”

Manager Bob Geren called it “the biggest series you can get for August,” and his rotation came to town as the hottest in the majors - a 1.81 ERA over 18 games with 18 straight quality starts (six or more innings, three or fewer earned runs), matching the longest A's streak since the AL recognized the earned run as an official stat in 1913.

Anderson supplied neither quality nor quantity, and the streak ended in a hurry. The Rangers staged a two-out rally in the first inning, scoring three times - the most first-inning runs yielded by an A's pitcher since May 2 (Ben Sheets) - and bunched three infield hits in the second for a 4-0 lead.

After the first infield hit, by Andres Blanco, Anderson hyperextended his knee on a pitch to Julio Borbon by stepping just short of the hole that was dug by opposing pitcher Tommy Hunter. After a few warm-up tosses, Anderson stayed in, but he was pulled after the inning.

“A little stiff, a little sore,” said Anderson, who wore a wrap around the knee after the game. “It's not excruciating pain - or any pain for that matter. Just stiff and unwanted.”

He said he expects to make his next start, Wednesday in New York. “All signs point to go,” Anderson said. “It's kind of wait and see.”

The A's did come back, a little. Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a two-run homer, and Daric Barton hit a solo shot.

But while the A's, with the fewest homers in the majors, were playing long ball, the Rangers were playing small ball, believe it or not. They had six infield hits, and Michael Young blooped a two-run double (Coco Crisp missed on a dive) off Boof Bonser in the fourth.

There was nothing small about Josh Hamilton. Amid chants of "MVP, MVP, MVP," Hamilton had three hits, all liners, his 24th game with at least three hits, tops in the majors and a club record.

Defensively, Hamilton robbed Ellis of extra bases, going a long way to make a catch in left-center, two steps before he crashed into the wall. More "MVP" chants ensued.

"Never seen anything like that," Ellis said. "He's amazing. It's like they need a higher league for him."

Ben Sheets has Stephen Strasburg beat on injuries

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

day it was announced that **Stephen Strasburg** will probably need Tommy John surgery, **Ben Sheets** visited the A's clubhouse and said, "I wish that's all I had."

Sheets, 32, actually had three procedures performed during his Aug. 9 surgery. Along with the Tommy John surgery - in which a tendon from his hamstring was inserted into his elbow to reconstruct the ulnar collateral ligament - he also had had the flexor and pronator tendons in his elbow repaired.

Strasburg's surgery isn't expected to be so complex.

"They fixed it all," Sheets said. "It doesn't add more time to the rehab. It makes it a little tougher to come back from, the more stuff you have."

Oddly, Sheets has hamstring pain from the surgery. Usually when a UCL is repaired, a ligament is used from the non-pitching arm. But Sheets said, "It was too small. Then (the doctor) tried to take something out of my leg, and that was too small. So he ended up taking a hamstring tendon. ... It feels like I have a bad hamstring pull."

Sheets doesn't expect to pitch in 2011, and his future in baseball is questionable.

"My arm's going to tell me," Sheets said. "I'm not going to pitch like I did this year - not results-oriented, I'm talking about the way I felt - but if the arm heals and feels great, I'm sure I'll give it a shot. That's up in the air."

Sheets, who signed a one-year, \$10 million contract and went 4-9 with a 4.53 ERA in 20 starts, said he'll be with the team most of September. Management wanted him to be a positive influence on the young starters, and Sheets said, "Sometimes they have a question here or there, and I try to confidently reinforce how good they were."

Briefly: Kurt Suzuki was 0-for-22 before hitting a single and a double in his first two at-bats off **Tommy Hunter**. ... The Rangers' six infield hits gave them 147 on the season, tops in the majors. The club record is 155.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Hot Harden: Texas' Rich Harden, who will face his former team today, threw 6 2/3 hitless innings in his last start and was pulled without getting a chance at a no-hitter. He was fresh off the disabled list and threw 111 pitches.

Drumbeat: Time to sweep -- or at least win two of three

John Shea from Arlington, Texas, where the A's hope to win the series and narrow the gap in the AL West . . . 8/27/2010, 4:50PM

The A's are pitching three left-handed starters this weekend in what manager Bob Geren calls "the biggest series you can get for August."

Geren was asked if a motivational speech to his players was in order.

"This is the kind of series where there's no motivational speaking that needs to take place," Geren said. "They're very motivated for this series and the whole rest of the season. I hear them talk a lot among themselves every night. They know."

Here's the A's lineup (with Anderson on the hill): CF Crisp, 1B Barton, C Suzuki, LF Cust, 3B Kouzmanoff, DH Larish, 2B Ellis, RF Davis, SS Pennington.

Cust in left and Larish the DH for a second straight day. "I like the swings (Larish) has been putting on the ball," Geren said. Still, a big difference from Texas' DH, Vladimir Guerrero.

Ben Sheets visited the clubhouse and publicly spoke for the first time about his three-part Aug. 9 surgery. Aside from a Tommy John surgery, he had his flexor and pronator tendons in his elbow fixed.

"They fixed it all," Sheets said. "It doesn't add more time to the rehab. It makes it a little tougher to come back from, the more stuff you have."

Oddly, Sheets has hamstring pain from the surgery. Usually when an ulnar collateral ligament is repaired, a tendon is used from the non-pitching arm. But Sheets said, "It was too small. Then (the doctor) tried to take something out of my leg, and that was too small. So he ended up taking a hamstring tendon. . . . It feels like I have a bad hamstring pull."

Sheets doesn't expect to pitch in 2011, and his future in baseball is questionable.

"My arm's going to tell me," said Sheets, who has a \$10 million salary and went 4-9 with a 4.53 ERA in 20 starts.

A's can't rally after Anderson's injury

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- As the A's are well aware, possibly more so than any other team in the Majors thanks to an ever-growing disabled list, there's really no such thing as good timing when it comes to injuries.

Bad timing, on the other hand? Yes.

Really bad timing? Most definitely.

Brett Anderson and Co. will tell you all about it.

The A's lefty, looking to guide his club to an opening victory in a pivotal three-game set with the Rangers, watched that chance fade -- and fade quickly -- in Friday's 7-3 loss, when he exited after allowing four runs in just two frames due to a mild hyperextension of his right knee.

Anderson's rough go of it made for quite the less-than-warm welcome into the Texas heat, in which the A's fell one game behind the .500 mark and 9 1/2 behind the Rangers in the American League West -- where they set out to gain ground this weekend on a Texas team that has now won six of its past eight.

The loss not only seemingly put into question Oakland's future, but Anderson's, as well. The A's southpaw was immediately tagged for three runs in the first thanks to RBI hits from Vladimir Guerrero and David Murphy, representing just the third time all season an A's starter has given up three or more runs in the first.

In the second, Anderson put Andres Blanco on base via a base hit and proceeded to move him to second on a wild pitch -- one that came as a result of sliding in Texas starter Tommy Hunter's mound hole and falling, which brought out A's trainer Steve Sayles and manager Bob Geren.

"It's weird, because I'm taller than Tommy Hunter, but his stride's longer and his hole is farther than mine, so instead of landing on the ball of my foot, my knee just locked and I hyperextended it," Anderson said. "I just didn't feel real comfortable after that."

Anderson remained in the game, but only to give up back-to-back singles, the last of which brought home Blanco. He then induced a double-play ball from Michael Young and walked Josh Hamilton before getting Guerrero on an infield popup to end the frame and stop the bleeding at four runs.

That was all the A's could get out of him, though, as the 22-year-old Anderson left after two frames due to his knee injury. His four runs allowed put an end to an A's record-tying streak of 18 consecutive quality starts by an Oakland pitcher. Furthermore, his two innings pitched halted a streak of 24 consecutive games with six innings or more by the starters -- a mark that was one outing short of tying the Oakland record.

"After the fact," Anderson said, "you're kind of disappointed in the fact you didn't keep the streak going. That's the fun of pitching -- you're just trying to fit in and go along with what everyone else is doing. When everyone's throwing out quality starts and you're the odd man out, you don't ever want to be that guy."

"You never really want to take yourself out or come out of the game, but it was for precautionary measures. It's kind of unfortunate because I was throwing pretty good up to this point. I liked where I was at, but stuff happens. You can't really control where [Hunter] puts his foot."

As long as Saturday doesn't bring much pain, Anderson said he'll be good to go for his next start on Wednesday in New York. Righty Boof Bonser was brought in to relieve him on Friday, and he retired the side in order in the third before surrendering three runs in the fourth thanks to RBI hits from Young and Hamilton. Bonser, pitching for the first time since Aug. 16, gave the A's four-plus innings, giving up three runs on seven hits with one walk and two strikeouts.

A handful of those hits, however, were infield hits. Of the 15 hits the Rangers compiled, six came on the infield -- another nod to a rather frustrating night for the A's, who collected eight hits -- two of them on homers from Kevin Kouzmanoff and Daric Barton off Hunter.

"I was just trying to help the bullpen, so we didn't have to use all our guys, that was the big thing," Bonser said. "The infield hits -- that's awful. That's one of those where, as a pitcher, you'd rather have them just hit bullets off the wall. That's baseball, though."

"They really didn't hit the ball that hard off any of our guys tonight," Geren said. "We actually made more loud contact than they did. They got seven runs, but they had six infield hits and a bloop double. They hit a couple balls well, obviously, but they got some breaks and they took advantage of it."

Hamilton, for one, made plenty of noise with his bat, recording his Major League-best 24th game of three or more hits this season for a Rangers record. On Friday, he had three hits, a walk and an RBI.

"He's amazing right now," Mark Ellis said. "It's almost like they need a higher league for him, the way he's swinging the bat, and then doing what he does out there on the field. He's really good, very good."

Ellis, a veteran, has been around the game long enough to not only appreciate a talent such as Hamilton, but to know that Rangers Ballpark at Arlington has brought about some interesting scenes in his years.

"They had a lot of infield hits, and I thought we actually swung the bats well, just right at guys," he said. "It's something that happens. It's a weird ballpark, and strange things seem to happen here. Usually the ball's flying here."

The A's put up a fight in the ninth against Rangers closer Neftali Feliz, putting guys on first and second with one out, but Cliff Pennington lined out to third base and Coco Crisp followed with a flyout to put an end to the threat and seal the deal on a tough loss.

"Against a team that's winning the division, that's not really how you want to come out or start a series, but we battled back and put some pressure on their guys," Anderson said. "If we can take that and couple it with the pitching we've been getting before today, we should be good to go. We'll start that streak of quality starts again tomorrow.

"We've still got a chance to win the series," noted Ellis. "Obviously, it would have been nice to get a win tonight and have a chance at the sweep, but if we can win the series we won't be out of it. There's still a month left in the season. They're a good team, a really good team, but we know we can compete with them. We're definitely not giving up just because we lost tonight."

Rangers look to pull further ahead of the A's

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

As the season hits its stretch run, the Rangers continue to assert their dominance in the American League West.

With Friday's 7-3 win over the A's, Texas moved closer to its first division title since Pudge Rodriguez, Juan Gonzalez and Rafael Palmeiro guided the 1999 team to the playoffs.

"It's a great opportunity, and we're excited about it," Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton said. "But we're not focused that far ahead yet. We still have a long ways to go."

The series opener against Oakland served as the latest reminder of how the Rangers gained a hold on the division: a deep lineup and the franchise's best rotation in years.

Behind 7 2/3 strong innings from Tommy Hunter, Texas extended its lead to 9 1/2 games over the A's on Friday. Meanwhile, its offense snapped an Oakland streak of 18 straight quality starts by scoring four runs against Brett Anderson, who left after the second inning with a hyperextended right knee.

For Saturday's nightcap, the Rangers will send former A's pitcher Rich Harden to the mound. Harden has faced Oakland twice this season with mixed results.

On May 3, Harden limited the A's to two hits over seven shutout innings, striking out nine while not allowing a walk for the only time this season. Then, on Aug. 7, Harden lasted a season-low 2 1/3 innings, allowing three earned runs on two hits and five walks while striking out two.

In his start on Monday against the Twins, Harden tossed a no-hitter through 6 2/3 innings, but was pulled following 111 pitches and five walks.

"It was an interesting night," Harden said after the outing. "I was effectively wild. But I got out there and had a good arm slot. Even when I missed, I felt I was getting everything into my pitches. I made pitches when I had to and had good defense behind me."

The A's will counter with lefty Dallas Braden, who has looked sharp since returning from the 15-day disabled list on July 20. Over seven starts in that span, Braden is 4-2 with a 2.81 ERA.

A's: Pitchers providing quality innings

Though it was snapped Friday, Oakland's streak of 18 straight quality starts is tied with the 1927 Philadelphia A's for the longest such streak in franchise history.

A's right-hander Ben Sheets rejoined his teammates in Texas on Friday for the first time since undergoing season-ending elbow surgery. The 32-year-old said he would consider returning to the mound if all goes well.

"Mother Nature's going to do most of the healing," Sheets said. "Time will be the biggest thing. I wouldn't rule anything out, but you never know. I don't have a clue what I'm going to do, to tell you the truth."

Rangers: Kinsler set to begin rehab games

Second baseman Ian Kinsler (strained groin) is scheduled to begin a rehab assignment with Double-A Frisco on Saturday. Though Kinsler was the team's regular third-base hitter when healthy, manager Ron Washington said Friday that Hamilton will remain in the No. 3 hole for the rest of the year.

Worth noting

After Friday's 7-3 victory over Oakland, the Rangers lead the season series, 7-6. ... Braden is 0-2 with a 4.85 ERA in two starts against Texas this season. ... Sheets' surgical procedure was administered by Rangers team physician Dr. Keith Meister.

Anderson feels OK after hyperextending knee

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Starter Brett Anderson left Friday's 7-3 loss against the Rangers after just two innings due to a mild hyperextension of his right knee, but the A's southpaw believes the injury is minor and won't cause him to miss his next start.

Already down, 3-0, with a runner on first and no outs in the second inning on Friday, Anderson slid into the mound hole created by Rangers starter Tommy Hunter, forcing him to fall and throw a wild pitch to Julio Borbon. He was visited by A's trainer Steve Sayles and manager Bob Geren before proceeding to finish the frame -- not before allowing two more hits, a walk and a run, though.

"It's weird, because I'm taller than Tommy Hunter, but his stride's longer and his hole is farther than mine, so instead of landing on the ball of my foot, my knee just locked and I hyperextended it," Anderson said. "I just didn't feel real comfortable after that."

Following the second inning, Geren decided not to further risk damage to Anderson's knee. After all, the 22-year-old hurler has already endured two disabled list stints this year, both due to his left elbow.

"We were just giving him time for it to calm down," Geren said of his mound visit. "We watched him warm up and he looked OK. He finished the inning and then sat down, and at that point we realized it was the right thing to do. I made the decision."

"He was checked out by the doctor. We'll know a lot more tomorrow -- how he feels, if it swells up."

Based on how he felt immediately after the game, though, Anderson didn't appear the least bit worried he won't be ready for his next start on Wednesday in New York.

"It's a little stiff, a little sore," he said, "but it's not excruciating pain -- not any pain, for that matter. Just stiff. ... I have a big bandage on it now, so the movement's limited. I can't really do too much tonight, so we'll see if there's swelling tomorrow and go from there. Right now, all signs point to go for my next start."

Overall, it was a rocky outing for the A's southpaw, who surrendered four runs on six hits and two walks en route to throwing 50 pitches during his pair of innings. It marked his shortest outing since June 3 at Boston, where he left with elbow pain and was subsequently placed on the disabled list.

Anderson's four earned runs put an end to an A's record-tying streak of 18 consecutive quality starts. Furthermore, his two innings pitched halted a streak of 24 consecutive games with six innings or more by the starters -- a mark that was one outing short of tying the Oakland record.

Geren aware of importance of Texas series

ARLINGTON -- Bob Geren isn't normally one to make bold statements, but the A's manager did recognize on Friday that his club's three-game weekend set with the Rangers holds a rather large weight in determining Oakland's near future.

The A's -- coming off a 2-1 trip to Cleveland -- entered the series 8 1/2 games behind first-place Texas in the standings, a club that has won five of its past seven and seemingly has no plans of stopping its successful ways.

"Obviously, they're the team ahead of us," Geren said. "It's big in that respect. I like the way we've been throwing the ball. If we continue with our great pitching and get runs for them, we'll do well. The goal is to put a dent in their lead. It's the biggest series you can get for August."

The A's realize wins are not only significant for gaining ground in the division but also in picking up momentum as they're set to face the likes of the Yankees and Red Sox in the next week. And although Geren said he hasn't spoken much to his players about the season-changing effect these three games could have, the skipper also mentioned a pep talk isn't necessary.

"This is the kind of series no motivational speaking needs to take place," he said. "They're very motivated for this series, and for the rest of the season. They know what they need to do."

The A's and Rangers entered the series even for the season at six games each. Texas will make one final visit to the Oakland Coliseum at the end of September.

Worth noting

Jeff Larish received his second straight start in the designated hitter's slot on Friday as a nod to manager Bob Geren's decision to load up on lefties against the Rangers' Tommy Hunter. Jack Cust, meanwhile, was placed in left field for the second day in a row, as well. ... Friday marked the 20th time in the past 32 games the A's have played a team that was in first place in their division or the Wild Card race at the time of the game.

No Manny, no problem as Rangers top A's

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- The Rangers put in a waiver claim on Manny Ramirez, only to see his waiver rights be awarded to the Chicago White Sox on Friday.

Ramirez would have given the Rangers another potentially powerful bat; not only in their chase for a division title that now looks like a lock, but also for what they are hoping will be an extended run through the playoffs.

Instead, they'll have to continue to settle for David Murphy, who had a two-run double, and Julio Borbon, who had three singles in the Rangers' 7-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics at the Ballpark in Arlington on Friday night.

Murphy's two-run double finished off a three-run first inning for the Rangers against Oakland left-hander Brett Anderson. The Rangers led 7-0 after four innings and starter Tommy Hunter took it from there, earning his 11th win by allowing three runs in 7 2/3 innings.

The Rangers, with their fifth victory in their past six games, now have a 9 1/2 game lead in the American League West. This is the second time this season the Rangers have had a 9 1/2 game lead, but now there are just 34 games to go.

"We showed some speed tonight, but more than that, we executed," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "Tonight was a good night all-around. When the game asked us to do something, we did it."

Josh Hamilton certainly did. He was 3-for-3 for his 24th three-hit game of the season -- a new club record. But, on a day in which the Rangers put in a waiver claim on another big slugger, Murphy and Borbon gave a reminder of what they offer the Rangers' offense.

Murphy does not have Ramirez's Hall of Fame hitting ability, but he continues to be on a nice run that has helped make up for the absence of Ian Kinsler and Nelson Cruz. He is hitting .322 with four home runs and 21 RBIs in his past 27 games.

"I feel good right now," Murphy said. "I feel ready to contribute in any situation. I feel I'm in one of those streaks where I feel as good at the plate as in any hot streak in my career."

Borbon does not have Ramirez's monster power, but he's been an integral part of the Rangers' much-discussed re-tooled approach to winning offensive baseball. Widely heralded in Spring Training, this was the approach that relied less on sheer power and more on situational hitting, putting the ball in play and taking advantage of the bounty of speed the Rangers have never enjoyed before.

The Rangers had 15 hits on the night, including 10 in the first four innings that allowed them to build the 7-0 lead. Borbon had two of those 10 hits, including an infield single in the second.

"We got some breaks offensively," third baseman Michael Young said. "We got swinging bunts and some lawn darts that fell into the outfield. We probably need to hit the ball a little harder, but we want to make sure we're versatile enough to score in different ways."

Of those 10 hits in the first four innings, five were infield singles. Three of the five players who reached on an infield hit ended up scoring. The Rangers, with six on the night overall, lead the Major Leagues with 146 infield hits this season.

"They really didn't hit the ball that hard off any of our guys tonight," Athletics manager Bob Geren said. "We actually made more loud contact than they did. They got seven runs, but they had six infield hits and a bloop double. They hit a couple balls well, obviously, but they got some breaks and they took advantage of it."

Andres Blanco had two of those infield hits. He led off the second and fourth innings with singles and ended up scoring both times. In the second inning, the Rangers scored a run on three straight infield hits by Blanco, Borbon and Elvis Andrus.

"In the second inning, I probably wish they would have hit the ball harder," Anderson said. "So many infield hits ... that's about the only time you'll hear you wish they would have hit harder. It's a little bit frustrating because you're making your pitches and they're not really making any hard contact."

Blanco, who remains the Rangers' second baseman in Kinsler's absence despite the acquisition of Cristian Guzman and Alex Cora in the past month, also made a terrific catch in the fifth by diving into the first-base stands to grab Cliff Pennington's foul pop.

That was one great defensive play. Hamilton made another in the ninth, when he raced into the left-center field gap to run down Mark Ellis' long fly ball before crashing into the wall.

"He's amazing right now," Ellis said. "It's almost like they need a higher league for him, the way he's swinging the bat, and then doing what he does out there on the field. He's really good, very good."

Hamilton was playing left field, and once again reinforced that outfield defense continues to be a significant strength on this team. If Ramirez was on the Rangers, he would play left, Hamilton would move to center and Borbon would be on the bench. Murphy would join him there once Cruz came off the disabled list.

If one were to argue why the Rangers might not need Ramirez, Friday night's game might be Exhibit A.

Sheets won't rule out pitching again

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Some things just never change.

That proved to be the sentiment around the visiting clubhouse on Friday in Arlington, where the A's were greeted with the all too familiar sound of Ben Sheets' resonating voice.

Sheets was dressed in A's gear as if he'd never left, but he was also sporting a rather complex contraction around his surgically repaired right arm, which underwent repairs to the flexor tendon, pronator tendon and ulnar collateral ligament less than three weeks ago.

Friday marked the first time Sheets was reunited with his green and gold teammates since his Aug. 9 procedure, and, after catching up with most of them, he spent a handful of time reassuring reporters he has not ruled out pitching again.

The 32-year-old righty, who went 4-9 with a 4.63 ERA in 20 starts for Oakland before succumbing to his second elbow surgery in as many years, was only slated to have flexor tendon surgery -- the same procedure he underwent in February 2009. However, orthopedist Dr. Keith Meister determined UCL reconstruction -- otherwise known as Tommy John surgery -- was necessary, as were repairs to the pronator tendon.

"I think he fixed it all," Sheets said on Friday. "It [doesn't] add [any] time to the rehab. It makes it a little tougher to come back, the more stuff you have done, but it [doesn't] add [any] time."

Tommy John surgery involves the replacement of the UCL with another tendon, typically taken from the wrist and forearm area. However, Sheets' wrist tendon proved to be too small, so Meister was forced to try from his leg, which also was too small. Thus, a tendon was taken out of Sheets' left hamstring, leaving him with a good dose of leg pain.

The veteran hurler said he's unclear as to the timetable involved with the rehab process, but 2011 is likely the earliest he could make his way to a mound again.

"Mother Nature's going to do most of the healing," he said. "Time will be the biggest thing. I wouldn't rule anything out, but you never know. I don't have a clue what I'm going to do, to tell you the truth. If I felt like I did last time, there's no way."

"The option is definitely open, but my arm is going to tell me. I'm not going to pitch the way I did this year -- not result-oriented, but just the way I felt. If my arm heals and it feels great, I'm sure I'm going to give it a shot. It's up in the air; it really is."

Sheets plans to continue rehab near his home in Louisiana and take a few days out of each month to consult with Meister -- the Rangers' team physician -- in Texas. His plans right now, though, also include supporting his teammates along the way as they make a late-season push. He'll travel to New York, where the A's begin a four-game set with the Yankees on Monday, and make his way back to Oakland to soak in the clubhouse atmosphere.

"I'm not bored here," he said with a smile. "I'm sure my family thinks it's good, too, because I get on my own nerves.

"I can't miss New York. I ain't been [there] yet. [I] haven't been to Minnesota, either. I'll be with the guys most of the year. I got two kids at home, so I have to be their dad, too. So I'm trying to be in both places."

Sheets said he has enjoyed watching an Oakland pitching staff that has put together a club-tying record of 18 consecutive quality starts. He was widely known around the clubhouse for his mentoring ways, but Sheets wasn't about to take all the credit for their success on Friday.

"They haven't allowed runs all year," he said. "I just like watching them. They're getting deep into games, [manager Bob Geren]'s letting them pitch. You don't see a lot of six-inning starts from them. They're getting seven virtually every night, keeping their pitch count down. Their stuff's so good.

"I just tried to make them feel comfortable. That's the only thing I ever tried to make them do -- try to confidently reinforce how good they are."

Meanwhile, Sheets is attempting to reinforce positive thinking in his own mind as he enters yet another year of rehab.

"The only thing Meister is worried about healing is the flexor tendon, so that tells me what's on the top of the list," he said. "It has more of a track record. I think he's confident the ligament is going to heal, and he's very confident it's all going to heal. He was really excited with the job he'd done, and I saw the pictures and was excited, too. I thought it looked good."

Rangers extend margin over A's

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Josh Hamilton helped keep Tommy Hunter's success going at home.

Hamilton had his major league-high 24th three-hit game of the season, Hunter pitched into the eighth inning and the AL West-leading Rangers pulled farther away from the Athletics with a 7-3 victory over Oakland on Friday night.

Hunter (11-2) improved to 7-0 in nine starts at Rangers Ballpark this season, allowing three runs and seven hits with four strikeouts and two walks before leaving with two outs in the seventh.

"A lot of defense and a lot of well-hit balls by teammates," Hunter said of his unbeaten run at home. "We score a lot of runs, you have to take that into consideration. There are a lot of guys who'd have success if they had as much run support as I do. I continue to enjoy getting it and hopefully they continue giving it."

Texas has averaged eight runs in Hunter's seven home wins.

The Rangers increased their division advantage over the second-place A's to 9 1/2 games, and Hunter is looking forward to having more fun in October.

"I want to go to the playoffs, I want to win a World Series," Hunter said. "I don't read too far into it, but we need to go deep into the postseason. That's what baseball is all about, winning a World Series. That's what we're working for."

Hamilton raised his major league-best batting average to .358 and demonstrated his speed in the first when he scored from second on an infield single.

His dash home highlighted a three-run first off Brett Anderson (3-5). Hamilton doubled with two outs, then rounded third on Vladimir Guerrero's single off the glove of first baseman Daric Barton. Second baseman Mark Ellis retrieved the ball in short right field and fired to the plate, where Hamilton slid head-first ahead of catcher Kurt Suzuki's tag.

Hamilton also made a tough, running catch on the warning track in left field of Ellis' drive in the ninth. Hamilton smacked into the padded wall after tracking down the ball and emerged with a big smile on his face.

"I can't say enough about what Hamilton did tonight, his skills were on display again," Rangers manager Ron Washington said.

"That ninth inning, what Hamilton did, it saved it there. Because if that ball falls, no telling what could happen and we may not have been able to get out of it."

The catch was also Hamilton's favorite play of the night.

"Anytime I can take something away from somebody, that's what I love doing most," Hamilton said.

Andres Blanco and Julio Borbon, the Nos. 8 and 9 batters in the Rangers order, added three hits each as Texas won for the fifth time in six games to maintain the largest lead in the majors.

Kevin Kouzmanoff had a two-run homer in the sixth and Barton connected with the bases empty in the eighth for the A's, who've lost four of six.

"They didn't really hit the ball hard off any of our guys, to be honest," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "We actually made more loud contact than they did. They ended up with seven runs, but I think they had six infield hits and a bloop double. They got some breaks and took advantage of it."

Speed helped that. It was a weapon for the Rangers again in the second with three straight infield singles, the last by Elvis Andrus to produce their fourth run.

Anderson was removed after two innings with a hyperextended right knee after allowing four runs and six hits. His right foot landed in a hole on the mound during his follow-through on a pitch to Borbon in the second.

Anderson fell awkwardly, and a trainer and Geren ran into the field to check on Anderson.

After throwing a couple of practice pitches, Anderson remained in the game, but was replaced by Boof Bonser to begin the third.

Geren said the A's would know more about the severity of Anderson's injury on Saturday.

Rangers right-hander Frank Francisco left the game in the ninth when he reinjured his right side while walking the leadoff man.

Francisco was making his first appearance since a cortisone shot in his right armpit on Monday. He'll have an MRI on Saturday.

NOTES: Rangers LHP Cliff Lee will take his regular turn Tuesday night in Kansas City despite an 8.39 ERA over his last four starts.

The Rangers have considered extra rest for Lee, who's gone at least seven innings in 19 of his 23 starts this season. Lee says he doesn't need a break, and manager Ron Washington will go with the current rotation for now. ... Texas 2B Ian Kinsler will begin a four-game rehab assignment for Double-A Frisco on Saturday.

Kinsler, out since July 29 with a strained left groin, is expected to be activated by Sept. 3 for a three-game series at Minnesota.

... RHP Ben Sheets joined his A's teammates for the first time since extensive surgery on his right elbow on Aug. 9, unsure of his future in baseball. He knows he probably won't be able to take the mound in 2011 as he faces a rehab of from 12 to 18 months. As for 2012, Sheets said he's open to resuming his career depending on his level of recovery.

A's Game 126 Report Card: Heading to Texas, still down and out in the AL West ...

Sam McPherson, examiner.com 8/28/2010

Offense: The slightest dropoff in offense dooms the A's, even with their stellar pitching. Six hits and four walks weren't enough, because there was only one extra-base hit – and the team left nine men on base as it went 2-for-13 with RISP. When you lose by a run, every one of those failed at-bats is magnified. One of them might have changed the game, and the A's just couldn't get it done. Three stolen bases couldn't make the difference, either. **GRADE: D**

Defense: No errors in this one, and the team turned one double play. At least the defense can't take the blame for this one, right? **GRADE: B**

Pitching: Overall, the staff continued its streaks of excellence (two different ones: the five-runs-or-less streak and the starters-six-innings-three-runs streak). Vin Mazzaro wasn't great, but he kept his team in the game. The home run he gave up was the difference, though, as it meant Cleveland got the big extra-base hit the A's couldn't. Jerry Blevins and Brad Ziegler delivered scoreless outings in relief. **GRADE: B+**

Coaching: Five of the team's six hits came from the 6-through-9 slots, and Bob Geren ended up swapping out Jack Cust (in the 5-spot) for Rajai Davis – probably not the best choice for a five-slot guy. But in the end, Geren isn't the one out there failing to deliver at the plate. **GRADE: B+**

Overall Game Grade: B- (80.2%). The A's had one-run leads in this game twice, and Mazzaro didn't hold it, either time. The second time was the worst – Oakland's starter gave the lead up instantly. That's not a recipe for victory, obviously.

Overall Season Grade: B (83.85%). Winning two of three in Cleveland is nice, but this was another winnable game that got away from the team because the offense stinks. Instead of patting themselves on the back for winning the series, the A's should be cursing themselves for yet another blown chance to move beyond .500 on the year.

A's Record: 63-63. Oakland goes to Texas for three games now, and they're still 8.5 games out. All this time has passed with some amazing pitching efforts, and the A's haven't gained ground on the Rangers since the last time they played. Texas is in cruise control; Oakland is, too, but in a different way – and not as good of a way, at that.

A's "Should Be" Record: 67-59. Brett Anderson has a 2.33 ERA this month, and only one win to show for it. Such is the lament of the A's starters right now. Oakland gets to face Tommy Hunter, with a 10-2 record – but only 42 strikeouts in his 85.2 innings this year. He's hittable, having given up 84 hits in those innings.

Same old story as A's can't score enough to support pitching staff in 3-2 loss to Cleveland

Sam McPherson, examiner.com 8/27/2010

The only thing consistent about the Oakland Athletics' 2010 season -- beyond the somewhat amazing starting pitching, of course -- is the inability of the offense to be consistent in any sort of way other than a maddeningly inconsistent one.

Got that?

So last night, once again, the A's pitchers did their job -- holding the opponent to a mere three runs.

And sadly, once again, the Oakland hitters didn't do their job -- scuffling to score only two runs in yet another defeat laid solely at their feet.

Cleveland's 3-2 win over Oakland on Thursday continues the seemingly never-ending return to .500 for the A's again, for a team-record 24th time this year.

And, while the pitching staff has been on fire -- allowing five runs or less for the 24th straight game -- the offense just can't do enough on a regular basis to get the team anywhere significant.

Despite that streak of pitching excellence, Oakland is -- typically -- only 12-12 in that stretch.

Vin Mazzaro wasn't great on Thursday, giving up three runs in 6 1/3 innings on seven hits and two walks, but combined with the relief efforts of Jerry Blevins and Brad Ziegler, the A's held the opponent to three runs.

That should almost always be enough to win for a major-league club -- except this one, of course.

If the Oakland offense was just a little better, they'd be winning games like this. A great example exists to the south, where the San Diego Padres are leading the National League West by six games with a similar team: first in NL ERA (3.30) and 13th in NL OPS (.705).

Considering the A's numbers (1st in AL ERA, 3.48; 13th in OPS, .693), it's difficult to wonder why the Oakland squad can't match the Padres in success this year.

Sure, San Diego's numbers are slightly better in both categories, but significantly, the Padres also have a game-changing bat in the middle of their lineup: first baseman Adrian Gonzalez. He's hitting .299 with 27 HRs and 86 RBI, with an OPS of .914, good enough for sixth in the NL.

The A's "best" hitter, first baseman Daric Barton, is hitting .279 with five HRs and 42 RBI -- and his .787 OPS mark is "good" enough for merely 31st in the AL.

And there in lies the problem: without a single bat in the lineup to truly scare opposing pitchers, even mediocre guys like Cleveland's Justin Masterson (now 5-12 with a 5.23 ERA after beating the A's last night) can beat a team like Oakland.

Perhaps the worst part of this whole equation is the Oakland organization's continued lack of action on this matter.

It's one thing to admit you have a problem; it's another thing to simply ignore it, cross your fingers and hope it'll go away or get better.

A's Game 125 Report Card: Offense doesn't waste time in this one

Sam McPherson, examiner.com 8/27/2010

Offense: Oakland scored five runs in the first inning to make this game boring. If only the offense could do that every game, right? Overall, the team had eight hits and three walks, and three hits came with RISP. That helps, as does three extra-base hits. Kevin Kouzmanoff's three-run double in the first was the hit of the game, as after that, Cleveland had no chance to comeback against the A's pitching. **GRADE: B+**

Defense: Kouzmanoff made an error that cost the A's a run, but in this game, it didn't hurt. This season has been a rough one for Kouz, who is only sixth in the AL in fielding percentage. He was supposed to be worthy to continue the Eric Chavez Gold Glove tradition, but it hasn't worked out that way. **GRADE: B**

Pitching: Trevor Cahill continued his oppression of the major leagues this year with seven innings of strong work, allowing no earned runs (see above). He threw 104 pitches, but Cahill only struck out two batters. In the long run, Cahill may not be able to repeat this year's success due to that "flaw" in his game. Time will tell, and for now, it's working. Two relievers finished the game without allowing a run. **GRADE: A**

Coaching: Bob Geren lifted Cahill earlier than physically required, because the game was a blowout. That keeps his staff fresh for the final six weeks of the season. With the offense's hot start, Geren could just kick back and enjoy this one. **GRADE: A**

Overall Game Grade: A- (89.9%). This is the kind of game the A's wish would happen more often, with an early offensive burst and strong pitching. However, we all know it doesn't happen that way often enough, as Oakland is still hovering around that .500 mark.

Overall Season Grade: B (83.88%). Cleveland is struggling right now, so the A's have done well to take advantage with these two relative easy wins. With the offense clicking, it would be really great to get the sweep on Thursday before heading into a gauntlet of games in the upcoming week.

A's Record: 63-62. The inability of the team to string together a long winning streak with this pitching staff has to be taking its toll on the club as a whole. The A's haven't been three games over .500 since June 3, and sooner or later, the frustration is going to kick in – even for paid professionals.

A's "Should Be" Record: 67-58. Interesting note on Henry Rodriguez' ninth inning in this one. He threw ten pitches in the inning on his way to recording three strikeouts. His ERA is now 3.12, and if this performance can be bottled, he might have a serious future in the Oakland bullpen.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento topples Fresno, moves 1.0 game back

By Allie Mandel / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento's Dallas McPherson hit his 12th home run in August as part of a seven-run sixth inning as the River Cats topped the Fresno Grizzlies 11-3 on Friday night before 13,527 fans at Raley Field.

Sacramento now trails Fresno by 1.0 game in the Pacific Coast League South Division standings with 10 games remaining.

The Grizzlies got off to a strong start, scoring two quick runs in the first inning. Emmanuel Burriss lead off with a walk on five pitches before right fielder Eugenio Velez hit his 11th double of the season, advancing Burriss to third. Two batters later, Velez and Burriss scored on a Jesus Guzman single. It looked like the Grizzlies would tack on more runs after Ryan Rohlinger doubled, but the top of the first came to a close in a stunning fashion.

With one out, Sacramento starter Brett Tomko snared a hard-hit line drive back to the mound. Then, with left fielder Joe Borchard batting, Rohlinger strayed from second base, which allowed River Cats catcher Anthony Recker to attempt to throw him out. Rohlinger made it past the tag, but Guzman, attempting to steal home, was thrown out on a quick turnaround throw by shortstop Eric Sogard.

The River Cats answered back, scoring three runs of their own in the first. Following a similar pattern to the Grizzlies, lead-off hitter Corey Wimberly walked before Sogard hit a double that glanced off Velez's glove in right field. Left fielder Chris Carter was then hit by a pitch to load the bases. This brought up McPherson, who blasted a three-run double to left center on the first pitch.

McPherson, who later hit a three-run home run, missed 47 days on the disabled list after suffering a hamstring strain during the home opener in April. After a rough July, he hit his groove in August hitting .309 with 12 home runs and 33 RBIs.

"His confidence is way up," said Hitting Coach Brian McArn. "He's finally getting consistent at-bats, learning his swing again, and getting a bunch of good at bats."

The Grizzlies evened the score in the fourth, scoring their third run off of two solid hits. Brett Pill, who went 1-for-4, hit a double to open the inning. One out and two batters later, Ben Copeland tripled to score Pill and tie the game. Catcher Steve Holm and Burriss would both ground out to end the inning.

There would be a scary moment to start off the fifth inning as Velez hit a line drive straight at Tomko. The comebacker went off Tomko's glove as he ducked out of the way and bounced to second baseman Adrian Cardenas, who threw Velez out at first with plenty of time. Tomko was not hurt, smiling as he pointed to his glove. He would go on to strike out the final two Grizzlies batters of the inning.

Tomko's night ended in the sixth, with one out and a runner on third. The veteran hurler allowed three runs (all earned) over 5.1 innings to drop his ERA to 6.88. Tomko was replaced by left-hander Cedrick Bowers, who escaped the jam by striking out the next two Grizzlies.

The River Cats took the lead for good in the sixth. Matt Watson started the inning with a single to right field. Grizzlies reliever Alex Hinshaw then walked Travis Buck and Jeff Baisley to load the bases with no outs. Adrian Cardenas then hit into what appeared to be a double play until second baseman Burriss juggled the ball, knocking it to Rohlinger at short. Baisley would come off the bag at second to be called out while Watson scored from third.

The bad luck continued for Fresno as catcher Anthony Recker hit a shallow pop fly to right field. Burriss, Velez and Copeland converged on the ball, which landed between the three players allowing Buck to score for the inning's second run. Grizzlies reliever Tony Pena then walked Sogard to once again load the bases, before pinch-hitter Michael Taylor hit a two-run single.

After recording just one out, Pena was replaced by Dontrelle Willis. Willis promptly gave up a home run to McPherson. The bomb was McPherson's 22 home run of the season and 12th of August.

"I was thinking, get a good fastball to hit," McPherson said. "I've faced Dontrelle in the past, and I know he has a pretty good breaking ball, so I really wanted to jump on the first fastball that I saw."

The home run gave the River Cats a 10-3 lead through seven innings. The seven-run inning is one run shy of the Cats' season high for most runs in an inning.

"We walked 10 times tonight," McArn said. "We were selective, got runners on base and had some timely hits. Any time you walk that many times and get some key base hits, good things can happen."

The River Cats tacked on one more run in the seventh to bring the final score to 11-3. With two more games against the Pacific Coast League South Division leaders, Manager Tony DeFrancesco looks to keep his team on track through the weekend.

"The most important thing is to try to win the series," DeFrancesco said. "Out of five games, you want to win three out of five, and that will put us in good shape. If we win the next two, that's a bonus."

"It's one game at a time. We still have eight more games left in the season (after the Fresno series), so whether you're one game out or one game up you still have to play good baseball."

RockHounds' lead cut to one game after loss

Reporter-Telegram

Former Midland RockHound Michael Affronti hit a bases clearing triple in the sixth inning to key a five-run outburst as Corpus Christ defeated the RockHounds 8-3 on Friday night at Citibank Ballpark.

Thanks to the loss, the RockHounds lead in the Texas League South Division was reduced to one game as Midland heads to Frisco for a series this weekend.

On Friday, the RockHounds built a 2-0 lead after Matt Sulentic slapped an RBI double and Petey Paramore followed with an RBI double.

But in the top of the sixth, RockHounds starter Graham Godfrey got in trouble when he gave up a single to J.D. Martinez and Koby Clemens back-to-back. Then after Jonathan Gaston was intentionally walked, James Van Ostrand hit a sharp single to left that scored J.D. Martinez. A batter later, Affronti hit his triple to right that scored three runs.

Affronti was 4 for 4 on the day with 4 RBI.

The RockHounds will take on Frisco in the first game of a four-game series, beginning at 7 p.m. today in Frisco.

Ports Edge Giants in 4-2 Victory

Teams combine for 16 walks and 15 strikeouts

STOCKTON, Calif. – After hosting a celebrity home-run-athon to benefit breast cancer services prior to the game on Pink Night, the Stockton Ports (68-62) and San Jose Giants (70-60) seemed to put on a walk-athon, as both clubs combined for 16 total walks in the first five innings. But the Boys of Banner Island edged the Giants for a 4-2 win, to extend their lead in the second half standings to 5.0 games.

Fabian Williamson walked seven batters, a season-high, in 4.2 frames. He allowed just one run though, as the Giants left 14 runners on base in the game. Reliever Mike Hart collected his second win on the year for Stockton, by tossing 2.1 shutout frames. Paul Smyth collected his 26th save on the season, allowing one run on three hits in 2.0 innings. Stephen Parker led the team with two hits, and Todd Johnson walked three times in the contest. Despite the high walk total, the strikeouts were plentiful as well, as both teams combined for 15 strikeouts as well. Williamson struck out six batters, tying a season-high.

The Ports took a 1-0 lead in the first inning. With two out, third baseman Stephen Parker doubled to get the offense rolling. He took third on an error by right fielder Juan Perez. First baseman Mike Spina then hit an RBI single to score Parker. Right fielder Jeremy Barfield then singled to continue the offense, but catcher Yusuf Carter struck out to end the inning.

The Ports collected two more runs in the fourth inning to pull ahead, 3-0. Designated hitter Todd Johnson led off the inning with a walk. He took second as Tyler Ladendorf hit a sacrifice bunt. David Thomas next grounded out to San Jose starter Jorge Bucardo, who took the loss in the game. Left fielder Jermaine Mitchell next stepped up to the plate and walked. While shortstop Grant Green was batting, Bucardo balked, which allowed both runners to advance into scoring position. Green then doubled to left field, scoring Johnson and Mitchell.

The Giants responded by scoring their first run in the fifth. Jose Flores walked to start the inning. He advanced to second on a single by catcher Johnny Monell. Williamson then struck out second baseman Charlie Culberson before walking designated hitter Michael Sandoval. With the bases loaded, Williamson struck out shortstop Ehire Adrianza. The Ports then called on Hart to relieve Williamson. Hart walked the first batter he faced, Drew Biery, to drive home a run. Hart got left fielder Wendell Fairley to fly out to end the threat and leave the bases loaded.

San Jose pulled within one run in the top of the eighth, as Smyth was called in to face the Giants. Adrianza scorched a triple to the right field corner to start the inning, and scored as Biery grounded out. Fairley and Perez both singled in the inning, but were left on base as Flores grounded out.

The Ports collected an insurance run in the eighth inning. Ladendorf doubled to lead things off, and moved to third on a sacrifice bunt by Thomas. An RBI single by Mitchell made it a 4-2 ballgame.

Smyth allowed just one base runner in the top of the ninth, as he shutdown the Giants offense to secure his 26th save and the Ports win.

Cougars Rout Snappers, Take Series **Kane County wins 2 of 3 against fellow playoff hopeful**

BELOIT, Wisc. – The Kane County Cougars' offense came back to life Friday night at Pohlman Field and led the Cougars to a 14-5 victory over the Beloit Snappers. The Cougars, who knocked out 13 hits – eight for extra bases – won two of three in the series and increased their lead over Beloit for the Wild Card spot to 2.0 games with 10 left. The Cougars also remain 2.0 games behind Clinton for the top spot.

The Cougars, who scored 10-plus runs for the first time since August 11, struck early and often against Edgar Ibarra (6-11). Conner Crumbliss doubled and scored on an error in the top of the first, and he poked an RBI single during a four-run second. Jason Christian also doubled home a run and Tyreece House nailed a two-run triple. Leading, 5-4, after five innings, the Cougars turned it into a rout against the Beloit bullpen. They added three in the sixth, highlighted by a Myrio Richard RBI single, and two in the seventh, as Leonardo Gil cracked his 11th homer and Jose Crisotomo plated Christian to make it 10-5. A four-run eighth, led by Juan Nunez' two-run double, propelled the Cougars to the 14-5 blowout.

Connor Hoehn (7-4) notched the victory, tossing three innings and yielding one run, and Ryan Doolittle worked the final pair. Starter Murphy Smith got a no-decision. He gave up four runs – two earned – on four hits over four innings with two walks and four strikeouts.

The Cougars (32-27, 64-64) continue their seven-game road swing Saturday night at 6:35 CT with the opener of a four-game series against the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (29-31, 55-73). Jonathan Joseph (1-5, 3.79) will oppose Del Howell (3-6, 4.92). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 6:20 p.m.

Oakland A's Prospect Profile: AJ Kirby-Jones

Maren Kasselik, OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 27, 2010

Thirty homerun seasons have been infrequent among Oakland A's prospects, with Chris Carter, Corey Brown and Grant Desme being the only A's prospects to have reached that total over the past 10 years. Vancouver Canadians slugger A.J. Kirby-Jones could add his name to that list next season. The A's 9th round pick has shown impressive power in his first pro season. Maren Kasselik takes a closer look.

With a weekly batting award under his belt, offensive power numbers that rival all other Northwest League hitters, and a first-place team in line to make the playoffs, Canadians first baseman [A.J. Kirby-Jones](#) is proving he deserves a shot at the next level. What makes his numbers stand out, however, is that the righty is a statistical outlier in the C's lineup.

As a team, Vancouver fields an offense that ranks in the middle of the league for most major hitting categories, including walks (238, good for fourth), strikeouts (513, third fewest), on-base percentage (.335, fourth), batting average (.253, fourth) and OPS (688, fourth).

While the C's have been average at the plate as a team, Vancouver has relied on the 21-year-old Kirby-Jones' power numbers to help propel them into playoff contention. After a sub-par first half (third place in the Northwest West division standings with a record of 17-21), the C's hold a five-game lead atop the second-half West standings with a record of 20-7 — the best winning percentage in the entire Northwest League (.741).

Kirby-Jones is responsible for 12 of Vancouver's 31 homeruns — 39 percent of the team's production in that area — as well as 59 walks, nearly one-quarter of the team's total. His on-base (.420) is 85 points better than the team average, his slugging (.449) is 95 points better, and his OPS (.870) is 182 points better.

Included in those monstrous offensive numbers are a grand slam (the first of his career) in a 10-3 C's victory at Eugene on July 25 and a multi-homer game (also the first of his career) in a 5-4, 12-inning loss at Boise on July 31. Over that week-long span, Kirby-Jones's hot streak — .391 BA, five homeruns, nine RBIs — landed him Northwest League Offensive Player of the Week honors (July 25-August 1). In that time, Kirby-Jones helped his team to a 6-1 record.

Kirby-Jones's success at the plate justifies the rationale behind his relatively high draft position (ninth round out of Tennessee Tech in June). Oakland A's Director of Scouting Eric Kubota told OaklandClubhouse.com after the draft that the A's made a "conscious effort to add power into the system [in the 2010 draft] and Kirby-Jones is a perfect example of that."

Kirby-Jones is fulfilling those job requirements: he leads the Canadians in runs (37), homers (12), RBIs (35), total bases (97) and walks (59). Of the players who have spent the majority of the season with Vancouver, he is far and away the C's best hitter, more than doubling the homerun total of the next-best Vancouver slugger ([Michael Choice](#), six homers since joining the team in mid-August) and the walk total of the next-best Vancouver eye ([Tony Thompson](#), 21 walks).

"The guy probably out-performed anyone at the college level for the past few years," Kubota told OaklandClubhouse.com. "We have scouts who went in and said that the power was real. It wasn't due to college baseball and it wasn't due to aluminum bats or anything. They strongly felt that the power was real and that it would translate to our game."

If Kirby-Jones continues producing in the Northwest League, the C's could take home a league title. The real fun could begin, however, when Kirby-Jones is summoned to higher levels within the A's minor league system, especially when he reaches the hitter-friendly California, Texas and Pacific Coast Leagues.