

A's News Clips, Monday, August 30, 2010

Hopeful Oakland A's not set to concede AL West race

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's have four games left with the Texas Rangers on their schedule. Based on their performance the past two days, it's unfortunate for them that those contests don't come until late September.

The A's are a pretty confident bunch right now after taking a three-game series from division-leading Texas with Sunday's 8-2 victory at Rangers Ballpark.

After dropping Friday's opener, the A's outscored the home team 13-2 on over the final two games and moved 7½ games behind the Rangers in the American League West.

With 33 games left, the A's face some steep odds in catching the Rangers. But they have given themselves a reason to continue scoreboard-watching when they begin a four-game series today at Yankee Stadium.

"That's very doable," second baseman Mark Ellis said of making up the deficit. "There's a whole month left in the season. We play them four more times. It's not easy to close out the division."

But to put into context the A's challenge, consider:

If Texas goes 16-16 over its final 32 games, Oakland would have to go 24-9 just to tie for first place.

Seventeen of the A's remaining 33 games come against teams that currently have winning records. Eleven of those 17 contests -- or one-third of their remaining schedule -- are against opponents that entered Sunday either leading their division or tied for the lead.

Texas has just 14 games remaining against teams with winning records and six games against division leaders.

Working in the A's favor: The Rangers play 20 of their next 25 on the road and visit the Oakland Coliseum for a four-game set Sept. 23-26.

A's manager Bob Geren was asked if he felt his team could make the necessary run.

"If our offense continues to swing then bats the way they are, sure, definitely," Geren said. "We have to get that consistent offense."

The A's showed some versatility in piecing together Sunday's 12-hit attack. During a three-run sixth inning, they got a solo homer from Kevin Kouzmanoff, a well-executed safety squeeze bunt from Cliff Pennington and a run-scoring single from Coco Crisp. That rally opened up a 7-1 lead.

"We threw everything we had at them," Geren said.

Not surprising, though, was that the A's changed the tone of the weekend with their starting pitching.

Gio Gonzalez (12-8) followed Dallas Braden's four-hit shutout by pitching six solid innings, allowing two runs on five hits. He struck out four and walked one.

"I know (Texas is) missing a couple guys, but it's a good lineup," Ellis said. "It's a tough ballpark to pitch in, and they didn't have any fear. They went right at guys."

Gonzalez has bent Braden's ear for advice all season, and he talked with Braden before taking the mound about how to handle Texas' hitters.

Apparently, Gonzalez is also picking up some of Braden's nutty tendencies. After allowing Josh Hamilton's solo homer in the sixth, Gonzalez caught himself talking to the baseball as Braden often does.

"He's rubbing off on me," Gonzalez said. "After the pitch to Hamilton, I grabbed the ball and just started yelling at it -- 'Come on, do your job!' -- The baseball even told me to calm down."

Gonzalez lowered his ERA to 3.23. Over his past five starts, he's 3-1 with a 1.36 ERA, allowing just five earned runs in 33 innings

A's update: A display of power

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

ARLINGTON, Texas -- The A's hit the road and discovered the power in their bats.

Mark Ellis and Kevin Kouzmanoff each homered Sunday in an 8-2 victory over the Texas Rangers, giving the A's eight home runs through the first six games of this 10-game, three-city trip.

That's newsworthy stuff from an offense that went deep just three times in 14 games before the trip. The A's have 81 homers, fewest in the majors.

"We feel we're capable," Ellis said. "We haven't done a great job of scoring runs all year, but we feel like we have guys who are capable of scoring runs and driving in runs."

Kouzmanoff is counted on to be one of those run producers in the middle of the lineup. One of the American League's coldest hitters through much of August, he was dropped to seventh in the lineup on a couple of occasions.

But he's 9 for 20 with eight RBIs on the road trip, and six of his nine hits are for extra bases. Manager Bob Geren since has moved Kouzmanoff back to the fifth spot in the order.

Ellis snapped a career-high 57-game homerless streak with his fourth-inning solo shot off Colby Lewis. Ellis hadn't gone deep since June 17 against the Cubs.

"Hopefully I don't have to wait 2½ months to hit another one because that would be November," Ellis said.

Trevor Cahill said he's looking forward to his first career start in New York today, when the A's open a four-game series against the Yankees.

As he prepares to take the mound at Yankee Stadium, one of baseball's most high-profile venues, Cahill (14-5, 2.43) is gaining steam as an AL Cy Young candidate.

"There's still a lot of baseball left," he said. "I don't think about that one bit."

Brett Anderson played catch and ran to test his hyperextended right knee, saying everything was fine. He'll throw his regular side session today and appears on target for Wednesday's start. ... Geren said the A's still haven't discussed September call-ups, or whether they'll bring up players Wednesday, when rosters can expand. ... Jeff Larish started in left field, the first time the corner infielder has played the outfield in the majors. He went 1 for 3. Jack Cust returned to the DH spot.

Chin Music: Jeff Larish gets first look in outfield as A's go for series victory in Texas

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/29/2010 11:56AM

These 2:05 p.m. starts here in Texas are a little wacky, but that's what the Rangers typically do for Sunday home games. They drew 47,411 last night, and I'd expect another good-sized crowd today. It's very hot, however, and more humid than the past two days. A's starter Gio Gonzalez could benefit from some quick innings ...

—Jeff Larish is playing left field today with Jack Cust returning to DH. This marks Larish's first major league start in the outfield. He's typically a corner infielder. I saw him getting instruction from outfield coach Todd Steverson yesterday as he shagged flies during batting practice. "We had to give Larish a few days to work out there," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He hasn't been out there since spring training. He played there in spring training quite a few times." Larish is 3-for-11 with a homer and two RBIs in three starts (two at DH, one at third base) since he was brought back from the minors, and Geren is making an effort to get his left-handed bat in there against right-handers.

—Brett Anderson played catch and ran this morning, reporting that his right knee continues to make progress. Unless there's a setback in his side session tomorrow, mark him down for Wednesday's start against New York.

Win or lose today, the A's face long odds to catch the Rangers in the standings. But taking two of three from the AL West leaders would be a nice way to head into a four-game series at Yankee Stadium ...

The lineups ...

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

Rangers — Blanco SS, Young 3B, Hamilton LF, Guerrero DH, Cantu 1B, Murphy RF, Molina C, Cora 2B, Borbon CF; Lewis RHP.

A's take Texas series, cut lead to 7 1/2 games

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Dallas Braden seems to be rubbing off on Gio Gonzalez.

"I had a pep talk with the baseball today," Gonzalez said.

The conversation occurred after Josh Hamilton homered in the sixth inning on Sunday.

"I grabbed the ball and started yelling at it, 'C'mon do your job.' "

And the response was . . . ?

"The baseball told me, 'Calm down, relax.' "

It's affirmative. Braden's definitely rubbing off on Gonzalez, but that's not a bad thing. One day after Braden shut out the Rangers, Gonzalez and the A's beat them 8-2 to move 7 1/2 games behind first-place Texas, the smallest deficit in eight days.

In a game that decided the series, the A's were a complete package. Gonzalez and two relievers combined on a five-hitter. Kevin Kouzmanoff and Mark Ellis hit home runs. Cliff Pennington and Gabe Gross perfectly executed a safety squeeze. The result was Oakland's eighth win in 12 games.

Manager Bob Geren, providing a laundry list of plusses, said, "Good pitching. Good bullpen. Swung the bats well. Stole bases. Hit and run. Safety squeeze. We threw everything we had at 'em, and we beat 'em."

The Rangers still own the biggest lead in the majors and get to play in Kansas City next while the A's have four toughies against the Yankees in New York. Still, they spoke optimistically as if they're not close to being done.

"I'm just saying don't count us out yet," Gonzalez said.

"Seven and a half. That's very doable," Ellis said.

"Nobody's giving up on anything," Geren said.

The A's led 5-1 in the sixth when Geren called for Pennington to put down a safety-squeeze bunt with Gross at third and Rajai Davis at first. It was textbook. Pennington bunted on the left side of the infield, and Gross took off once he realized he'd be safe. Pitcher Colby Lewis threw out Pennington, and the A's led 6-1.

Coco Crisp's RBI single made it 7-1.

"It's a great play," Geren said. "We've been working on it. Had the perfect guys to do it. We've played a couple of other teams who have done it. Tampa's amazing at it. It's almost impossible to defend, so I figured if you can't fight 'em, join 'em."

Braden has been a mentor of sorts to Gonzalez, trying to motivate him before starts and dissecting opposing hitters. Gonzalez had his eyes glued to Braden Saturday night, choosing not to leave the park early as some pitchers do during night games preceding their starts the following afternoon.

"It's impressive what Dallas did," Gonzalez said of Braden's four-hitter. "I just tried to follow his footsteps."

Braden had compliments for Gonzalez, too, saying, "He looks for every bit of information he can find. It's awesome. He doesn't think he's got it all figured out. I try to get across to him there's always, *always* (room for improvement."

Even if it means a pep talk with the baseball?

"I'm losing my mind," Gonzalez said.

Cahill a legitimate Cy Young candidate

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Trevor Cahill, who pitches tonight in New York, is in the conversation for the American League Cy Young Award, and the A's who know him best say that's exactly where he belongs.

Pitching coach **Curt Young**: "Sure. When you go deep in every game and give your team more than a chance to win every game, you should be considered."

Fellow starter **Brett Anderson**: "Absolutely. He's tough to barrel up. He's having a pretty special season."

Catcher **Kurt Suzuki**: "Why not? He's done everything to this point and is alongside the leaders in every category besides strikeouts."

Cahill's not necessarily a strikeout pitcher, but he's second in the league in ERA at 2.43 and first in opponents' batting average at .201. He missed most of April (left elbow ailment) but has 14 wins, tied for sixth most in the league. Only **CC Sabathia** has more since May 1.

Felix Hernandez has 192 strikeouts to Cahill's 88, and Cy Young voters tend to dig the strikeout. Cahill is efficient enough as a ground-ball pitcher, thanks to his specialty, the sinker. Relying mostly on a sinker and changeup in 2009, he's now throwing a curve and sometimes a slider, making it tougher for hitters to guess.

His homers are down (.8 per nine innings compared with last year's 1.4) as are his walks (2.7 per nine innings compared with last year's 3.6).

"He's turned into a consistent strike-thrower," Young said. "Last year, he put himself into an I-need-to-throw-a-strike mode. Now he's locating. When he does that, with the movement he has, he'll get a lot of grounders. He's been about as consistent as you can ask for."

Cahill's ERA in five August starts is 0.92, and it's 1.63 since the All-Star break. He has surrendered seven or fewer hits and lasted at least five innings in all 23 starts, the longest streak in Oakland history.

"He's doesn't have an overpowering fastball or a big-time slider like Felix or Sabathia or Brett," Suzuki said, "but he'll get you out and pitch deep in the game."

Briefly: The A's, with the fewest homers in the majors, have eight in six games. ... Anderson remained optimistic about pitching in New York on Wednesday after hyperextending his right knee in his last start. He'll throw his bullpen session today. ... **Mark Ellis** broke a 57-game homerless drought, longest of his career. ... **Jeff Larish** played the outfield for the first time in his career.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Defining average: The A's moved above .500 on Sunday, but will it last? They've had a .500 record 25 times this year (most in their history), surpassing the previous high of 23, reached by Connie Mack's 1947 A's, who finished 78-76 and 19 games out of first place.

Drumbeat: Today's momentum's swing

John Shea from deep in the heart of Cowboy country -- the Rangers may be in first place, but football's still king (based on what locals watch on every TV in every establishment) . . . 8/29/2010 11:34PM

Gio Gonzalez, who has surrendered no more than one run in eight of 12 starts since June 21, is on the hill in today's matinee, which will decide the series. The A's will leave Texas 7 1/2 games behind the Rangers or 9 1/2.

Brett Anderson (hyperextended right knee) reported he's doing much better and sees no problem with starting Wednesday in New York. His bullpen session tomorrow will be the final test.

Kurt Suzuki went 6-for-9 in the first two games after entering the series 0-for-22. He said he enjoys hitting in the Texas heat, but mostly he's not worried about which pitch is coming. "Not thinking," he said. "Just going out there swinging."

Daric Barton has an 11-game hit streak, matching his career high, and is hitting .410 in the stretch. He homered in the first two games of the series. Rajai Davis is hitting .360 over eight games, and Kevin Kouzmanoff is at .467 on the trip.

Jack Cust is 6-for-20 on the trip. Manager Bob Geren has him at DH today, not left field, preserving Cust's legs.

On the other hand, Coco Crisp is hitting .172 in six games and Mark Ellis .130 in 14 games. Cliff Pennington is 2-for-24.

Lineup: CF Crisp, 1B Barton, C Suzuki, DH Cust, 3B Kouzmanoff, 2B Ellis, LF Larish, RF Davis, SS Pennington. LH Gonzalez.

Gio up to task, keeping A's in race with win

Gonzalez follows Braden's shutout to take two from Texas

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Two days ago, the A's dashed into Texas, tripped up and quite literally fell, when Brett Anderson went down injured, and looked up with a series-opening loss and 9 1/2-game American League West deficit.

That night, Mark Ellis noted a sweep would have been preferable given the standings, "but if we can win the series, we won't be out of it."

Fast forward to Sunday, when the A's did just that by way of an 8-2 victory over the Rangers that followed a 5-0 shutout less than 24 hours prior.

The rubber-match triumph in the Lone Star State put Oakland 7 1/2 back of Texas with 33 games remaining on the A's calendar, leaving a postseason berth still out of close reach, but not unattainable.

At least that's how the A's see it.

"That's very doable with a month left in the season," Ellis said. "It's not easy to close out the division, I know that from experience. We're just going to keep playing and see where we end up at the end of the year."

"We needed these two games, there's no doubt about it. The season wouldn't have been over, technically, but it's nice to win these two games."

A's manager Bob Geren said the series victory didn't so much make a statement to the Rangers as it did prove that Oakland is a ballclub capable of more than just pitching, leaving him to believe his team still has a legitimate shot at catching Texas.

"If our offense continues to swing the bats the way they are to match the great pitching we have, sure, definitely," he said. "We have to get that consistent offense. Our pitching's been the best in baseball since the All-Star break."

The stats back it up, too. Oakland's starting pitching staff owns a 2.75 ERA since the break, and Sunday starter Gio Gonzalez has aided that number immensely thanks to a 2.27 mark over his past 12 starts.

The A's southpaw was forced to follow up quite the performance from teammate and mentor Dallas Braden, who on Saturday tossed his second shutout of the season. Gonzalez didn't quite make it to the ninth, but he did put together a solid six-inning performance, giving up two runs on five hits while walking one and striking out four.

"It's impressive what Dallas did," said Gonzalez, who improved to 12-8 with a 3.23 ERA on the season. "I was just trying to follow the footsteps of a guy who pitched a great game yesterday. The Rangers are a great hitting team, and we respect every one of them."

Josh Hamilton collected Texas' two RBIs on the day, the first coming on a single in the third and the second courtesy of a sixth-inning solo homer -- one that influenced Gonzalez to take a step back and channel Braden by having a little pep talk with the baseball.

"You have to see stuff like that and acknowledge the fact the guy knows what he's doing out there," Gonzalez said of Braden's act. "He's rubbing off too much on me. I started yelling at the ball, saying, 'C'mon, do your job.' The baseball even told me to calm down."

The maneuver worked, as did a lot of other things for the A's on Sunday, when they brought out equal doses of small ball and long ball against Texas starter Colby Lewis, who gave up seven runs (six earned) in 5 2/3 innings.

Both clubs remained scoreless through the first two frames, but Rajai Davis got things going in the third with a double and following a Cliff Pennington single and a Coco Crisp walk to load the bases, scored on a sacrifice fly from Daric Barton.

Pennington singled again to lead off the fifth, and after Crisp struck out, he stole second and was joined on the bases by Barton following a walk. Pennington crossed home plate thanks to a throwing error from Lewis, who attempted to start a double play ball from Kurt Suzuki, but instead threw it into the outfield. The A's made it 4-1 when Suzuki stalled a rundown, which resulted in a double play off the bat of Jack Cust, long enough to allow Barton to score.

Oakland tagged Lewis for three more runs in the sixth, which began with a long ball from Kevin Kouzmanoff, marking his 12th homer of the season. The A's then got back-to-back singles from Jeff Larish and Davis -- the former was replaced on the bases by Gabe Gross, who scored from third courtesy of a suicide squeeze play started by Pennington.

"It's a great play," Geren said. "We've been working on it and had the perfect guys to do it, and it was executed perfectly. ... We've played a couple other teams that have done it. It's almost impossible to defend, so I figure if you can't fight them, join them."

"The situation presented itself," Pennington said, "and it worked."

An RBI single from Crisp capped off a three-run sixth, and the A's added one more in the ninth on a sacrifice fly from Matt Carson. Meanwhile, the relief duo of Craig Breslow and Michael Wuertz combined for three shutout frames to seal the rubber match.

"Big win," Geren said. "Just good baseball all the way around. Good pitching, good bullpen, swung the bats well, stole bases, safety squeezes. We threw everything we had at them and beat them."

"The whole goal is to win every series that we play, and we were able to do that," said Ellis, whose homer was his first since June 17. "From an outsider's perspective, it's probably easy to say we needed a sweep, but that's not easy to do with a first-place team. To get two games is good, it's really good."

The A's, now headed to New York for a four-game set with the Yankees, shifted one game above the .500 mark with the win and have now claimed victory in eight of their past 12 games, making contention a serious state of mind.

"Nobody's given up on anything," Geren said. "Everybody's trying to win every game. These guys fight 'til the end every time."

"You know what?" Gonzalez added. "I'm just saying, 'Don't count us out yet.' We're still fighting. The season's not over yet."

Yanks return home to face A's ace in waiting

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

After going 3-3 through Toronto and Chicago during last week's road trip, the Yankees should be happy to be back in the Bronx, where they've enjoyed the best home record in the American League.

But New York will face a tall task Monday as it opens a four-game set against Oakland, which will send right-hander Trevor Cahill to the mound. Cahill, 22, has vaulted into the AL Cy Young Award discussion and become the ace of baseball's youngest staff.

"It's a great experience being able to develop in the big leagues with other pitchers my age," Cahill said. "We've developed a spirit and camaraderie together. It's a great experience to be growing up with these guys."

Cahill has a 14-5 record and the league's second-best ERA at 2.43, while leading the league with his .202 batting average against. He has attributed much of his success to the addition of a curveball to his arsenal and being able to command his pitch movement.

One of Cahill's worst starts of the year came against the Yankees on July 6. He allowed six earned runs on four hits, including a pair of Alex Rodriguez home runs, over six innings to suffer the loss in a 6-1 defeat.

"That team definitely sets the bar," Cahill said after the game. "I wish I could've shown more, but it just didn't work out that way."

But Rodriguez will be unavailable to the Yankees this time around, as he is on the 15-day disabled list with a strained left calf. Mark Teixeira is also day to day after missing Sunday's contest against the White Sox with a bruised right thumb. It marked the first contest Teixeira missed due to injury all year long.

New York will counter Cahill with right-hander Dustin Moseley, who is 4-2 with a 4.63 ERA since joining the Yankees' rotation.

A's: Good reports on injured pitchers

Hurlers Joey Devine and Josh Outman, who haven't pitched all season, will join the team in Oakland for the upcoming homestand to continue their rehabs. ... Southpaw Brett Anderson, who left after two innings in Friday's start due to a hyperextended right knee, said he's ready for Wednesday's start against New York.

Yankees: Pettitte getting closer to return

Veteran left-hander Andy Pettitte is nearing his return to the mound, as he threw a successful 35-pitch bullpen session on Sunday. Pettite is 11-2 with a 2.88 ERA in 18 starts this season, but he hasn't pitched in a game since July 18 due to a strained left groin.

Worth noting

Oakland took two out of three against Texas, but still trail the first-place Rangers by 7 1/2 games in the AL West. ... The Yankees lead the season series, 5-1, and will host the A's for the first time this year.

Devine, Outman progressing, but restless

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Joey Devine and Josh Outman will be returning to Oakland this week, but the rehabbing A's hurlers won't immediately be part of an expanded September roster and are still not guaranteed any big league action before season's end.

Both pitchers underwent Tommy John surgery last year and have been stationed in Arizona all season. They are two days apart in a 60-day throwing program created by A's bullpen coach Ron Romanick, who is taking a cautious approach with them.

"We have to go week to week with them," Romanick said Sunday. "I know it's a competitive thing, an alpha male thing, but we're looking at the end result. They're ready when they're ready. I've told them, there is no such thing as a perfect rehab process."

Devine, reached via phone Saturday, said he "feels great" and insists he is indeed ready to embark on a rehab assignment. He's been throwing a bullpen every four days, with the most recent coming Thursday, when he tossed 30 pitches.

"The best part was I woke up and felt like I could pitch again that day," Devine said.

But Romanick is in no hurry to rush the right-handed reliever, who in 2008 posted a 0.59 ERA in 42 appearances with Oakland. The same goes for Outman, who appeared as both a starter and a reliever with the A's last year, before succumbing to elbow pain in June.

The pitchers are slated to be in Oakland for seven days beginning Friday, but Romanick said only to continue their rehab process since most Arizona action -- notably the club's rookie league team -- will have stopped by then. Devine said it looks like the plan is for them to take their rehab work to Instructional League on Sept. 9.

"I hope to have them throwing live batting practice at 75 percent game speed while they're in Oakland," Romanick said. "We can create that environment the best we can. Really, we can create any kind of environment for them."

Devine and Outman are expected to be involved in a handful of simulated games, with many batters coming from a stash of September callups -- a group which manager Bob Geren assured Sunday has not been decided upon.

"Maybe I'll throw well enough and be activated on the spot," Devine said.

However, Romanick says that's wishful thinking, as he's not about to commit to a return date for either pitcher, no matter how badly they want to be in uniform by season's end.

"It's not about tomorrow, it's about right now," he said. "That's the only way to really let a rehab process work. You can't look at where you think you need to be. You can't look at the calendar or the season. You need to set small goals. I'd like to pitch them tomorrow, but that discussion doesn't do us any good."

"I'm very amazed at this whole process," Devine said. "In '08, they put me on the 60-day DL and I took four weeks off, and then it only took four weeks of throwing until I was ready again. I've pretty much doubled that amount of time and then some.

"Each bullpen session seems to be a step better. I'm throwing with more intensity, commanding all of our pitches. I'd say Outman is too. He threw a bullpen Saturday with batters standing in and looked phenomenal. So if I had my way, I'd already be on a rehab assignment."

Much of that notion, insists Romanick, comes from the mental battle, one which is hard to control in the midst of a year's plus time worth of recovery.

"The ideal situation for me would be to go on a rehab assignment with a Minor League team that makes the playoffs and then finish the season with the big league club," Devine said. "That's my goal, to pack up my locker at the end of the season just like everyone else and start a normal offseason. It's important for me to pitch in the big leagues so I know for certain I'm back at the level I was at in 2008.

"There's still that mental aspect of knowing that I can pitch in the big leagues. It's tough mentally -- it never helps being away from the game I've played since I was 5 years old."

Romanick understands he has to be the captain of Devine and Outman's rehab process, the one who continually pushes them to keep at the process in order to establish a more sustainable routine on a Major League mound for years to come.

"It's hard," he said. "Nobody likes a setback. It's only human nature to want to be ready for tomorrow. If you don't listen to your arm and your body, you're not giving yourself the opportunity to do it the right way. You might return too soon and come out of the shoot feeling great, but then you've got that dead arm feeling.

Anderson seems OK after workout

ARLINGTON -- A's lefty Brett Anderson ran and played catch Sunday morning and based on how his knee responded, he believes he'll make his next scheduled start Wednesday in New York.

"I didn't want to push it too hard today," Anderson said, "but it was fine. I should be all set for Wednesday."

The 22-year-old Anderson hyperextended his right knee when he stepped in the mound hole created by Rangers hurler Tommy Hunter and fell in the second inning of Friday's 7-3 loss to Texas. He's slated to throw his normal bullpen on Monday and if all goes well, he'll be cleared for his start against the Yankees.

"A bullpen is always the best test," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Anderson owns a 0-2 mark with a 5.68 ERA in three career starts against the Yankees, but in those outings he's also averaged 7.1 strikeouts per nine innings.

"The Yankees are another elite team," Geren said. "It's a good test for us. It seems we've been playing all No. 1-type teams and our pitchers have done a nice job against elite offensive teams."

Worth noting

Jeff Larish received his first Major League career start in left field Sunday, when manager Bob Geren decided to hand designated hitter duties to Jack Cust, who had started the club's previous three games in the outfield. "Larish is ready to go," Geren said. "I wanted to DH Cust to rest his legs." ... Entering Sunday's contest, the A's stood at the .500 mark, which they've reached 25 times this season -- a franchise record. The previous high was 23 times, reached in 1947. ... Watching a movie on the large television screen inside the visitor's clubhouse usually tends to be the entertainment of choice when the A's are in Texas. Before Sunday's rubber match, many were engaged in "Dumb and Dumber."

Major Lee-ague: This and that ...

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 8/29/2010 4:48PM

Some postgame tidbits as we say farewell to the Rangers Ballpark in Arlington for the last time this season:

- The A's improved to 30-13 in day games this season after Sunday's win.
- The club now has 8 home runs through the first 6 games of their current road trip through Cleveland and Texas. They had just 3 over their previous 14 contests.
- **Gio Gonzalez's** 12 wins are an ongoing career high and second on the team only to **Trevor Cahill**, who is 14-5. He improved to 3-1 with a 1.93 ERA in 7 career games - 5 of them starts - against Texas.
- **Mark Ellis'** fourth-inning homer was his first since June 17 at Wrigley Field, ending a 56-game drought. It marked his first long ball against an AL club since May 29 at Detroit's Comerica Park.
- The A's have a Major League-leading 52 stolen bases since the All-Star Break and 117 overall, which ranks third in the AL and the Majors.
- **Cliff Pennington** earned his 23rd stolen base Sunday, and that's the most by an A's infielder since **Carney Lansford** tallied 35 of his 37 steals in 1989 while playing in the infield.
- **Kevin Kouzmanoff** homered Sunday for the second time in three games, and he's now 9-for-20 with 8 RBIs on the road trip after going 4-for-42 (.095) over his previous 14 games.
- **Craig Breslow** entered Sunday's game having allowed at least one run in six of his nine August outings, but he managed to toss two perfect innings against the Rangers after Gio's exit.
- **Michael Wuertz** followed Breslow with a shutout ninth and has not allowed an earned run in 21 of his past 24 appearances after posting a 7.71 ERA over his first 17 outings.

A's win series in Texas

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Texas — Gio Gonzalez won his third consecutive start and the Oakland Athletics cut their AL West deficit to 7 1/2 games with an 8-2 victory Sunday, taking two of three in their series with the division-leading Texas Rangers.

Mark Ellis and Kevin Kouzmanoff homered for the A's off Colby Lewis (9-11), while Cliff Pennington snapped out of a 2-for-24 slide with two singles and a sacrifice squeeze bunt.

Gonzalez (12-8) left with a 7-2 lead after throwing 65 of his 95 pitches for strikes in six innings on another hot day in Texas. The left-hander is 7-1 with a 2.10 ERA in 10 day games this season.

Lewis missed on his eighth attempt to get his 10th victory, and six of the seven runs he gave up in 5 2-3 innings were earned.

It was the right-hander's shortest outing since pitching only five July 16 at Boston when he got his ninth victory. Lewis is 0-6 since and Texas has scored only eight runs while he was on the mound in those eight games.

There is only one more series between the AL West's top two teams the final five weeks of the regular season. That is a four-game set Sept. 23-26 at Oakland, which has an 8-7 series lead.

Josh Hamilton drove in the only two runs for Texas, with a two-out bloop RBI single in the third and his 31st homer in the sixth. Hamilton has five homers his past 10 games and raised his majors-best batting average to .359.

Hamilton's 403-foot blast off the facade of the second deck of seats in right field was the only homer allowed by Gonzalez his last seven starts. Gonzalez has given up only 11 homers over 167 innings this season.

Oakland went ahead to stay when Ellis broke a 1-all tie with his third homer, a towering flyball that dropped just beyond the 14-foot wall in left-center field.

The A's scored twice in the fifth for a 4-1 lead after Lewis' throwing error on what should have been an inning-ending double play.

Lewis fielded Kurt Suzuki's comebacker, but threw the ball way wide of second base and into center. Pennington scored and Daric Barton moved from first to third before then scoring on an inning-ending double play.

First baseman Jorge Cantu snagged Jack Cust's hard grounder at the bag, wiping out the force at second. Suzuki got caught up between first and second and avoided being tagged long enough for Barton to score.

Kouzmanoff led off the sixth with his 12th homer, before Pennington had his squeeze bunt and Coco Crisp an RBI single to chase Lewis.

Oakland had the bases loaded with no outs in the third with is Nos. 2-4 hitters coming up, but managed only one run on Barton's sacrifice fly. In the bottom of the inning, Hamilton drove in Julio Borbon, who had an infield single and advanced on a sac bunt.

Texas plays its next 10 games on the road. ... The Rangers plan to activate RF Nelson Cruz (right hamstring) from the disabled list before Monday night's game in Kansas City. He was 4 for 11 with a stolen base in three rehab games for Double-A Frisco. ... Rangers manager Ron Washington said every pitcher in the rotation will get an extra day off rest with the upcoming off day Thursday. That includes struggling Cliff Lee, who has pitched every fifth day for Texas since he was acquired July 9.

Encouraging the Poor to Stay Poor

By J. C. BRADBURY, New York Times, 8/28/2010

Major League Baseball had a minor scandal last week when closely guarded financial data from several teams was leaked to the public.

The documents revealed that three franchises — the [Florida Marlins](#), the [Tampa Bay Rays](#) and the [Pittsburgh Pirates](#) — generated healthy profits while receiving substantial revenue-sharing payments that were supposed to be used to improve on-field performance. Though this revelation may be embarrassing to baseball, what revenue-sharing recipients were doing with their transferred wealth was not surprising.

Baseball's revenue-sharing system was designed to increase the competitiveness of small-market teams that presumably lack the financial muscle to compete with wealthier franchises. Redistributing wealth would give poor teams more resources to improve their rosters, and richer clubs would have less money to extend their financial advantage. The cumulative effect would be to spread good players around the league to achieve a level of competitive balance where “every well-run club has a regularly recurring reasonable hope of reaching postseason play” — the standard put forth by the [Commissioner's Blue Ribbon Panel on Baseball Economics](#).

Despite the good intentions behind revenue sharing, doling out money to baseball's have-nots has the unintended consequence of creating a disincentive to win. Though the correlation is not perfect, winning tends to attract fans, which increases local revenue. But a healthier bottom line means drawing less from the revenue-sharing pool. The quandary faced by poor-and-losing teams is that using the added wealth to improve their clubs increases local earnings, but these gains may be offset by reducing revenue-sharing payments.

[In my book on valuing baseball players](#), I estimated the relationship between winning and revenue for M.L.B. teams. The revenue function shows disparate responses to winning at various levels of success, which support the notion that revenue sharing discourages improvement. The function shows that improving from a mid-60s-win team to a mid-70s-win team generates financial losses. The observed revenue bump from losing is consistent with the hypothesized disincentive to win when teams face a cut in revenue sharing. I refer to this region as the loss trap, because improving your team over this range of wins can cost you money.

Also, strong returns to winning do not kick in until a team hits the mid-80s in wins. Losing teams might improve their financial standing somewhat if they improved drastically, but transforming a loser to a winner does not happen overnight and cannot be willed into existence. Thus, the safety net offered by revenue sharing encourages teams to remain perpetually bad.

Investing revenue-sharing money into a team does not always make sound business sense; therefore, it is not surprising that low-revenue teams choose to hoard revenue-sharing disbursements. And though revenue-sharing recipients are charged to use the money to improve on-field performance, what constitutes proper use is hard to determine. The players union was able to coax the Florida Marlins to sign Josh Johnson to a four-year, \$39 million deal by threatening legal action for not properly using its revenue-sharing receipts. The leaked documents, however, reveal that monitoring team behavior in light of bad incentives has proved difficult.

The failure of revenue sharing to promote competitive balance can also be seen in baseball's historical record. Since its introduction in the mid 1990s, revenue sharing has not made baseball any more competitive than it used to be. Sports economists often measure competitive balance by comparing the standard deviation of winning percentages across teams to an ideally balanced league where all teams are of equal strength, a measure known as the Noll-Scully ratio, which was named after the sports economists Roger Noll and Gerald Scully. As the metric declines toward one, competitive balance improves. The Noll-Scully ratio saw a drastic reduction in the average imbalance in baseball from 2.4 in the 1930s to 1.8 in

the early-1990s. Since then, the ratio has not declined any further. Thus, the addition of revenue sharing appears to have had little effect on competitive balance.

It does not appear payrolls are the best policy instrument for improving competitive balance. Though payroll and winning are correlated, several teams have found success on small budgets in recent history, including the revenue-sharing scofflaws Rays and Marlins. It is also not clear that baseball's competitive balance needs further improvement. Since 2000, 23 of M.L.B.'s 30 clubs have made the playoffs, and two of the seven that have not reached the playoffs (the Cincinnati Reds and the Texas Rangers) are on track to participate in the postseason this year.

Growing attendance and revenue over the past decade do not indicate that fans are turned off by any perceived imbalance, and revenue sharing does not appear to help poor teams compete. Rather than tweaking the current revenue-sharing system, I think it would be best if M.L.B. abandoned it.

A's Game 129 Report Card: Lost opportunities on the mind as Oakland conquers the Texas heat

Sam McPherson, examiner.com 8/30/2010

Offense: With 12 hits on Sunday, the A's had 23 hits in the final two games against Texas. Sure, they missed Cliff Lee's turn in the rotation, but that happens sometimes. Oh well. Five different players had two hits in this game, which enables a team to string together some momentum. Also, the A's hit two more home runs, to total five in the three-game series. The power is always a key to winning ballgames. Three sacrifice hits showed some small-ball ability as well. **GRADE: A**

Defense: The Rangers made two errors, which made the A's look good simply by comparison alone. Oakland also turned two double plays, with Mark Ellis the middle man on both. If he'd played enough this year, he'd be atop the AL defense charts for second baseman with his .995 fielding percentage. **GRADE: A**

Pitching: Gio Gonzalez got the job done, and his season is truly establishing his reputation. He may not be doing anything spectacularly, but he's doing everything well nonetheless. For the year, opponents are hitting only .225 off him, and he's struck out 138 batters in 167 innings. If he can bring those walks down and turn some of them into strikeouts (he's walked 37 batters in 66 full-count situations, while only striking out 22, for example), he's going to be a great pitcher. Craig Breslow and Michael Wuertz pitched scoreless innings in relief. **GRADE: A**

Coaching: Bob Geren probably could have let Gio go another inning, but in the 92-degree heat, why bother? Smart move. Also, he juggled his outfield combo of Jeff Larish, Gabe Gross and Matt Carson into a run, a hit and an RBI on the day. Deftly done, sir. **GRADE: A**

Overall Game Grade: A (95.0%). This was a great way to finish the Texas road games for the year, taking two in a row to steal the series. Again, it may be too late, but if pride was all that was on the line here, the A's can stand proud.

Overall Season Grade: B (83.98%). This is the highest the season grade has been since Game 33, by the way – the day after Dallas Braden's perfecto. The squad was 18-15 that night, Tuesday May 11, after an extra-innings win in Texas.

A's Record: 65-64. Oakland is ahead in the season series against Texas, 8-7, with four games left at the Coliseum in September (the last home series of the year for the A's). Since those games probably won't matter, Oakland is probably going to win the season series against the division winner. That's a bittersweet reality, isn't it?

A's "Should Be" Record: 69-60. If Oakland actually had this record (which is also their Pythagorean Projection, by the way), they'd only be 3.5 games out of first place and still in the thick of the playoff race. Lost opportunities, even in April or May, always come back to hurt you in August and September.

A's Game 128 Report Card: Oakland offense supports Braden's efforts once again

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

Offense: It's funny to think there was a time when the A's offense couldn't score for Dallas Braden. The first 40 innings he threw after the perfect game, Oakland scored four runs for him in those innings, and he couldn't win. Last night, the A's got 11 hits and five walks, as they roughed former A's ace Rich Harden again. Kurt Suzuki had four hits to lead the way, the team went 3-for-9 with RISP, and four extra-base hits helped the charge, including Daric Barton's home run (two games in a row for the first baseman). **GRADE: A**

Defense: Braden only registered one strikeout, so the defense had to make the 26 other outs. And they did. Thirteen ground balls were handled, and 13 fly balls were caught. It was a very impressive effort by the A's defense in wilting-hot weather. **GRADE: A**

Pitching: Braden was great, period. He gave up only four hits on the night, didn't walk a batter, and held the Rangers hitless with RISP (four at-bats). He did throw 120 pitches in the heat, which might affect his recovery a little bit. That's something to keep an eye on, for sure, as that's his season-high pitch count, too. But for now, Braden is 5-2 in his last seven starts. **GRADE: A**

Coaching: Not sure it was the best idea to let Braden throw all those pitches in the Texas atmosphere. Considering Dallas was dehydrated earlier this year already, hopefully he doesn't have a recurring experience. With the offense scoring every other inning through the first seven frames, it was an easy day for Bob Geren, otherwise. **GRADE: B**

Overall Game Grade: A (94.0%). If only the A's offense could do this more often. Sure, they do it about 40% of the time right now, and even just upping that to 60% of the time would net the team some more wins.

Overall Season Grade: B (83.89%). It's stunning to think this is the 25th time the A's have been at .500 this year, and the positive of all this is that they've not sunk deep below .500 really. So they're staying afloat, albeit only barely.

A's Record: 64-64. Oakland closes with a day game in Texas today, as Gio Gonzalez goes against Colby Lewis. Should be a good pitchers' duel to close out this series, which really doesn't have much meaning in terms of the AL West race. Lewis pitched for the A's briefly in 2007 before going to Japan for a couple of years, by the way.

A's "Should Be" Record: 68-60. It's too Braden won't be pitching in New York this week, but Alex Rodriguez is out, too (with an injury). It would have been fun to see the two face each other in a game in Yankee Stadium. That being said, with four games against the Yankees looming, it'd be really nice to win today's game in Texas.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento takes lead in playoff race

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento defeated Fresno 2-1 on Sunday afternoon at Raley Field to take a 1.0-game lead in the Pacific Coast League South Division.

River Cats Single-A call-up Jermaine Mitchell hit a go-ahead RBI single in the eighth inning to score Michael Taylor from second base.

The River Cats took four of five games in the Highway 99 Showdown Series, and also walked away with the crucial playoff tiebreaker, holding a better division record than the Grizzlies (the first tiebreaker is head-to-head record, but the two teams split the season series).

Sacramento outscored Fresno 33-16 in the five-game series, benefiting from two 10-run games and solid pitching throughout. With just eight games remaining, the River Cats will need to hold their lead to grab a playoff spot. Sacramento opens a home series against Las Vegas on Monday, and closes the season with a road series at Colorado Springs.

Mitchell, called up Saturday from Single-A Stockton after River Cats team MVP went on the disabled list with a sprained left thumb, was the hero Sunday. Taylor instigated the eighth-inning rally attack, drawing a four-pitch walk and stealing second base to get into scoring position. With two down, Fresno intentionally walk Anthony Recker, bringing Mitchell up in the clutch situation.

"I was just trying to see the ball and hit the ball," said Mitchell, who was 0-for-7 in Triple-A entering the at-bat. "I was just hoping to see a pitch that I could hit back up the middle, and I got it."

Taylor barely beat the throw to the plate, getting in standing up.

"I just don't slide," Taylor said of the play. "I either hit the catcher or I don't slide. If I'm going to beat it I'm going in standing up, but if the ball is going to beat me I'm going to run him over."

The River Cats finished in winning fashion, with left fielder Travis Buck making a sensational sliding catch down the left-field line for the final out of the ninth. Reliever Justin James finished the game by retiring the side, earning the win.

Four different River Cats pitchers took the mound, registering seven strikeouts and one walk, keeping the solid Fresno offense off the base paths.

Jason Jennings made the start for Sacramento. He posted a solid outing against the Grizzlies, allowing two hits, including a Jesus Guzman RBI double in the first inning. Jennings showcased pinpoint control, walking no batters and sitting down four on strikes. He was called up from the Arizona League Athletics on August 24, where he allowed only three hits in three starts.

"Jennings is a veteran pitcher, and he had the advantage of watching these guys play for four days," River Cats Pitching Coach Rick Rodriguez said after the game. "He really knew how to pitch to these guys and incorporate his strengths. He did a very good job, the relievers are doing great. Recker's been calling a great game and they've just been following his lead."

Fresno came out of the gates fast, scoring a run in the top of the first. Ryan Rohlinger smacked a double down the right-field line with one down. Guzman drove the run home by slamming a high, 1-0 fastball from Jennings over the right-center wall on a hop for a ground rule double.

"After the first inning, Jennings was able to make an adjustment," Rodriguez said. "The relievers did the same and we were able to shut them down. The whole staff fed off of that, and we were able to keep a good hitting team off the bases. A lot of credit goes to the relievers."

The River Cats offense had a frustrating start against Fresno starter Kevin Pucetas, who entered the game with a 5.72 ERA. Sacramento had a runner in scoring position in each of the first three innings, and stranded five base runners overall. In the

fourth, with two down, Taylor smacked a two-out triple into the right-field corner, but again the Cats could not make anything of the opportunity.

Sacramento attempted to get runs across against Pucetas, but could only get runners aboard. They had collected four hits, three walks and two errors to get men aboard, but lacked the big hit.

That hit finally came in the sixth inning off the bat of Adrian Cardenas. Cardenas stroked a single into left field with Travis Buck on second, bringing in the tying run. Buck had boarded on a two-out single, and advanced to second when Taylor was hit by a pitch. After walking Recker, Pucetas was taken out in favor of Joe Patterson.

"Any time you're talking about a close rivalry like this, it's all about execution in big spots," Taylor said. "There's usually about two or three big spots that win a big series like this when there's a heated rivalry and both teams are competing for a spot in the playoffs. We just won more big spots."

Fresno managed three hits in the seventh inning, but came away with no runs. Sacramento reliever Fernando Hernandez gave up a leadoff single to Brett Pill and then a fielder's choice to Eugenio Velez. Velez attempted to steal second but was shot down by Anthony Recker behind the plate. Tyler Graham smacked a broken-bat single into center, ending Hernandez's outing in favor of Travis Blackley. Blackley gave up a single to catcher Johnny Monell, but got the third out to strand both runners.

Sacramento's next opponent, Las Vegas, is an offensive juggernaut, ranking second in the PCL in runs scored, first in doubles, first with 163 home runs, and first in slugging and on-base percentages. But their pitching ranks last with a 6.21 ERA. Their first game at Raley Field is Monday at 7:05 p.m.

Andy Jenkins Leads Frisco Over Hounds

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

When Andy Jenkins homered in the last of the first inning, Frisco took a 4-0 lead, but it would take more heroics from the Frisco designated hitter in the last of the eighth to give the RoughRiders a 6-4 win Sunday evening.

Jenkins' 2-run double into the right-field corner scored Rangers Major Leaguer Christian Guzman and Emerson Frostad, breaking a 4-4 tie as Frisco evened the 3-game series at a game apiece, bringing the RoughRiders to within one game of the RockHounds in the Texas League South second half pennant race.

In the last of the first, Ian Kinsler (he and Guzman are both in Frisco on re-hab assignments) drove in the game's first run, but it was a line drive single that helped change the course of the game. Ryan Edell struck out Joey Butler, leaving Kinsler on first with two out. Frostad then sent a line drive back up the middle, striking Edell in the left hip and bounding away for a single. After a lengthy conversation at the mound with Athletic Trainer Justin Whitehouse and manager Darren Bush, Edell stayed in the game. The first pitch he threw to Jenkins would turn into a 3-run home run and a 4-0 Frisco lead.

Edell would allow no runs on just two hits over his next 5.1 innings, and the 'Hounds would chip away, eventually tying the game at 4-4 in the top of the eighth.

Fautino De Los Santos, who had retired the side in order in the seventh, walked Guzman on four pitches to open the eighth. Renny Osuna laid down a sacrifice bunt, and De Los Santos struck Butler out before walking Frostad intentionally to pitch to Jenkins (right-hander against right-hander). But Jenkins took a 1-1 pitch the opposite way, dropping a double into the right field corner, bearing the tie and squaring the series.

In addition to Kinsler and Guzman, Texas Rangers right-hander Dustin Nippert also appeared in the game, making a re-hab appearance and going the first 2.1 innings, allowing only a walk.

There are eight (8) games remaining in the 2010 Texas League season, and the 'Hounds will play the next five of those games on the road. Monday's game at Frisco concludes the 3-game series, and will provide a two-game swing. With a win, Frisco gains a tie for first place, while the RockHounds would re-gain a two-game lead with a victory. The 'Hounds then move on for a 4-game set at San Antonio ... a series which could determine the South's second playoff spot.

The RockHounds close the regular season at Citibank Ballpark with a 3-game Labor Day weekend series against Frisco.

The pennant race & the wild card: The RockHounds now lead first half champion Frisco by just one game in the South. San Antonio's second straight win over Corpus Christi draws the Missions within three games of the top spot and virtually eliminates the Hooks, who are now seven out with eight to play.

If Frisco wins the second half, the wild card race takes effect. The RockHounds continue to lead San Antonio by three games with Corpus Christi six games out. Corpus Christi and San Antonio meet four times in the last eight games and the Hooks also host Frisco for four.

There are eight (8) games remaining in the 2010 Texas League regular season.

San Jose Scores Late, Ports Lose 7-2

Stockton hosts home finale on Monday

STOCKTON, Calif. – The San Jose Giants (71-61) scored four runs in the seventh inning to break a 2-2 tie, and they wrapped up Sunday's game with a 7-2 victory over the Stockton Ports (69-63) at Banner Island Ballpark.

The Ports' lead over the second-place Bakersfield Blaze shrunk to four games in the second half standings. The Ports are also now tied with Visalia for first place in the Wild Card race, after Visalia defeated Modesto on Sunday.

Stockton starter Jose Pina allowed one run on three hits in 4.2 innings, and didn't allow a hit until the fourth inning. Andrew Carignan picked up the loss for Stockton, allowing two runs on two walks in 0.1 innings. Scott Hodsdon tossed the final three innings, allowing three runs on four hits.

The Ports jumped to an early 1-0 lead in the bottom of the first with a solo home run by Grant Green. It was his 18th home run of the season, and his seventh solo shot of the year.

The Giants tied it up in the top of the fourth. Shortstop Ehire Adrianza doubled off the right field wall to lead things off. Left fielder Wendell Fairley was then hit by a pitch. Francisco Peguero next grounded out for the first out of the frame. An RBI single by Jose Flores brought home Adrianza. Second baseman Charlie Culberson followed that hit by grounding into a double play to end the inning.

The Ports took a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the fourth. Designated hitter Mike Spina singled to get things rolling, and moved to third on a double by center fielder Tyler Ladendorf. Ladendorf finished the game 2x3 with a pair of doubles. Left fielder Kent Walton hit an RBI single to bring home Spina.

The Giants tied it back up at 2-2 in the top of the sixth, collecting a run off Ports reliever A.J. Huttenlocker. With one out, Peguero singled toward shortstop, and Green made a throwing error that allowed Peguero to take second and third base. Flores next stepped up to the plate and slammed a triple to right field. Flores was stranded on third as the next two batters were retired.

Carignan started the seventh inning on the mound for Stockton. He walked James Simmons and Drew Biery before being replaced by Hodsdon. Catcher Joel Weeks came up to bat, and singled to load the bases with no out. Adrianza then hit a sacrifice fly to right field to bring home Simmons. Hodsdon next hit Fairley with a pitch to keep the bases loaded. A two-RBI double by Peguero made it a 5-2 ballgame in favor of San Jose. Flores came up for his fourth plate appearance on the night, and reached on a fielder's choice, as third baseman Brandon Pinckney attempted to put out Fairley at home. Fairley was safe as the ball came out of Napoleon's glove. Hodsdon then struck out Culberson to end the seventh.

Hodsdon faced the minimum in the eighth frame, before giving up a single to Adrianza to start the ninth. Adrianza scored the seventh and final San Jose run later in the inning as Peguero grounded out.

The Ports had the bases loaded with one out in the fifth, but left all the runners stranded as Spina and Barfield were retired. The Ports also had some scoring opportunities in the sixth inning, as the first three runners reached base, but two of those runners were caught stealing at second base. The Ports had a base runner in each of the seventh through ninth innings, but were unable to bring the runners home.

Cougars Lose a Thriller in 11 Innings **Kane County drops extra-inning marathon**

APPLETON, Wisc. – In a wild, 4-hour, 7-minute marathon Sunday afternoon that lasted 11 innings, the Kane County Cougars suffered an 11-10 loss against the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers at Time Warner Cable Field. The Cougars scored three

times in the eighth and three in the ninth to tie the game, but the Rattlers managed a run in the 11th to end it in their favor. The Cougars' lead over Beloit for the Wild Card playoff spot is down to 1.0 game with eight remaining in the regular season.

The Cougars battled back several times in the contest. They trailed, 6-1, after four innings when Mitch LeVier and Conner Crumbliss hit a solo and two-run homer, respectively, in the fifth to cut it to 6-4. The Cougars also trailed, 9-4, after seven innings, and LeVier, Crumbliss and Jose Crisotomo drew consecutive bases-loaded walks in the eighth to make it 9-7. The Rattlers countered with a run in the bottom of the eighth for a 10-7 score, and the Cougars rallied again. Down to the team's final strike, LeVier nailed a two-run double in the ninth, and Crisotomo walked with the bases loaded to tie it, 10-10. The Cougars drew a season-high 14 walks in the game.

Max Peterson (4-5) had pitched a perfect 10th but gave up the game-deciding run in the 11th on a single by Khris Davis. The Cougars' pitching quintet of Chris Mederos, Bo Schultz, Josh Lansford, Jose Guzman and Peterson walked only three on the day but yielded 16 hits. Rigoberto Almonte (2-0) won it for Wisconsin.