

A's News Clips, Sunday, September 5, 2010

A's starter Trevor Cahill has ace up sleeve, works out of constant trouble against Los Angeles Angels

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

For the second straight game, the A's got six innings of shutout ball from one of their young starters despite his not being even close to his sharpest.

Friday night, it was Gio Gonzalez. Saturday afternoon, it was Trevor Cahill's turn.

Cahill tiptoed through potential trouble in four innings and picked up his 15th win of the season as the A's beat the Los Angeles Angels 3-1 at the Oakland Coliseum.

Cahill, who was roughed up for eight earned runs by the New York Yankees in his last start, had similar control problems as he walked a career-high six batters. This time, he made big pitches when he had to and also was the beneficiary of two big plays in the field -- one of his own making.

"Trevor's pitches were really moving -- sinking, running," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "When you're a sinkerball pitcher, sometimes they say you have too much movement for your own good. But he finds ways to keep us in games and win, and somehow, he still found a way to go six shutout innings without his best stuff. That's impressive."

Suzuki said he's almost more impressed that Gonzalez and Cahill could find ways to win even without their "A" games.

"One, it shows that they're talented, and two, that they're learning quick," he said. "They're figuring out ways to get outs and keep us in ballgames even on days that they don't have their dominant stuff, because we all know what it looks like when they are on and how good they can be."

Second baseman Mark Ellis, who gave Cahill some insurance with a sixth-inning RBI single for a 3-0 lead, agreed.

"They're learning how to pitch, they're growing up," Ellis said. "Little things aren't bothering them like they used to, Gio especially. They're so young, but they're getting mentally tougher learning on the job. They've pitched amazing, they're just really fun to watch, and they're only going to get better and better."

Cahill, 22, became the A's first 15-game winner since Dan Haren in 2007. Even though he started the season on the disabled list and didn't win his first game until May 5, he was typically low-key about his personal achievement.

"It's better than last year when I only got 10 (wins) pitching the whole season," he said. "Hopefully, I can add some more, and we can make a good run at the division this last month."

Manager Bob Geren put Cahill's 15-6 record in better perspective.

"His record is one of the best in the league on a team that's right at .500, so that's quite an effort by him," Geren said.

Cahill helped himself out by picking off Angels leadoff hitter Alberto Callaspo with two on and one out in the first inning. With the bases loaded in the third, he retired Hideki Matsui on a fly to center for the third out. In the fifth, Cahill was the beneficiary of a terrific throw by left fielder Rajai Davis and tag by third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff when Callaspo tried to take an extra base on a Howie Kendrick single. Cahill also walked two in the sixth but again escaped unscathed.

"My goal is not to walk anybody, and I think I set the new standard of walking everybody," Cahill said.

Once Cahill left the game after the sixth, having thrown 116 pitches, the A's bullpen made quick work of the Angels. Brad Ziegler, Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey each worked an inning, and the only man to reach base was Torii Hunter, who hit a one-out solo homer in the eighth off Breslow.

Bailey, who came off the disabled list Aug. 22, picked up his 21st save of the season and his first since July 18.

A's update: Reliever Brad Ziegler ignores pain to pitch perfect seventh inning

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Despite sporting a gash on his right side that looked as if he'd been in a knife fight, Brad Ziegler fought through some pretty severe pain and pitched a perfect seventh inning Saturday after nearly being impaled by a broken bat shard Friday night.

Ziegler said he managed only three to four hours sleep Friday night because the four-inch gash he incurred was hurting so badly.

"Actually, whenever I move, I feel it, even when I'm just taking steps," he said. "It's not a deep cut, but it's enough to cause pain, especially when some sweat gets in there."

"Once I loosened up I started feeling better, but I told (manager Bob Geren), 'Once I come out there and go, I'm probably not going to go out for a second inning.' He said no problem, just give us what you can."

Reliever Joey Devine, who's been out of commission for nearly two seasons after Tommy John elbow surgery, threw a 20-pitch simulated inning Saturday, facing hitters Landon Power, Steve Tolleson and Matt Carson. It was the first time he has faced live hitters in four months, but those who went up against him were impressed.

"He looked really good," Carson said. "I don't know if he's going to make it back this year, but we could definitely use him."

Devine, who estimated he pitched at about 80-85 percent of his normal velocity, said Friday he hopes to pitch in a game before the end of the season. Geren wouldn't commit to that but said he was happy with the right-handed's outing.

"He's going to progress and pitch, it's just a matter of when and where," Geren said.

Devine's next scheduled simulated outing is Tuesday.

It's been a banner week for the A's minor league system. Triple-A Sacramento clinched the Pacific Coast League's South Division title Friday. The River Cats overcame a 121/2-game mid-June deficit to Fresno (Giants). In the 12-8 clinching win at Colorado Springs, fresh signee Jeremy Hermida had three hits.

Double-A Midland, the defending Texas League champion, locked up a playoff spot with a win Friday and was looking to clinch the South Division second-half title Saturday night.

After a fourth-place first-half finish, Single-A Stockton has already clinched the North Division of the California League. Also, Single-A Vancouver has clinched first place in the second half of the short-season Northwest League.

Wild Cahill finds way to win No. 15

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Like Gio Gonzalez the night before, Trevor Cahill won Saturday despite not having his best stuff.

That's a far better measure of how much the two young A's pitchers have improved in the past year than their successes when at their best; it's struggling through a bad day that separates good starters from the mediocre.

Just like Gonzalez, Cahill completed six scoreless innings, laying the foundation for Oakland's 3-1 victory over the Angels. Cahill recorded his team-high and ongoing career-high 15th win, tied for fifth-most in the league.

That's despite a career-high six walks, a figure that had Cahill shaking his head.

"My goal was not to walk anyone, and I think I set the new standard of walking everyone," he said.

The primary issue: a sinker that wouldn't cooperate, the same trouble Cahill had when giving up eight runs at New York last week. He said that usually means his release point is off.

"I was missing by quite a bit," he said. "My sinker away to right-handers, which I execute 90 percent of the time, today I was just yanking it. The last two starts, it wasn't there on a consistent basis."

Against the Yankees, that meant a pounding. Versus the Angels, Cahill managed to avoid damage.

"You're not going to be on every time, but they're learning how to pitch," Oakland second baseman Mark Ellis said of Gonzalez, 24, and Cahill, 22. "They're getting mentally tough. They're so young, it's unbelievable, and they're learning on the job. It's amazing how far those two, especially, have come."

Cahill helped himself by picking Alberto Callaspo off second in the first inning. And in the fifth, Rajai Davis threw out Callaspo trying to go from first to third on Howie Kendrick's single. Callaspo made it in safely but slid past the bag, and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, after shifting to get the throw, slapped the tag down and held it there.

"He did a great job of staying with it," Cahill said. "A lot of guys would get up and show the umpire the ball, but you've got to congratulate Kevin for keeping the tag down until the play was over."

Oakland got single runs in the first (an RBI single by Jack Cust), second (RBI single, Cliff Pennington) and sixth (ditto, Ellis). Before Ellis' hit, Kurt Suzuki had been thrown out in a rundown between third and home, going on contact; manager Bob Geren came out to argue because he felt Angels catcher Jeff Mathis impeded Suzuki.

The Angels' lone run came on Torii Hunter's homer off Craig Breslow in the eighth. Andrew Bailey worked a perfect ninth for his first save since coming off the disabled list on Aug. 22.

Coco Crisp has been successful in his past 15 steal attempts, the most by an A's player since Rickey Henderson's 15 in a row in 1998.

Jeff Larish took a pickoff throw flush off the right elbow in the fourth, temporarily losing feeling down to his fingers, but he remained in the game.

Flying things tend to find Brad Ziegler

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Brad Ziegler once spent six days in intensive care after he was hit in the head by a line drive in the minor leagues. He had his skull fractured again by a deflected thrown ball one offseason, so he's had his share of frightening baseball experiences.

On Friday night, Ziegler was struck below the right shoulder blade by a shard of **Mike Napoli's** bat when it shattered in the ninth inning.

"When I saw the bat coming, I was like, 'Great, I'm going to get stabbed,' " Ziegler said Saturday morning. "And I also didn't have any idea where the ball went, so I was trying to duck away from the bat and maybe the ball, too. That was as scary as anything, because I never saw the ball."

The long gash was bandaged, but Ziegler said that stitches still might be required if it opens up when he pitches.

"It hurts, and it also feels like I got punched and bruised," he said. "That's been my life, dodging flying objects."

Ziegler was stiff and sore, but he pitched a 1-2-3 seventh Saturday.

Just Devine: Joey Devine faced hitters for the first time in four months, throwing 20 pitches in a simulated inning. He'll do it again Tuesday or Wednesday before a possible rehab assignment.

Devine, who has had some setbacks in his return from Tommy John surgery, was happy to throw to hitters, but he gave himself a C for his efforts.

"If that's a C, I don't want to see his A, then," said infielder **Steve Tolleson**, one of the men who faced him.

Breast Cancer Awareness Day: Hundreds of breast cancer survivors will form a ribbon on the field before today's game, and all proceeds from commemorative items will benefit various cancer charities. The A's have raised more than \$1 million for breast cancer education and research since 1999.

In addition, the team will donate \$5,000 to the Breast Cancer Emergency Fund of San Francisco in memory of KTVU reporter **Faith Fancher**.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Comeback 'Cats: Triple-A Sacramento has won its division despite trailing by 12 1/2 games in mid-June. "If you'd told me then we'd make the playoffs, I'd have laughed at you," said infielder Steve Tolleson, who was then with the River Cats. "It was miserable."

Drumbeat: Ziegler's stiff, sore after getting hit with bat shard; Devine throws

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 9/4/2010 12:45pm

Brad Ziegler - who twice in his career has been hit in the head with baseballs - was cut below his back right shoulder blade by a bat shard after Mike Napoli's bat shattered in the ninth inning last night. Ziegler has the lengthy cut all neatly taped up, but he said there's some concern it might open up when he next pitches.

Ziegler hopes that he can work again as soon as today, because he came in feeling stiff and sore and he feels that that might be only worse tomorrow if he doesn't face a hitter or two today. Manager Bob Geren was going to consult with Ziegler after he played catch.

Joey Devine threw 20 pitches in a simulated inning, facing Steve Tolleson, Landon Powell and Matt Carson. Devine said he felt good, threw all his pitches and he was mostly just thrilled to get out and face hitters for the first time in four months; he's had numerous setbacks while returning from last year's Tommy John surgery.

Devine gave himself a C grade for his outing, and when I mentioned that to Tolleson, he laughed and said, "Then I'd hate to see his A game!" Tolleson thought Devine's two-seam and four-seam fastballs and his slider looked good; a scout who was watching said Devine's location wasn't really sharp, but for a first effort after so long, that's to be expected.

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

Triple-A Sacramento clinched the division title last night, which is amazing considering that the River Cats were 12 1/2 games out in mid-June. Newest River Cat Jeremy Hermida joined the team yesterday and had three hits, including two doubles, scored a run and drove in a run. Another recent addition, local favorite Tommy Everidge, drove in two runs and Michael Taylor had three hits and he's hitting .270.

Cahill works out of jams for 15th win

Righty sets career high in walks in six scoreless innings

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- In the midst of Trevor Cahill's postgame meeting with reporters on Saturday, Gio Gonzalez, whose locker sits right next to Cahill's, blurted out something.

"He was trying to copy Gio," Gonzalez said, joking.

Looking at the past two contests, Gonzalez has a point. On Friday night, it was Gonzalez who worked around poor control to string together six scoreless innings in an A's victory.

On Saturday afternoon, Cahill took a page out of Gonzalez's book, battling with his command en route to tossing six scoreless frames in a 3-1 win over the Angels.

"I definitely almost had a heart attack," Cahill said. "But I guess I just like to put extra pressure on myself."

This season, Cahill has made a living by hammering the zone, pitching to contact and letting his defense do the work. On Saturday, Cahill had trouble finding the plate, as only 60 of his 116 pitches were strikes.

With an inconsistent arm slot, Cahill's top pitch, his sinker, was unpredictable. Since he usually plays off the sinker's movement to set up his other pitches, Cahill said his entire arsenal was out of whack on Saturday.

"The command wasn't there, but I got out of some jams -- that was the key," Cahill said. "My goal was to not walk anybody, and I think I set the new standard of walking everybody."

Although that's a bit of an exaggeration, Cahill did issue a career-high six walks.

Take the third inning, for example. After getting two quick outs to start the frame, Cahill allowed a single to Howard Kendrick and issued consecutive walks to load the bases. But Cahill induced an inning-ending popup from Hideki Matsui to keep the Angels off the board.

Cahill again walked two batters in the sixth inning, the second of which prompted a mound visit from manager Bob Geren. But after talking to the skipper, Cahill regrouped and got another inning-ending flyout to finish off his afternoon.

"Just experience," Cahill said. "Being in that situation when you know you don't have your best stuff and not trying to be too fine was the key. Last year when I didn't have my best stuff, I tried to hit the corners. Today I was just trying to throw it down the middle, and I couldn't really do that even for the most part. I was able to do it when I had to."

When looking back at the 2010 season, it will surely be remembered as the one when Gonzalez and Cahill made significant leaps in their development. With the victory, Cahill moved to 15-6 to become Oakland's first 15-game winner since Dan Haren went 15-9 in 2007. Gonzalez isn't far behind with his 13-8 record.

Given their ages -- Cahill is 22 and Gonzalez is 24 -- some of their fellow A's have taken notice.

"One, they're talented," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "And two, they're learning quick. They're figuring out ways to get outs and to keep us in ballgames even on the days when they don't have their dominant stuff. Because we all know what it looks like when they are on."

On a day where runs were at a premium, a couple of key defensive plays by the A's were noted by Geren and his players alike. The initial sequence came in the first inning, when Cahill picked off Alberto Callaspo from second base with runners on first and second and no outs.

The second key defensive play came in the fifth inning, when Kendrick singled to right field, but Rajai Davis delivered a strike to third base to nab the advancing Callaspo. Callaspo initially made it into third before the tag, but slid past the base and was tagged out by Kevin Kouzmanoff.

"It was a strong throw, but I give Kouz a lot of credit for staying with the tag," Geren said. "A lot of guys will just swipe it and not stay with it."

While Cahill maneuvered his way through the Angels' lineup, his counterpart, Jered Weaver, was also largely effective against the A's. Weaver finished seven innings, allowing three earned runs on six hits and three walks while striking out five.

Oakland received RBI singles in the first, second and sixth innings, but didn't need anything else. The Angels' lone run came in the eighth inning, when Torii Hunter delivered a solo shot to center field off A's lefty Craig Breslow.

"It is what it is," Weaver said. "I can only go out and do my job. It [run support] just hasn't been there. Just go out and battle."

One day after receiving a gash from a broken bat, Brad Ziegler pitched a perfect seventh inning on Saturday. Ziegler said he frequently feels tenderness in the spot where the bat hit him, below his right shoulder on his back, and said he could sleep only three or four hours on Friday.

Andrew Bailey was in a save situation for the first time in nearly seven weeks and he didn't disappoint, recording a 1-2-3 ninth to pick up his first save since July 18. Bailey missed a month with a rib cage muscle strain before getting activated from the 15-day disabled list on Aug. 22.

"The adrenaline gets going no matter what," Bailey said. "I think as far as that, I didn't miss a beat. It was just nice to be back out there."

Coupled with Texas' 12-4 loss on Saturday, the A's moved eight games back of the American League West-leading Rangers with 27 contests left to play. Vin Mazzaro will try to lead Oakland to the three-game sweep in Sunday's series finale against Ervin Santana and the Angels.

"Right now we just have to worry about us and winning games and focus on the team at hand," outfielder Coco Crisp said. "We can't focus on Texas."

A's, Angels headed in different directions

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com

The Angels scored a run on Saturday.

That's a success in itself, considering their recent offensive woes.

Although the Angels escaped a second straight shutout, they have scored only 12 runs in their past 12 games, being blanked in four of them. Although the Halos have had only five hits in each of their two games against the A's, getting runners on base is only part of their scoring problem. Even when the Angels do pound out hits, they can't seem to string them together. Since Aug. 1, they are hitting only .199 (46-for-231) with runners in scoring position.

"Some guys are having good at-bats; some guys are struggling," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "There's been a lot of inconsistency in our offense, reflected in our inability to score runs. Some guys have done what we would have anticipated offensively, but too many guys have been struggling. You can't put this whole year on the offense. But our on-base percentage has been terrible, and our situational hitting has been less than ideal."

Oakland is on the other side of the coin, experiencing new-found life in the batter's box, especially with the long ball. Although the A's rank last in the Majors with 86 home runs, they have hit 13 in their last 12 games. Among the chief power-hitters has been Kevin Kouzmanoff, who has four home runs and eight RBIs in his past eight games.

"Coming in, we figured he could do that," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He's adjusted a little bit to the league, and he's coming around lately. He hit some homers on the past road trip, and [Friday] was a big one. He's a strong man, he really is."

If both teams' recent offensive trends continue Sunday, the A's could do something they haven't done in seven years: win the season series against the Angels. With Oakland's win Sunday, the A's have an 8-7 edge with four games remaining. Oakland last won the season series in 2003 when they were 12-8.

Angels: A's killer headed to the mound

If the Angels are able to scrape together another run -- even just one -- they have to like their chances to come away victorious Sunday. Ervin Santana will take the mound in the series finale against a team he has dominated throughout his career. In 19 games (17 starts) Santana is 11-3 with a 1.73 ERA against the A's, including 5-1 with a 1.89 ERA in 10 appearances at Oakland Coliseum. The 27-year-old right-hander has also been consistent as of late, going 6-2 since July 24.

Athletics: Mazzaro dusts himself off

With Santana on the mound, the A's will counter with Vin Mazzaro, who is coming off one of the worst starts of his young

career. In his last outing, Mazzaro was roughed up against the Yankees, allowing nine runs (seven earned) in 3 2/3 innings in a 9-3 loss. He also gave up three home runs in a game for the first time in his career. Mazzaro has made four starts against the Angels with marginal success -- 1-1, 4.94 ERA -- but Hideki Matsui and Torii Hunter are hitless against the right-hander in seven at-bats each.

Worth noting

Oakland is 31-14 in day games, tops in the Majors. ... Trevor Cahill's six scoreless innings Saturday marked the fifth time in the past nine games that A's pitchers have worked past the fifth inning.

Ziegler's injury revives maple bat debate

Reliever suffers scratch, bruise after broken wood hit him

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- For years now, the debate over the use of maple bats has been ongoing within the baseball community.

It was reprised Friday night, as Oakland reliever Brad Ziegler was struck by a large portion of Mike Napoli's broken bat in the ninth inning of an 8-0 A's win. Ziegler had a deep scratch and a bruise on his back below his right shoulder, but was able to stay in the game and finish the inning. He received a new bandage and ointment before Saturday's matinee and said he would be a game-time decision.

"It really feels like it's starting to tighten up today," Ziegler said Saturday.

As Oakland manager Bob Geren pointed out Friday, had Napoli's bat rotated another 10 or 20 degrees before it struck Ziegler, it could have done more damage or even impaled the reliever. Napoli said he was using a maple bat from maker SSK on Friday.

"That's one of the things we've been talking about with maple bats for a long time, the inherent danger," Ziegler said. "It didn't seem like bats broke like that -- with the barrel end flying all the time -- 10, 15 years ago. Now that's happening a lot, almost every game or every other game. It was just a matter of time before someone got hit with one, I just wish it wasn't me."

Maple bats have become more prevalent in baseball over the past couple of decades, replacing ash bats. Although maple bats can pack more punch than their ash counterparts, maple bats tend to break in fuller shards as opposed to flaking like ash ones.

Some have even said pitchers should wear protective headgear on the mound. Asked whether he would support such a measure, Geren said, "If there was something available and a pitcher wanted to, I would have no problem with it."

'Scary' cramp won't change Braden's plans

OAKLAND -- Although he left Sunday's contest in New York with a right hamstring cramp, A's lefty Dallas Braden is scheduled to make his next start Tuesday against the Mariners.

With temperatures on the field at Yankee Stadium reaching triple digits, Braden's hamstring tightened up after he threw a pitch to Curtis Granderson.

"It was so scary," Braden said. "I never experienced something like that before. I knew my day was done."

Braden has battled through numerous injuries this season, including elbow stiffness, a rolled ankle and a mysterious illness that affected him for a week in May.

Reliever Joey Devine, who has missed all season but is on day 38 of his 60-day throwing program, threw a 20-pitch simulated game before Saturday's tilt with the Angels. It marked the first time in four months that Devine faced batters.

"He reported that he felt good," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "He looked pretty good."

Devine threw between 75 and 100 percent on Saturday and is scheduled to throw another bullpen session or simulated game on Tuesday. Devine said he hopes to pitch in a game or two before season's end, as he will be eligible to return for the season's final week if he sticks to the throwing program.

Fellow pitcher Josh Outman, who has also missed all season, threw off flat ground before Saturday's game.

Four A's affiliates are playoff-bound

OAKLAND -- It was a banner day for the A's farm system on Friday, as three Minor League affiliates clinched postseason berths.

While Triple-A Sacramento won the Pacific Coast League South Division, Double-A Midland and Class-A Advanced Stockton each won their respective second-half titles to secure playoff berths. Class A Vancouver has already clinched its division, meaning all four affiliates will participate in the postseason.

"Were having a very good year in our system as far as winning," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "It's wonderful. They work very hard and deserve credit. You look at our team up here and so many of them have come through our system, they do a great job."

Although outfielder Matt Carson is currently with the A's, he played 64 games with Sacramento this season, batting .303 with 13 homers and 36 RBIs for the RiverCats. Sacramento won its ninth division title in 11 years on Friday, despite trailing by as many as 12 1/2 games in June.

"There's times when I went down that the team was struggling pretty good," Carson said. "We'd be down quite a few games, and we'd get some momentum going and before we knew it we were up. It's pretty cool, I don't think I've been on a team that's been that far back and overcome the deficit. It's definitely going to be one I'll remember."

The Triple-A playoffs feature two rounds and a championship game, meaning Triple-A callups could be considered as early as the second week of September and as late as Sept. 22.

Among the possible callup options could be outfielder Matt Watson -- who has played in Oakland this season -- top prospect Michael Taylor, catcher Josh Donaldson, infielder Eric Sogard and recently acquired outfielder Jeremy Hermida. Top power-hitting prospect Chris Carter is on the disabled list with a sprained left thumb.

Cahill first A's pitcher in three years to win 15 games

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Trevor Cahill pitched six scoreless innings to become Oakland's first 15-game winner in three years in the A's 3-1 win over the Los Angeles Angels on Saturday.

Mark Ellis, Daric Barton and Cliff Pennington all drove in runs for Oakland, which won its second straight following a four-game losing streak.

Torii Hunter homered for the Angels, who have lost nine of 12.

Cahill (15-6) gave up just four hits, all singles, but walked a career-high six. The right-hander, who has won six of his last eight starts, allowed only one runner past second.

Coming off his worst outing of the season when he gave up eight runs and nine hits over four innings in an 11-1 loss at the New York Yankees, Cahill repeatedly had to pitch out of trouble. The right-hander escaped a two-on, two-out situation in the first then retired Hideki Matsui on a fly to center after loading the bases in the third.

The Angels threatened again in the fifth, but right fielder Rajai Davis threw out Alberto Callaspo trying to go from first to third on Howie Kendrick's one-out single. Bobby Abreu then struck out looking.

Brad Ziegler, Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey completed the five-hitter for Oakland. Bailey got the final three outs for his 21st save in 24 tries.

The lack of scoring continued a troubling trend for Los Angeles.

The Angels went into the game having scored only 11 runs over their previous seven games and had been shut out four times in the last two weeks, including an 8-0 loss against the A's on Friday.

With the offense struggling, starter Jared Weaver had little margin for error. Though he didn't get hit hard, Weaver wasn't his normal self and had only five strikeouts after going into the game tied with Seattle ace Felix Hernandez for the major league lead.

The Angels problems extended to their defense.

Center fielder Peter Bourjos casually tracked down Kurt Suzuki's fly ball leading off the sixth, then let the ball bounce in front of him as Suzuki raced to second with a double. Suzuki was later thrown out trying to score on a grounder but Bourjos bobbled Mark Ellis' single in the same inning, allowing Kevin Kouzmanoff to score and make it 3-0.

Weaver (11-11) walked three and allowed six hits in seven innings. He is winless since Aug. 6, a span of five starts.

Hunter homered off Oakland reliever Craig Breslow in the eighth, his 19th of the season. It's Hunter's first RBI since Aug. 6, the second-longest drought of his career.

Callaspo and Kendrick had two hits apiece for the Angels.

Notes: Injured A's RHP Joey Devine pitched a simulated game Saturday and appeared fine. Devine is rehabilitating from reconstructive Tommy John elbow surgery. LHP Josh Outman, who also had Tommy John surgery, was also scheduled to pitch a simulated game but threw off flat ground instead. ... The game drew just 14,227 fans. ... Oakland is 31-14 in day games, tops in the majors.

A's Shutout Angels Behind Gonzalez

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 9/4/2010

Oakland, CA – Returning home from a long road trip, the Oakland A's just want to focus on their remaining games and win. They were swept by the New York Yankees and now trail Texas by ten games in the American League West.

"It was a great trip until NY," manager Bob Geren said. "We're happy to be back home and playing back in our division." "We want to win as many games as we can."

The three game series against division rivals, Anaheim Angels is always exciting. Both teams have struggled yet the A's remain a half game ahead in the standings. The Angels face not making the post season for the first time since 2006. The morale is pretty low for both teams but only one team will walk away with a win and increase their chances of finishing the season strong.

"Of course we want to win!" Coco Crisp said. "We want to win every game and it's an opportunity to win in every situation." "It's September and we know the importance of each game, we'll continue to play with intensity and have fun out there at the same time."

The smiles were beaming throughout the ball park. Oakland had every reason to celebrate after shutting out the Angels 8-0. It was a team effort on both offense and defense throughout the entire game. Gio Gonzalez won his third consecutive start and pitched six scoreless innings.

Gonzalez who has been "HOT" on the mound allowed four hits, no runs, walked three and struck out six. He's become one of the most reliable options in the rotation and moved to 7-3 with a 2.11 ERA over his last 14 starts.

"Thanks to the defense, I'm 100%," said Gonzalez. "It was just one of those nights, each player picked each other up for the win." "A day with hitting like this tells you we wanted this win, this game was important to us, we wanted to stop the bleeding."

Oakland recorded their first run off errors from the Angels in the first frame. They were not in synch and the pitching from Scott Kazmir was just horrible. He had no command of the mound and just seemed lost in trying to find his strike zone.

"I'm embarrassed," said Torii Hunter. "We're getting no run support from our starting pitchers and we barely get runners in scoring position." "We're trying too hard, we've been inconsistent this year, not just offensively but our total game."

The A's dominated in the seventh inning with two 2-run homers from both Kevin Kouzmanoff and Cliff Pennington. A double from Mark Ellis, and singles from both Rajai Davis and Gabe Gross. A total of six runs combined earned in one frame opened

up Oakland's lead to a comfortable 8-0. An effort by all put the struggling Angles farther away from mentally getting back in the game.

"I'm not the guy who worries too much about home runs," Pennington said. "If I did, I obviously wouldn't be very good at it because I don't hit very many." "I was trying for a base hit and got the home run so I guess I surprised myself."

The hitting spree Oakland demonstrated is something you don't see too often. But the determination to finish the season strong is still imminent. These players haven't given up and the victory tonight moves the A's nine games behind Texas who lead the American league West.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Playoff-bound Sacramento slugs past Sky Sox

Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento is rolling into the PCL playoffs while swinging some hot bats.

The River Cats toppled host Colorado Springs 16-9 on Saturday night, collecting 19 hits one day after clinching the division with a 12-run, 21-hit outburst.

Lead-off batter Corey Wimberly led the way Saturday, going 3-for-6 with a double, triple, two runs, five RBIs and his 56th stolen base. With two games remaining, Wimberly is three runs shy of 100 for the season.

Five other River Cats had multiple hits Saturday, including Michael Taylor's 4-for-5, three-run, two-RBI performance with a double. Corey Brown went 4-for-5 with a triple, home run, three runs and two RBIs. Brown's home run was his third in five games.

The 16 runs ties a season high set three previous times. Sacramento's eight-run first inning also matched a season high for runs in an inning.

The River Cats batted around the order in the first, loading the bases twice against Sky Sox starter Josh Muecke (6-9), who was pulled after giving up eight runs (all earned) through 0.1 innings. The River Cats led 13-0 before Colorado Springs rallied for two runs in the sixth and seven in the seventh. Sacramento's bullpen allowed seven runs in three innings, with Jared Lansford allowing six of those runs while recording only two outs.

Sacramento starter Travis Banwart (4-2) continued a string of solid starts, allowing only two runs and six hits over 6.0 innings, striking out five and walking one.

The River Cats conclude their regular season with Sunday and Monday day games at Colorado Springs. Sacramento then opens the PCL Playoffs at home. Games 1 and 2 of the PCL Pacific Conference Championship Series will be played Wednesday and Thursday at Raley Field, with both games starting at 7:05 p.m.

'Hounds offense slumps in loss to Frisco

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

The Midland RockHounds returned home Saturday with a playoff spot secured. However, with home field in the first round still on the line, they had something to play for against the Frisco RoughRiders.

The RockHounds lost, 5-0, to the RoughRiders at Citibank Ballpark on Saturday and now have just two more chances to secure home field should a fifth game be necessary in their Texas League South Divisional Series with the RoughRiders next week.

"It was a tough road trip," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said. "But we still have to come out and play better than that. We just have to come back today and battle."

Losing the game was one thing, but RockHounds' defense didn't do starting pitcher Matt Wright many favors and the offense lacked any punch against RoughRiders starting pitcher Richard Bleier, whom they roughed up the last two times they faced.

After taking a 2-0 lead in the fourth on an unearned run, the RoughRiders capitalized on the RockHounds' lack of concentration in the fifth.

Guilder Rodriguez, who was 3 for 4 in the game, hit a would-be single to center fielder Archie Gilbert. However, Gilbert took his time getting to the ball and Rodriguez stretched it into a double. Jose Felix followed with a grounder to second baseman Jemile Weeks, who misplayed it, allowing Rodriguez to score from second.

Bleier set the tone, holding the RockHounds to two hits in three innings of work. His last two times facing the RockHounds, though, he allowed a combined nine earned runs in 13 2/3 innings.

One of those outings came his last time out, but the RockHounds didn't have the same success this time around, although they came close putting two men in scoring position with one out in the third.

"He got out of a jam (in the third) with balls being hit right at guys instead of in holes," Bush said. "But he always does a good job."

RockHounds pitcher Matt Wright (7-3) was facing the RoughRiders for the second straight start.

Along with a pair of RockHounds errors and Gilbert's miscue, Wright couldn't keep the RoughRiders from getting good contact off him. He allowed five runs, three earned, on 11 hits.

With two games to go, Bush must balance the importance of setting up his rotation for the playoffs and trying to win one of the next two games to get home field in a possible Game 5. Anthony Capra (6-12) will have to chance to pick up that win for the RockHounds at 6 p.m. today at Citibank Ballpark.

"We want to make sure the pitching staff is ready for the playoffs," Bush said. "Ultimately we want to win the league and we're going to give our best effort."

Shawn Shroyer can be reached at sshroyer@mrt.com.

NOTEBOOK

ROCKHOUNDS BITES: The RockHounds recognized the recipients of the club's team awards. Outfielder Corey Brown was named Player of the Year. Ryan Edell was named Pitcher of the Year. Mickey Storey was Reliever of the Year and outfielder Archie Gilbert was voted the Fan Favorite Award. Hitting coach Webster Garrison was recognized as the recipient of the Mike Coolbaugh Award, which goes to the Texas League Coach of the Year. Shortstop Josh Horton was honored as one of the RockHounds' two Texas League postseason All-Stars. Brown, who is now with Triple-A Sacramento, was the other. ... The schedule for the Texas League Divisional Series between Midland and Frisco has been announced. Game 1 will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Frisco. Game 2 will be at 7 p.m. Thursday at Frisco. Game 3 will be at 7 p.m. Friday at Citibank Ballpark. If necessary, Game 4 will be at 7 p.m. Saturday at Citibank Ballpark. If necessary, Game 5 will be at 6 p.m. at Frisco or Citibank Ballpark. The gates for Games 3 and 4 will open at 6 p.m. Gates for Game 5 will open at 5:30 p.m. if played at Citibank.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: Frisco RoughRiders (33-35) -- Travis Chick (RHP, 1-2, 6.89); Midland RockHounds (34-34) - - Anthony Capra (LHP, 6-12, 4.10)

Barfield Leads Attack In 14-10 Ports Victory

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - In a game that had no impact on the Cal-League playoffs, the Stockton Ports and Bakersfield Blaze both brought the offense on Saturday night at Sam Lynn Ballpark. The Ports, one night after clinching the second-half title in the North Division, matched a season-high with 21 hits in defeating the Blaze 14-10.

For the third straight night, Stockton scratched a run across in the first inning. Grant Green singled with one out and came around to score in a two-out double from Jeremy Barfield to give Stockton a 1-0 lead.

The Blaze plated four runs in the last of the first, all unearned for Ports starter Justin Murray. Cody Podraza started the frame by reaching on a throwing error made by Green. Two batters later, Chris McGuiness walked followed by a double from Mike Bianucci to tie the game at 1-1. Tommy Mendonca grounded to second to give the Blaze a 2-1 lead. David Paisano came up next and knocked an RBI single to center and Vinny DiFazio followed with an RBI double to left to give the Blaze a 4-1 edge.

The Ports were quick to tie the score in the second. Todd Johnson brought in the first run of the inning with an RBI single to make it a 4-2 contest. With one on and two out, Green launched his 20th home run of the season—a two-run shot to left to tie the score at 4-4.

Stockton took the lead back in the top of the third when Kent Walton reached on a fielder's choice force out to score Mike Spina, making it a 5-4 game.

The Blaze had their last big inning of the game in the third. Murray allowed four straight hits to start the inning, the largest one being a three-run homer from Paisano to give the Blaze a 7-5 advantage. DiFazio followed with a double and, two batters later, scored on a Joe Bonadonna double to make it an 8-5 Blaze lead.

Stockton countered with their biggest inning of the night in the fourth. Blaze starter Kennil Gomez (5-9) started the frame by walking Brandon Pinckney. Johnson followed with a two-run homer to right to make it an 8-7 game. Gomez allowed a single to Green and then walked Parker. After Spina reached on a fielder's choice where no put-out was recorded, Barfield struck again, this time with a grand slam to center to put the Ports up for good 11-8.

Gomez would leave the game after Barfield's grand slam, taking the loss after going three-plus innings and allowing 11 runs on 12 hits.

Barfield would drive in another run in the fifth on a fielder's choice force-out to make it 12-8. In the sixth, Stockton tacked on two more runs on an RBI double from Green and a fielder's choice ground-out from Parker to make it a 14-8 lead.

Murray would go four innings for Stockton and not factor into the decision, allowing eight runs (four earned) on 1- hits while striking out two and walking one.

Andrew Carignan (3-3) picked up the win after tossing two perfect innings while striking out four.

A.J. Huttenlocker (SV, 1) pitched the final three innings for the Ports and picked up a three-inning save. Huttenlocker allowed a two-run homer to Doug Hogan in the ninth to make it a 14-10 game, but got DiFazio to ground to short to end the game.

Barfield led the charge in terms of RBI for Stockton, going 3-for-6 with six RBI. Green went 5-for-6 on the night and drove in three runs while crossing the plate five times.

Stockton matched a season-high with 21 hits. Second baseman Tyler Ladendorf was ejected in the top of the fifth for arguing balls and strikes after striking out looking.

The Ports and Blaze will play the third game of their four-game set on Sunday at Sam Lynn Ballpark. Ian Krol (1-0, 3.07 ERA) will head to the mound for Stockton, opposed by Bakersfield left-hander Robbie Ross (4-4, 4.98 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:15 p.m. PDT.

The Cougars Are Post-Season Bound! **Kane County clinches playoff spot for 6th time in 8 years as A's affiliate**

GENEVA, III. – For the sixth time in eight seasons as an Oakland A's affiliate, the Kane County Cougars are headed to the playoffs. The Cougars clinched a post-season berth Saturday night with their 6-2 win over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers and Cedar Rapids' win over Beloit. Clinton also lost in Burlington, so the Cougars own the top playoff spot by 1.5 games over Clinton with two games to play.

The Cougars, who have won four straight and nine of their last 12, took control of the game with a four-run third inning. With the bases-loaded and no outs, Tyreece House nailed a two-run double and Conner Crumbliss scored on an error to turn a 1-0 deficit into a 3-1 lead. House later scampered home from third as the Rattlers threw to first to confirm a strikeout on Leonardo Gil. The Cougars scored two more runs in the fourth, as Jose Crisotomo brought home Jason Christian with an RBI grounder and House singled in Max Stassi to make it 6-1.

Dan Straily (10-7) picked up the win for the Cougars, becoming the 27th pitcher in team history to win 10-plus games in a season. He gave up a run on four hits, walked three and fanned seven over six innings. Ryan Doolittle handled the next two innings, and Kenny Smalley gave up a run in the ninth before striking out Cutter Dykstra to end it.

The Cougars (38-29, 70-66) and Timber Rattlers (31-37, 57-79) play Game 2 of the series Sunday night at 6 CT. Aaron Larsen (0-1, 10.80) will face Efrain Nieves (4-4, 5.27). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 5:45 p.m.