

A's News Clips, Monday, Labor Day, September 6, 2010

Vin Mazzaro hurt by the home run ball again as Oakland A's lose to Los Angeles Angels 7-4

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The education continues for A's right-hander Vin Mazzaro in his second big league season.

One lesson being learned:

Balls often fly out of the yard when he falls behind in the count.

Mazzaro served up a pair of two-run homers and lasted just 4 1/3 innings Sunday in a 7-4 defeat to the Los Angeles Angels, which denied the A's a three-game sweep in front of the home crowd.

Though Mazzaro has shown improvement at times over a rocky rookie campaign of 2009, the long ball has done him damage in recent outings.

He's lost his past six decisions, posting a 5.60 ERA over that eight-start stretch, and has allowed five homers in his past two outings.

"He really hasn't thrown the ball that well in the last month or so," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He's had some decent games, but his command of the strike zone is not where it needs to be."

More important than the number of homers: the situations in which they've come.

Mazzaro (6-8) has given up 18 homers this season and 14 have come with men on base, which leads the American League. For the second straight start, Mazzaro surrendered a homer on a 3-0 count.

He grooved a 3-0 fastball that Mike Napoli crushed for a two-run shot in the third, putting the Angels ahead 4-0. Three batters earlier, Mazzaro tried to go inside with a fastball that ran over the plate, and Bobby Abreu launched a two-run homer to right-center.

"I've given up homers on 3-0, 3-1 pitches," Mazzaro said. "I should be expecting them to be swinging. It's a matter of locating that fastball."

He's not the only Athletic to struggle in that situation.

The A's have allowed four homers on 3-0 counts -- most in the majors. They've all come in the past three weeks.

Jerry Blevins served one up to Minnesota's Jim Thome on Aug. 15; Brett Anderson allowed one to Toronto's Jose Bautista the very next day; and Mazzaro allowed yet another to the New York Yankees' Nick Swisher on Tuesday.

Geren was asked what adjustments his pitchers need to make on 3-0 pitches.

"Honestly, don't get to 3-0," he said. "A hitter can be as selective as he wants in that count. It's a count that a lot of teams don't swing away on. But when a power hitter that can hurt you gets that opportunity, really, it's not much different than 2-0."

The A's could have gained on the AL West-leading Texas Rangers for the third straight day, but they remain eight games out of first.

Mazzaro, 23, has posted a 4.06 ERA in 17 starts since joining the rotation in early June. And 12 of those have been quality starts.

But after Jeff Larish delivered a two-run double in the fourth Sunday that pulled the A's to within 4-3, Mazzaro gave a run right back in the fifth on Torii Hunter's RBI double, and Geren came with the hook.

Mazzaro has pitched recently with a blister on his right middle finger, according to catcher Landon Powell.

Though Mazzaro didn't mention the blister after the game, Powell added:

"I'm not trying to blame it on that, and I don't think he would either. But it's like having a little leak in your tire. It's not going to run as smoothly. It's definitely affected his breaking ball. It didn't have the same bite."

Oakland A's update: Kevin Kouzmanoff leaves game with back spasms

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's could be without third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff for a period after he left Sunday's 7-4 loss to the Angels with lower back spasms.

Kouzmanoff, who leads the team with 14 homers and 69 RBIs, singled to left field in the fifth inning but pulled up lame on his way to first. He left for pinch runner Gabe Gross.

Manager Bob Geren said he assumed Kouzmanoff might miss this afternoon's series opener against the Seattle Mariners.

"I don't really have much more information other than the trainer thought it was a pretty good spasm," Geren said.

Kouzmanoff was receiving treatment after the game and unavailable for comment. But he said through a team spokesperson that he felt the spasm about four steps out of the batter's box.

Kouzmanoff has been a constant in the lineup, appearing in all but four of the A's 136 games.

He's hitting just .256 and has been prone to slumps, but he has 12 RBIs in his last 12 games.

In a brief clubhouse ceremony, A's co-owner Lew Wolff presented Dallas Braden a diamond ring to commemorate the lefty's May 9 perfect game.

The ring has 88 diamonds total -- 27 around the base to represent the 27 consecutive outs; 10 on the sides to signify the 10 players in the A's lineup that day (DH included); and 51 in the middle to represent Braden's uniform number.

Wolff also gave Braden a diamond pendant for his grandmother Peggy Lindsey, who attended the perfect game.

"The 209" is engraved on one side of the ring, a reference to Braden's affection for his hometown of Stockton.

The A's had a rally stymied on an odd play in the sixth. Rajai Davis tried to steal second and dived into the bag as Cliff Pennington singled to right on the pitch. Davis broke late for third and was thrown out easily. Geren argued interference on the play after it appeared Angels shortstop Erick Aybar might have gotten in Davis' way. ... The A's raised \$70,650 on Breast Cancer Awareness Day.

Chin Music: Braden gets some perfect game bling

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/5/2010 12:52PM

Had a couple days off, so we'll get the blog back cranking again, though there wasn't a lot to report in A's land this morning ... There was a brief, informal ceremony in the clubhouse as A's co-owner Lew Wolff presented Dallas Braden with a diamond ring commemorating his perfect game (Braden also received a diamond pendant to give to his grandmother). "Keep it up," Wolff said. "Can you do two in one year?" Braden's response afterward: "I told him I don't have that club in my bag."

—Joey Devine played catch and said his elbow felt really good a day after he threw a 20-pitch simulated game. It's pretty easy to forget about Devine, isn't it? The guy's been such a big storyline over the past two springs, but injuries have basically robbed him of two seasons. But I have a feeling you'll be reading about him again when February rolls around. How good would it have been to have a healthy Devine in the 'pen when Michael Wuertz was struggling early in the season and then when Andrew Bailey went down? That's a big "if," I realize, but it's something to ponder ...

Today's lineups:

A's — Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Cust DH, Ellis 2B, Larish LF, Davis RF, Powell C, Pennington SS; Mazzaro RHP.
Angels — Callaspo 3B, Kendrick 2B, Abreu LF, Hunter RF, Matsui DH, Napoli 1B, Aybar SS, Mathis C, Willits CF; Santana RHP.

Brothers Anthony Dixon of the 49ers and A's prospect Rashun Dixon hope to rock both sides of Bay someday

By Mark Emmons, San Jose Mercury News

Anthony Dixon, the 49ers rookie running back, and his younger brother Rashun talk often on the phone, comparing their journeys through the professional sports ranks. They usually end up daydreaming.

Imagine Anthony playing at Candlestick Park, piling up chunks of yardage and scoring touchdowns. And across the Bay there's Rashun, a promising outfielder in the A's farm system, hitting home runs at the Coliseum.

"I was joking with him the other night, telling him to look at the Manning brothers and all the other brother duos in the pro game," Anthony recalled. "I said, 'Let's go catch them all and do it bigger than they did. Let's take on all those dudes.' "

Rashun, 20, would be fine with that. He is finishing up his third season of pro baseball with the Single-A Kane County Cougars in Geneva, Ill.

"Hopefully we both can be watching each other on big screens someday," he said.

The Dixons already have come a long way from a hardscrabble childhood and take nothing for granted. Growing up in Terry, Miss., the four Dixon sons and their mother sometimes were homeless -- forced to accept the help of extended family and twice having to live in shelters.

"My background pushes me every day," said Anthony, 22, a sixth-round pick out of Mississippi State who led the NFL in rushing during the exhibition games. "I think about how I grew up before every game I play. It reminds me why I put in all the work. Then I just go out there and attack."

The Dixons all are athletes, following in the footsteps of their father -- who played in the New York Mets system.

The youngest, Deshun, just started his pro baseball career after being selected in the 10th round in June by the Tampa Bay Rays. Second-oldest brother, Antwon, a linebacker at Division II Midwestern State, is redshirting this fall with a knee injury.

But their work ethic comes straight from their mom, Velma. When she and her husband divorced 14 years ago, Velma found herself supporting four kids alone, without child support. They moved often and once spent a year in a homeless shelter.

"It was very difficult," Velma said. "We had nothing. But we got through it all. I didn't turn to drugs and alcohol the way some people do. I turned to hard work, working two and three jobs. I'd like to think my kids learned something from seeing that."

They did.

"The difficult part was having to watch my mom go through it because she's such a hard worker," Rashun said. "We never had anything given to us while I was growing up."

Anthony added: "We banded together and decided something positive could come from this. We all wanted to put a smile on Mama's face."

The sons bought into the attitude that they would have to work for everything they got. At Mississippi State, the 6-foot-1, 233-pound Anthony set school records with 3,994 yards and 42 touchdowns in 48 games.

He was ecstatic to be drafted by his favorite childhood team but disappointed to be only a sixth-round pick. A DUI charge before Anthony's senior year may have raised character questions. But he has been a positive, I'll-do-anything-I'm-asked presence for the 49ers. His 300 yards on 74 carries with four touchdowns in the exhibition season, and the sudden retirement of Glen Coffee, put him in the mix to provide depth behind workhorse Frank Gore.

"There was no sense getting upset," Anthony said of the draft. "I didn't want to worry about asking questions on why I fell. I just decided that it was time to go work."

That's what Rashun already was doing in the A's organization.

He also signed a football letter of intent with Mississippi State. But then the A's selected him in the 10th round of the 2008 draft and offered a signing bonus worthy of a much higher pick -- \$600,000.

"I was excited to play football," Rashun said. "But the closer I got to the draft, more teams started talking to me, and I realized that I probably would have a better opportunity in baseball."

The past two years, Baseball America has named the 6-2, 210-pound Rashun the best overall athlete in the A's system. Rashun, a right-handed hitter whose play improved as the season progressed in Kane County, is batting .275 with eight home runs and 54 RBIs in 118 games.

"I'm becoming a more polished ballplayer," said Rashun, whose goal is to reach Double-A next season. "It's all about working my way up to the big leagues."

Things are looking up for the Dixons. Velma works at the same high school her kids attended. Anthony made the 49ers roster. And Rashun is intent on holding up his end of their all-Bay Area dream.

"Hopefully I'll be getting the chance to join him there," Rashun said.

Note: Former San Jose State receiver Kevin Jurovich was among eight players signed to the 49ers practice squad Sunday. The others are quarterback Jarrett Brown, fullback Jehuu Caulcrick, linebacker Bruce Davis, former Stanford tackle Matt Kopa, linebacker Keaton Kristick, safety Chris Maragos and defensive tackle Will Tukuafu.

Mazzaro struggles as A's can't sweep Angels

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

A's manager Bob Geren won't call it a trend, but it's no doubt happening too regularly.

Oakland pitcher Vin Mazzaro grooved a 3-0 fastball to Mike Napoli, who deposited it over the wall in left-center during a four-run inning that helped sink the A's in a 7-4 loss to the Angels on Sunday. The A's missed sweeping the Angels in a three-game series, which they last did in 2004.

A's pitchers lead the majors with four home runs allowed on 3-0 counts, and all four came during losses in the past 21 games. It was the second by Mazzaro, who was victimized in his previous start when Nick Swisher homered into the second deck at Yankee Stadium.

On consecutive days, Aug. 15-16, Jerry Blevins and Brett Anderson gave up homers on 3-0 counts to Minnesota's Jim Thome and Toronto's Jose Bautista.

Geren was asked what his pitchers could learn from the slip-ups.

"Honestly," he said, "don't get to 3-0."

Of course, it isn't always that simple. Is it?

"Our philosophy is throwing two of the first three pitches for strikes, and that's how you're successful," Geren said. "When you're 3-0, you're 0-for-3, and that's what you want to stay away from at all costs. A hitter can be as selective as he wants in that count."

Geren didn't want to hear that it's a trend, saying, "We actually have a trend of pitching ahead and pitching really well the last few months. That's more of our trend."

Nevertheless, Mazzaro's losing streak is six, longest by an A's pitcher this year. His last win was July 24, and his ERA in eight starts since then is 5.60.

On Sunday, two Angels homered off him in the fourth inning. Like Napoli, Bobby Abreu hit a two-run homer (the count was 0-1), and Mazzaro was done after Torii Hunter's RBI double in the fifth.

"I should be expecting it," Mazzaro said of opponents digging in on 3-0, adding he tried to throw down and away to Napoli and left the pitch up. Mazzaro said he's not fatigued but a "little frustrated" he's not locating better.

One problem could be the blister on Mazzaro's middle finger, according to catcher Landon Powell, who said it was there before Sunday.

"It's kind of like having a little bit of a leak of air in your tires and trying to go 90 mph," Powell said. "It's not going to run as smoothly. It's definitely affecting his breaking balls. They don't have the same bite."

The A's cut the deficit to 4-3 after Powell's RBI single in the third and Jeff Larish's two-run double in the fourth, but the Angels moved ahead 7-3 after scoring twice off Boof Bonser in the seventh. The A's scored their final run on Jack Cust's ninth-inning single.

Rajai Davis' baserunning mistake cut short a sixth-inning rally. Davis took off from first on a pitch to Cliff Pennington, who singled to right. Davis slid headfirst into second but tried advancing to third and was easily thrown out. Geren argued that shortstop Erick Aybar obstructed Davis, but the umpires weren't buying it.

Kouzmanoff leaves game with back issues

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Kevin Kouzmanoff singled to left field and barely made it to first base in the fifth inning. After a few steps - four, according to Kouzmanoff - he felt tightness in his back and was in discomfort by the time he reached the bag.

He was replaced by pinch-runner **Gabe Gross** and diagnosed with back spasms. It's uncertain when Kouzmanoff will return to third base. Today is unlikely.

"Normally when a guy leaves a game with an injury, it's not too often he plays the next game," manager **Bob Geren** said. "It is possible if he'll come in feeling great. We'll know a lot more in the morning."

Kouzmanoff injured his back in 2004 when falling down dugout steps pursuing a ball in the Arizona Fall League and was limited as a minor-leaguer in 2005 with a back injury. With the Padres in 2008, he missed six games with a sore lower back. Last September, he missed time with back and calf ailments.

Braden's ring: The ring the A's promised to **Dallas Braden** for his Mother's Day perfect game arrived, and **Lew Wolff** presented it to the pitcher in the A's clubhouse. Wolff congratulated Braden and playfully asked, "Can you do two in one year?"

"I don't know if I've got that club in my bag," Braden said.

The ring has 88 diamonds: 51 is his uniform number, 27 for the Rays who were retired and 10 for the A's who played in the game. A matching pendant goes to Braden's grandmother, **Peggy Lindsey**, who raised him after his mother's death and was at the game.

Braden plans to put it in a trophy case that includes two minor-league championship rings, five gloves from an all-lefty A's rotation and **Kurt Suzuki** and **Jack Cust** bobbleheads.

Briefly: Reliever **Brad Ziegler** on banning maple bats: "I would be in full support of it, but major-league hitters enjoy the harder wood. As a pitcher or fan, that's a risk you take. I just hope it doesn't take someone getting killed for someone to make a change." Ziegler has a gash on his back after being drilled by a shattered bat Friday. ... **Rajai Davis** stole his 42nd base, a career high, surpassing last year's 41.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Ribbon of hope: The A's raised \$70,650 on Breast Cancer Awareness Day, which benefits research, and a total of \$1.145 million in the 12 years of the A's-hosted event. Before the game, 500 breast-cancer survivors formed a symbolic ribbon on the field.

Drumbeat: Winning combination: day game at home

John Shea from the Coliseum, where the A's are seeking a sweep of the Angels -- but does it matter? . . . 9/5/2010 12:26PM

The A's twice beat the Rangers last weekend to cut the deficit in the AL West, then got clobbered by the Yankees four straight days in New York. Now they're home with two straight wins over the Angels, the deficit down to eight.

All the A's need is for Texas to have a simple nine-game losing streak, like the crumbling Padres.

"Baseball is a strange game," A's skipper Bob Geren said. "I don't think anyone would've predicted it, but it can happen. With the great young pitching (the Padres) have had, it would've been hard to predict that."

Regarding the A's: "We have to get pretty hot and (the Rangers) pretty cold. Everyone can do the math."

The A's are 40-27 at home and 31-14 in day games, the best mark in majors.

They have the lowest home ERA in the majors and lowest day ERA. Just don't bet the farm on night games on the road.

The lineup: CF Crisp, 1B Barton, 3B Kouzmanoff, DH Cust, 2B Ellis, LF Larish, RF Davis, C Powell, SS Pennington. RH Mazzaro on hill.

Long balls catch up to Mazzaro in A's loss

Righty allows two homers, five earned runs in 4 1/3 innings

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Vin Mazzaro doesn't dig the long ball.

As for his opponents? Now that's a whole different story.

For the second straight outing, Mazzaro was doomed by the home run, this time in a 7-4 loss to the Angels on Sunday, as the A's missed out on a three-game sweep.

"He really hasn't thrown the ball that well over the last month or so," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "He's thrown some decent games, but the overall command of the strike zone is not where it needs to be."

Since starting off the season with a 6-2 record and a 3.45 ERA, Mazzaro is 0-6 with a 5.60 ERA over his last eight starts. He hasn't won since July 24.

After Sunday's contest, A's catcher Landon Powell said Mazzaro has been battling a blister on his middle finger for a couple starts.

"It's kind of like having a little bit of a leak of air in your tires or a rock stuck in your tires and trying to go 90 mph -- it's not going to run quite as smoothly," Powell said. "For him, it definitely affected his breaking balls a little bit. It didn't have the same bite that it maybe sometimes does."

Throughout his brief career, the 23-year-old righty has had trouble limiting home runs, and it's especially been a problem lately. Five days after he served up a career-high three dingers to the Yankees in a tough loss, Mazzaro gave up a pair of two-run shots in a rough third inning on Sunday.

The first came on a 0-1 pitch to Bobby Abreu, who launched a belt-high fastball over the right-center-field wall to break a scoreless tie. Three batters later, Mike Napoli sent a 3-0 fastball deep to give the Angels an early 4-0 lead.

Against the Yankees, Mazzaro also served up a two-run homer to Nick Swisher on a 3-0 count.

"I've given up a couple hits on 3-0, 3-1 pitches, so I should be expecting them to be swinging," Mazzaro said. "It's just a matter of locating that fastball and keeping it down in the zone."

With the pair of blasts attached to his name, Mazzaro is tied with Ben Sheets for the team lead with 18 home runs surrendered. Mazzaro gave up 12 in 17 starts last season, but said he isn't too concerned with the amount of home runs he's given up.

"I'm just falling behind and leaving the pitch up," Mazzaro said. "The only way it's going to stop is if I keep attacking the zone, getting ahead."

Both Mazzaro and Geren said fatigue isn't a factor in his recent struggles. Mazzaro pitched more than 150 Minor League innings in 2007 and 170 more in 2008. He tossed a combined 148 innings last season between Triple-A and Oakland, while he has logged 152 2/3 total innings this season between the Minors and Majors.

"I'm feeling pretty good right now," Mazzaro said. "I'm feeling strong, healthy. Everything's working right."

Once Mazzaro spotted the Angels four runs, Oakland's lineup clawed back into contention by scoring three runs against Halos starter Ervin Santana.

Powell plated Rajai Davis with an RBI single in the third before Jeff Larish delivered a two-run double to the right-field gap in the fourth, scoring Jack Cust and Mark Ellis. But Larish would also be the final out for two of Oakland's best scoring chances on the afternoon.

After Santana walked Cust and Ellis to load the bases in the fifth inning, Larish struck out swinging to kill the threat. Larish also represented the tying run in the bottom of the ninth against Angels closer Fernando Rodney, but grounded out to second to end the game with runners on first and second. In all, Oakland left 11 men on base.

"He was able to keep us a little off-balance as far as his offspeed pitches," Davis said of Santana. "He had a pretty good fastball and he pitched good enough to win."

Santana finished six innings, allowing three runs (two earned) on six hits and four walks while striking out three.

After cutting the deficit to 4-3, Oakland didn't score until pushing across a futile run in the bottom of the ninth. Meanwhile, A's long relief man Boof Bonser surrendered two runs in his 2 1/3 innings, giving up a pair of RBI singles in the seventh.

"We put a lot of runners on base, put guys in motion and got some clutch hits," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "It was the offensive day we've been looking for, for some time. And it was a good time to get it."

Oakland third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff left in the fifth inning with lower back spasms. He hit a sharp single to left field off Santana, but grabbed his lower back while jogging to first and immediately left the game upon reaching the bag. Geren said Kouzmanoff will be day-to-day.

The A's missed out on a chance to pick up three games in as many days on the American League West-leading Rangers, who lost, 6-5, in Minnesota on Sunday. The A's trail Texas by eight games with 26 left to play.

A's Kouzmanoff exits with back spasms

Third baseman leaves in fifth inning after hitting single

By Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff left in the bottom of the fifth inning of Sunday's 7-4 loss to the Angels due to lower back spasms.

Kouzmanoff hit a hard single to left field on a 2-2 pitch from Ervin Santana, but grabbed his lower back about 15 feet out of the batter's box and jogged slowly down to first base. Head trainer Steve Sayles came out to first base to check on Kouzmanoff, who immediately left the game.

A's manager Bob Geren said Kouzmanoff will be day-to-day.

Kouzmanoff has provided the A's with a bit of a power boost lately, as he has knocked out four home runs in his last 10 contests. He leads the A's with 14 home runs and 69 RBIs this season.

Outfielder Gabe Gross pinch-ran for Kouzmanoff and entered the game in right field, moving Rajai Davis to left field and Jeff Larish to third base.

The A's have used the disabled list 23 times this year, two short of the team record set in 2008.

Braden's quick pick keeping runners honest

OAKLAND -- Since he's been 13 years old, Dallas Braden has realized the value of an effective pickoff move.

While Braden ranks second in the American League with eight pickoffs, he once picked off four runners in the same game. Granted, he was only 14.

"I had one inning in that game when I hit two guys and picked them off," Braden said. "Then I walked a guy and picked him off. That's how I got out of the inning."

Braden would be hard-pressed to pull off such a feat at this level, but his unique move has certainly commanded respect around the league. Unlike other pitchers who often use a leg kick to deceive the runners, Braden's move is a quick snap of his wrist and elbow that rarely uses his legs to create any power.

Though Oakland's rotation features two young lefties, Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez, Braden said he hasn't tried to pass on his knowledge when it comes to picking off runners.

"I do it purely based on feel and timing, just whatever kind of feel I get from the runners, so it's not something I would necessarily be able to teach," Braden said. "It's something that they could definitely work on and get comfortable at their own level with. But honestly, when you think about it, those are two types of guys especially that don't need something like that because they have the ability to go dominate the inning."

Braden said he's never possessed overpowering stuff, so he's always been looking for creative ways to get people out. Braden's pickoff prowess has also limited the opponents' ability to steal bases, as they have just one stolen base in 205 chances against him this season.

"Just because you can't get the guy out at the plate, doesn't mean you can't get that guy out again," Braden said. "There's always outs to be had in the game. The game dictates itself that way. ... Pickoffs are like bonus outs."

While Gonzalez commended Braden's move, he also said it's something that can't be duplicated.

"It's quick, bro," Gonzalez said. "One of the best pickoffs in the Major Leagues in my opinion. ... It's so hard to teach because the fact it's so ... bam. Instant. I think he does it just to show off sometimes."

Larish enjoying everyday chance with A's

OAKLAND -- While Jeff Larish barely got off the bench in his first stint with the A's, he's barely been out of the lineup since returning to Oakland for his second go-round.

Larish started in left field, batting sixth, for Sunday's series finale against the Angels, marking the 10th time in 13 games Larish has been in the starting lineup. After playing exclusively at first base and third base for his five-plus professional seasons, Larish has started six of the past eight contests in left field.

"I feel pretty comfortable out there now," Larish said. "It was just a matter of getting that first game under the belt because I haven't been out there in a while. But I haven't got a missile hit at me yet, so we'll see what happens. The ball's kind of snaking and shooting up [now with Oakland's field being used for football]."

As Oakland manager Bob Geren pointed out before Sunday's game, Larish has reached base safely in eight of nine games during his second stint.

"It's nice get the opportunity to play every day," Larish said. "I'm going to enjoy it while it lasts."

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki received a day off Sunday, his first full day of rest since Aug. 22.

Matinee stars: A's excel in day games

OAKLAND -- Entering play Sunday, the A's featured baseball's best record in day games at 31-14. Alas, their 36-54 record at night has put Oakland behind the eight ball in their quest for the American League West crown.

While it may just be the result of the game's quirky nature, Oakland manager Bob Geren offered up a few possibilities for the stark difference in results.

"You can see spins of balls and different things a little better in the day time," Geren said. "So sometimes weaker pitching is exposed more in the day time and our pitching is real good."

Geren also noted the large contingent of young players on his roster and how they may respond to day games after night games better than older players.

The A's will play their third day game in a row on Monday, as they will take advantage of Labor Day with a rare Monday matinee.

A's raise \$70,650 for breast cancer

OAKLAND -- The A's celebrated their 12th annual Breast Cancer Awareness Day on Sunday, raising \$70,650 for the cause.

Proceeds of the event will benefit the American Cancer Society, Cancer Prevention Institute of California and Susan G. Komen for the Cure. Funds were raised through the sale of commemorative memorabilia, raffles, special ticket packages and fan support.

Since the event's inception, the A's have raised more than \$1.145 million for breast cancer awareness, research and education. Each year, the A's also gives a \$5,000 "Gift of Faith" grant to a local charity in memory of the late TV reporter Faith Fancher. This season, the grant went to the Breast Cancer Emergency Fund of San Francisco.

As part of the pregame ceremonies, more than 500 breast-cancer survivors dressed in pink uniforms gathered on the field in the symbolic shape of a ribbon.

Worth noting

Before Sunday's game against the Angels, A's owner Lew Wolff presented Dallas Braden with a ring and a pendant for his grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, to commemorate Braden's perfect game. ... Class A Kane County locked up its sixth postseason berth in eight years with a 6-2 win over Wisconsin on Saturday. Five of Oakland's six Minor League affiliates have made the playoffs, all but the Rookie League A's.

A's have been running wild on the bases

By John Barone / MLB.com

The Athletics have been running wild lately. But with 26 regular-season games remaining, time is running out on their bid to catch the American League West-leading Rangers.

Oakland enters Monday afternoon's series opener against Seattle at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum eight games back of first-place Texas. In the stolen-base department, however, manager Bob Geren's club ranks second to none since the All-Star break.

The A's 59 second-half thefts pace the Major Leagues, thanks in large part to the efforts of outfielders Coco Crisp (18) and Rajai Davis (15) and shortstop Cliff Pennington (10). Oakland is 49-24 in games it's recorded a steal this season, but 18-45 when it doesn't.

Brett Anderson won't be stealing any bases Monday. Instead, the 22-year-old left-hander will aim to prevent them after yielding four runs, one of which was earned, on eight hits over six innings in Wednesday's road loss to the Yankees.

Anderson's Monday counterpart, Jason Vargas, also absorbed a tough-luck defeat Wednesday. The 27-year-old southpaw scattered four hits across seven frames of three-run ball against the Angels at Safeco Field, marking his 19th quality start of 2010.

Vargas, who's already set career highs in starts, innings, wins and strikeouts, has logged at least six frames in all but five of his 26 outings this year.

"You can't say enough about what the guy has done," Mariners catcher Josh Bard said. "This year has obviously been a big disappointment for us as a club, but he's been one of the bright spots.

"I hope he gets the credit that he deserves, because that guy is ready to pitch every fifth day and he's doing it."

Mariners: Strong on Labor Day

Seattle has won five of its past seven Labor Day games. ... The Mariners have scored three or fewer runs in 10 consecutive contests, the second longest streak in franchise history. ... Right fielder Ichiro Suzuki needs 40 hits to overtake Edgar Martinez (2,247) for the top spot on the club's all-time list.

Athletics: Strong ERA at home

The A's boast a Major League-best 2.85 home ERA. ... Oakland has won 14 of its past 19 day games. ... The A's have clubbed 13 home runs in their past 13 contests after totaling seven long balls over their previous 26 tilts.

Worth noting

Vargas is 2-0 with a 1.69 ERA in three appearances against Oakland, including one start. He has never started a game at The Coliseum. ... Anderson is 1-1 with a 0.47 ERA across three outings against Seattle this season, holding the Mariners to a .203 batting average over 19 innings of one-run ball.

Mazzaro Struggles Against Angels for the Loss

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 9/6/2010

Oakland, CA – They were one game away from a sweep, but things didn't fall in place for the A's. With the Texas Rangers being swept by the Minnesota Twins it would've been nice to chip away at the number of games Oakland falls behind the the top team in the standings. But the A's failed to stop the runs behind poor pitching from Vin Mazzaro and lost 7-4 to the Angels.

"He really hasn't thrown the ball that well over the last month or so," manager Bob Geren said. "He's thrown some decent games but overall command of the strike zone is not where it needs to be."

Mazzaro's performance was shaky from the start and he hasn't won since July 24. In 4 1/3 innings he gave up six hits, five runs (all earned), walked three and struck out none. In the third frame Mazzaro gave up two home runs to Bobby Abreu and Mike Napoli. Both hit two-run homers that advanced their lead to 4-0.

"I'm falling behind and leaving the pitch up," Mazzaro said. "The only way it's going to stop is if I keep attacking the zone, getting ahead."

The A's cut the lead to one in the fourth frame when Jeff Larish hit a two-run double. Bottom of the ninth they rallied late when Jack Cust singled in a run with two outs. Mark Ellis followed with a single before Angels closer Fernando Rodney retired Larish to end the game.

"We gave you the win yesterday," Ervin Santana said. "But this time tomorrow expect a loss when I step on the mound."

Santana was a man of his word, he completed six innings allowing six hits, three runs (all earned), four walks and three strike outs. During a nine game stretch he produced seven wins and two losses. With 6.3 runs per game Santana has a 15-9 record and tied Dean Chance for 10th on Angels all time list.

The Angels came alive offensively and resembled a different team than the past two days. Abreu homered, singled, walked and drove in three runs while scoring three times. Hideki Matsui delivered three hits, Jeff Mathis had two hits and Torii Hunter slammed an RBI double. A team effort by all collectively won the game.

"We put a lot of runners on base," manager Mike Scioscia said. "We put guys in motion and got some clutch hits." "It was the offensive day we've been looking for, for some time and it was a good time to get it."

Unfortunately for the A's the loss keeps them eight games behind Texas and the Angels are now 1 1/2 game behind Oakland who sits in second place. With 26 games remaining anything is possible and the A's will continue to play at their best and finish out the month strong.

Notes -Rajai Davis recorded his #42 steal and a new career high surpassing his #41 from last season.

Kevin Kouzmanoff left the game during the fifth inning with back spasms. Kouzmanoff leads the team with 14 home runs and 69 RBI's.

Today was the Oakland A's 12th Annual Breast Cancer Awareness Day. Over 500 Bay Area breast cancer survivors were in attendance and formed a symbolic human ribbon on the field in dedication of hope and survival. They released white doves which served as a symbol of hope. They raised a total of \$70,650 and the funds were raised through the sale of special ticket packages, commemorative pins, jerseys, hats, a autographed quilt, fan and sponsor support.

As part of "A Gift of Faith" grant, the A's will donate \$5,000 annually to local charity in memory of longtime KTVU channel 2 reporter, the late Faith Francher. This year's grant will be presented to the Breast Cancer Emergency Fund of San Francisco, which provides immediate financial assistance to low-income battling breast cancer when they are too sick to work.

Angels avoid sweep by A's

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Bobby Abreu and Mike Napoli helped the Los Angeles Angels find the power that's been missing from their lineup.

Abreu and Napoli each hit two-run home runs, leading the Angels to a 7-4 victory over the A's on Sunday, avoiding their first sweep by the A's in six years.

"This is the offensive day we've been looking for in quite some time," Angels' manager Mike Scioscia said. "It was a good day to get it."

Torii Hunter and Hideki Matsui also drove in runs for the Angels, who have still lost nine of their past 13 games.

Ervin Santana (15-9) gave up three runs and six hits to improve to 7-2 over his last nine starts. He walked four and struck out three.

"I know in years past I haven't gotten run support," Santana said. "I know the guys are trying to score. Maybe this is the year there's a lot of run support for me. When you score first, it's fun to pitch. It allows you to pitch better without adding too much pressure."

Jeff Larish drove in two runs for the A's, who lost for the fifth time in seven games. Landon Powell and Jack Cust each added an RBI.

Vin Mazzaro (6-8) lost his sixth straight decision after allowing five runs on six hits over 4 1-3 innings. He walked three and did not strike out a batter. Mazzaro, who pitched with a blister according to Powell, has given up 12 earned runs over his last eight innings and hasn't won since July 24 against the Chicago White Sox.

"He really hasn't thrown the game that well in the last month or so," A's manager Bob Geren said. "The overall command of the strike zone is not where it needs to be."

Santana completed at least six innings for the 12th time in his last 14 starts and has been remarkably efficient since starting the season 1-3. He has recorded a decision in 21 of his last 22 starts.

"He went out there and made good pitches," Scioscia said. "We got six strong innings and that was good enough. He's been very consistent and we always feel good with him on the mound."

Santana has a career 1.80 ERA against the A's and improved to 12-3 against them in 21 appearances, 19 starts.

"It's just being in the strike zone, working ahead and working quickly," Santana said. "Throwing fewer pitches allows you to go deeper into the game."

Abreu hit a two-run home run in the third to put the Angels ahead. He entered the at bat with two hits in his previous 34 at bats. Abreu later walked and scored and singled home a run in the seventh.

"I need to make better pitches," Mazzaro said. "I fell behind a lot and it hurt me. The only way that's going to stop is to keep attacking the zone and getting ahead."

Napoli also hit a two-run shot in the third to give the Angels a 4-0 advantage.

"Mike got jammed a little bit on that ball and still got it out," Scioscia said.

Rajai Davis walked to open the third and stole his career-high 42nd base. He scored when Powell singled.

Larish's double in the fourth cut the lead to 4-3. Jack Cust singled and Mark Ellis was safe on Erick Aybar's fielding error ahead of Larish.

Hunter doubled home a run in the fifth and RBI singles from Abreu and Matsui in the seventh iced the game.

Cust singled in a run with two outs in the ninth. Ellis followed with a single before Fernando Rodney retired Larish to end the game.

Notes: A's Breast Cancer Awareness Day raised \$70,650. ... A's IF Kevin Kouzmanoff left the game in the fifth inning with lower back spasms. ... The Angels scored more runs than they had in their previous four games combined. ... Angels RHP Dan Haren will make his first start against the Cleveland Indians in three years and the seventh overall. ... Abreu has six home runs against the A's this year. ... Santana matched Dean Chance for 10th on the Angels' all-time win list with his 74th victory.

Mazzaro still winless since July 24 as Angels knock A's around to win, 7-4

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 9/6/2010

Just like his first year in the majors in 2009, it's been a tale of two, distinct "seasons" for Oakland Athletics starter Vin Mazzaro in 2010.

Consider:

- In 2009, Mazzaro won his first two major-league starts without giving up a run, before going winless in the month of July with a 8.51 ERA. He finished the year 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA;
- In 2010, the A's young righty won six of his first eight decisions, before going winless in August. His record now stands at 6-8 with a 4.29 ERA.

After today's 7-4 shellacking at the hands of the Los Angeles Angels, Mazzaro has now lost six straight decisions and is winless since late July.

Mazzaro's last two starts have been especially poor, as he's given up 14 runs (12 earned) in just eight innings of work against New York and Los Angeles.

He's been victimized by bad defense at times this year (12 unearned runs have scored off him in only 115 1/3 innings), but that wasn't the case so much today.

Never a great strikeout pitcher anyway, Mazzaro didn't get a single "K" today -- while walking three and giving up six hits in only 4 1/3 innings of work. Two of the hits were home runs, each a two-run shot in the third inning, that buried the A's offense in a deep hole early.

Generally, Mazzaro is putting too many men on base: he gives up more than a hit per inning (never a good sign), and his walk totals are too high (3.75 BB/9) for a pitcher who isn't overpowering the batters with his stuff (5.9 K/9).

Mazzaro turns 24 at the end of this month, so he has some time to improve. But after over 200 innings in Oakland over the past two seasons, he still hasn't turned the corner on the way to being consistently good.

Scouts and those watching Mazzaro insist he has the tools to succeed, but so far, it just hasn't shown up on the field of play with any consistent regularity.

He didn't make the A's rotation out of spring, but he's the No. 5 guy now due to injuries. If he wants to hold on to that slot for 2011, he's going to have to show the kind of improvement Trevor Cahill and Gio Gonzalez have shown this season.

Dolich: Birth of Billyball

Andy Dolich, CSNBayArea.com

During the recent filming of "Moneyball" at the Oakland Coliseum, I had a flash back to the birth of "BillyBall." In 1981, A's fans began embracing the aggressive play that Billy Martin put into action in 1980, when he took over as manager.

"BillyBall" and "Moneyball" are about as similar as the ballet and The Nutcracker as performed by the Mike Singletary Dancers. In 1981, current A's GM Billy Beane, the focal point of Michael Lewis's best selling book "Moneyball" was hitting .268 for Lynchburg in the Carolina League. In 114 games playing on the same team with Daryl Strawberry, Billy smacked 13 doubles 9 triples and 9 homers. He also developed a nasty hole in his swing when the curveball headed toward the strike zone. Brad Pitt was 18, having just graduated from Kickapoo High School in Springfield, Missouri and six years away from his career start with the Ewings on TV's Dallas. Michael Lewis was completing his college education at Princeton. Billy Martin, the A's field general wasn't spending any time worrying about sabermetrics, computer printouts, on-base percentage or guys from Ivy League schools armed with MBAs and spread sheets.

The Haas family purchased the A's from Charlie Finley in August of 1980 for a little over 11 million dollars. If current A's pitcher Ben Sheets wanted to blow his 2010 salary he could have bought the team. That's inflation for you!

In a match made south of heaven, Finley hired Martin after the A's last place finish in 1979 when the green and gold went a mule like 54-108. Billy Martin, born and raised in West Berkeley had surprised the baseball media mavens by coming home and pushing the A's to a second place finish in 1980.

So how did this whole "BillyBall" phenomena come about? It all started with Oakland Tribune sports columnist Ralph Wiley's take on Martin's team during a spring training visit to Scottsdale in 1980. Wiley's words nailed BillyBall to a T. The team mimicked their skipper with a volatile, in your face, go for broke, tactically brilliant style of play. Wiley originally penned it as "Billy ball" until the ad guys, (more on that later) sloganeered it to the one word, "BillyBall."

I was hired by the A's in November of 1980 as Vice President of Business Operations. In simple terms, I was the (CTS), chief ticket seller. We had a bit of an uphill climb. In 1979 the A's drew a Major League low attendance of 306,763. That's a measly 3,787 fans a game! That attendance was so putrid that the team was derisively nicknamed the Triple A's. The next lowest attendance was the Atlanta Braves at 769,465. The Dodgers led the league that year with 2,860,954 and the Giants did a respectable 1,446,402. For comparison the Dodgers outdrew the A's by only 31,000 fans per game.

As I was getting my bearings as a newbie to life on the Hayward fault after living on the East Coast, I read Wiley's original "BillyBall" column in the Trib and filed it away as a possible idea for our 1981 marketing campaign.

When the late Walter A. Haas Jr. bought the team there was no front office to speak of. Only Carl Finley, Charlie's cousin, and PR Director Mickey Morabito handled all the business, stadium operations, marketing and PR duties. Basically it was a franchise that had been run at a minor league level for five years. After the championship years of the early 70s, Finley had shut everything down. Fans were hungry for something to happen, so anything we did looked inspired. With Walter Haas owning the team in the Bay Area, we had the equivalent of the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.

Customer service was nonexistent. The A's reception area had a three legged desk that had a water stained oak tag sign on it that said, "Dial 0 for Assistance." When you dialed there was no one on the other end.

Finley looked at the marketplace as a 20 mile radius of the Coliseum. We aimed at a market that went from Sacramento in the north, Fresno in the south and Reno in the west.

We had very little time to select an ad agency. Instead of the normal ad agency pitches, we created an advertising RFP (request for proposal) in which we told the agencies what we were looking for. The only agency that came close to our vision was Hal Riney and Partners. This agency, headed by the cantankerously brilliant Hal Riney, was becoming a veritable all-star team of creative power. It was an incubator of innovation producing future ad legends Jeff Goodby, Rich Silverstein, John Crawford, Andy Berlin, Jerry Andelin and Graham Kirk, among others.

Many of the losing agencies took the easy way out and showed us unimaginative storyboards of Billy Martin arguing with umpires or fans jumping up and down after a home run or great play. We sent them to the showers after an early hook.

In a series of meetings with our new agency we hammered out the basics of what "BillyBall" was to become. We decided that Billy Martin was our focal point and even with his mercurial personality he represented what we wanted our fans to believe in. "BillyBall, It's a Different Brand of Baseball."

We just picked up on what was going on at the Coliseum. With no big bats, Martin focused on the running game. Remember, Rickey Henderson created the "Rickey Run" by stealing 100 bases in 1980. Billy used the stolen base, hit and run and suicide squeezes. His trademark became the delayed steal of home. If the pitcher threw to first to hold the runner on with men on first and third, the runner on third would break for home. Martin had timed the play in practice so he knew that it would almost always work or at least cause some sort of havoc.

The A's almost disappeared from the baseball landscape in the late 70s after Finley's selloff. Under Martin, the team re-emerged with a new class of stars led by Henderson, Mike Norris, Dwayne Murphy and Tony Armas, along with the Five Aces pitching staff of Mike Norris, Steve McCatty, Brian Kingman, Matt Keough, and Rick Langford. We also had a Beard (Dave), a Chicken (Stanley), and a Klutts (Mickey). We even graced the cover of Time magazine with Billy Martin as the coverboy.

The print, radio and TV ads were precedent setting. We didn't use canned baseball footage or disjointed talking heads to sell A's Baseball. We created humorous slices of life.

MEMORIES

The camera zooms in on an elderly couple rocking on the porch of their small house. The white haired wife is a sweet looking grandmotherly type. She starts talking, "Billy was a quiet boy. He stayed out of trouble. He was....polite to everybody." As she prattles on, her basset hound looking husband leans toward the camera, eyebrows arched and head shaking in utter disbelief. He points to his head. "Mother doesn't remember too good anymore", he intoned.

A graphic comes up on the screen with the announcer saying "Billyball, It's a different Brand of Baseball."

The other spots that helped us win Clio's (the Oscars of the ad world) were:

CONFERENCE

Pitcher Steve McCatty calls time out and there is a mound conference. "Hey, does anyone remember Wally's best friend on Leave it to Beaver?" Mike Heath, Davey Lopes and Cliff Johnson are all perplexed. Billy comes out, sighs and says "Eddie Haskell" as he turns to walk back to the dugout. McCatty, "That's why he's the manager."

RICKEY LAUNCH

A super slo-mo of Rickey stealing second with a voice over of a NASA shuttle launch.

TIMID SOUL

A fan comes up to the ticket window and there is Billy as the seller. The guy is timid and by the end of the transaction Billy has the guy foaming at the mouth. The actor in the spot became a rich guy doing Round Table Pizza commercials.

NO ARGUMENT

Billy comes out to question an umpire's call and plays the Mother Theresa role. It's a classic.

We had to shoot the spots early in the morning or after spring training workouts and games were finished. All of them were done at our spring training facility. Shooting the morning spots was like herding gerbils. In those days, players and coaches would repair to the Pink Pony and other local adult beverage watering holes after a tough day at the office.

It took me awhile to decipher spring training code. I would be freaking out badgering Mickey Morabito, "Where is Billy? When will he be here. We have a crew of 30 eating our money just standing around!"

Billy has the flu they would tell me. "The flu?, he was fine yesterday." It took me awhile to understand the spring training flu was caused by an overdose of Jack Daniels, Mr. Stoli or Bud Weiser.

Did the campaign work? You be the judge. In 1981 the A's drew 1.3 million fans with 30 dates lost because of the players strike. Had we not lost those games, the A's would have had the greatest one year attendance increase in the history of baseball from 800K to about 2.2 million. The previous record was set when the Houston Colt 45's moved into the Astrodome. We went from 3,797 fans per game in 1979 to 26,000 a game. From 326 seasons tickets to 4,600 season tickets.

It sure helped that the A's exploded out of the starting gate in 1981 by winning their first eleven in a row, 17 out of 18. We dropped a game at home on April 19th, 3-2 to the Mariners. After a three game series in New York on May 14th, we stood at an eye popping 25-9. We won the first half in the strike shortened season and ultimately were swept by the Yankees in the A.L. Playoffs. A bit of history was created when, in the first playoff game at the Coliseum on Oct. 15, "Crazy George" Henderson created the wave in the left field upper deck.

So when you slide into your seat at the local Cineplex next spring to watch "Moneyball" with Angelina's hubby playing the cerebral Billy Beane, remember that Billy Martin was playing himself in the most exciting action thriller of 1981, a blockbuster hit that was thrilling sellout crowds at the Oakland Coliseum and beyond. It was called BillyBall.

A's Take Game 2

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 9/5/2010

Oakland, CA – No surprise the Oakland A's can pushed through tough situations. Another challenging day of pitching led to the A's defeat over the Angels 3-1. No comparing Trevor Cahill's performance to Gio Gonzalez who also pitched six scoreless innings the day before without presenting their best at the mound.

"They're learning how to pitch and growing up in the process," Mark Ellis said. Little things aren't bothering them like it used to, Gio especially. "They're so young, but getting mentally tougher and pitching amazing!" "They're fun to watch and will only get better and better."

Cahill pitched six scoreless innings but struggled by giving up a career-high six walks. He allowed four hits, no runs and four strike outs. Deemed one of his worst performances while having trouble finding the plate as 60 of his 116 pitches were strikes. The defense took over and backed him through victory.

Top of the fifth frame, Rajai Davis made an unbelievable throw from left field to third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff. Alberto Callaspo tried to take an extra base when Howie Kendrick's singled, but was unsuccessful when he was tagged out. This was the type of defense displayed behind just "OK" pitching from the young 22 year old.

"I definitely almost had a heart attack," said Cahill. "But I guess I like to put extra pressure on myself." "The command wasn't there, but I got out of some jams which was the key." "The goal was not to walk anybody and I think I set a new record for walking everybody."

The Angels scored their only run when Torii Hunter hit a solo home run top of the eighth inning. Hunter's solo shot helped avoid another shutout with no help from Angels pitcher Jered Weaver who is 3-6 in 16 appearances against the A's.

Weaver allowed six hits, three walks and gave up two solo runs in the first and second frames. He's lost his last five starts and recorded 11-11 while his opponent American League All-Star Cahill moved to 15-6.

"They're not falling in the right spot right now," Weaver said. "I was brought up not to give up, I'll continue to battle and let the chips fall where they may."

Those chips fell all over the place as he self destructed along with his teammates. The Angels had an opportunity in the first inning before Callaspo's out by Davis's throw to third. Cahill allowed a single to Howard and followed with consecutive walks before Hideki Matsui popped up to end the inning.

"It feels good to win," Coco Crisp said. "It would be nice to win the division but right now our focus is on the Angels." "Right now we have to worry about our team and keep the ball rolling to finish the month out strong."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

River Cats edge Sky Sox, stay hot for playoffs

By Robbie Enos / Sacramento River Cats

The satisfaction of officially owning the Pacific Conference Southern Division crown hasn't relaxed the Sacramento River Cats' bats just yet.

They rolled off a 3-2 victory over the Colorado Springs Sky Sox, putting them at the 79 win mark. If they complete the sweep against the Sky Sox Monday, it will be the sixth time and third straight season that the River Cats have broken the 80-win barrier.

Travis Buck led off the top of the ninth inning with the score tied at 2-2. Buck boarded on a single and was then replaced by pinch runner Anthony Recker. Corey Brown singled to right field, putting runners on the corners. Michael Taylor delivered the final blow, hitting a sacrifice fly to center field to bring Recker in.

The first three innings of the game were scoreless with only two combined hits. Colorado Springs starter Jeff Francis finished after those innings with just one hit allowed to go with three strikeouts. River Cats starter Bobby Cramer allowed one baserunner.

The silence was broken by Colorado Springs in the bottom of the fifth. Mike Paulk singled with a ground ball past Corey Wimberly at third, and then advanced to second on a wild pitch. Paul Phillips executed perfect small ball, hitting a ground ball to second baseman Adrian Cardenas to advance Paulk to third.

Warren Schaeffer popped out and it looked like Cramer might get out of trouble. But that hope was put away when Cole Garner drove an 0-1 pitch into center field, bringing in Paulk for the first score of the game.

The Cats returned the favor in the second, beginning with a fielding error that allowed Travis Buck to get on base. Corey Brown walked and then both runners advanced on a Michael Taylor groundout. Adrian Cardenas singled to right to score Buck, and then Brown came home on a Wimberly bunt, giving the Cats the one-run lead.

Colorado tied the score back up thanks to more production from Paulk. He doubled to lead off the bottom of the seventh and then scored after Phillips brought him in again. Paulk's hit was his 20th double of the season.

Josh Donaldson and Cardenas both had two-hit days for Sacramento. Cramer finished after seven innings of work, allowing eight hits and a walk. His two earned runs allowed put his ERA at 1.94 for the season. Michael Benacka earned his sixth win of the season, and Fernando Hernandez registered his fourth save.

After Monday's game at 12:05 p.m., Sacramento will have Tuesday off before their first two playoff games at home. Both games will be at 7:05 p.m.

Battle for home field comes down to final game

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

The Midland RockHounds' bid for home field advantage in the first round of the playoffs and starting pitcher Anthony Capra's attempt for his first win in a month were denied on Sunday.

Facing the very same Frisco RoughRiders they'll face in the Texas League South Divisional Series, the RockHounds lost 10-5 at Citibank Ballpark and are now tied in the standings with the RoughRiders. Today's game will decide whether the RockHounds or RoughRiders will earn home field should a Game 5 be necessary in their upcoming series.

"It's a big game," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said of today's match up. "Both sides want to win. The fifth game will be a crucial situation. It gives you a chance to come home and sleep in your own bed the night before."

Capra (6-13) took the loss and, in the process, made his sixth straight start without earning a win. That's not to say he's been a liability every time he's toed the rubber.

He's posted a 4.85 ERA during his winless six-start stretch, but his lack of command has prevented him from staying in games long enough to earn a victory, averaging fewer than five innings per outing. In those six starts, he's walked just as many batters, 19, as he's struck out in 26 innings.

Such was the case on Sunday when he walked and struck out four in 5 2/3 innings as he allowed seven runs on just six hits. All four batters he walked came around to score. The three innings in which he didn't walk a batter, he blanked the RoughRiders.

"It's consistency," RockHounds pitching coach Scott Emerson said. "He has to concentrate and focus. He's got the ability to throw everything for strikes. You saw it for three innings. He has the ability to repeat his mechanics."

If there was one positive from Capra's outing, it was that he nearly made it through six innings.

The RockHounds are expected to use only relief pitchers today against the RoughRiders, so the RockHounds couldn't afford for Capra to depart early and put more strain on the bullpen. Capra's pitch count was at 53 after two innings, but he made it through his final 3 2/3 innings on 44 pitches.

"That was huge for him to rebound after the second," Bush said. "Then he almost made it out of the sixth. That was very big."

NOTEBOOK

ROCKHOUNDS BITES: While Saturday's loss was a forgettable one for the RockHounds, there was one brilliant moment in the action. In the third inning, RockHounds catcher Gabriel Ortiz, in the lineup to give Petey Paramore a break from behind the plate, turned a 5-2 double play to end the inning. With Jose Felix at third and Marcus Lemon at first, Renny Osuna hit a grounder to Alex Valdez at third. Felix was moving on the pitch, so Valdez threw home to Ortiz. Ortiz ran Felix back to third and tagged him out. Amid the chaos, Lemon bolted for third, hoping to reach the base while Felix was being run down. Instead, Ortiz dived between Lemon and the bag, put on the tag and ended the threat.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: Frisco RoughRiders (34-35) -- Michael Schlact (RHP, 1-4, 7.11); Midland RockHounds (34-35) -- TBA

Late Blaze Rally Dooms Ports

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - Fortunately for the Stockton Ports, Sunday night's game meant nothing in terms of the playoffs. Had that not been the case, the contest might sting for more than a night. The Ports, holding a 7-3 lead into the 7th, allowed 10 runs over the final two innings and allowed the Bakersfield Blaze to come back and earn a 13-9 win, their first victory of the series.

For the fourth straight night, the Ports scored in the first inning. Stockton got an RBI double from Stephen Parker and an RBI groundout from Jeremy Barfield to take a 2-0 lead. Parker now has 98 has a team-leading 98 RBI on the season.

Stockton added three more runs in the second on one swing of the bat-a three-run homer from Kent Walton to make it a 5-0 lead.

Stockton's first five runs came off Blaze starter Robbie Ross, who went five innings and allowed eight hits while striking out six.

It was a big fly that got Bakersfield on the board in the third. Joe Bonadonna started the frame with a single and Erik Morrison followed with a two-run blast to left to make it a 5-2 contest.

Bakersfield added a run off Ports starter Ian Krol in the fifth. With a runner at third and one out, Chris McGuinness reached base on an error made by first-baseman Dusty Napoleon and was credited with an RBI as Bonadonna scored from third to make it a 5-3 game.

Krol went five innings and left with a chance to receive the win, allowing three runs on seven hits while walking two and striking out five.

The Ports added a pair of runs in the sixth on a two-out, two-run double from Brandon Pinckney off Blaze reliever Shane Zegerac that gave Stockton a 7-3 cushion. The runs were charged to reliever Hector Nelo who tossed two-thirds of an inning before having to leave due to injury.

After Mike Hart tossed a scoreless sixth, the ball was handed to Trey Barham in the seventh. Barham struggled, allowing a solo home run to Morrison-his second of the night-to start the inning. Two batters later, Mike Bianucci doubled, David Paisano singled, and Tommy Mendonca tied the game with a three-run homer to right. Barham finished the inning and allowed four runs on five hits while recording a strikeout.

Stockton took the lead back in the top of the eighth without the benefit of a hit. Blaze reliever Yoon-Hee Nam (4-2) started the inning by walking Tyler Ladendorf. Napoleon tried to sac-bunt Ladendorf to second. Nam fielded the ball and decided to throw to second and the throw was high, putting two on with nobody out. Walton then drew a walk to load the bases and two batters later with one out, Pinckney drove in Ladendorf with a sac-fly to right to break the tie and give Stockton an 8-7 advantage.

Bakersfield, however, would come back with their biggest inning of the series in the eighth. With Jose Pina (2-4) on the hill and one out, McGuinness homered to right-center to tie the game at 8-8. McGuinness' home run was the first of seven consecutive hits of Pina. Two batters later, Paisano hit a two-run homer to left to make it a 10-8 Blaze lead. The Blaze went on to score three more runs to take a commanding 13-8 lead.

Pina would be charged with the loss, allowing six runs (five earned) in a third of an inning of work. Pinckney, who was the DH in the contest, came on to pitch in the inning. Pinckney threw two pitches and induced two fly ball outs to end the frame.

Nam received the win for the Blaze after allowing an unearned run in his lone inning of work. Stockton added a run in the ninth off Blaze reliever Trevor Hurley, who struck out the side to end the ballgame.

The Ports and Blaze will play a matinee contest to close out the 2010 regular season at Sam Lynn Ballpark. Fabian Williamson (4-2, 4.66 ERA) will take the ball for Stockton, opposed by Bakersfield right-hander Wilfredo Boscan (9-13, 4.65 ERA). First pitch is set for 1:15 p.m. PDT.

Cougars Keep Rolling Vs. Wisconsin

Kane County win streak hits 5 thanks to balanced offense, solid 'pen work

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars used two big innings and an 11-hit attack Sunday night to beat the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, 9-4, in front of 7,392 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars have won five consecutive games and have matched their season-high for games above .500 at 10. The Cougars also solidified the 2nd-half Western Division championship on Sunday, which means they play Quad Cities on Wednesday night in the opening round of the Midwest League playoffs.

The Cougars trailed, 1-0, in the second when Juan Nunez nailed a two-run double for a 2-1 lead. After the Rattlers responded with three in the third against Aaron Larsen, the Cougars took a permanent lead with a four-run fourth. Mitch LeVier led off with a homer, Tyreece House added a sacrifice fly and Conner Crumbliss and Anthony Aliotti each poked RBI singles. Aliotti also belted a two-run triple during a three-run sixth that accounted for the 9-4 final.

Larsen pitched four innings and gave up four runs -- three earned -- in a no-decision. Connor Hoehn and Rob Gilliam (7-6) each worked one scoreless inning, Josh Lansford logged two and Jose Guzman handled the ninth, as the quartet combined for five shutout innings. Efrain Nieves (4-5) took the loss for Wisconsin. The Cougars are one win away from posting the 10th 40-win half in franchise history.

The Cougars (39-29, 71-66) and Timber Rattlers (31-38, 57-80) conclude the regular season Monday afternoon at 1 CT. Kenny Smalley (0-1, 6.14) will make a spot start, as the Cougars have pushed back Murphy Smith (8-2, 3.64) to Game 1 of the playoffs on Wednesday. Nick Bucci (5-7, 3.72) will go Wisconsin. The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and www.kccougars.com with pre-game coverage starting at 12:45 p.m..