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AOL Fanhouse

AL Cy Young Race Boiling Down to Ultimate Have vs. Have-Not Question

9/07/2010 11:02 PM ET By John Hickey

The argument for years about baseball's Gold Glove awards is that the winners always seem to be players who could hit, too, even though that's not part of the qualification for the award.

The question now is whether or not the Cy Young Award, baseball's ultimate pitching honor, is heading down a similar path.

Let me explain. Some pitchers are buoyed by great offensive teams. They're more likely to get the nod than pitchers who have to beg for runs from anemic offenses.

In the American League in 2010, we have one of the best have vs. have-not matchups ever.

Yankees lefty CC Sabathia, 2010's first 19-game winner, could be on the brink of his second Cy Young win in four years. The thing is, should he be?

If you are talking about pitching, pure pitching, then Sabathia (19 wins, a 3.14 ERA, 170 strikeouts in 209 innings) has had a fine year. Head west and north, though, and you come to Felix Hernandez, the Seattle right-hander who is having a lights-out year.

It comes down to one number that stands apart from all the rest -- Hernandez only has 11 wins. Pitching for the offensively challenged Seattle Mariners will do that for you, even when you lead the league in innings pitched (219 1/3) and strikeouts (209) and are fractionally second in the AL in ERA (2.30).

As Seattle DH Russell Branyan put it when talking of Hernandez, "He's been Cy Young incredible; we just haven't scored much for him.

"I've seen pitchers have this happen to them for 10 or 12 games. But never for a whole season like this."

In Hernandez's 10 losses, the Mariners have scored 10 runs. Of those, only seven were scored when he was actually in the game.

AL Cy Young Contenders

Leaders in each category in bold. WAR stands for wins above replacement. FIP stands for fielding-independent pitching
Source: Baseball-Reference.com and FanGraphs.com Pitcher

	W	ERA	K	BB	WHIP	IP	WAR	FIP
Clay Buchholz (Red Sox)	15	2.25	103	56	1.06	151 2/3	3.2	3.62
Trevor Cahill (Athletics)	15	2.72	94	54	1.07	178 2/3	1.9	4.21
Felix Hernandez (Mariners)	11	2.30	209	60	1.08	219 1/3	5.9	2.96
David Price (Rays)	17	2.87	163	71	1.23	178 2/3	3.6	3.47
CC Sabathia (Yankees)	19	3.14	170	66	1.22	209	3.9	3.62

Contrast his run support to that of Sabathia, who has the benefit of playing for a Yankee team that is first in the league in runs scored to the Mariners' last. Not only have the Yankee hitters provided Sabathia with 170 runs worth of support (that's 5.86 runs for each of his 29 starts), but the Yankees scored more runs for Sabathia by the end of June (94) than the Mariners had scored for Hernandez through the end of August (92).

The Mariners have averaged 3.17 runs per game for each of Hernandez's first 29 starts, meaning essentially that Sabathia has a buffer of more than 2 1/2 runs per start before he ever takes the mound. That's going to add up to more wins over time -- a lot more wins.

Seattle has nine games in which it has scored either one or zero runs when Hernandez has been the starter. New York has had three games offering such little support to Sabathia.

"There are a lot of pitchers who pitch well when their teams are going good," Seattle right fielder Ichiro Suzuki said after Sunday's eight shutout innings by Hernandez. "What's tough is to do it in this situation like we have where he's not getting any run support.

"Should Felix be the Cy Young winner? That's not for me to say. He's got the numbers to do it, except for the wins. Unfortunately, I don't have the right to choose."

Again, this is not to decry anything Sabathia's done, because winning games is at baseball's core, and he's won more this year than anybody. It's just not evident statistically that he's pitched better, which is supposed to be what the Cy Young is about.

Curiously, Hernandez was on the other end of the debate last year -- well, his backers were; he's willing to take things pretty much as they come -- when he tied for the league lead in wins (19), finished second in ERA (2.49) and was 1 2/3 innings shy of leading the league in innings pitched.

Even then, however, the scales weren't nearly as out of balance as they are in 2010. Hernandez finished second to Zack Greinke of the Royals in the '09 Cy Young race, but even a bad Kansas City team scored 3.72 runs for Greinke in his starts and he only had three fewer wins (16 to 19) than Hernandez.

As much as anything, it helped Greinke's cause last year that no pitcher in the league won 20 games, that he got off to a fast start that generated early buzz and that he won the ERA title in dominating fashion at 2.16.

The question now is how the voters -- two members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America (BBWAA) from each American League city -- will balance the cases of Hernandez and Sabathia.

And it's best not to forget that current ERA leader Clay Buchholz of the Red Sox (15 wins and a 2.25 ERA in 151 2/3 innings), 15-game winner Trevor Cahill of the A's (third in ERA at 2.72 in 165 2/3 innings) and 16-game winner David Price (17 wins and an ERA of 2.87 in 178 2/3 innings) have considerable support, too.

What's in a Win? MLB FanHouse's 2010 AL Cy Young Award Roundtable

9/07/2010 11:43 PM ET By FanHouse Staff

FanHouse's John Hickey brought you the tale of one Felix Hernandez Tuesday evening. The Mariners' ace has been insanely good this season, and he's also been insanely starved for victories, prompting a stirring debate about how big of a factor a pitcher's record and win total should be in the voting process.

The debate wasn't so pronounced within the MLB FanHouse crew, but we discussed King Felix, CC Sabathia and the shape of the race anyway.

Read on below ...

Andrew Johnson: Let's start with a simple question, and then get into the heavy stuff. Who do you think should win and who do you think will win? Is this another litmus test to see where the Baseball Writers' Association of America sits with the wins statistic?

Ed Price: The BBWAA voting is evolving, but this is the best test case yet.

Wins have become less important -- check Tim Lincecum last year -- but still matter, as I think they should. But then again, I gave Ben Sheets a third-place vote in 2004 when he was 12-14 but third in the NL in ERA, third in innings and second in strikeouts.

This is the first time in a while that a pitcher stood out so strongly in every statistic but wins.

AJ: The question then, I guess, is how much they should matter, and my answer is not much at all. Is there any doubt that Felix Hernandez has been the best pitcher in the American League this year? He leads the league in innings and is five points behind Clay Buchholz for the ERA lead with all the attendant dominance in peripheral categories as well.

CC Sabathia leads in wins, and my question, especially to those covering the team -- and seem to favor him in this debate -- is, so what?

The Yankees have scored 10 or more runs in his starts six times. King Felix has gotten five or more runs of support from the Mariners in just seven of his starts. Why should he be punished for something he has no control over?

Wins can matter, but it seems to me like they only should as some sort of tiebreaker way down the list of potential tiebreakers if two pitchers are close in other areas. I don't see CC and Felix as particularly close.

Maybe the voters go for someone like Buchholz, David Price or Trevor Cahill as some sort of compromise in the middle of the CC-Felix spectrum?

Jeff Fletcher: I'm living proof that voting is evolving. I had always considered myself an enlightened voter, but I voted for Barry Zito over Pedro Martinez in 2002, my first year with a Cy Young ballot. I also voted for Bartolo Colon over Johan Santana in 2005 under similar circumstances. In both cases, I voted for the guy who eventually won, but in both cases, I now believe I picked the wrong guy.

We, as a group, are getting smarter, but we're not there yet. Although Zack Greinke and Tim Lincecum both won Cy Youngs with modest victory totals last year, the guy in the NL who actually got the most first-place votes was Adam Wainwright. Wainwright's only significant edge over Lincecum or Chris Carpenter was victories.

Are wins meaningless? Of course not. Some pitchers rack up more victories simply by staying on the mound longer, long enough for his team to take the lead, or long enough to reduce the number of relievers who could blow it. However, it's tough to find the specific case in which two pitchers are roughly equal in terms of their effectiveness, but one has thrown significantly more innings per start (not just more starts), and ends up with more wins. That is certainly not the case this year. Felix Hernandez is actually averaging more innings per start than CC Sabathia.

Sabathia has done one thing better than Hernandez: sit in the dugout while his team scores runs.

Josh Alper: Who should win? Hernandez and, frankly, any argument otherwise takes a serious stretch. Sabathia has been a rock in a pretty iffy rotation for the Yankees and he's had a perfectly fine season, but that doesn't make him a better pitcher. It just makes him better than A.J. Burnett and Javier Vazquez at making runs stand up. That's a damn low bar for an award.

Who will win? Sadly, I fear it will be CC. Last year made the BBWAA look very good by picking Greinke and Lincecum on the basis of statistics other than wins, but it wasn't really a typical year. No playoff team other than the Cardinals had a guy who piled up victories, and Adam Wainwright, said Cardinal, actually got the most first-place votes. For some reason,

it has always been easier for voters to overlook gaudy win totals when they come on lesser teams. If Sabathia is sitting with 22 wins on the best team in baseball, it's hard for me to believe that he won't win the award.

Hopefully I'm wrong because this is an important moment for the general acceptance of analytics in baseball. This isn't some deep formula at work, it's pretty simple to see that Hernandez is the best pitcher in baseball so long as you look at a picture that doesn't begin or end with victories.

Pat Lackey: I'm certainly not one to argue that Felix has been the best pitcher in the AL this year, but I think it's interesting how quickly sentiment is sliding away from wins and losses. People were worried that Zack Greinke's 16 wins last year wouldn't be enough even though he was pretty obviously the best pitcher in the AL, and he won easily. Meanwhile Tim Lincecum won the NL Cy Young with even fewer wins (15) than Greinke had.

Now we're seriously discussing Hernandez for the award and he probably won't even get to 15 wins. Heck, he might not even finish above .500 this season. Does that affect his chances? Say he pitches well in September but gets a couple losses and a couple no decisions and ends up 11-12. Does that hurt his chances compared to being 13-11?

The Sheets reference is a great one, Ed; Baseball-Reference.com has him as the second-best pitcher in the NL in 2004 by Wins Above Replacement (behind Cy Young runner-up Randy Johnson and ahead of that year's winner, Roger Clemens), but mostly because of his 12-14 record he finished eighth in that year's voting. That left him tied with one closer (Brad Lidge) and behind another one (Eric Gagne) and a 20-game winner that wasn't nearly as good as he was that year (Roy Oswalt). Does he finish higher in the voting in 2010 than he did in 2004?

John Hickey: I've seen Felix getting lots of love in the roundtable, and I should point out that I have talked to a few potential voters (not in the Seattle area), and I get then sense that they aren't comfortable with the eight-game gap between Hernandez and CC Sabathia.

I should also point out that I don't have a Cy Young vote this year. There are still plenty of people out there who value wins, and that can't be overlooked. I would actually be surprised if Felix won it, although I understand how insurgency voting can turn things upside down.

AJ: Just playing devil's advocate, but is the only reason people care about wins because other people care about wins? Where would pitcher wins rank next to all the other statistics if you were to go to Baseball-Reference or FanGraphs or another statistical site and try to figure out who the best pitcher in the AL is? It wouldn't rank in my top five. Maybe not even in my top 10.

But that's just me.

Basically I'm looking for a compelling reason to care, at all, about wins.

JF: I think there may also be an us-against-them mentality with some voters. A lot of the sabermetric stuff, in my opinion, goes too far, especially the whole FIP concept, which boils pitchers down to nothing more than a collection of strikeouts, walks and homers. That's the sort of thing that can cause someone who has been around the game a long time to revolt against the non-traditional stats.

However, you don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. While FIP -- and WAR, which comes from FIP -- may not give pitchers enough credit for what they do, you don't have to go all the way to the other end of the spectrum and rely on wins and losses.

There are plenty of good, traditional stats in the middle. My favorite is the most basic of all: ERA.

Marc Lancaster: Based strictly on the sheer weight of data generated by a 162-game season, there's little question that baseball is the most heavily analyzed sport we have in these days of sabermetrics and Pitch F/X. But it also remains the most traditional sport in many regards, and that extends from its old-guard executives, scouts and managers to the writers who make a living covering the game.

So no matter how much supporting evidence we pile up to demonstrate Felix Hernandez has been the best pitcher in the American League this season -- as I, too, believe he has been -- and despite the evidence of progress in recent voting in favor of Zack Greinke and Tim Lincecum, it's going to be a tough sell to many of those writers if Sabathia ends up with, say, 22 wins to King Felix's 12 or 13.

Baseball just has an inertia to it, and it's very, very difficult to move it in another direction when it has been rolling one way as long as anyone can remember. So while there's little question that the 28 BBWAA members who will be voting for the AL Cy Young Award will do more homework than those tasked with choosing, say, the Gold Glove winners, there is a certain reliance on tradition at work here.

I'm not saying it's right, but it's there. And that could ultimately lead to the Cy Young winner being determined, not by some quasi-objective parsing of numbers upon which everyone can agree, but by the luck of the draw when it comes to the philosophies of those 28 voters. However it shakes out, it will give those 28 writers and the rest of us another storyline to debate when the award is handed out in November.

AJ: Food for thought ... Felix isn't even the No. 1 sabermetric candidate according to WAR or FIP. Francisco Liriano and Cliff Lee both grade out better on those fronts, and they are far on the fringes of the discussion.

Tom Fornelli: While I can't add much to this debate that hasn't been talked about as far as statistics are concerned, I will add this. If you ignore all the stats and just go with what you see with your eyes, then I think Felix is the obvious choice.

I've seen both Felix and CC pitch plenty of times this season, and while there's no denying that Sabathia is a very good pitcher, when I see him throw I'm thinking to myself: "nice pitch."

When I see Felix throw, I'm thinking to myself: "Wow, that's just not fair."

Baseball is a team sport, but I hate punishing players for being on bad teams when handing out individual awards. Felix's record is directly related to the quality of team he pitches for, and comparing the Mariners to the Yankees is just as unfair as being asked to hit against Hernandez. Put Hernandez on the Yankees, and do you have any doubt he would win 20 games -- at least -- this season?

EP: Back in 2004, I asked then Rockies manager Clint Hurdle if Randy Johnson (16-14, 2.60 ERA, led league in strikeouts) should win.

"You talk about Cy Young, you're talking about the baddest dude in the league, aren't you?" Hurdle said. "He's the baddest dude in the league for me."

JA: I don't even think it is a sabermetric/non-sabermetric thing. These things are just tools to use in the analysis of the question and when you weigh them all together, along with actually watching the guy pitch and do his thing, Felix comes out on top. You can't just use one thing and make every decision based off of that, be it wins, WAR, FIP or whatever.

I'm not sure you can discount the fact that CC as the other guy is a big factor. If it was Hughes or Vazquez, say, that was leading the Yankees in wins it would probably be less of an issue. CC is an establishment guy, has already won a Cy Young and no one is going to be embarrassed about writing his name down.

That's a great quote, Ed. Totally sums it up.

Felix is the baddest dude in town right now.

Newsday.com

Davidoff: Hernandez more deserving of Cy Young than CC

September 8, 2010 by KEN DAVIDOFF

Barring injury - and the big fella is more durable than a green sea turtle - CC Sabathia will pick up a 20th victory for the first time in his career before this 2010 regular season concludes.

Even if last night proved not to be that moment, as the Orioles continued their impressive play with a 6-2 victory over Sabathia and the Yankees at Yankee Stadium for the defending World Series champs' third straight loss.

A 20th win will represent a neat accomplishment for one of the best pitchers of his generation. And it should factor as much into his American League Cy Young Award candidacy as should his shoe size, his political affiliation and what he had for breakfast on French Independence Day.

But don't just take my word for it.

"There are a lot of things that have to go right to win 20 games," Joe Girardi said before the game. "It just can't be dominant pitching."

Girardi manages the Yankees in part because he appreciates statistical analysis more than your average skipper. He said that if he had a vote for the best pitcher award, he'd select Sabathia over Felix Hernandez. Of course he would. He needs Sabathia, not King Felix, to lead this shaky Yankees pitching staff in the postseason.

If we were to slip some truth serum in Girardi's morning juice, however, we suspect he'd agree with us: Hernandez is far more deserving of the Cy Young than is Sabathia.

"Felix Hernandez has had a great year. We've seen enough of him," Girardi said. "I can tell you that. I think our guy has had an amazing year, as well."

Sabathia has enjoyed a perfectly excellent season. He has earned his \$23-million salary. His 209 innings rank second in the AL; his 169 strikeouts rank seventh; and his 3.19 ERA places him eighth.

Hernandez, however, ranks first in innings pitched (2191/3), first in strikeouts (209) and second in ERA (2.30). Wins? He has 11, which ties him for 22nd with seven other pitchers.

Wins seem glorious - you play to win the game, as Herm Edwards once said - but as a measure of performance, they're nothing short of horrible. Wins reflect the pitcher's team more than the pitcher himself. As Exhibit A, we present the Yankees' Phil Hughes, who has received the most run support among all major-league pitchers who have made at least 20 starts, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. With 6.65 runs per game he starts, it's no wonder Hughes has a 16-7 record to go with his 4.29 ERA.

Right behind Hughes, among all big-league pitchers with at least 20 starts? That would be Sabathia, who has enjoyed 5.9 runs per game.

Hernandez? Of the 115 major-leaguers who have started 20 or more games, King Felix sits 111th with 3.17 runs per game.

The Mariners' righthander might not have been pitching in the pressure of a pennant race for the last couple of months. But with such little run support, he sure has pressure to keep the opponent quiet.

Just for good measure, we can look at a couple of geekier statistics. FIP, which stands for fielding independent pitching, evaluates how pitchers perform independent of their fielders. Hernandez has a 2.96 FIP, and Sabathia 3.62 (before last night). xFIP is similar, but normalizes the home-run-per-fly ball rate. Hernandez is at 3.25, and Sabathia 3.85.

Celebrate Sabathia's greatness, and let's not forget that we have another 31/2 weeks to go. If you tout Sabathia's wins as why he should get another Cy Young, however, then you're just misinformed.

Seattle Times

Seattle Mariners hand Oakland 7-5 loss

Mariners get five runs in second inning, scoring more than three runs total for the first time in 12 games.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. — Adam Moore wasn't exactly describing a juggernaut when asked about the rare offensive explosion by his team.

The Mariners had erupted for five second-inning runs on Tuesday night, ending a near-record streak of futility, but it took a whole lot of luck and ball placement to get it done. And the Mariners needed every one of those runs, eventually hanging on for a 7-5 win over the Oakland Athletics.

Seattle had gone 11 straight games without scoring at least four runs, one shy of tying a dubious, 22-year-old club record, so Moore wasn't quibbling too much about the quality of the hits.

"It wasn't pretty, but they were key hits," said Moore, whose sacrifice fly in the second was probably the hardest hit ball of the inning. "We'll take them any way we can get them."

Moore delivered his team's biggest hit of the night an inning later, driving a Dallas Braden pitch over the wall in left-center to give Seattle a 6-0 lead. That turned out to be the decisive run of a game in which Mariners starter Doug Fister struggled from the get-go and reliever Brandon League went on to allow three runs in the ninth.

David Aardsma came on and retired Cliff Pennington on a fly out to left with the tying run on base to notch his 29th save.

The sparse Coliseum crowd, announced at 10,067, could barely believe its eyes as the Mariners went to work on Braden. With a runner on first, Jose Lopez grounded a ball to the left side that — instead of becoming a double play — found a hole for a single to put two on.

Casey Kotchman then hit a slicing liner to left field that popped out of Jeff Larish's glove for a run-scoring single. The relay throw back in by shortstop Pennington got by everybody for an error that moved runners up to second and third.

Moore hit his sacrifice fly, then Matt Tuiasosopo chopped a slow roller toward third that wound up going for an infield single. Josh Wilson blooped a single to center to score a second run, then Ichiro hit a blooper the other way that bounced just inside the left field foul line for a hit to make it 3-0.

Chone Figgins then hit a flare that dropped in front of the center fielder for a fourth run and Russell Branyan brought in run No. 5 with a ball blooped over the outstretched glove of the first baseman.

"That's key for us," Moore said. "We haven't been able to score a lot of runs early in ballgames."

The Mariners haven't scored runs at any point in games, period.

Even with their latest outburst, they remain on pace to score just 523 runs this season — the lowest total in a non-strike year since the designated hitter era began in 1973. Seattle's team low for runs scored is 558 in 1983.

Franklin Gutierrez got the big inning going with a leadoff walk. But he was lifted an inning later after hyperventilating in the dugout following some running catches.

Gutierrez said he was "obviously" frightened because he'd never experienced something like that. He wasn't sure whether his troubles catching his breath were related to a stomach ailment that knocked him from a pair of games over the weekend.

"I feel better right now," he said. "We'll see what happens tomorrow."

The A's team doctor examined Gutierrez on-site and told the player there didn't appear to be anything seriously wrong.

Fister seemed to be hitting a wall himself as the game wore on. He barely survived his fifth and final inning with a 6-2 lead, watching Kurt Suzuki hit a ball to the warning track with two on for the final out.

"I was having trouble the whole night, just leaving the ball up," Fister said. "I was just trying to focus on ... using the defense. I don't get to use the defense if the ball's up and out of the zone."

Garrett Olson delivered two scoreless innings of relief. But Mariners manager Daren Brown had to wait through that nervy ninth before knowing victory was secured.

The seven hits in the second inning was a season-high. Seattle's six hits that frame with runners in scoring position was the most by the Mariners in that situation in any one game since getting eight against San Diego on May 21.

"We talk about putting ourselves into good offensive situations and I thought we were able to string some hits together in the five-run inning," Brown said, acknowledging that "Some guys hit the ball into right places sometimes. But we'll take them."

AquaSox to play for Northwest League title

EVERETT — Anthony Fernandez struck out eight in six scoreless innings as the Everett AquaSox beat Vancouver 3-1 Tuesday night to sweep their best-of-three Northwest League West Division playoff series.

The AquaSox play Spokane in Game 1 of the best-of-three league championship series at 6:35 p.m. Thursday in Spokane.

Rainiers open series

Right-hander Andy Baldwin will start for the Tacoma Rainiers Wednesday night in West Sacramento, Calif., in the opening game of their Pacific Coast League playoff series.

Sacramento hosts the first two games of the best-of-five series. Game 3 is at Safeco Field in Seattle at 7 p.m. Friday.

Tickets for Rainiers playoff games at Safeco Field are on sale at the team's offices (1804 W. Union Ave. in Tacoma), at www.tacomarainiers.com, or by calling (253) 752-7707.

Mariners 7, Athletics 5: Seattle avoids tying dubious team record

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle survives a nervous ninth inning, with three runs allowed by Brandon League. The A's put the tying run on with two out, but David Aardsma came on and retired Cliff Pennington on a flyout to left.

The Mariners entered this game having gone 11 straight contests without scoring at least four runs. One more game like that would have tied the club mark set back in 1988.

No worries about that tonight, as the M's notched a season-high seven hits in the second inning -- many of them on bloopers, seeing-eye grounders and a dropped ball in the outfield. That's the way baseball goes sometimes.

On defense, the M's came out ahead in the game of inches and feet as well.

With two on, two out in a 6-2 game in the fifth, Kurt Suzuki drilled one to the wall in left. But the ball landed in Matt Tuiasosopo's glove. On another night, maybe it leaves the park and the M's go on to lose. Not tonight.

One key to this win, given what happened later, was a solid two innings of relief from Garrett Olson after taking over in the sixth from a shaky Doug Fister.

Ryan Rowland-Smith says Roberto Clemente nomination is 'bright spot' in dark season

Posted by Geoff Baker

Ryan Rowland-Smith hasn't had a whole lot to be happy about this season. But he got one positive nod today when the Mariners announced him as their nominee for the annual Roberto Clemente Award.

The award, named after the famed Pittsburgh Pirates slugger, goes every year to the player who best represents the game of baseball through sportsmanship, community involvement and positive contributions to their clubs. Rowland-Smith got the nomination this year for his work running the team's annual Cystic Fibrosis golf tournament as well as organizing baseball camps for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Ballard.

He also teamed with Volunteers of America and the Action Teams to encourage local high school students to volunteer in their communities.

"My whole family's always been on me about that stuff, whether it be treating people with respect or reminding them why they come to baseball games and cheer players on," Rowland-Smith said. "As a player, it's also a great platform to get people thinking about these charities and the things we support. It helps you have a voice on bigger issues as an athlete and that's something I feel is important."

Mark Lowe was last year's nominee by the Mariners. A selection panel and fan vote determines the winner from the 30 nominees of various teams.

Past Mariners winners include Harold Reynolds (1991), Jamie Moyer (2003) and Edgar Martinez (2004).

Rowland-Smith plans to host the golf tourney again next year and build on what he's started.

"It's been a dark season for me," he said. "And this has been a bright spot I needed."

Moving right along, the Mariners have installed Franklin Gutierrez in the clean-up spot for tonight's game, shifting Russell Branyan down to the No. 3 hole. Don't forget, the M's have gone 11 straight games without scoring at least four runs and will tie the franchise record from 1988 if they score three or fewer again tonight.

"The first six or seven guys in our lineup have been pretty much the same," Mariners manager Daren Brown said. "I'm just putting guys in positions that I think maybe something will click. I don't think I'm any smarter than anybody else that's been doing this. But at the same time, I think it's important to show that we're trying to do something."

Brown said the team had early success with Branyan in the No. 3 spot when he first came up as manager.

So, we'll see. Matt Tuiasosopo hasn't played in a while and gets a left field start tonight.

MARINERS

RF Ichiro
2B Chone Figgins
DH Russell Branyan
CF Franklin Gutierrez
3B Jose Lopez
1B Casey Kotchman
C Adam Moore
LF Matt Tuiasosopo
SS Josh Wilson

RHP Doug Fister

ATHLETICS

CF Rajai Davis
1B Daric Barton
C Kurt Suzuki
DH Jack Cust
2B Mark Ellis
LF Jeff Larish
RF Jeremy Hermida
3B Steve Tolleson
SS Cliff Pennington

LHP Dallas Braden

Can the Mariners avoid 100 losses?

Posted by Larry Stone

Granted, that's not one of the burning issues of our time. The Mariners have had a disastrous season, and that won't change depending on whether the "L" column in the newspaper on Oct. 4 reads 100 or 99.

Still, there is something symbolic about 100 losses as the line of demarcation for a truly, epicly bad season. It's a round number that resonates, just like a 20-win season seems better than a 19-win season, and a .300 average seems better than a .299 average. Somehow, that one point, one win, one loss translates to something more meaningful. One-hundred losses would be immediate shorthand for a season turned ugly.

There was a point this year I would have bet good money that the Mariners would hit triple-digits in defeats, hands down, no questions asked. In fact, I thought they could be headed for upwards of 105. When the M's lost 2-1 to the Royals on Aug. 7 -- two days before Don Wakamatsu was fired, the turmoil raining down in all corners -- their record fell to 41-70. That put them on pace, mathematically, for 102 losses, but things were falling apart so rapidly that it seemed possible, even likely, that the pace would accelerate. And when Wakamatsu was fired on Aug. 9, adding another layer of disruption, 100 losses seemed more inevitable than ever.

But now, as we head down the home stretch, the Mariners actually have a decent chance to avoid 100 losses. And that's despite the fact their bats have already gone into winter hibernation. The M's have gone 11 games and counting without scoring more than three runs, 15 straight without scoring more than four.

Heading into tonight's contest in Oakland, the M's have 24 games left. They stand 54-84. Their magic number is 63 -- the number of victories needed to avoid triple-digits in losses. So here's their task: Go no worse than 9-15 the rest of the way.

Is that doable? Well, 9-15 equates to a .375 winning percentage. Their overall winning percentage this season, for all their issues and struggles, is .391. So they need to play even worse than they have all year to hit 100 losses. Their record under Wakamatsu's replacement, Darren Brown, is 12-14 (.462), so he has done an admirable job restoring order.

On the other hand, the M's are in the midst of one of their periodic nosedives this year. After starting Brown's tenure by winning seven of 11, they have gone 5-11 since. That's a .313 winning percentage -- and, as we just mentioned, their offense is malfunctioning worse than ever. If they don't snap out of that malaise quickly, 100 losses could happen. Having Felix Hernandez's magic arm for four or five of the remaining 24 games will help. Their schedule is not easy, either. After Oakland, they are at the Angels for three, then home for series against Boston and Texas. They then go on the road to play Toronto, Tampa Bay and Texas before returning home for four with Oakland to end the season. Every opponent except the A's and Angels has a winning record -- and the Mariners are a combined 9-19 against those two teams.

So here the Mariners stand at another crossroads. All they have to do is scrape out nine more wins and they can avoid one final humiliation this season.

I'd say it could go either way.

Seattle PI

Mariners end scoring slump in Oakland

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Scoring more than a few runs a game has been a challenge for Seattle lately. That's why Adam Moore embraced the Mariners' five-run inning against Oakland's Dallas Braden, even if it lacked style points.

Seattle banged out seven hits in the second inning, all of them soft singles, and jumped to a six-run lead before holding off a late rally to beat the Athletics 7-5 on Tuesday night.

"We haven't been able to score a lot of runs early in ballgames and tonight was key," said Moore, Seattle's catcher who homered and drove in two runs. "It wasn't pretty but they were key hits and we'll take them any way we can get them. We just had a flow of hits where balls were finding the green in the outfield. We were able to find every hole tonight."

The Mariners hadn't scored more than three runs in 11 consecutive games, the second-longest stretch in franchise history, before breaking out against the A's. They did it against Braden, who pitched a perfect game against Tampa Bay in May and had won five of his previous eight starts.

Eight of Seattle's nine starters had at least one hit and six players scored.

"That's something we haven't done a lot since I've been here," interim manager Daren Brown said. "But it was good to see it tonight. We'll take 'em."

Seattle jumped on Braden early, scoring five runs in the second inning after the left-hander had retired the side in order in the first. Moore homered in the third to make it 6-0.

Braden (9-11) had allowed only one earned run over his previous 14 innings. He left after five innings, giving up nine hits.

"Brutal to quite brutal," Braden said, summarizing his outing. "I've seen less bleeding at a hemophiliac convention. That was rough."

The timing couldn't have been better for Mariners right-hander Doug Fister.

Fister (5-11) scattered five hits over five innings and pitched out of several jams for only his second win in nearly four months. He also led Seattle to its first win at the Coliseum since Opening Day. The Mariners had lost six straight in Oakland since then.

Fister, winless in his previous four starts, didn't make it easy on himself. The right-hander loaded the bases in the first and had runners on second and third with one out in the second but escaped both times.

He wasn't as fortunate in the fifth but kept the damage to a minimum.

Cliff Pennington walked and Rajai Davis singled. After Daric Barton fouled out, Suzuki lined a two-run single to center to trim the gap to 6-2. Fister then walked Jack Cust but got the last two batters on fly outs to end the threat and his night.

Fister's win is his first since Aug. 8 and only the second in his last 17 starts. The 26-year-old missed nearly three weeks in June with fatigue in his right shoulder and made one rehab outing in the minors before returning to the big league club.

"Honestly I was having trouble the whole night, just leaving the ball up," Fister said. "I was just trying to focus on getting that tilt back and using the defense. Usually I don't get to use the defense if the ball's up and out of the zone."

The A's loaded the bases against reliever Garrett Olson in the sixth and came away empty again when Olson got Suzuki to ground out.

Seattle's bullpen nearly melted down and gave the big lead away.

Oakland pinch-hitter Coco Crisp, not in the lineup due to a sore left knee, hit a two-run single in the ninth off Brandon League to drive in Cust and Ellis. Crisp later scored on a wild pitch to make it 7-5 before David Aardsma got Pennington to fly out and end the game for his 29th save in 34 tries.

Oakland had a chance to improve its fading playoff hopes after first-place Texas lost to Toronto earlier in the day. Instead, the A's remain seven games behind the Rangers with 24 to go.

Ichiro Suzuki had two hits for Seattle, giving him 2,211 for his career and moving him into a tie for 169th place with Willie McCovey on the all-time list.

Chone Figgins, Jose Lopez, Matt Tuiasosopo and Josh Wilson also had two hits apiece for Seattle.

Kurt Suzuki singled twice and drove in two runs for the A's.

Notes: Oakland OF Jeremy Hermida went 1 for 4 after being selected from Triple-A Sacramento earlier Tuesday. Hermida, who began the season with Boston before being released by the Red Sox on Aug. 31, takes the roster spot left vacant when Oakland optioned RHP Vin Mazzaro to Sacramento on Monday. ... Phil Hellmuth, winner of 11 World Series of Poker bracelets, threw out the first pitch. ... Brown plans to give each of Seattle's five starting pitchers an extra day's rest the next two times through the rotation. ... A's rookie Steve Tolleson had a career-high three hits.

Rowland-Smith nominated for Clemente Award

Left-hander Ryan Rowland-Smith is the Mariners' nominee for the Roberto Clemente Award, recognizing players for their community service. Each major league team has one nominee.

A news release detailed Rowland-Smith's many off-field causes:

Chair of the annual Cystic Fibrosis Mariners Care Golf Tournament.

Active supporter of the Boys & Girls Clubs, including hosting baseball camps.

Supporter of Ronald McDonald House Charities.

Supporter of the Northwest Sarcoma Foundation.

"I'm very proud that every member of the Seattle Mariners is involved in community activities," teams CEO Howard Lincoln said in the news release. "We have received so much from this community and we are serious about our commitment to return that kindness and support to the people who have given us so much."

Past Mariners to win the award include Harold Reynolds (1991), Jamie Moyer (2003) and Edgar Martinez (2004).

Fans can vote at www.chevy.com/clemente. The winner of the fan vote will receive one vote among a panel of judges.

The award is named for the Pittsburgh Pirates outfielder who died in a plane crash in 1972 while delivering supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

Everett Herald

Mariners defeat Oakland 7-5

Associated Press

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Mariners Minor League Report: Bonilla spends an inning at each position Sunday for West Tennessee

By Kirby Arnold
Herald Writer

There isn't a position on the baseball field Leury Bonilla hasn't played since the Seattle Mariners signed him as a non-drafted minor-league free agent in 2002.

Sunday, the 25-year-old Dominican played them all Sunday for the Class AA West Tennessee DiamondJaxx. He played center field in the first inning of the final regular-season game against Chattanooga and pitched a scoreless ninth. In between, he played every other position.

His place in the official boxscore looked like this:

Bonilla, L CF-LF-RF-2B-SS-3B-1B-C-P

Bonilla, who played for the Everett AquaSox in 2006, has been a versatile player most of his career. He played everywhere but center field in 2007 with Class A Wisconsin, and last year at West Tennessee he played games at first base, second, third, shortstop, left field and right field, and he pitched an inning at Class A High Desert after being sent there in June.

Sunday's journey around the diamond was orchestrated by West Tennessee manager Tim Laker, and Bonilla had no idea what was up until a few innings into the game.

"I started in center field, then he said, 'Oh wait, I forgot. You need to play left field,' before I went out in the second inning," Bonilla told the Jackson (Tenn.) Sun. "Then he did the same thing in the third inning to move me to right field."

On the mound in the ninth, Bonilla struck out the first hitter he faced before giving up a single. He ended the game by getting a double-play grounder.

Despite all the movement in the field, the ball didn't find Bonilla until the seventh when he caught a popup at first base.

He was hardly all-field (and pitch)/no-hit. Bonilla hit a two-run homer in the first inning.

"We began talking about it about a month ago, and it just worked out that we'd already made the playoffs and we jumped out to a big lead," Laker said. "It was something nice we wanted to do for him since he'd already played every position on the field throughout the season."

A look around the Mariners' minor league system (the Everett AquaSox' reports appear daily in the sports section):

Class AAA Tacoma Rainiers

The Rainiers clinched the Pacific Coast League Pacific North Division title with a victory Sunday at Fresno in the next-to-last game of the regular season.

It sent the Rainiers into the best-of-five PCL Western Conference playoff series, with the first two games tonight and Thursday at Sacramento.

Because renovation has begun at Cheney Stadium in Tacoma, the Rainiers will play home postseason games at Safeco Field in Seattle, with Game 3 at 7 p.m. Friday, Game 4 (if needed) at noon Saturday and Game 5 (if needed) at 7 p.m. Sunday.

Outfielder Greg Halman finished the regular season with 33 home runs, second in the PCL behind the 36 homers by Mark Trumbo of Salt Lake. Halman led the league with 169 strikeouts.

First baseman Mike Carp hit 29 home runs, sixth in the PCL, and third baseman Matt Mangini finished with a .313 batting average, .352 on-base percentage, .521 slugging percentage and .873 on-base-plus-slugging percentage. His batting average ranked 12th in the PCL.

Class AA West Tennessee

The Jaxx finished 34-26 and third in the Southern League North second-half standings but clinched a wild-card playoff spot and will face Tennessee in the first round. They'll play Thursday and Friday night at Tennessee, with the third game (if needed) Saturday at West Tennessee.

The organization announced after Sunday's regular-season finale that the team would be named the Jackson Generals beginning with the 2011 season.

Class A High Desert Mavericks

The Mavericks finished 38-32 and second by one game to Rancho Cucamonga in the California League South. They begin a best-of-three first-round series at home tonight against Rancho Cucamonga, with the second and third games scheduled on the road Thursday and Friday.

Second baseman Kyle Seager won the league batting title with a .345 average, and High Desert teammate Jake Shaffer, an outfielder, finished second at .338. Seager's .419 on-base percentage also led the league.

Outfielder Johermyn Chavez finished second with 32 home runs and first baseman Rich Poythress third with 31.

Mavericks hitters were bunched near the top in OPS, with Chavez second at .964, Poythress third at .960, Seager fifth at .921 and Shaffer sixth at .904.

Class A Clinton LumberKings

The LumberKings begin the best-of-three Midwest League playoffs at home tonight against Cedar Rapids, with the second and third games scheduled for Thursday and Friday at Cedar Rapids.

Infielder/outfielder Vinnie Catricala won the league's player of the week award after batting .467 with five doubles, two homers and 10 RBI in a nine-game stretch.

Shortstop Nick Franklin became the third player in pro baseball _ the first below the Class AAA level _ to hit at least 20 home runs and steal at least 20 bases in a season. He also is the only minor leaguer this season with at least 20 homers, 20 steals and 20 doubles. He batted .383 with 22 homers, 63 RBI, 22 doubles and 25 steals.

The Mariners promoted Franklin to Class AA West Tennessee on Sunday to replace injured shortstop Carlos Triunfel (injured finger on his right hand).

Rookie-level Pulaski Mariners

The Mariners won the Appalachian League East with a 37-28 record but were swept in two games last week by Elizabethton in the first round of the playoffs.

Third baseman Ramon Morla led the league with 17 home runs and 60 runs, and he finished second with a .323 average, 49 RBI and 89 hits. Second baseman Jorge Agudelo led the league with 24 steals.

AquaSox best in the West

Clutch pitching, defense lifts Everett over Vancouver, into championship series

By Nick Patterson
Herald Writer

EVERETT -- There's a concept commonly bandied about in sports circles: bend, but don't break.

The Everett AquaSox pitchers elevated that concept to an art form Tuesday night. And as a result, the Sox will be playing for the Northwest League title.

Everett's pitchers came up clutch time and time again, and the Sox defeated the Vancouver Canadians 3-1 to advance to the league championship series.

Everett swept the best-of-three divisional series 2-0. The Sox face Spokane, which swept Yakima in the East divisional, in a best-of-three championship series beginning Thursday in Spokane.

"It's a great feeling," Everett manager Jose Moreno said. "The kids deserve it, they played so hard year round. Since spring training this is what it's all been about, you work to play in September and be in the playoffs. We're going to be playing in the final, and it's a good feeling."

Before a boisterous Everett Memorial Stadium crowd, supplemented by a small section of enthusiastic Canadians fans, Everett's pitchers did the business when it mattered most. Vancouver put 16 runners on base, but only managed to push one across the plate. Hurlers Anthony Fernandez, Willy Kesler and Tyler Burgoon combined to strand 13, including five at third base.

"I haven't seen that before this year," Sox catcher Steven Baron said of Everett's pitchers' elusiveness. "Every inning there were two or three runners on base. It was definitely hectic.

"But it's really nice," Baron added. "We're excited about playing for the title."

Fernandez played the lead role of Houdini in this escape act. The left-hander from the Dominican Republic tossed six scoreless innings, despite surrendering six hits and four walks, allowing the Sox to build a 3-0 lead.

And Fernandez was at his best at the game's most-critical junctures. He struck out eight, and five of those strikeouts came with a runner perched at third. His willingness to throw offspeed pitches with full counts left the Vancouver batters flailing.

"That was something we've done all year. Especially Anthony, he has that tough mentality," Baron said. "He's able to stay confident and stay with his pitches. He was able to make some tough pitches, 3-1 curveballs, 3-2 changeups. He's pretty much been like that all year."

Pitchers can't strand 13 without a little help from the defense. The Sox didn't play their best defensive game Tuesday, but they came up with the big play when it mattered most. In the eighth inning with two runners on, Vancouver's Josh Whitaker sent a high pop shallow in the infield. Third baseman Kevin Mailloux and Baron both went for it and interfered with one another. However, with the ball looking like it was going to pop free, Mailloux reached out while going to ground and managed to make a snow-cone catch, ending the inning.

Fernandez earned the win. Kesler went two innings, allowing one unearned run and stranding three. Burgoon struck out three of the four batters he faced in the ninth to pick up the save.

Robbie Anston continued his hot hitting at the top of Everett's lineup, going 2-for-3 with a run and an RBI. He went 5-for-7 in the two playoff games against Vancouver. Kalian Sams also was 2-for-3 for the Sox.

Michael Choice went 3-for-5 to lead Vancouver. Starter Nathan Long took the loss, allowing three runs in five innings.

The game's tone was set in the top of the first inning when Vancouver loaded the bases with one out, but was unable to score. Fernandez struck out Doug Landaeta and Ryan Lipkin to end the threat.

Everett got on the board in the bottom of the first when Anston led off with a double, was sacrificed to third and scored on Mailloux's sacrifice fly. Then the Sox made it 3-0 in the second on RBI singles by Sams and Anston.

Then Fernandez pulled off his magic act again. He found himself in identical jams in both the fifth and sixth innings as Vancouver put runners at second and third with two out in both frames, and each time he escaped in an identical fashion. First in the fifth, with the crowd hanging on every pitch, Fernandez worked the count full on cleanup hitter A.J. Kirby-Jones before fanning him with a slider. Then in the sixth he again went to a full count, this time on Whitaker, and again he went to the slider to get the swinging strikeout, sending the crowd into a frenzy.

Vancouver finally got on the board in the seventh, but inevitably it was at the expense of a bigger rally. The Canadians had runners at the corners with nobody out. Choice got the run home, but by grounding into a rally-killing double play, making it 3-1.

Rowland-Smith is Mariners' nominee for Clemente award

Posted at 1:23 pm by Kirby Arnold

Major League Baseball just announced that Mariners pitcher Ryan Rowland-Smith is the team's nominee for the Roberto Clemente Award for his contributions off the field. Here's the official release from MLB, complete with commercial references to the award sponsor (It's not only an award for humanitarian efforts, but also an opportunity for commercial endorsement):

Major League Baseball and Chevrolet, the official vehicle of Major League Baseball, today announced that Ryan Rowland-Smith is the Seattle Mariners 2010 nominee for the prestigious Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevrolet. Rowland-Smith is one of the 30 Club nominees who are finalists for the national award, which is given annually to the Major League Baseball player who combines a dedication to giving back to the community with outstanding skills on the baseball field. Tomorrow marks the ninth annual Roberto Clemente Day, which was established by Major League Baseball to honor Clemente's legacy and to officially recognize local Club nominees of the Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevrolet.

Since 2007, when Rowland-Smith made his Major League debut with the Mariners, he has been active in a number of community causes. Rowland-Smith is chair of the annual Cystic Fibrosis Mariners Care Golf Tournament. This year's event raised over \$170,000 for CF research.

Rowland-Smith has also been an active supporter of the Boys & Girls Clubs. Each of the past two off-seasons, he has hosted baseball camps that provide baseball instruction as well as life skills lessons through the character development programs at the Boys & Girls Clubs.

Other local charities and non-profit organizations Rowland-Smith has supported over the years include Ronald McDonald House Charities and Northwest Sarcoma Foundation. Rowland-Smith is also active in the Major League Baseball Players Trust, the charitable foundation of the Major League Baseball Players Association. This season, Rowland-Smith teamed with Volunteers of America and the Action Teams to encourage local high school students to volunteer in their communities and help recruit and train a new generation of volunteers. On June 3, Rowland-Smith joined student leaders at the North Seattle Food Bank to help distribute food to Northwest families and sort and bag items to be delivered to home-bound seniors.

"I'm very proud that every member of the Seattle Mariners is involved in community activities. We have received so much from this community and we are serious about our commitment to return that kindness and support to the people who have given us so much," said Howard Lincoln, Seattle Mariners Chair & CEO.

The Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevrolet recognizes players who best represent the game of baseball through sportsmanship, community involvement and positive contributions to their Clubs. The award is named for the 12-time All-Star and Hall of Famer who died in a plane crash on New Year's Eve 1972 while attempting to deliver supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. The award pays tribute to Clemente's achievements and character by recognizing talented current players who truly understand the value of helping others.

The Mariners have produced three Clemente Award winners: Harold Reynolds in 1991, Jamie Moyer in 2003 and Edgar Martinez in 2004.

Fans are encouraged to participate in the process of selecting the national award recipient by visiting www.chevy.com/clemente, powered by MLB.com and created specifically for the Roberto Clemente Award platform, from September 7 to October 8 to vote for one of the 30 Club nominees. Participating fans will be automatically registered for a chance to win a trip to the 2010 World Series, where the national winner of the Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevrolet will be announced.

The winner of the fan poll will receive one vote among those cast by the selection panel, which includes Vera Clemente, wife of the late Hall of Famer; Commissioner Selig; MLB Network analyst and former Roberto Clemente Award winner Harold Reynolds; MLB Network analyst, TBS broadcaster and former Roberto Clemente Award winner John Smoltz; Hall

of Famer and ESPN broadcaster Joe Morgan; former All-Star catcher and FOX broadcaster Tim McCarver; and MLB.com senior correspondent Hal Bodley.

MLB celebrates Roberto Clemente Day as part of the broader "MLB Going Beyond" platform, which strives to integrate community service and the importance of giving back.

Mariners.com

Mariners post five-run second, hold off A's

Five players drive in runs to support Fister's effective start

By Jim Street / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Fu Manchu interim manager Daren Brown sported on Tuesday might be around longer than he expected -- and a little more gray than he would like.

"It is an offensive goatee," Brown said. "It seems to work for [pitching coach] Carl Willis, so I told him I would give it a day or two."

Whatever works and on this night, the Mariners' offense worked better than usual.

Seattle erupted for five runs in the second inning, built a six-run lead, and then held on in the ninth inning for a 7-5 victory over Oakland before 10,067 at the Coliseum.

A five-run lead when the inning started dwindled to two runs before closer David Aardsma came to the rescue, getting the game-ending out -- and his 29th save -- on his second pitch.

The save Aardsma notched prevented bullpen colleague Brandon League from being responsible for blowing a five-run lead after retiring the first two batters of the inning -- on six pitches.

The wheels came off quickly as the five batters reached base.

"Brandon has been so good all year long that you don't expect him to struggle like that," Aardsma said. "My only thought when I came in was to get ahead in the count and get the last out."

The first pitch to Cliff Pennington was a ball, but the second was a strike, and was hit routinely in the air to left fielder Matt Tuiasosopo, leaving two runners in scoring position.

Right-hander Doug Fister won for the second time since May 14 and defeated the Athletics for the fourth time in five career decisions and reduced his ERA to 1.80 against them. Two of his five victories this season are against Oakland.

So, does he own them?

"I definitely would not say that," Fister said. "They have a lot of good hitters over there and we fortunately were able to end up on top tonight."

Amazing what run support can do for a pitcher.

Eight of the nine Mariners starters had at least one hit, and catcher Adam Moore hit a home run as Seattle ended a six-game losing streak in Oakland and prevented the Athletics from closing to within six games of the first-place Rangers in the American League West.

How the West eventually is won is of little concern to the Mariners.

But more innings like the one they had off Athletics left-hander Dallas Braden could make the final three weeks of the season much more satisfying than the first 22 weeks.

A leadoff walk to Franklin Gutierrez, who left the game in the third inning because he was "hyperventilating," lit an offensive spark in the second inning that continued to burn for more than half-an-hour.

Before it went out, the Mariners had a season-high seven hits, went 6-for-8 with runners in scoring position, and scored five runs, ending a streak of 11 consecutive games scoring three or fewer runs.

The second-inning rally came right out of left field, literally.

With two runners on and nobody out, first baseman Casey Kotchman hit a fly ball to left field that sliced away from Jeff Larish, who finally tried to make a diving catch near the line.

The ball landed a foot or so on the fair side of the foul line and caromed off the wall. Gutierrez scored on the hit, Jose Lopez advanced to third and Kotchman advanced to second on a throwing error.

Moore hit a sacrifice fly and Matt Tuiasosopo reached on an infield single, the first of five straight singles, producing the third, fourth and fifth runs of the inning.

A majority of them were of the seeing-eye variety, but that didn't matter to the run-starved offense.

Josh Wilson, Ichiro Suzuki and Russell Branyan delivered the run-scoring hits.

"We talk about putting ourselves in good offensive situations and we were able to string some hits together in the five-run inning," Brown said. "That is something we haven't done a lot since I've been here, and it was good to see it tonight."

The five-run inning matched the season high, set on Aug. 14 against the Indians in Cleveland. It was the first time Seattle had as many as six hits with runners in scoring position since going 8-for-14 against the Padres on May 21.

"We had some guys hit the ball in the right places a couple of times," Brown added, "but we'll take 'em."

Moore tacked on a run in the third, belting his fourth home run of the season.

Fister weathered a rough first, getting out of a bases-loaded, one-out jam by snagging a line drive and turning it into an inning-ending double play.

A single, walk and a one-out hit batter had put Fister in a bind.

The Athletics, already aware that the first-place Rangers lost again, had hopes of jumping out to a quick lead. But Mark Ellis' liner up the middle landed in Fister's glove and Jack Cust was an easy DP victim at first base.

"I thought Fister, from the first inning on, had some tough innings to get out of," Brown said. "He wasn't real sharp and he was able to get through five innings with the lead and get the win."

"Obviously, any win is a good win, and winning on the road is a good win anytime."

Fister improved to 5-11.

Brown said after the game that Gutierrez "was a little bit congested" early in the game and after making a couple of catches, "he came in and didn't feel real well."

"It wasn't anything to do with [his recent illness] and he feels a lot better right now, but as a precaution, we took him out and had their team doctor look at him."

Gutierrez's status is day-to-day.

Club to give Felix extra day between starts

Ace may get more leeway on pitch count down the stretch

By Jim Street / MLB.com

09/07/10 9:42 PM ET

OAKLAND -- The Mariners' rotation is being arranged so that every starter, including ace right-hander Felix Hernandez, get five days between starts instead of the normal four days.

An additional day of rest could make Hernandez a little stronger down the stretch and enhance his chances of winning the American League Cy Young Award.

"He will get five more starts regardless what we do," interim manager Daren Brown said Tuesday, "and giving him one extra day of rest is important."

Hernandez, who leads the AL in virtually every pitching category except wins, takes a 16 1/3-inning scoreless streak into his next start, Saturday night against the Angels in Anaheim. His next start after that would be the following Friday night at Safeco Field against the Rangers.

"What we are trying to do," Brown said, "is protect him a little bit. Not limit his innings, but do what we can to take care of him."

Hernandez has pitched a league-high 219 1/3 innings, putting him in position to surpass last season's career-high 238 2/3-inning workload. He has surpassed the 200-inning mark three consecutive seasons.

Brown said he might give his ace more leeway when it comes to the number of pitches Felix throws in a game, "but you won't see us going to 125 or 130 pitches with him."

Right-hander Doug Fister, who started Tuesday night's game against the Athletics, and left-hander Jason Vargas also are reaching career highs in innings and could benefit from the extra day of rest.

Moore ranks high in catcher's ERA

OAKLAND -- One of the more obscure statistics in a game that's all about numbers is the catcher's earned run average.

The Mariners' Adam Moore ranks second in the American League with a 3.21 mark, which is just slightly higher than Athletics receiver Kurt Suzuki at 3.18.

"It's a very good thing for a catcher to see," veteran Mariners catcher Josh Bard said. "Obviously catching Fifi [Felix Hernandez] every fifth day helps because he's given up one run in a month and a half.

"But Adam has been doing a good job with all of our pitchers, regardless who's been out there."

The primary job of the catcher for most teams is to handle the pitching staff, and the way Moore, a rookie, sees it, when the opponent scores a run, he's as responsible for it as much as the pitcher.

"We take pride in our pitchers," he said, "and when a run scores, we feel we called the wrong pitch. It's our job to lower our ERA every day. The fewer runs we allow, the better chance we have of winning the game, obviously."

Bard seemed surprised and impressed that Suzuki ranks at the top of the AL.

"When you look at someone with as big of a body work as Kurt has, and dealing with a young pitching staff without a lot of big-name guys, he should take a lot of pride in that," Bard said.

Gutierrez on an RBI binge

OAKLAND -- Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez has established a personal career high with at least one RBI in four consecutive games and has taken over the Mariners' lead in the RBI department.

That's the good news.

The not-so-good news is that he has 54 RBIs this season and could become the first player since Alvin Davis in 1988 to lead the team with fewer than 70 RBIs.

Jose Lopez led the team with 96 last season, just the second time since 1994 that the club leader had fewer than 100. Ken Griffey Jr. was tops with 95 in '94 -- a season that ended on Aug. 12 because of a strike -- and Bret Boone had a team-leading 83 in 2004.

Gutierrez's recent RBI binge prompted interim manager Daren Brown to put the center fielder in the cleanup spot for Tuesday night's game against the Athletics.

"Offensively, the first six or seven guys have been pretty much the same and we're trying to put guys in position that maybe something will click," Brown said. "I don't think I'm any smarter than anyone else doing this, but we want to show that we are trying to do something."

The Mariners went into the game having scored three or fewer runs in 11 consecutive games.

"I think Guti swung the bat well [Monday] and [Russell] Branyan [batting third] swung the bat well at home," Brown said. "Mixing and matching and putting guys in different spots might allow something to click. Who knows? We had some success when I first got here with Branyan batting third."

"But the bottom line is we still need someone to come up with a big hit in the game."

Young lefties duel in A's-Mariners finale

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

Who will play in the outfield for the A's on Wednesday? And will Ryan Rowland-Smith get back into a game for the Mariners? These are a couple of interesting questions needing answers as the series between the two American League West rivals concludes in Oakland.

The A's have used 15 outfielders this season, the most since they used 18 in 2007. That mark has manager Bob Geren rotating his outfielders almost every day, and despite the promotion of Jeremy Hermida, the skipper is not ready to name an everyday left or right fielder. Hermida will be fighting Matt Carson, Gabe Gross and Jeff Larish for playing time over the remainder of the schedule.

It's possible that the A's will give more of a look to Hermida, a former first-round Draft pick of the Marlins who spent 52 games with the Red Sox this year.

"He's still young," Geren said. "He's shown some real promise. I'm happy we got him, and we'll give him a chance to see what he can do."

The Mariners would like to see what Rowland-Smith can do after the lefty, who was in their rotation at the beginning of the year, but was demoted to the bullpen and then on the disabled list before rehabbing at Triple-A Tacoma, was promoted.

Southpaw Luke French is scheduled to start against Oakland lefty Gio Gonzalez, but it's possible that Seattle could use Rowland-Smith, who last pitched Thursday for the Rainiers. And while Rowland-Smith could be used as a reliever, the Mariners will look to get him a few starts before the end of the season.

"For me, Rowland-Smith, a guy who has had success here before, didn't have good numbers here early, might be important to give him a start or two as we go along as much as anything for his confidence," Mariners interim manager Daren Brown said. "If we got into that situation where we needed it, I would do that. Slide him and give everyone an extra day."

Mariners: French on a roll

French had one of the best outings of his young career in his last start, when he had a no-hitter going into the seventh against the Indians and ended up earning the win with 7 2/3 shutout innings, striking out four and giving up one hit. He's 1-2 with a 5.89 ERA in five games against Oakland, three of them being starts. ... Right fielder Ichiro Suzuki has recorded at least one hit in 77 of 90 career games at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. He has at least one hit in 18 of his last 19 games at the ballpark since July 9, 2008.

A's: Gio learning self-control

Gonzalez has said that keeping his emotions in check has been the key for him this year. It's showing big-time lately. He won each of his last three starts, posting a 0.95 ERA and .200 opponents' batting average. The winning streak is one short of his career-high of four. He has allowed one run or fewer in nine of his last 14 starts and is 7-3 with a 2.11 ERA over that span. He is 2-1 with a 3.93 ERA in seven career appearances (five starts) against Seattle. ... The A's didn't hit a home run Tuesday, but they've hit 15 homers over their last 15 games after hitting seven long balls over the previous 26 games.

Worth noting

Before going without an RBI on Tuesday night, Mariners center fielder Franklin Gutierrez set a career-high with at least one RBI in four consecutive games. ... The A's are 36-54 at night, which is the third-worst night record in the AL.

Rowland-Smith a worthy Clemente nominee

By Jim Street / MLB.com

09/07/10 10:00 AM ET

SEATTLE -- Ryan Rowland-Smith has no idea how long his Major League career will last, but he knows that when it ends, his charitable work off the field will continue.

"I would like to do more than I'm doing now," the Mariners left-hander said. "I definitely will get more involved as we go along."

Rowland-Smith, an active member in the Seattle community since his MLB debut in 2007, understands and welcomes opportunities that MLB and its players have to make a positive impact on the lives of children and their communities. And, in just three years, he has already become a significant supporter and spokesman for local charities in the Pacific Northwest.

Since his first year in Seattle, he has supported the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in their efforts to find a cure for CF, a fatal disease afflicting children and young adults. In 2010, he served as the chairman of the Cystic Fibrosis Mariners Care Golf Tournament for the second consecutive year and helped to build awareness and raise valuable funds for cystic fibrosis research.

He collects auction items throughout the season and recruits teammates and sponsors to participate in the event, which supports the CF Foundation. The tournament, held on June 21 this year, raised more than \$170,000.

As a result of his off-the-field work, the 27-year-old from Newcastle, Australia, is the Mariners' nominee this season for the prestigious Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevrolet, which will be awarded during the World Series.

The award recognizes the player who best exemplifies the game of baseball, sportsmanship, community involvement and the individual's contribution to his team. It is named in honor of the former Pirates outfielder, whose spirit and goodwill will always be remembered. Clemente died in a plane crash while attempting to transport relief supplies to earthquake-stricken Nicaragua on Dec. 31, 1972.

Fans can participate in the selection process of the overall winner of the award now through Oct. 4. The fan ballot winner will be tallied as one vote among those cast by a special selection panel of baseball dignitaries and media members. The panel includes MLB Commissioner Bud Selig and Vera Clemente, widow of the Pirates' Hall of Fame right fielder.

Voting fans also will be automatically registered for a chance to win a trip to the 2010 World Series, where the national winner of the Roberto Clemente Award presented by Chevy will be announced.

"It's a great honor to even be nominated," Rowland-Smith said. "I am aware that other Mariners players have won the award, and that means a lot to all of us."

Former Mariners Harold Reynolds (1991), Jamie Moyer (2003) and Edgar Martinez ('04) received the game's ultimate honor for their charitable work.

"A big part of being a Major League player is to use that platform to help others," said Rowland-Smith.

Rowland-Smith is also active with the Boys & Girls Clubs and in each of the past two offseasons, has teamed up with the Boys & Girls Clubs of King County to host baseball camps for kids. In addition to providing baseball instruction to each participant, he stresses the important life-skills lessons that are taught daily through character development programs at the Boys & Girls Clubs.

A gift bag stocked with baseball memorabilia is presented to each camp participant.

Rowland-Smith said his association with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation has been an eye-opening and rewarding experience.

"Meeting the kids, being around them and seeing how positive they are puts everything in perspective," Rowland-Smith said. "We all struggle at times in our lives, but when we step back and look at what these kids are going through, our troubles are really not that big.

"They put us on a pedestal because of what we do, but it's as rewarding for myself as much as it is for the kids."

Rowland-Smith has also been active with the MLB Players Trust, the charitable foundation of the Major League Baseball Players Association, and their community programs. In 2010, he teamed up with the Volunteers of America and the Action Teams to encourage local high school students to volunteer in their communities and help recruit and train a new generation of volunteers.

On June 3, he joined local high school student leaders at the North Seattle Food Bank to help distribute food to hungry families and sort and bag food to be delivered to home-bound seniors.

He also found time to lend his support to the Ronald McDonald Charities and Northwest Sarcoma Foundation, is active with Mariners Care, the Mariners' non-profit foundation, and its programs, including Mariners D.R.E.A.M. Team school assembly program, Mariners Get Well Tour, Mariners-Nikon Social Responsibility Program, and Seattle Mariners FanFest.

Kitsap Sun

By at Least One Measure, Bainbridge Island Is Mariners Country

By Derek Sheppard

Kitsap Sun

Posted September 6, 2010

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND — Sports bars are hard to find and the people who live there seem more inclined to throw a leg over a road bike than to throw a fastball. But is Bainbridge Island a hotbed of Seattle Mariners fans?

By at least one abstract and unscientific measure, yes.

Exhibit A could be a guy like Larry Burris, who has had season tickets since the Mariners entered the league in 1977.

"I've seen a lot of bad baseball in my life," he said.

He's seen more of it this year, with the Mariners limping toward a last-place finish. But any true measure of fanaticism has to be under the umbrella of dedication, regardless of how well, or poorly, a team is playing.

So, is Bainbridge Island home to Kitsap County's most dedicated Mariners fans?

According to season- and 16-game ticket plan data provided by the Mariners, Bainbridge Island's zip code of 98110 has more long-term ticket accounts than any other Kitsap zip code.

It is only the fifth-most populous zip code in the county, but it's home to a Kitsap-high 52 account holders. The next closest is the Poulsbo-area zip code 98370, with 31.

So why does Bainbridge Island have Kitsap's highest concentration of frequent Safeco visitors?

Affluence is the easy answer, local Mariners fans said, but the literal and figurative connections to Seattle play a big role, too.

"At the most we're driving, what, three miles?" said Jeff Main of Bainbridge, the board president of the Spartans Baseball Club, a youth program. He doesn't have season tickets, but said he knows people do — as well as people who canceled season tickets in recent years.

"A lot of people gave that up for Lent," he said, making a joke referring to recent poor performances by the team.

Technically, the farthest anyone on Bainbridge would have drive to the ferry terminal, where most people would park and walk on the boat, is about 7 miles. That's roughly equivalent to the drive from Seattle's Greenlake neighborhood to Safeco. Of course, parking near the Bainbridge terminal is a comparative bargain at \$10, compared to two or three times that in downtown Seattle.

But for many Bainbridge-based Mariners fans, the ferry ride to the game happened well in advance of the game.

"So many people from Bainbridge work in Seattle," Burris said. For them, it's a simple thing to leave work, eat dinner, attend the ballgame, catch a boat home and be in bed by midnight.

It's more complicated for, say, a shipyard worker in Bremerton. He has to take the hourlong ferry to the game, then face the common Bremerton dilemma of having to leave games early to catch the 10:30 p.m. boat or risk waiting until 12:50. That more arduous journey may make the Bremerton shipyard worker less likely to be a season-ticket owner than the Islander who commutes to Seattle.

The ferry also adds an experience that fans who hop in a car and drive home after a game don't have. There's a shared joy, or pain, that comes with the ride on a ferry packed with fans.

It's an experience Al Reasoner of Bainbridge Island has shared. He was on his way to a game with his brother, Bob Reasoner of Port Ludlow, on Thursday.

"Usually we're crying," Al said of the ride home after games this year.

On the flip side, there are rare moments of Seattle sports pandemonium. Burris remembers the atmosphere at Colman Dock after game five of the 1995 American League Division Series, when the Mariners knocked off the Yankees thanks to the famous Edgar Martinez hit known as "The Double."

"I thought the terminal in Seattle was going to fall down," Burris said. "The building was literally vibrating. It was a huge party home."

But for Bainbridge Island's most dedicated fans, it's not all about proximity. Those who dedicate themselves to attending more than the average number of games universally cite another factor.

The game itself.

Walt Hannon, who owns Walt's Lynwood Market on the island, is a self-professed sports nut who religiously follows the Mariners, Seahawks, and Huskies, and was "in tears" when the Sonics left town.

"I've seen a lot of big games in this town," he said.

He's been a Mariners season-ticket holder since 1996. He still gets to about 10 games a year and sells the extras to friends at his store.

With the economy taking a toll on his business, like many others, the stress can build. A ballgame is a welcome respite.

"To me it's mental R&R," he said. "It's very important."

For Burris, a childhood in the Los Angeles area listening to famed announcer Vin Scully all but demanded he become a student and a lover of the game.

No matter how awful the hometown nine is.

"If you like baseball, you can figure out some reason to go," he said.

The News Tribune

Mariners go on offense, defeat Oakland 7-5

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

Published: 09/08/10 12:05 am

OAKLAND – It went like this: Doug Fister got out of a bases-loaded jam in the first inning, then walked to the Seattle dugout to catch his breath.

Before he next took the mound, Fister had time to count the 10,067 fans in the Oakland Coliseum – his team was building a seven-hit, five-run rally that propelled Fister to his second win since May as Seattle beat the Athletics, 7-5.

Considering the Mariners hadn't scored more than three runs in any of their past 11 games – yes, games – that single inning accounted for more runs than the team had scored in a game since Aug. 14.

Those seven hits in the second inning? Season high for an inning.

"We have used the same six or seven guys at the top of the lineup, but we've tried them in different spots," interim manager Daren Brown said. "We kept hoping something would click.

On a cool September night, with hardly anyone in attendance, something clicked – and Oakland starter Dallas Braden couldn't stop it.

In fact, he started it.

The left-hander who pitched a perfect game earlier this year opened the Seattle second by walking Franklin Gutierrez – then gave up seven hits to the next eight batters, with the only out coming on a sacrifice fly.

"Gutierrez isn't your classic cleanup hitter and Russell Branyan probably isn't a No. 3 hitter," Brown said. "But when you're not scoring runs, you have to try something. We tried something and got it going pretty good."

The rout was on except, of course, nothing is that easy for these Mariners.

Seattle built leads of 6-0, then 7-2, and still had to fire up David Aardsma in the ninth inning – when Brandon League imploded.

Oakland scored three times against League with two outs, put two more runners on base and essentially forced Brown's hand.

Aardsma got the save, his 29th of the year, with one pitch.

No one was more relieved than Fister, the pitcher who at one point in early May led the American League in earned-run average, then stopped winning when his team ceased to score runs.

"I struggled in the first inning, I basically struggled to get the ball down all night," Fister said. "I got through five innings, that's about all I can say."

Fister departed with a 6-2 lead, handing off to Garrett Olson. Olson went two scoreless innings, Jamey Wright added a third.

And while all that was going on, the only bad news the Mariners got came when Gutierrez came out of the game after hyperventilating in the third inning.

"He was congested, he ran down a couple of fly balls and was a little light-headed," Brown said. "He couldn't catch his breath."

Gutierrez came out, was checked by the Oakland team physician and declared fine. Whether he plays today is in question.

Fister and his bullpen got a 7-2 lead to the ninth when Brown went to League.

"Brandon hadn't pitched in three days, and you like to get those late-inning guys in at least every three days," Brown said. "He got two outs on six pitches. Then things got adventurous."

With two on with two outs and a two-run lead, Brown went to his closer.

"I was close to hyperventilating, too," he deadpanned.

Aardsma threw one pitch – a 94 mph fastball – got a pop up into shallow left field and Seattle had its 55th win of the season.

Along the way, the Mariners piled up 13 hits, including two by Ichiro Suzuki, running his hitting streak to nine consecutive games. More important, it pushed his hit total for the season to 181 with 23 games left.

Should he reach 200 hits, it would be for the 10th consecutive season and match a Pete Rose record for 200-hit seasons in a career.

Rookie Adam Moore homered, Matt Tuiasosopo and Josh Wilson had two hits apiece and Brayan drove in his 52nd RBI.

No, it may not mean much. But the Mariners' offense had begun to weigh down a pitching staff that simply couldn't hold opponents low enough to stay in games.

"You need to score to win, and these guys have been trying," Brown said. "Tonight, they got to have a little fun at the plate. They had some good at-bats, they had some balls drop in – and we'll take every one of those."

Safeco's boys of September

JOHN MCGRATH; STAFF WRITER

Published: 09/08/10 12:05 am

In 2045, when Dustin Ackley and Justin Smoak return to Seattle for the silver-anniversary celebration of the Mariners 2020 world championship, their conversation will take them back to Sept. 10, 2010 – the first time they played in Safeco Field as teammates ... on the Tacoma Rainiers.

That's the daydream, anyway.

If all goes according to the building-for-the-future blueprint, the Mariners will evolve into the Dustin and Justin Show, with Ackley serving the role of set-up man for the power-hitting Smoak. That the Carolinians cut their teeth with the Rainiers figures to be regarded as a footnote by the rest of the world, but in Tacoma, home of the original collaboration of Dustin and Justin, it'll be an essential piece of sports lore.

Of course, there's always the chance Ackley won't develop into anything more than a serviceable utility player, and that Smoak's alarming strikeout rate during his brief tour with the big club – after arriving in Seattle as the prize acquisition in the trade that sent Cliff Lee to Texas, the switch-hitting first baseman whiffed 23 times in 63 at-bats – was a prescient indicator of a career-defining struggle.

But after a summer that found the Mariners eliminated from contention midway through spring, I've got no tolerance for any scenario in which the glass is half-empty.

The glass is half-full, thank you very much. Actually, it is quite full as the Rainiers begin a best-of-five playoff series tonight against the Sacramento River Cats. They'll return to Raley Field in West Sacramento for Game 2 on Thursday night before the series moves to Safeco Field on Friday, the Rainiers' temporary home away from home. (Their real home, Cheney Stadium, is in the wrecking-ball phase of a \$30 million renovation.)

Some Mariners fans – specifically, those without an interest in the Pacific Coast League – are frustrated with general manager Jack Zduriencik's decision to keep the core of the Rainiers together for the playoffs.

The Mariners already have borrowed liberally from Tacoma, the thinking goes, so why not just clear the Triple-A deck and give former Rainiers manager Daren Brown a lineup with which he's familiar?

But there's something to be said for the experience gained in games of genuine consequence, even if they're minor-league games, instead of participating in (or, worse, looking on from a standing-room only position in the dugout) the glorified big-league exhibitions that distinguish the September Call-Up season.

And make no mistake: The Oakland organization, which controls the River Cats, is so convinced of the legitimacy of the PCL playoffs that it recently demoted A's starting pitcher Vin Mazzaro to Sacramento.

Granted, Mazzaro was 0-6 with an ERA of 8.60 in his past eight starts with Oakland.

But the first week of September is not a typical time for major leaguers to be called back to the minors. The curious move seems to have had less to do with Mazzaro's stalled progress than an organization whose micro-management of the River Cats suggests the franchise ought to change its nickname from the A's to the Triple-A's.

Sacramento, in any case, is a PCL powerhouse, winners of nine division titles since 2000.

No other pro team in North America has won nine titles since 2000. (The Yankees and hockey's Detroit Red Wings are close, with eight apiece.)

A decade of such sustained success can create a climate of indifference, which might explain why the River Cats fell as many as 12 1/2 games out of first place this season before they rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

As for the Rainiers, they're not foreign to the postseason, either.

They won the PCL's Pacific North Division in 2009, with the help of four position players (Mike Carp, Brad Nelson, Chris Woodward and Mike Wilson) who returned this season.

During the last hurrah of Cheney Stadium last week, it was easy to overlook the fact Tacoma was competing for its first back-to-back division titles since 1981-82, when the team was affiliated with – here's a news flash – the Oakland A's.

I'd be happy to establish a correlation between winning at the Triple-A level and winning, a few years later, at the major-league level with seasoned, polished prospects. And it can't be denied: Oakland became a dominant team in the late 1980s.

What also can't be denied is that Tacoma's back-to-back division title teams of 1981-82 had scant representation on Tony La Russa's A's.

But those Tacoma Tigers had some characters. There was Mike Davis, who represented the tying run when the Dodgers' Kirk Gibson hit his legendary homer that ended Game 1 of the 1988 World Series. (Against the A's, it should be noted.)

There was Danny Goodwin, the only player to be the first overall selection of two different amateur drafts. There was Mike Gallego, a second baseman who won a World Series ring with the 1989 A's, and '89 Oakland teammate Tony Phillips, who retired with 2,030 career hits and almost as many enemies.

And there was Rick Bosetti, who went on to leave his mark – sort of the way a dog does upon a fire hydrant – on the warning track of every major-league park.

Despite the presence of such an extraordinary reliever, the Tigers lost to Spokane in the 1982 playoffs – a year after they were beaten by Albuquerque in the 1981 finals. But enough about yesteryear.

The 2010 Tacoma Rainiers not only are alive and kicking, they're the embodiment of the impossible.

They're bringing playoff baseball to Safeco Field.

Tuiasospo learns versatility a necessity

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer
Published: 09/08/1012:05 am

OAKLAND – Matt Tuiasosopo insists he doesn't think about playing baseball when he awakens on any given morning.

"I start thinking about it at breakfast," he said.

The kicker, of course, is that Tuiasosopo is rarely certain – throughout breakfast or lunch or the ride to the ballpark – whether he'll be playing for the Seattle Mariners that night.

On Tuesday, he was the starting left fielder, the 12th time he's started at the position this season. Tuiasosopo has also started games a shortstop (two), third base (seven) and first base (seven).

This means he's had to practice at each position all season, whether with the Mariners or the Tacoma Rainiers.

"I've learned a lot this season, played positions in the minors I'd never played before – first base and left field – that can only help me," Tuiasosopo said. "And I've had at-bats where I could have come through and didn't.

"It's been a tough year."

In his sixth season in the Mariners organization, Tuiasosopo turned 24 in May. After playing 14 big-league games in 2008 and nine last year, Tuesday was his 41st game of 2010.

Tuiasosopo has rarely started two consecutive games, and is batting .189 with three home runs and 10 RBI in his first 106 at-bats. The younger brother of former Washington Huskies quarterback Marques Tuiasosopo has become a big-league reserve player, and begun learning the tricks of that trade.

"Every park we visit, I take ground balls to learn the infield, take balls in the outfield to learn whether the grass is fast or slow, whether you get true hops," Tuiasosopo said. "Every infield is different. They can be soft, the cutout of the grass can give you different hops.

"If you haven't played games there, you'd better learn it in early work, because you might get in a game that night."

Tuiasosopo struggled at the plate in Tacoma, where he has spent most of the past three seasons. In more than 600 minor league games, the right-handed hitter has a career .270 batting average.

"I like Tui, and I'm not going to say his future is as a utility player," manager Daren Brown said. "I think he has the ability to play regularly, given a chance."

Tuiasosopo doesn't think about that when he wakes up each morning.

Maybe at breakfast.

ON THE SIXTH DAY

With days off Thursday and next week, Brown and pitching coach Carl Willis have decided to stay in rotation – meaning Felix Hernandez will pitch each six days instead of every five.

"He's going to get five more starts, regardless, and we need to protect him where we can," Brown said. "It'll give us the chance to give (Jason) Vargas and (Doug) Fister an extra day, too."

Later in September, in lieu of an off day, the Mariners might give a spot start to lefty Ryan Rowland-Smith, allowing them to keep Felix on an every-sixth-day routine.

ON TAP

Seattle completes its series with Oakland with a 7:07 p.m. game that will be televised on FSN. Probable starting pitchers: Seattle's Luke French (4-4, 3.64) vs. Gio Gonzalez (13-8, 3.12).