

A's News Clips, Saturday, September 18, 2010

A's Brett Anderson cools off Twins

By Jess Myers, Oakland Tribune

Playing the hottest team in baseball on a cold night with a sellout crowd waiting for them to fail, the A's could have felt intimidation. Instead, they found inspiration.

The end result was a 3-1 win over the formerly red-hot Minnesota Twins, and the A's first-ever victory at Target Field. They were swept in a three-game series last month at the Twins' new home.

Starter Brett Anderson carried the heaviest load, scattering four hits over 6²/₃ innings to win his third consecutive start and improve to 6-6.

"Anytime you play in a place like this, you don't feel as much of the aches and pains. It's just a lot of energy," said Jack Cust, who hit his 12th home run of the year in the win. "Anytime the place is packed like this, it makes it fun for the young guys and for everyone. It's a playoff atmosphere."

Cust did his best to quiet the crowd, and the Twins, starting in the second inning. The A's took a 1-0 lead when he led off with a double to center, advanced on Kurt Suzuki's bouncer to first, then came home on a sacrifice fly by Rajai Davis. Twins right fielder Jason Repko lasered a throw to the plate after fielding Davis' fly ball, but Cust slid in under the tag of catcher Drew Butera.

The A's doubled their lead in the fifth thanks to a two-out double by Coco Crisp and an RBI single by Mark Ellis.

After giving up hits in the first two innings, Anderson retired 14 of the next 15 batters in the third through seventh innings. The lone exception was Danny Valencia's solo home run to center, briefly cutting the A's lead to 2-1.

"Anderson pretty much shut us down," said Twins manager Ron Gardenhire. "Using all of his pitches, he was pretty good tonight. Great breaking ball. Decent changeup. He was cutting the ball hard in on our right-handers. He really didn't give us too many opportunities."

Cust homered in the sixth, boosting the A's lead to 3-1.

But with two outs in the seventh, Anderson hit a rough patch, and the game's only real drama played out. Valencia singled and Anderson walked J.J. Hardy before giving way to right-hander Michael Wuertz. The only batter Wuertz faced, Jason Repko, beat out a slow roller to third for an infield single to load the bases. That's when Twins All-Star catcher Joe Mauer was called upon to pinch hit, bringing the sellout crowd to life, and to its feet. A's manager Bob Geren sent Craig Breslow to the mound, and Breslow coaxed a shallow fly ball to left, ending the inning.

"Breslow against Mauer was obviously a huge thing," Geren said. "You saw 40,000 or 50,000 people on their feet for that at-bat. That's major league baseball at its finest. It was fun just being in the ballpark watching that matchup."

Andrew Bailey pitched the ninth, earning his 25th save, and getting a ground ball out of Matt Tolbert to end the game, leaving Mauer waiting in the on-deck circle.

"My command was good," said Anderson, who had last faced the Twins more than a year ago. "I gave up the home run, which was a pretty good pitch. It was an inside fastball and he just kind of ambushed me there."

Notes: Despite the A's rapidly nearing mathematical elimination, Geren said there is value in playing a team like Minnesota in September, with the Twins closing in on the AL Central crown. "We've had a lot of good series where our young guys have been tested and our pitchers have been tested," Geren said. "Playing these kinds of games in September is good for them, and they're important to us too." ... A's left fielder Chris Carter went 0-for-3 on Friday, giving him an Oakland record 0-for-27 streak at the start of his major league career. The previous mark of 0-for-25 was set in 1972 by Bill McNulty. ... The A's last win outdoors in Minnesota was on Aug. 11, 1981, a 6-5 victory at Met Stadium. Oakland was 71-86 all-time at the Metrodome.

Architect proposes building new A's stadium above highway

By Chris Metinko, Oakland Tribune

While Major League Baseball continues to meander in its slow deliberations on where the Oakland A's should call home, an architect in this city is pressing an idea of a new ballpark -- above Interstate 980.

The idea is the brainchild of Bryan Grunwald, 67, of Oakland, an urban designer and planner. Grunwald's proposal calls for a new baseball stadium to be built over the depressed portion of I-980 between 14th and 18th streets. In essence, the bridges at 14th and 18th streets would be widened to connect, creating a solid platform where the stadium could be built.

Sound odd?

Grunwald points to several instances where highways have been decked to install green parks -- such as in Seattle and Phoenix -- and connect neighborhoods.

But a ballpark above a highway with big rigs rumbling past?

Oakland Councilman Ignacio De La Fuente said such an idea has been proposed before, when the city was initially considering ballpark sites years ago.

"That site was looked at," De La Fuente said. "There were businesses over there that were interested in such a thing and we looked at it."

De La Fuente said eventually the idea was turned down for other sites.

In December, Oakland unveiled three sites in Jack London Square -- Howard Terminal at the Port of Oakland; Jack London Square North, an area bounded by Jefferson, Market and Second streets and Interstate 880; and Victory Court, between Oak Street and the Lake Merritt Channel.

City leaders also listed the current Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum site as a potential area for a new stadium, but that idea has received the least support.

Perhaps the biggest barrier the I-980 site would face would be getting the air rights -- rights to build above a highway -- from the Federal Highway Administration and the California Department of Transportation. It could take years to get those rights, and there is no guarantee they would ever be given.

Doug Boxer, who cofounded the group Let's Go Oakland -- a collection of business and community leaders trying to keep the A's in town -- said the city and Major League Baseball have already put in a lot of time studying stadium sites, and that adding another now may only bog down the proceedings.

"The city and Major League Baseball have been engaged in a process that's now 18 months old," said Boxer, who also sits on the city's planning commission.

Boxer said a lot of questions exist concerning the financing, infrastructure and timing of the I-980 ballpark proposal, and time may be of the essence when considering a new stadium in Oakland.

Grunwald disagrees.

He said he believes his idea could be built within five years and would be an ideal fit for the city and team -- with the location of the ballpark downtown, a lot of retailers and restaurants surrounding the area and plenty of existing parking in downtown garages.

Grunwald said he thinks the ballpark could reunite West Oakland with downtown, a schism created when I-980 was built.

Eric Angstadt, planning director for Oakland's Community and Economic Development Agency, said the idea of building a ballpark on top of I-980 had been looked at when the city and Major League Baseball began looking at sites but was dismissed because it did not meet certain requirements. He did not elaborate on those requirements.

Angstadt, however, did add that the idea to bridge the two sections of town would be something to explore.

"The idea of reconnecting West Oakland with downtown makes sense from a planning perspective and from several other perspectives," Angstadt said.

"The idea to do that by roofing the freeway with a public space is one way to do that."

Grunwald already has put on several presentations to community and business groups and said he has received mostly positive feedback.

The Jack London District Association, West Oakland Neighbors, Oak Center Neighborhood Association and the West Oakland Association have all sent letters to council members and the mayor endorsing the idea of looking into Grunwald's proposal.

"Construction projects that span freeways have been shown to be practical and successful in cities including Seattle, Portland, New York City and Chicago. There are no obvious reasons why such a plan should not be considered here," wrote Ben Delaney, president of the Jack London District Association, to the mayor and City Council in June.

Grunwald said he is trying to meet with top city officials to try and hash out the possibilities.

"I think the A's are a big asset to the city and it would be a shame to lose them," Grunwald said.

However, De La Fuente said all the talk of a stadium may be moot, considering the A's have stated time and again their intentions to move south.

"We keep talking about all these different sites, but all I know is Lew Wolff has no interest in Oakland," De La Fuente said.

"The reality is the A's have not given a real indication they are interested in any site in Oakland."

Anderson, A's handle watered-down Twins lineup

Jon Krawczynski, Associated Press

Jack Cust had a solo homer and a double, and the A's gave Brett Anderson just enough run support in a 3-1 victory over the Twins on Friday night.

Anderson (6-6) gave up four hits and struck out five before Craig Breslow got pinch-hitter Joe Mauer to pop out with the bases loaded to end the seventh inning. Andrew Bailey earned his 25th save in 28 tries.

Anderson is "one of the best young pitchers in baseball," manager Bob Geren said. "When he gets on a little roll, he can roll right through a lineup and he did that."

Nick Blackburn (9-10) had another encouraging start for the Twins, who were coming off a three-game sweep of the White Sox that put them nine games up in the AL Central. Blackburn gave up three runs and eight hits in seven innings.

But he didn't get much help from a watered-down Twins lineup. Danny Valencia had two hits, including a solo homer, but the rest of the team managed just three more in the series opener.

Center fielder and leadoff man Denard Span was scratched because of a sore right shoulder, right fielder Jason Kubel rested his sore wrist, and Mauer was rested after catching all three games in the White Sox series.

Minnesota manager Ron Gardenhire gave Ben Revere his first career start in center field, and the rookie grounded out to the pitcher in three of his four at-bats. All three replacements combined to go 1-for-8, but Jason Repko's infield single loaded the bases with two outs in the seventh.

Gardenhire brought in Mauer to pinch-hit and 40,681 fans came to their feet. But after just missing the first pitch, which caught a little more of the plate than Breslow probably would have liked, Mauer popped out to shallow left field to end the inning.

Pitching hasn't been an issue for the A's this season. They entered the game with a 3.56 ERA from their starters, the lowest total for an American League rotation this late in the season since the Red Sox finished 2002 at 3.53.

Anderson has given up five combined earned runs in his last four starts.

It's the offense that has been the problem.

Oakland didn't have a batter in the lineup hitting better than .278 on Friday night. The A's entered the night with the second-fewest extra-base hits, second-lowest slugging percentage (.372) and the fourth-fewest runs scored in the AL.

Five of Anderson's six losses this season came with one or fewer runs of support. But the A's had four extra-base hits and also got runs on a sacrifice fly by Rajai Davis in the second inning and an RBI single by Mark Ellis in the fifth.

Briefly: Oakland rookie Chris Carter went 0-for-3 and fell to 0-for-27 to start his career, breaking Bill McNulty's franchise record. It's the longest career-opening streak by a non-pitcher in the majors since Vic Harris, who went 0-for-36 in 1972.

A's leading off

Staff report

Playoff impact: This weekend is the last chance for the A's to be spoilers, as the Twins race for best record in the AL. The A's have been more helpful to the Twins (2-5 this season) and Yanks (1-9) than the Rays (4-5).

Anderson on point as A's top Twins

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 09/18/10 12:27 AM ET

MINNEAPOLIS -- Realistically, the A's know their chances of surpassing Texas' large lead in the American League West have diminished greatly in the past week, perhaps to the point of nearly impossible measures.

Mathematically, though, manager Bob Geren stresses his club is still in it.

That's why they're playing like a team out to win them all, and in big ways.

That they did Friday against the Twins, a ballclub that just one month ago swept the A's at Target Field and has since made a push for baseball's best record.

This time around, the Twins watched a dominant A's pitching staff led by Brett Anderson shut down their usually noisy lineup, which was handed just five hits as Oakland walked away with a 3-1 victory -- marking the fifth straight game in which they've scored three runs, a club record.

The win came on a cold Friday night in Minnesota, where the A's may have gotten as close to a playoff-like experience as they will all season in the bottom of the seventh inning when Anderson got two quick outs before allowing Danny Valencia to reach on a single and walking J.J. Hardy.

With runners on first and second, Geren pulled Anderson and elected to go with righty Michael Wuertz, who watched a bunt single to Jason Repko load the bases.

Southpaw Craig Breslow was summoned to garner the final out of the inning against pinch-hitter Joe Mauer, who brought along with him a rather large beast.

"You're not just facing Joe Mauer," Breslow said. "You're facing 40,000 fans."

All 40,000-plus in attendance were on their feet, seemingly trying to set some kind of record for noise level in an effort to shake Breslow, a former Twin who happens to know the Minnesota crowd all too well.

"I've played here," Breslow said. "I've seen how loud they can get here, especially when the team's playing well. When a game's on the line, they're into it."

The A's lefty took a rather simple approach against Minnesota's All-Star catcher, a career 2-for-4 hitter against Breslow, who watched Mauer foul off the first pitch before working a 2-1 count and, ultimately, fly out to shallow left field.

"I was just trying to go in on him," he said. "He's so good at taking the ball the other way. The first pitch I gave him wasn't a great one, but I stayed with my approach and it worked to my advantage."

"That's Major League Baseball at its finest," Geren said. "I'm glad we came out of it on the right end."

Mauer's inning-ending out kept the A's on the path to victory, which was very much guided by Anderson.

The A's hurler gave up just four hits and one run -- a solo shot to Valencia to lead off the fifth -- in 6 2/3 innings to improve to 6-6 on the season and has now surrendered a combined five earned runs in four starts in September.

"Anderson pretty much shut us down using all of his pitches," Minnesota skipper Ron Gardenhire said. "He was pretty good tonight. Great breaking ball, decent changeup. He was cutting the ball hard in on our right-handers and really didn't give us too many opportunities."

His efforts, which included one walk and five strikeouts, helped the A's put an end to a two-game skid and reach the .500 mark once again.

"He threw the ball really well," Geren said. "He was throwing hard and moving in and out with his fastball. His breaking ball is always good, and there was no exception tonight. It was a very solid outing against a team like that."

Anderson allowed just three baserunners through the first six innings, all of which didn't include his best breaking ball, he admitted. Enter the slider, which bailed him out more than once.

"That's big for me," Anderson said, "to feel comfortable even when my breaking ball's not spot-on. The sinker, it really helped me out, helped me get a few ground balls."

In a way, the southpaw is making up for lost time, as he endured two stints on the disabled list this year, both due to an ongoing battle with his left elbow. Thus, finishing the season on a high note is of personal importance for Anderson. The same can be said of Jack Cust, who began the year at Triple-A after being designated for assignment 24 hours before Opening Day.

Cust provided Anderson a good dose of offensive support Friday, first in the second inning by tallying a leadoff double off Minnesota's Nick Blackburn and scoring on a sacrifice fly from Rajai Davis to give the A's a 1-0 lead.

Mark Ellis' fifth-inning RBI single made it 2-0 and, after Valencia narrowed Oakland's lead to one, Cust extended it back to two with his 12th homer of the season, a solo shot to left field.

"It's always important to finish strong," Cust said. "It's a long year, but I hope to keep my approach going to keep them from doing the same thing again. I'm trying to give them no reason to be able to do that again."

Slowey looks to continue dominance of A's

By Gina Mizell / MLB.com

Kevin Slowey will likely feel just fine on Saturday if he can repeat the performance he put together the last time faced the A's.

Slowey will take the mound against Oakland for the first time since tossing seven hitless innings against that club when the Twins square off with the A's on Saturday in the second game of a three-game series at Target Field.

Slowey was removed from that Aug. 15 start by manager Ron Gardenhire following the seventh inning, despite the fact that he was working on the first Twins no-hitter since 1999, because his pitch count had already reached 106. Jon Rauch then relinquished the no-no, and the shutout, in the ensuing frame.

The decision to take Slowey out did not get a positive response from the crowd at Target Field that was hoping to see a chance at history.

"I'd boo me too. I took a pitcher out with a no-hitter going, but I would do it a thousand times the same way because Slowey's just come off an elbow injury and we're not even about to come close to risking this guy," Gardenhire said after that game. "It's the way it is, and it's sad, because like I said, I'd be booing too."

Fast forward one month, and Slowey will be making his third start since coming off the disabled list with a strained right triceps on Saturday and looking for his second win in a row. In his last outing at Cleveland, he gave up six hits and two unearned runs with no walks and five strikeouts.

Luckily for the A's, they will also be handing the ball to a starter that knows a thing or two about tossing a no-hitter -- and a perfect game -- in Dallas Braden.

However, Braden has struggled in September, dropping his last three starts. He allowed a season-high four walks in his last outing against the Red Sox to go along with six hits and four earned runs in 5 2/3 innings.

"The story today was I provided a nice walk-a-thon for them," Braden said following that contest. "Anytime you put guys on base like that, you can't expect to come out clean."

Athletics: Carter looks for elusive first hit

Chris Carter, the A's top prospect, is still looking for his first Major League hit after going 0-for-3 against the Twins on Friday. Carter is 0-for-27 in nine games since making his big league debut on Aug. 9, but A's manager Bob Geren said he's not worried about his slugger who ranked fourth in the Pacific Coast League in home runs (31) this season.

"I can tell he's a little more relaxed," Geren said. "He's putting together good at-bats against right-handers. He'll be all right."

Twins: Span sidelined by shoulder injury

Ben Revere made his first Major League start for the Twins on Friday night, going 0-for-3 with a walk while batting leadoff against Oakland. He took the place of Denard Span, who was a late scratch from Friday's lineup after he felt shoulder soreness during early batting practice before the game as a result of an injury he suffered while diving for a ball during Thursday's game at Chicago. Without Span and Jason Kubel, who is nursing a sore left wrist, available to play, Minnesota was without an outfielder on the bench on Friday.

"He went out and tried to swing and it bothered him," Gardenhire said of Span. "Hopefully it's a day thing."

Worth noting

Oakland scored three runs on Friday against the Twins, marking the first time in team history that the A's have scored that exact amount in five consecutive games. ... Mark Ellis is batting .426 (23-of-54) in September. ... The A's are 33-16 in day

games, compared to a 40-57 mark in night games. ... Joe Mauer was given the night off from behind the plate on Friday, as he was not in the starting lineup. The Twins have a 12:10 p.m. CT on Saturday so Mauer likely got a break before catching Slowey in the day contest. ... Twins manager Ron Gardenhire is three wins away from reaching 800 career managerial wins.

Sweeney eyes Spring Training return

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 09/18/10 12:45 AM ET

MINNEAPOLIS -- Ryan Sweeney hobbled around the A's clubhouse as a surprise guest on Friday afternoon, showing off a right knee brace he hopes will be gone soon if he wants to be ready by Spring Training.

The A's outfielder, who underwent season-ending knee surgery July 30, made the four-hour drive with wife Natasha from their home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on Friday in a simple effort to get out of the house.

After all, Sweeney can only watch so much television in between physical therapy appointments, at which he arrives via help from his mom.

"I can't really do anything," Sweeney said. "I've been on crutches with the brace for eight weeks already, so it's kind of frustrating."

Sweeney realizes that said frustration could potentially mount come Tuesday, when he's scheduled to visit Dr. Richard Steadman in Veil, Colo., for not just a checkup on his right knee but an evaluation on his left knee, which Sweeney said may require surgery as well.

The 25-year-old outfielder is hoping that's not the case, as four to six months of recovery time is expected for each knee. Thus, his goal of beginning baseball activity within the next couple of months would be wiped away if Steadman decides another surgery is necessary.

"I'm told my left one isn't as bad as the right," Sweeney said. "It's just a question of whether it will affect me next year if I don't have it. But I don't want to be out any longer than I need to be."

"I want to be ready by Spring Training, so everything just depends on what happens with my left knee. If I need the surgery, I don't know if recovery time will be different since it's not supposed to be as bad as my right one."

His right knee forced Steadman to perform arthroscopic debridement of patellar tendinitis, which had the surgeon cleaning up a handful of scar tissue and giving the knee a dose of PRP jelly to help it heal quicker. Sweeney said he hasn't experienced pain in awhile -- just tightness.

"I started riding a bike last week," he said. "I'm just trying to stretch it, get all the swelling out. There's no muscle in my calf or quad right now, so I'm working on just building up a lot of muscle around the knee."

Ellis sees results after adjustments at plate

MINNEAPOLIS -- A's hitting instructor Jim Skaalen insists he takes a hands-on approach with all of his players, even those boasting a veteran status like Mark Ellis.

But Ellis, Skaalen said, is of the "low-maintenance" type. The A's second baseman has been around the game long enough and has taken enough hacks to know when and how to make minor adjustments, as he did recently.

"He modified his stance a little bit," Skaalen said before Ellis and Co. took on the host Twins on Friday. "It's kept his swing shorter, and he's getting good pitches to hit."

That much is certain with one look at his September numbers, which include a .440 average (22-for-50) and eight multiple-hit games. The 22 hits lead the American League for the month, and he entered Friday's contest having hit safely in 14 of his last 15 games.

As a result, Ellis has bumped his average from .268 to .276 in just a week's time, leading manager Bob Geren to place him in the third spot of the lineup Friday.

"He's definitely swinging the bat a little better," Geren said. "He's driving the ball to all fields and just seeing it better overall, which is leading to more hits."

"He's getting some breaks," Skaalen said. "When he was going bad, he was still hitting balls pretty good. He doesn't panic. He gets frustrated like everyone else, but I generally don't worry about him. I couldn't be more pleased with what he's doing right now.

"He's not chasing them early out of the zone. He's getting pitches where he's looking for them and getting rewarded."

Kouzmanoff takes step forward from injury

MINNEAPOLIS -- Kevin Kouzmanoff underwent light batting practice and took a handful of ground balls at third base on Friday afternoon, marking a sign of notable progress for the injured A's infielder.

Kouzmanoff has been battling lower back pain since Sept. 5 and, as a result, has not played in the club's last 10 games. Despite Friday's big step forward, though, there's still no timetable for a return, although manager Bob Geren did not rule out the Minnesota series.

"It's a possibility," Geren said. "The good news is that he felt well enough to take BP today. We'll see how he comes out of it and go from there."

In Kouzmanoff's place, the recently acquired Aki Iwamura has received each of the last four starts at third base. Yet, he's still looking for his first hit with Oakland, as he entered Friday's game mired in a 0-for-10 slump.

"He's giving us quality at-bats," Geren said. "He's a real good defensive player, and he's been giving us good swings. That's all you can ask."

Worth noting

Oakland's short-season Class A affiliate, the Vancouver Canadians, dropped their previous working agreement with the A's on Friday and announced they have signed a new player development agreement with the Toronto Blue Jays. Vancouver will continue to play in the Class A Northwest League and go by the same name. The A's have yet to decide upon a new location. ... Chris Carter went 0-for-3 in Friday's game against the Twins and is now hitless in his first 27 Major League at-bats. It marks the longest hitless streak to start a career by a non-pitcher since Vic Harris went 0-for-36 in 1972.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Naturals one win away from championship

Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Game 3 of the Texas League Championship Series was the tale of two swings. The first had the Midland RockHounds thinking about a second straight victory. The second dashed those hopes.

With one swing of the bat, Northwest Arkansas slugger Eric Hosmer turned a one-run deficit into a one-run lead in the eighth inning. His two-run home run in the eighth put the Naturals on top, 2-1, and that's where the final score stood at Citibank Ballpark on Friday. The Naturals retook momentum and the series lead with the victory and enter Game 4 at 7 p.m. today up 2-1 in the best-of-5 series.

"That's a big win," Hosmer said. "Any time you come into someone else's home crowd, you know it's going to be tough. We fell behind, but we came up with big hits when we needed to."

The RockHounds' biggest hit of the game came in the sixth, but they nearly had one last rally left in them in the ninth.

Naturals closer Patrick Keating entered in the ninth to protect the 2-1 lead and he had to do it against the heart of the RockHounds order. He retired No. 3 hitter Shane Peterson on a fly out to center to start the inning and followed that with a strikeout of No. 4 hitter Val Majewski. Then things got interesting.

Alex Valdez singled through the right side to bring up Archie Gilbert. Gilbert fell behind in the count, 0-2, and sent a grounder toward Naturals second baseman Johnny Giavotella. Giavotella gathered himself near the outfield grass to get in position to field the grounder and go to first for the final out. Instead, the ball kicked off a footprint in the base path and shot over Giavotella's head, allowing Gilbert to reach and Valdez, the tying run, to advance to third.

"I've never seen that before," Hosmer said. "I think everyone was shocked."

If Keating was shaken, it didn't show. He needed five pitches to strike out Josh Horton to end the game.

"I was just thinking we need to get outs any way possible," Hosmer said. "That was all Patrick Keating, getting their 3-4-5 hitters and shutting them down. That's what champions do and we know we still have one more to go."

If not for Hosmer, there wouldn't have been any drama in the bottom of the ninth.

For seven innings, RockHounds starter Ryan Edell had the Naturals puzzled. Edell tossed seven shutout innings, allowing three hits and two walks while striking out seven. A solo home run from RockHounds designated hitter Grant Green in the sixth looked at the time like it would be enough to send Edell to the showers with the win.

"He was outstanding," RockHounds manager Darren Bush said of Edell. "He did a great job. He had everything working. He was hitting his spots up and down and he was elevating pitches when he needed to."

Then the Naturals came to bat in the eighth.

Facing RockHounds reliever Mickey Storey, Derrick Robinson earned a one-out walk. Two batters later with two outs, Hosmer deposited a first pitch fastball from Storey (1-1) over the right field wall.

"I faced him two times before and both times he threw me first pitch fastballs," Hosmer said. "He has a good curveball, but I just told myself not to get beat by his fastball."

It was one of just four Naturals hits in the game. However, the RockHounds didn't experience much more success against Naturals starter, John Lamb. Lamb allowed just two hits in 6 2/3 innings, but one was the home run by Green.

"Tomorrow's a new day," Bush said. "We have to win two in a row now. We just have to go out and leave it all on the field."

NOTEBOOK

ROCKHOUNDS BITES: RockHounds manager Darren Bush said right-hander Matt Wright will start tonight's game. Wright was touched up for four runs on seven hits and a walk in six innings in Game 3 against Frisco. He picked up the win, though, striking out eight RoughRiders. ... Meanwhile, Will Smith will be making his second start of the playoffs after not figuring in the decision in the Naturals' Game 4 victory against Springfield. He allowed three runs in 5 1/3 innings on seven hits and a

walk while striking out four. ... Northwest Arkansas catcher Manny Pina left Friday's game in the third inning after being run over by Midland's Jermaine Mitchell at the plate. Mitchell was on third base with one out when J.C. Holt hit a grounder in front of the mound. Pitcher John Lamb barehanded the ball and underhanded it to Pina at the plate. Mitchell elected to try going through Pina rather than around him, but Pina held onto the ball for the out. Pina was on the ground for a couple minutes before walking off the field with some assistance.

TODAY'S PROBABLE PITCHERS: Northwest Arkansas Naturals -- Will Smith (LHP, 0-0, 5.06); Midland RockHounds -- Matt Wright (RHP, 1-0, 6.00)