

A's News Clips, Saturday, April 9, 2011

A's beaten by Twins' eighth-inning rally

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS -- The search is under way for the A's offense, which has pulled a vanishing act that looks all too familiar.

A sterling effort from left-hander Brett Anderson went to waste Friday as the A's lost 2-1 to Minnesota in the Twins' home opener at Target Field.

Offseason improvements to Oakland's lineup were supposed to ensure the "Great Pitching, No Hitting" story line wouldn't surface as often this season as it did in 2010. But the A's are off to a 2-5 start and have scored three runs or less in five of the seven games.

They put up a run in the first inning off Twins starter Carl Pavano (1-1), then went into hibernation and watched Minnesota score twice off Anderson in the eighth to steal a victory.

"Yeah, it gets frustrating," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "It kind of stings a little more when your pitcher goes out and pitches his butt off."

The A's mustered just enough offense Thursday to beat the Blue Jays 2-1 and reward Trevor Cahill for a fine eight-inning effort. No such luck for Anderson (0-1), who struck out five and walked none over eight innings, the second complete game of his major league career.

The lefty has allowed just three runs in 14 innings over his first two starts but hasn't gotten a win.

Anderson held the Twins to four hits over the first seven innings, and two of those were infield singles. That kept a sellout crowd of 40,714 quiet for much of the game.

"His breaking ball was real good," Twins center fielder Denard Span said of Anderson. "He just had everything going. I think in that eighth inning, he got a little tired, just leaving the ball over the plate a little bit. But even the balls we did hit, we didn't hit them very hard."

In the eighth, Danny Valencia reached on a one-out infield single, and pinch hitter Jason Kubel grounded a two-out single to right that put runners on the corners.

Span shot a single down the right-field line to tie it. Joe Mauer followed with a weakly hit but well-placed grounder down the left-field line that scored pinch runner Matt Tolbert to put the Twins ahead.

"You at least try to match their guy," Anderson said. "Give credit to (Pavano). He held us in check the rest of the game. It's frustrating from my standpoint that I can't hold the lead."

Twins closer Joe Nathan allowed David DeJesus' one-out single in the ninth, then struck out Josh Willingham on three pitches and got Hideki Matsui on a pop-up to end it.

Willingham and Matsui -- the A's 4-5 hitters -- are two of the newcomers, along with DeJesus, expected to help rejuvenate the offense.

Pavano surrendered just four hits and one walk over eight innings.

The A's took the lead in the first when Daric Barton walked, went to second on a wild pitch, moved to third on Pavano's errant pickoff throw and scored on DeJesus' sacrifice fly.

But the A's lack of situational hitting -- which manager Bob Geren has stressed as a needed area for improvement -- came back to haunt them.

With a runner on third and one out in the third, Barton was rung up looking on a pitch that caught the inside corner and was too close to take in that situation. DeJesus grounded to first for the third out.

Mark Ellis led off the fifth with a double but was stranded there.

A's update: Matsui gives countryman Tsuyoshi Nishioka encouragement

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Matsui gives injured Nishioka encouragement

MINNEAPOLIS -- A's designated hitter Hideki Matsui provided a nice moment Friday for Minnesota Twins second baseman Tsuyoshi Nishioka, who is missing the chance to play against his countryman because of a broken leg.

Nishioka, one of the best players in Japan before signing with Minnesota over the winter, received a big ovation at Target Field when he took the field on crutches for pregame introductions before the Twins' 2-1 home-opening win over the A's.

After the ceremony, he started to make his way toward Matsui, who motioned for Nishioka to stay there and instead made his way across the infield for a friendly exchange.

Nishioka, 26, is 10 years younger than Matsui, and the two had never played against each other or even met.

"We greeted each other, and I told him I hope he has a quick and good recovery," Matsui said through interpreter Roger Kahlon.

Nishioka was appreciative of the gesture.

"I was so honored after he came over to me," Nishioka told Japanese reporters.

Nishioka fractured the fibula in his left leg Thursday when the Yankees' Nick Swisher slid hard into him at second base. Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said the best-case scenario is for Nishioka to be ready to play in four to six weeks.

Matsui, who signed with the Yankees in 2003 after a legendary career in Japan, knows the feeling of wanting to impress new teammates after jumping to the major leagues. He said Nishioka can't worry about that effort being put on hold.

"There's nothing he really can do at this point," Matsui said. "The important thing is focusing on recovering."

Notable items as the A's minor league affiliates have begun their seasons:

Second baseman Jemile Weeks, a 2008 first-round draft pick, made his debut with Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday. He had a three-run triple in the River Cats' 6-2 win over Tacoma.

Shortstop Grant Green, a 2009 first-round pick who's rated as the A's top prospect by Baseball America, is at Double-A Midland. Center fielder Michael Choice, the A's top pick in 2010, is starting the season with high Single-A Stockton.

Another top prospect, outfielder Michael Taylor, is on Sacramento's 7-day D.L. with a wrist strain.

A's manager Bob Geren said Ryan Sweeney will get an outfield start soon, and Landon Powell will start behind the plate either Saturday or Sunday to give Kurt Suzuki his first day off.

Chin Music: Perfect weather for A's-Twins series opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/8/2011 12:45PM

I thought I was pretty wise to jam my suitcase full of warm clothing for this nine-game road trip to cold weather cities. It's turned out to be a picturesque afternoon at Target Field in Minneapolis – sunshine and blue skies for the A's-Twins series opener. We've got a 3:10 p.m. start (local time), and it will cool off once the sun goes down. But the temperature is supposed to reach the mid-70's by Sunday (though a heavy chance of rain). Today is the Twins' home opener, so this place will be packed ...

–It's the standard lineup for the A's against right-hander Carl Pavano:

A's: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS; Anderson LHP.

Twins: Span CF, Mauer C, Morneau 1B, Young LF, Cuddyer RF, Thome DH, Valencia 3B, Hughes 2B, Casilla SS; Pavano RHP.

—Ryan Sweeney's playing time has been minimal so far – he's appeared in just three games off the bench and gotten just two at-bats. But manager Bob Geren says he plans to get Sweeney a start very soon for either Coco Crisp or Josh Willingham. Geren has said he looks forward to working all of his outfielders into the playing rotation to keep everyone fresh. When Crisp sits, I'd expect we'll see David DeJesus shift to center and Sweeney get the start in right. At least that's what Geren said he had planned during the spring. But Sweeney's innings will be tough to come by barring an injury. With Conor Jackson playing well, he'll be the first option to make a spot start in the outfield, particularly against lefties.

—The Japanese media was looking forward to covering the first game between Hideki Matsui and new Twins second baseman Tsuyoshi Nishioka, who made the jump from Japan in the offseason. But Nishioka suffered a broken leg Thursday and was put on the DL, so that storyline is on hold. Nishioka had been hitting second, so with him out, Joe Mauer is in the No. 2 spot today. He'd been hitting third. ...

—It's crucial for the A's that starter Brett Anderson comes out sharp today. The crowd will be jacked up, and Anderson can temper that by throwing strikes and keeping runners off base. In case you're interested, nobody in Minnesota's lineup has much history against Anderson or any numbers to suggest an advantage or disadvantage on either side ...

Twins win; A's Brett Anderson loses shutout in 8th

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

One of the few positives the A's can point to through the first seven games of the season is that they've held the lead in nearly every game.

Maybe they should revise that tactic, because for the fifth time this season, Oakland held a tiny early advantage only to lose. On Friday at Target Field, the A's inability to add on runs wasted a fantastic start by Brett Anderson, who dropped a 2-1 decision to the Twins.

Both of Oakland's wins have been comeback victories.

"Whenever we score first, we always lose. Whenever the other team scores, we win," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "We just need to keep the momentum on our side, score runs and score more runs."

One problem for Oakland on Friday was that Twins starter Carl Pavano was proving as difficult as Anderson. The A's lone run came in the first inning, when Daric Barton walked, went to second on a wild pitch and third on an error, then scored on a sacrifice fly by David DeJesus.

The team couldn't come up with the same kind of situational hitting in later innings. In the third, the team had a man at third with one out, and Barton struck out and DeJesus grounded out. In the fifth, Mark Ellis hit a leadoff double and was stranded at second after a short flyball, a popup and a groundout.

A's manager Bob Geren said his team's approach was good with men in scoring position, but Pavano "just made tough pitches in those situations," Geren said.

Anderson, like Pavano, was spotting the ball perfectly and changing speeds, plus getting some tappers with his curveball. He retired 14 in a row at one point, and the Twins made little solid contact.

"I was trying to match their guy pitch for pitch. But give them credit," Anderson said. "It's frustrating from the standpoint that I couldn't hold the lead."

In the eighth, Danny Valencia reached on an infield single and, with two outs, pinch hitter Jason Kubel found a hole between first and second, sending Valencia to third. The next two hitters, Denard Span and Joe Mauer, knocked groundball singles right down the lines, Span past first base and Mauer past third, and both sent in runs. The only really hard-hit ball in the inning was a line drive by Justin Morneau that left fielder Josh Willingham caught with a lunge for the final out.

"Getting beat by three straight groundballs is just bad luck with placement," Geren said. "But it's a difficult league to win with just one run."

Anderson has allowed only 13 hits, one walk and three runs in 14 innings (while striking out 10) and he's 0-2. The A's have scored a total of two runs while he was on the mound, and overall, the team is batting just .234.

Friday was Anderson's second career complete game; the other was on July 6, 2009, at Boston.

"Shoot, he pitched his butt off," Suzuki said. "We should have got a win for him."

Ryan Sweeney waiting, first start could be soon

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

When healthy, **Ryan Sweeney** was a regular the past three seasons with the A's.

After more than a week of the 2011 season, however, the outfielder has yet to start a game, and he has only two at-bats.

Sweeney smiled when asked Friday about his lack of playing time, and said, "I don't have anything to say about it. ... I'm just trying to stay positive with the situation."

Sweeney said he is getting in as much extra work as possible, and he has requested to hit against **Rich Harden** Monday when Harden throws live batting practice.

Manager **Bob Geren** said Sweeney will get a start soon, and he noted that Sweeney handled a limited playing schedule well during spring training as the team tried to work him in slowly after patella surgery last summer.

Geren said **Landon Powell**, who also has not had a start this year, is likely to catch today or Sunday.

No Nishioka: In Japan, this series was billed as a matchup of great older star **Hideki Matsui** and Twins rookie **Tsuyoshi Nishioka**, but Nishioka's leg was injured Thursday against the Yankees when ex-A's outfielder **Nick Swisher** slid into him hard while trying to break up a double play.

"I feel bad for what happened," said Matsui, who was fielding questions about Nishioka all morning. "Hopefully, he recovers from his injury and comes back and plays well."

Nishioka, the Pacific League batting champion last year, will not need surgery or a cast, the Twins announced Friday. The team has not indicated how long Nishioka will be out, but some reports suggest he will miss at least a month.

Briefly: Oakland's starters' ERA is 2.77. ... The A's have dropped the first game of each of their three series. ... **David DeJesus** has a 23-game hitting streak against the Twins. He's a .319 career hitter against Minnesota. ... After making errors in each of their first four games, the A's have not made one in the past three.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Almost balmy: It was sunny and 63 at game time for the Twins' home opener. "I cannot believe this weather," manager Bob Geren said. "When I saw Minnesota on the schedule for April ... Well, you couldn't ask for a better day than this."

Drumbeat: Mark Ellis back in lineup, other A's tidbits

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Target Field 4/8/2011, 11:48AM

Mark Ellis is feeling much better after getting treatment for an ear infection and he said that last night's flight actually helped break up the gunk in his left ear. So he's back in the lineup, in his now-usual seventh spot.

Here's the lineup behind Brett Anderson: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, DeJesus rf, Willingham lf, Matsui dh, Suzuki c, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Pennington ss.

Ryan Sweeney hasn't started a game yet, and I asked manager Bob Geren when the former regular might be in the lineup. He said he'll get Sweeney a start soon, either in place of Josh Willingham or Coco Crisp. Geren noted that Sweeney, by design, had a slow start to the spring as he recovered from patella surgery, and Geren said that Sweeney had handled playing only every few days and then every other day well.

I spoke to Sweeney, and going from starter to bit player doesn't seem to have him down too much. He smiled at the question and said he didn't have much to say about it, and he said he's adjusting. He'll try to get in as much extra work as possible to stay ready. Sweeney, like most of the returning A's, knows how quickly a stint on the bench can turn into playing every day, so I don't think he believes that this will be his lot long-term.

Landon Powell will start one of the next two games, Geren said. Powell also hasn't been in the starting lineup yet.

Andy LaRoche, who started at shortstop, third base and second base the past three games, jokingly asked first baseman Daric Barton if he really wanted to play today. LaRoche is swinging the bat so well, I believe Geren will find some spots to use him, though he might not be in the starting lineup until the Chicago series.

Anderson's gem spoiled late in A's loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/8/2011

MINNEAPOLIS -- Brett Anderson received support of one run or fewer in nearly half of his starts last season. The A's lefty was winless in those outings, and he entered the 2011 campaign 0-14 in 21 career starts with zero or one run of support.

On Friday, despite an impressive eight-inning performance against the Twins, Anderson moved to 0-15 in such games, as a late comeback by Minnesota left the A's on the losing end of a 2-1 series-opening contest at Target Field.

Back-to-back RBI base hits from Denard Span and Joe Mauer with two outs in the eighth wiped away Anderson's chances at his first shutout since July 6, 2009, at Boston.

The young southpaw handled a proven Twins lineup early, compiling five strikeouts and no walks while retiring 14 straight at one point. He allowed eight hits total, three of which didn't leave the infield.

The A's offense couldn't do much against Minnesota starter Carl Pavano, who gave up one run on four hits in eight innings while improving to 1-1 on the year.

Oakland jumped on the board in the first, when Daric Barton walked with one out, advanced to second on a wild pitch, moved to third on a throwing error by Pavano and scored on a sacrifice fly ball off the bat of David DeJesus.

That lone run almost proved plenty for Anderson, who breezed his way through the first seven frames and even fielded three of his 12 ground-ball outs, several of which had Mark Ellis and Daric Barton make use of a flashy glove.

A scoreless ninth from Joe Nathan, who earned his third save, sealed Oakland's loss, as the club moved to 1-2 in one-run games this season following a 2010 campaign in which they posted a 23-20 record in such contests.

Second-base question looms for Twins, as do A's

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 4/8/2011 7:42 PM ET

The Twins are feeling the effects of the loss of second baseman Tsuyoshi Nishioka, who has a fracture in his lower left leg, but it has not affected their play.

Catcher Joe Mauer is batting second in the lineup, Luke Hughes was recalled from Triple-A Rochester and Michael Cuddyer is taking ground balls at second base.

The new-look Twins topped the A's on Friday, 2-1. They'll square off again Saturday with Nick Blackburn on the mound against Oakland's Gio Gonzalez.

The question remains. What will the Twins do at second base?

"We'll mix and match at second base," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "I want options, and Michael is one of those options. If I can get Michael in at second, it gives [Jason] Kubel and [Jim] Thome in the lineup. It'll create some offense. Michael will play anywhere, and we've talked about it."

Gardenhire likes the idea of Mauer batting second.

"Mauer is a great on-base guy, and it gives [Justin] Morneau a chance to bat in the first inning, too," Gardenhire said. "So he'll get more at-bats this way, as they say. So we'll see."

Gonzalez was wild in his first start against Seattle, throwing just 67 of his 116 pitches for strikes but surrendering just one run in seven innings. He walked four in the game and will be looking to eliminate the free passes. He walked 92 batters in 200 1/3 innings last year. "We've faced two good pitching staffs, and we're facing another one," Gardenhire said. "These guys throw the ball pretty good. So we have to figure out a way to bang the ball around."

As for Blackburn, he pitched well in his first outing, allowing just one earned run over 5 2/3 innings in a win over the Jays.

Athletics: David DeJesus extended his 23-game hitting streak against the Twins on Friday. He boasts a .319 (107-for-335) mark in 83 career games against the Twins, hitting safely in 68 of those contests.

- The A's have lost the first game in each of their three series this season. They are 2-5 at Target Field.

- Josh Willingham has hit safely in five of seven games this season and has struck out at least once in every game. Five of his six hits have been against right-handed pitchers.

Twins: The Twins are off to a good start at home -- again. The club went 53-28 at Target Field last season, the third-best record at home in baseball. They won 18 of 26 series at home.

- Closer Joe Nathan appeared in a home game for the first time since the tie-breaking, 163rd game of 2009. He is 3-for-3 in save opportunities this season.

- The Twins have not scored a run in the first inning this season.

Worth noting

Ryan Sweeney and Landon Powell are the only Oakland players who have yet to start a game, and the A's manager Bob Geren said his goal is still to keep everyone on his 25-man roster active. ... Morneau notched career-hit no. 1,000 Friday and is the 13th player in franchise history to reach the mark.

Geren plans to get Sweeney playing time

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- It won't be long before former regular Ryan Sweeney, now relegated to a bench role, gets his first start of the season, manager Bob Geren said Friday.

Sweeney and Landon Powell represent the only Oakland players who have yet to get a starting nod, and the A's skipper noted before Friday's series-opening meeting with the Twins that his goal is still to keep everyone on his 25-man roster in action.

"We want to keep everyone healthy, get everyone some playing time," Geren said. "The plan is the same."

Sweeney, Geren said, will soon start in place of either Josh Willingham or Coco Crisp, both of whom have yet to receive a day off. The Twins have a pair of righties going in the final two games of the three-game set, so it's likely the left-handed Sweeney could be inserted into the lineup by weekend's end.

The 26-year-old outfielder, sharing backup duties with Conor Jackson, is seen as the club's best left-handed option off the bench, given his career .298 average against righties. In comparison, he owns a .248 mark when facing left-handers.

Sweeney pinch-hit in each of the team's first two games, going 0-for-2 against the Mariners. He's now a career 2-for-18 (.111) hitter with seven strikeouts in the pinch, though Geren is confident in his ability to adjust to his new role, especially since he eased into those same duties during the spring while recovering from patella surgery.

"He just has to keep working and do the best he can," Geren said. "His start time was delayed in the spring, so he was only playing every couple of days, but he reacted to it well. His timing was good and he has a real simple swing, so I think he'll adjust just fine."

The low-key Sweeney, who has accepted his backup responsibilities, had started each of the previous three A's openers before this year and was batting a team-leading .294 with one homer and 36 RBIs in 82 games last season before undergoing season-ending right knee surgery at the end of July.

Powell, meanwhile, will likely start behind the plate either Saturday or Sunday, Geren said. The A's catcher has yet to appear in a game this year after going 5-for-16 (.313) over his final 11 spring games. He endured four stints with Oakland last year and batted .214 with two home runs and 11 RBIs in 41 games.

Worth noting

Mark Ellis, who was treated for an ear infection on Thursday, returned to the A's starting lineup on Friday. ... Hideki Matsui is a .336 career hitter against the Twins, his best average against any team.

Mauer, Span rally Twins to win over A's

By JON KRAWCZYNSKI, ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS — Brett Anderson was rolling through the Minnesota Twins lineup, breaking bats and changing speeds for seven brilliant innings while the Oakland Athletics were clinging to a 1-0 lead.

In the blink of an eye, it all fell apart in the eighth inning, and Anderson watched another superb outing swirl down the drain.

Joe Mauer and Denard Span delivered RBI singles in the eighth to lift the Minnesota Twins to a 2-1 victory over the Athletics in their home opener on Friday.

In two starts this season, Anderson has received three runs of support. He gave up one run in six innings against Seattle to start the season, but his bullpen and bats failed him in a 5-2 loss to the Mariners.

"You just try to match their guy," Anderson said. "(Carl) Pavano gave up a run in the first and you just try to match him pitch for pitch after that. You give credit to him. He held us in check the rest of the way and I wasn't able to get it done in the eighth. It's frustrating from my standpoint that I wasn't able to hold the lead."

Anderson (0-1) gave up two runs on eight hits and struck out five in eight innings. Three of those hits never reached the outfield and he retired 14 in a row at one point.

Pavano (1-1) gave up one run on four hits in eight innings to get the win.

"He pitched his butt off," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "He kept them off balance, hit his spots, changed speeds well. We should have got a win for him."

After David DeJesus's sacrifice fly gave Anderson a 1-0 lead in the first inning, the young lefty mowed down the Twins, keeping them off balance with an assortment of off-speed pitches. He faced the minimum number of hitters in innings 2-7, getting double plays to end the sixth and seventh.

"That's their ace out there on the mound," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He really kept our hitters at bay for a while."

That 1-0 lead felt like a five-run advantage the way Anderson was throwing when he took the ball to start the eighth inning. He gave up another infield single to Danny Valencia with one out, then got Luke Hughes to pop out to left field. But pinch-hitter Jason Kubel hooked a single down the right field line and Span and Mauer each followed with run-scoring hits to put the Twins ahead.

"I made a good pitch to Kubel inside," Anderson said. "The pitch that Span hit was the same one that broke his bat before, it just seemed a tick out of the reach of gloves. That's the way baseball is sometimes."

Joe Nathan gave up one hit in the ninth for his first save at Target Field. He missed all of last season while recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Pavano is supposed to be the old, steady hand in the Twins' rotation, a guy who doesn't get rattled by charged-up environments like the home opener. But he got off to a shaky start in the first inning, walking Daric Barton, bouncing a wild pitch about five feet in front of home plate and then allowing Barton to take third when he threw a pickoff attempt into center field.

Barton scored on a sacrifice fly from DeJesus. The Athletics have held a lead in every game this season, but have just two victories to show for it.

"As far as the offense, it's early," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It's obviously very, very encouraging to see the starting pitching we're getting, and how deep they are going into the game. They're giving us a chance to win every single night."

NOTES: DeJesus, who played the previous eight seasons in Kansas City, has a 23-game hitting streak against the Twins. He is hitting .319 (107 for 335) in 83 career games against Minnesota. ... The Twins announced that 2B Tsuyoshi Nishioka's broken left fibula will not need a cast or surgery. There is still no timetable for his return. ... Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said RHP Kevin Slowey was scheduled to get an MRI on Friday on his sore pitching arm and was not available out of the bullpen. ... Geren said he planned to get OF Ryan Sweeney in the lineup on Saturday or Sunday. He hasn't started a game yet this season.

Finding their religion: Oakland A's plan first Jewish Heritage night

By [Michael McCarthy](#), USA TODAY

The issue of religious freedom vs. separation of church and state is always dicey and sports is not immune.

A growing number of MLB, NBA, NHL and NFL clubs are offering Christian, Jewish and Mormon nights.

But a national Muslim advocacy group doesn't think it's appropriate for teams to mix religion and sports. If sports teams are going to do it, then the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) wants equal time for other religions.

"The ultimate test of this kind of policy would be to have a Muslim Family Day — and gauge the public reaction to it," says CAIR spokesman **Ibrahim Hooper**. "Given the heightened state of anti-Muslim sentiment in our society, I have a feeling there would be some objections to that."

The Oakland A's, for example, will hold their first Jewish Heritage Night against the Los Angeles May 17. Attendees get an A's yarmulke and a seat in the plaza infield section for \$26.

On Sunday, the NBA's Golden State Warriors will hold their first Jewish Heritage night, including a Q&A with Israeli basketball player **Omri Casspi**, Jewish music and kosher barbecue. The 2010 World Series Champion San Francisco Giants are planning Fellowship (Christian), Jewish and LDS (Mormon) days among various ethnic heritage promotions this season.

Steve Fanelli of the A's says pro sports teams are offering religious-themed nights to move group ticket sales and because religious groups in their community approach them.

"Beyond religion it's the same philosophy for any theme day: give fans a chance to enjoy baseball with their group and get together in an environment they may not otherwise choose to," Fanelli says.

What do you think? Is it OK for sports teams to hold these religious-themed fan days? Or should sports stay away from religion. Vote [here](#).

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Late Tacoma rally knocks off Sacramento

By Mark Ling / Sacramento River Cats

Tacoma scored single runs in the sixth and seventh innings off Sacramento reliever Gabe DeHoyos en route to a 3-1 victory over Sacramento on Friday night at Raley Field.

Things looked grim for the River Cats when Matt Tuiasosopo lined a run-scoring triple to right field, giving the Rainiers an early 1-0 lead. Then, River Cats starting pitcher Guillermo Moscoso found his groove.

The 6-foot-1 hurler out of Lakeland, Fla. struck out the next two batters before finishing with four hits allowed and one walk with seven strikeouts in 5.0 innings.

The River Cats responded in the first as, after back-to-back walks by second baseman Jemile Weeks and shortstop Eric Sogard, left fielder Chris Carter singled home Weeks to tie the game.

Rainiers starter Blake Beavan settled down after his first inning as well. Beavan ultimately pitched 4.0 innings, striking out four with three walks and two hits allowed before being drilled in the thigh by a Josh Donaldson line-drive in the fourth. Beavan finished the inning, but was pulled to begin the fifth for lefty Cesar Jimenez.

Neither team would score until Carlos Peguero singled off DeHoyos, scoring Alex Liddi and giving the Rainiers a 2-1 advantage in the sixth.

The River Cats threatened in the sixth when Carter logged a lead-off walk then stole second with one out. Donaldson would strike out, bringing Steve Tolleson to the plate with a chance to tie the game at two.

To exploit the righty-righty matchup, the Rainiers pulled Jimenez in favor of Justin Miller. Miller responded by striking out Tolleson on five pitches.

After giving up a two-out single to Dustin Ackley in the seventh, River Cats reliever Joe Bateman relieved DeHoyos with one on and center fielder Greg Halman due up. Halman sailed a double over Carter's head in left field, scoring Ackley and putting the Rainiers up 3-1 with two out and a man in scoring position. Bateman then got the next batter, Tuiasosopo, to ground out on one pitch to end the inning.

After the seventh-inning stretch, Sacramento first baseman Anthony Recker dropped a bloop single between Ackley and Halman in shallow center field with one out. Miller then walked right fielder Adam Heether to bring up the top of the order with two on and one out. After Weeks flied out to left, Miller walked Sogard on a wild pitch, bringing up Carter with two out and the bases loaded. Carter battled, fouling off multiple offerings, but the slugger ultimately struck out to end the inning.

Bateman quickly retired the Rainiers in the eighth, allowing a single with two strikeouts.

Entering the bottom of the frame, leading 3-1, the Rainiers pulled Miller in favor of veteran Denny Bautista. Bautista retired River Cats outfielder Matt Carson on a deep fly ball before walking Donaldson. After a stolen base by Donaldson, Bautista struck out Tolleson and designated hitter Adrian Cardenas to end yet another River Cats threat.

"Both teams hit the ball hard," Carson said. "It just doesn't carry as well at this point in the season as it does once it warms up."

Sacramento made some noise in the ninth when, with two outs, Weeks singled and Sogard reached base on an error to bring up Carter for one final chance to send the fans home happy. Rainiers closer Chris Smith induced a game-ending grounder, giving Tacoma the 3-1 victory, tying the opening series at a game apiece.

The series will continue at 7:05 p.m. on Saturday where the first 2,500 fans will receive thundersticks courtesy of KCRA.

RockHounds bats big in Friday's win

Staff report, Midland Reporter-Telegram

The Midland RockHounds offense put another show on Friday night as they pounded out 10 hits, including four doubles to take a 7-3 victory against Arkansas at Citibank Ballpark.

It was the RockHounds' bats and an Arkansas error that gave them the lead in the bottom of the fifth inning to break a 2-2 tie.

Jermaine Mitchell hit a leadoff triple and later scored on a single to left by Grant Green as it was one Green's two RBI on the night. Later in the inning, Shane Peterson scored on a throwing error by Arkansas' Luis Jimenez.

The RockHounds added two more runs in the seventh as Mitchell scored on a Green triple. Green scored later in the inning on a Spina single.

Green was 2 for 4 on the night as he had two RBI, and Mitchell and Spina each had two hits. Shane Peterson, Stephen Parker, Petey Paramoe and Tyler Ladendorf also each had doubles.

On the mound, starter Carlos Hernandez pitched a solid six innings, giving up two runs on six hits with one walk and five strikeouts. Jared Lansford and Fautino De Los Santos combined to give up one run in the final three innings.

Unearned Runs Doom Ports In 5-2 Loss

Stockton Ports

MODESTO, Calif. - Over the first two games of the 2011 season, the Stockton Ports have committed five total errors while the Modesto Nuts have played perfect defense. On Friday night at John Thurman Field, it was defense that proved to be the difference in the game as Modesto cruised to a 5-2 win-their second straight to open the season.

After Stockton failed to capitalize on baserunners in each of their first two innings, Modesto broke the ice in the bottom of the second. Mike Zuanich led off the frame with a double to right. Three batters later with Zuanich at second and two out, Angelys Nina, who was added to the lineup because of a late scratch, singled to right to score Zuanich and give Modesto a 1-0 lead.

Modesto broke through big in the fourth while taking advantage of Stockton's first error of the night. After Dan Straily (0-1) struck out Zuanich to start the inning, Kent Matthes hit a ground ball to short that was bobbled by Dusty Coleman, allowing Matthes to reach first. Orlando Sandoval followed with a single and after a sac-bunt from Nina put runners at second and third, Dallas Tarelton hit a two-run single to center to give Modesto a 3-0 advantage. Eliezer Mesa came up next and doubled to right to score Tarelton to make it 4-0. Delta Cleary, Jr. followed with an RBI single to left to make it a 5-0 Nuts lead.

Straily would suffer the loss after tossing four innings, allowing five runs (one earned) on six hits while striking out six and walking one.

Nuts starter Nick Schnaitmann (1-0), after allowing hits in each of the first two innings, set down nine straight to take him into the fifth. Schnaitmann would earn the win on the night, going 5.2 scoreless innings and allowing two hits while striking out four and walking two.

Stockton scored their first run of the season in the seventh. Nuts reliever Kaimi Mead walked Max Stassi to start the frame, and then allowed a single to Leonardo Gil. Two batters later with Stassi at third, Rashun Dixon grounded out to third, allowing Stassi to score and cutting the Nuts lead to 5-1.

The Ports added a second run in the eighth when Michael Choice tripled to left. Choice's first hit and first RBI of the season brought the Ports to within three runs at 5-2, but Stockton would not come any closer. Both Ports runs came at the expense of Mead, who pitched 1.2 innings in relief for the Nuts.

Stockton's bullpen held strong down the stretch as Bo Schultz and AJ Huttenlocker combined for four innings of scoreless relief.

The Ports will try for their first win of the season on Saturday night at John Thurman Field. Right-hander Rob Gilliam (0-0, 0.00 ERA) will make his Cal-League debut for Stockton and be opposed by left-hander and Rockies top prospect Tyler Matzek (0-0, 0.00 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Bees Split Doubleheader

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

CLINTON, IA- LF Douglas Landaeta (4-5) drove in three runs and finished a home run short of the cycle to give the Burlington Bees a 9-5 win in game one of the doubleheader against the Clinton LumberKings. In game two, the LumberKings battled back for a 3-2 win before 889 fans at Alliant Energy Field on Saturday night.

Game one resumed with the Bees and LumberKings tied at 4-4 in the top of the fourth inning. The Bees scored a single run in the fifth inning to take a 5-4 lead. Landaeta (4-5) singled and scored on a triple by 3B Tony Thompson (1-5).

The Bees sent seven men to the plate in the sixth inning. RF Royce Consigli (1-4) led off the inning with a single and advanced to second base when C John Nester (0-4) reached on an error. CF Tyreece House (1-2) executed a beautiful sacrifice bunt to advance both runners into scoring position.

2B Nino Leyja (2-5) followed with an RBI single and Landaeta hit a two-run triple to jump the Burlington lead to 8-4. Landaeta scored on a past ball to make it 9-4.

RHP Nate Long (1-0) took the mound for Burlington when the game resumed in the fourth inning and pitched three innings, allowing one run on two hits to earn the victory.

In game two, the Bees scored two runs in the third inning against Clinton starting pitcher Anthony Fernandez. C Daniel Petitti (1-3) led off the inning and moved to second base when CF Tyreece House (0-2) worked a walk. DH Nino Leyja (2-3) singled to load the bases.

LF Douglas Landaeta (0-3) grounded into a double play to score Petitti and 3B Tony Thompson (2-3) followed with an RBI single to make it 2-0.

The LumberKings started off the third inning with back-to-back walks against Burlington RHP Josh Bowman. After Clinton loaded the bases, SS Marcus Littlewood (2-3) hit an RBI single to cut the Burlington lead to 2-1.

Clinton added single runs in the fourth and fifth innings to take a 3-2 lead. In the fourth inning, RF Julio Morbon (1-3) hit a single and went to second base on a groundout by LF Kevin Rivers (0-2). Morbon moved to third base on a wild pitch and scored on a throwing error to make it 2-2.

In the fifth inning, the LumberKings hit three consecutive singles off of RHP Chris Mederos to score the go-ahead run. 1B Mickey Wiswall lined an RBI single to make it 3-2

The Bees and LumberKings do battle in game three of the series on Saturday night at 6:00 p. Right-hander A.J. Griffin (1-1, 2.39 ERA AZL A's/Vancouver Canadians (A) in 2010) gets the start for the Bees against RHP George Mieses (4-4, 3.45 ERA Pulaski (R) in 2010) for Clinton. Pre-game coverage begins at 5:40 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com

Prospects scattered throughout California League

ANDREW BETTENCOURT, Visalia Times-Delta

The California League has always been a great breeding ground for future major league stars, but it's been awhile since the league has started a campaign with so many promising players scattered throughout the circuit.

There are eight Cal League players who are on Baseball America's top-100 prospect list, a number that could swell to 12-14 by the time the 2012 list comes out.

So if you're a local fan wondering who you may see at Recreation Park in 2011, odds are that you'll be watching a few players that scouts and executives are touting as future stars — and every Visalia Rawhide game should have at least two top-tier prospects given that most of the Arizona Diamondbacks' top seven prospects are on the Rawhide roster.

Don't want to put out a top prospect list without having seen most of these players play before, so this space has come up with a list of the ten most intriguing prospects to watch in the California League this season:

^a 1. Michael Choice, cf, Stockton: When national baseball writers like Sports Illustrated's Jon Heyman and MLB.com's Peter Gammons start writing about the possibilities that the A's may have found Major League Baseball's next superstar — which both writers have done with Choice — you tend to perk up and pay attention.

^a 2. Jean Segura, ss/2b, Inland Empire: There aren't too many players in the history of baseball who have the potential to steal 50 bases and club 60 extra-base hits in the same season — and just a precious few have actually performed to those levels on a consistent basis in the majors. Segura is one of those rare talents.

^a 3. Tyler Matzek, lhp, Modesto: Matzek comes in with the best ranking amongst league players in Baseball America's top-100 prospect list (No. 32). If Matzek pitches to his potential, then the Colorado Rockies have their version of Cliff Lee.

^a 4. Gary Brown, cf, San Jose: The San Francisco Giants' 2010 first-round pick had an impressive big-league camp this spring, and the Giants are hoping he will be their everyday center fielder by 2013. No one's questioning Brown's speed and defensive ability. What Giant fans want to know is if he can be a consistent hitter at the top of the lineup.