

A's News Clips, Sunday, April 10, 2011

Oakland A's beat Minnesota Twins 1-0

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS -- The A's know the "one-and-done" philosophy for scoring runs will not take them far.

They lived dangerously once again Saturday, mustering just a single unearned run against the Minnesota Twins.

But left-hander Gio Gonzalez made it stand with the help of some nifty bullpen work in a 1-0 A's victory before 39,936 fans at Target Field.

Oakland manager Bob Geren can only hope his starting pitchers continue shouldering the load until his hitters find home plate with more regularity.

"To make that one run hold up says a lot about our pitching staff," Geren said. "It's early. I know we're going to score a whole heck of a lot more than one run per game."

The A's have managed just two runs over their first two games against the Twins, yet they can win the series with a victory Sunday afternoon. They've scored just four runs over their past three games but have won two of them.

That's because their starters are giving them a fighting chance.

Gonzalez (2-0) held Minnesota to four hits over six innings. A's starters entered the day leading the majors in innings pitched (48 2/3) and ranked fourth with a 2.77 ERA. Gonzalez's effort lowered that mark to 2.47.

Conversely, the A's are averaging just three runs per game and are hitting .226 as a team.

"We got that one run," Gonzalez said of Saturday's effort. "It doesn't matter how we got it, but we got it. We definitely believe in our hitters. Once we start going, everything's going to be OK."

The A's got their run on a throwing error by Twins shortstop Alexi Casilla in the top of the sixth. With Kurt Suzuki on second base with two outs, Mark Ellis hit a routine grounder to Casilla, who short-hopped a throw that skipped away from first baseman Justin Morneau, allowing Suzuki to trot home.

That was enough for Gonzalez, who moved his fastball all around the strike zone and kept the Twins off-balance with his curve and changeup.

His most impressive work came in the bottom of the fifth, when he put runners on the corners with no outs but escaped unscored upon.

At one point, Ellis trotted it from second base with a message to Gonzalez: "Don't worry if you give up a run," Ellis told him. "We'll score more for you."

Said Ellis afterward: "It turned out that was a lie."

Gonzalez was at 106 pitches when Geren went to reliever Grant Balfour to start the seventh. Balfour struck out the side, including pinch hitter Jim Thome on three pitches.

He handed things over to Brian Fuentes after Joe Mauer's single with one out in the eighth. The lefty recorded the final five outs for his second save.

"Both of them did a heck of a job," Geren said.

Geren isn't pushing the panic button over his meager offense. He stuck with his standard opening day lineup and said he likes the approach players are taking at the plate.

One stat helps explain the A's inability to generate runs: They have not strung together hits in consecutive at-bats over the past 31 innings.

The A's have also hit just two homers through their first eight games, and both of those belong to Josh Willingham.

"You certainly can't tell your hitters to start hitting home runs. That's not an effective strategy," Geren said before the game. "But we'd take them."

A's update: Report says Trevor Cahill has agreed to a contract extension

By Joe Stiglich. Oakland Tribune

Report: Cahill agrees to contract extension

MINNEAPOLIS -- The A's and right-hander Trevor Cahill have agreed to a multiyear contract extension pending a physical, according to an ESPN report Saturday.

Team officials declined to comment on the report, as did Cahill's agent, John Boggs. But it's no secret that the A's have been interested in locking up Cahill.

He won 18 games and made his first All-Star team in 2010, and he'll become more expensive after the season as he becomes eligible for arbitration for the first time.

Cahill, 23, acknowledged during spring training that extension talks had been taking place. A's general manager Billy Beane told Bay Area News Group last season that the team needed to make case-by-case decisions on which of their young core players to sign long term.

Starting pitcher Brett Anderson agreed to a four-year, \$12.5 million deal last April, and catcher Kurt Suzuki received a four-year, \$16.25 million contract in July.

Cahill improved from a 10-13 record and 4.63 ERA as a rookie in 2009, to 18-8 and 2.97 in 2010.

But he said even he didn't know if a deal was close to being completed.

"I haven't heard anything," he said. "I don't know how everybody else knows."

Coco Crisp stole second in the fifth inning of the A's 1-0 victory over the Minnesota Twins. That gave Oakland six stolen bases through their first eight games.

Might manager Bob Geren put runners in motion more often with the A's struggling to score runs?

The A's ranked third in the majors last season with 156 stolen bases. Fifty of those belonged to Rajai Davis, who was traded in the offseason. But the A's can still swipe bags with players such as Crisp (32 steals in 2010) and shortstop Cliff Pennington (29).

Geren said the A's formulate their base-stealing strategy based on whether opposing pitchers and catchers appear vulnerable to it.

"You can't just say you're going to run to get something going, or you'll run yourself into outs," Geren said. "The opportunity has to be worth the risk."

Crisp is the only Athletic with anything close to a true "green light," though even his freedom to steal depends on the pitcher/catcher combo, Geren said.

With an infield single in the seventh inning, right fielder David DeJesus has a 24-game hitting streak against the Twins.

Chin Music: A's, Trevor Cahill reportedly agree to multi-year extension — no confirmation from team

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/9/2011 3:58PM

ESPN reported earlier today that the A's and right-hander Trevor Cahill are close to a multi-year contract extension. The team has not confirmed anything, and an A's spokesperson said no announcements would be made tonight. But it's known

that the A's have been having discussions with Cahill's agent for a while now, and if they were looking to lock up another starting pitcher after signing Brett Anderson last season, Cahill is the logical choice based on what he's accomplished to this point. If there are any more updates, I'll post again ...

A heavy storm is supposed to hit Minneapolis in the middle of the night, but we should be able to get today's game in, which begins at 6:10 local time. Tomorrow's series finale? We'll see ... Game time is 1:10 p.m., and weather.com calls for a 50 percent chance of rain in the middle of the afternoon.

Tonight's lineups:

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

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

—Same lineup as last night for Oakland, as manager Bob Geren isn't pushing the panic button on his team's offensive woes. "They're swinging at pitches they should swing at, not taking balls they should hit and not expanding (their strike zone) too much," Geren said before the game. Then he pointed out that the A's have hit only two home runs in seven games (no one besides Josh Willingham has gone deep). "You certainly can't tell your hitters to start hitting home runs — that's not an effective strategy," Geren said. "But we'll take them."

Without any improvement in power so far this season, I'd say the A's need to use the running game a little more. They've stolen five bases in seven games, and putting runners in motion more frequently could open things up. Just something to watch for. ...

Would you like to see the A's get more aggressive on the bases, or is patience required until the middle-of-the-lineup hitters start heating up?

Gio Gonzalez, relievers make A's run stand up

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

One run, that's what the A's got on Saturday at Target Field, and even that was a gift.

Gio Gonzalez was so good, however, and he got such solid backing by the bullpen, that the error-derived run stood up in Oakland's, yes, 1-0 victory over the Twins. The A's bats might not have perked up any, but they'll take it, and today, they have their first shot of the year at taking a series.

"We took advantage of minor mistakes, and I think we're going to break out once we start swinging the bats," Gonzalez said. "They're getting warm."

Gonzalez called the narrow win "a great game-changer for us." Gonzalez got into real trouble only once, in the fifth, when the Twins got back-to-back singles by Danny Valencia and Luke Hughes to start the inning. Hughes moved to second on a tapper by Alexi Casilla, then Gonzalez got Denard Span to hit a popup to short, but as Gonzalez was coming off the mound to help point out the pop to his defense, he took a bad step and began limping.

"I was trying to look at the popup and I lost sight of my landing spot and rolled my ankle," Gonzalez said. "It was just a little strain. I let the adrenaline kick in."

After some warmup pitches, he got Joe Mauer to ground out to end the inning. "I tried to change the momentum," Gonzalez said. "And the next inning, we scored a run. There's a momentum change when you minimize runs."

Gonzalez credited second baseman Mark Ellis for telling him during that fifth inning to not try to do too much because the A's would go out and score some runs for him.

"Which was a lie," Ellis said with a grin. "I wanted him to know he didn't have to be a hero, just do his job. And he did a better job than anyone could have asked."

Gonzalez, who has allowed only one run in 13 innings this season, came out after six innings, having thrown 106 pitches, and manager Bob Geren decided to have new relievers Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes divide up the final three innings. Balfour struck out the side in the seventh and got one out in the eighth before allowing a hit. Fuentes retired both men he faced in the eighth, walked Michael Cuddyer to add some tension to the ninth, then got a flyout, a foul out and a strikeout.

The A's had several missed chances. In the first, Daric Barton was thrown out at home trying to score from second on Josh Willingham's two-out single, and in the second, fourth and fifth innings, the team left men in scoring position.

Finally, in the sixth, the A's were nudged along by the Twins. With two outs, Kurt Suzuki singled, went to second on a wild pitch and scored on an error when shortstop Casilla made a poor throw to first on a grounder by Ellis.

Ellis hit a deep drive to left center in the second and Span made a sprinting, over-the-shoulder catch and then lost the ball. It was ruled an error rather than a triple, a scoring the decision the A's have officially protested.

Trevor Cahill, A's agree to contract extension

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Last year, the A's gave young starter **Brett Anderson** a multiyear contract that takes the left-hander through his arbitration years and potentially then some.

Next up, **Trevor Cahill**, who has agreed to terms on a multiyear extension. Cahill said results of his physical for the deal are pending, and it's believed there are some other bits of business remaining, but the team is expected to make an announcement soon.

John Boggs, Cahill's agent, called an ESPN.com report that the deal was completed "a little bit premature."

Cahill emphasized Saturday that he wasn't sure if the contract was entirely official, but he said that it will be nice to get it out of the way early in the season.

"It's good, because it lets me concentrate on pitching," Cahill said. "I'm not trying to impress everyone every time out there."

The deal is expected to include more guaranteed money than Anderson's \$12.5 million over four years. The A's began talking to Cahill about an extension in the middle of last year, and since then, Cahill, 23, has become an All-Star and an 18-game winner - and, more important, Toronto's **Ricky Romero**, who has the same service time and almost exact number of games started, signed a five-year extension worth more than \$30 million. Romero's contract changed the discussion for all teams negotiating with young starters, including the A's talks with Cahill.

First baseman **Daric Barton**, like Cahill, arbitration eligible after this season, is among those next in line for a possible multiyear deal, along with Saturday's starter, **Gio Gonzalez** and closer **Andrew Bailey**.

Briefly: Manager **Bob Geren** said **Landon Powell** will start at catcher today and outfielder **Ryan Sweeney** also will be in the lineup. ... **Hideki Matsui** is 2-for-14 on the trip, and he struck out with the bases loaded in the seventh. His .160 average is lowest among the A's regulars. "He'll be all right," Geren said. "He's been there before."

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Bert on Brett: A Minneapolis newspaper columnist compared Brett Anderson's great start and loss Friday to those new Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven had so often with the Twins. Blyleven said Saturday, "Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and know you did a good job."

Drumbeat: New deal looming for Trevor Cahill, and more A's news

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Target Field 4/9/2011, 3:04PM

Jerry Crasnick of ESPN.com is reporting that the A's have reached terms with All-Star Trevor Cahill on a multi-year deal, and that is indeed the case, but the contract is not officially completed yet. New deals require new physicals, and Cahill says the results of his aren't back yet. The A's said there will be no announcement today.

UPDATE: I just spoke to Cahill's agent, John Boggs, who called the reports the deal is done "a little bit premature."

It sounds as if there might be some legalese or t's to cross still, so it's not clear this will even be official tomorrow.

I'm going to be curious to see where the numbers end up on this one. Brett Anderson signed a four-year, \$12.5 million deal last year, and had the A's wrapped Cahill up in the middle of last season, as they'd hoped, the numbers might have been right around there. Now, Cahill is an All-Star, an 18-game winner, and a year closer to arbitration. Plus, contracts keep going up around baseball. All of that points to more dollars per year for Cahill.

With the caveat that he did say that things aren't official, Cahill did say it's nice to get this deal done now rather than later in the season. "It's good, because it lets me concentrate on pitching," he said. "I'm not trying to impress everyone every time out there."

I've never had the impression that Cahill was concentrating on anything other than baseball; he doesn't have the air of really worrying much about anything like a contract. Or anything else.

Manager Bob Geren says that Landon Powell and Ryan Sweeney will start tomorrow. No shakeup of yesterday's lineup, which managed all of one run; it's exactly the same, but here it is if you'd missed it yesterday or forgotten it: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, DeJesus rf, Willingham lf, Matsui dh, Suzuki c, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Pennington ss

It's Gio Gonzalez on the mound vs. Minnesota's Nick Blackburn. Gonzalez means it was Motown in the clubhouse today, always welcome.

Gonzalez is among those next on the A's to-do contract list, although I believe Daric Barton would come in line before him. Andrew Bailey will be a consideration reasonably soon, too.

Rangers looking uncatchable

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle 4/9/2011

The Boston Red Sox have been horrible, but that won't last. Tampa Bay's Johnny Damon was hitting .045 going into Friday's play: total mirage.

What's happening with the Texas Rangers, however, is looking a bit too real — especially as viewed from Oakland.

The A's have made some improvements, but their lineup isn't close to what Texas has put together. They can only dream of a dynamic shortstop like Elvis Andrus, a power threat of Nelson Cruz's magnitude or the Mickey Mantle-like presence of Josh Hamilton, to say nothing of Adrian Beltre and Ian Kinsler flirting with 30 plus homers.

And if they gave out an MVP award for the first week of the season, Michael Young would be a hands-down choice. Denied his offseason request for a trade, Young has been subjected to A. his first career start at first base; B. playing second base for the first time since 2003; and C. the DH role, which he detests. Such uncertainty is the very reason Young wanted out, and yet he has returned as a high-energy presence and clubhouse leader.

Manager Ron Washington and owner Nolan Ryan know they're sitting on a gold mine, particularly if starting pitchers Derek Holland, Alexi Ogando and Matt Harrison (a 6-foot-5 lefty) continue to be effective.

Like San Francisco, riding that sweet wave of success, the whole Dallas-Arlington area enters 2011 on a high.

"I'm amazed," said Ryan, a born-and-raised Texan. "Baseball has taken on a life of its own around here. It's fashionable to be seen wearing Rangers gear wherever you are. Never seen anything like it."

The A's pitching staff is very much for real, but their lineup is ordinary, and they'll have to generate their own excitement in the desolate Coliseum. If the Rangers are as good as they've looked so far, they won't be caught.

Sick monopoly

If it seems that Saturday afternoon games are disappearing, it's because Fox is pushing hard to have its Game of the Week as the only daytime option. It happens because television pushes baseball around like a schoolyard bully ... Meanwhile, there has been no significant change to the absurd blackout policies torturing subscribers of DirecTV's "Extra Innings" package. Fans living hundreds of miles away can't always watch the team that is geographically closest, and we're still getting rip-offs such as Thursday's, when the A's weren't shown locally and the telecast out of Toronto — right there on the DirecTV menu — was blacked out here. This is a yearly joke and massive stain on commissioner Bud Selig's legacy ... Finally, a headfirst slide into first base that makes sense: Andres Torres on his bunt single in the Giants' fifth inning Friday, grazing the bag with his left hand on a fadeaway slide as pitcher Jake Westbrook ran over to cover ... How to denigrate your own product: The A's have three bobblehead-doll promotions this year: Rickey Henderson, Ray Fosse and MC Hammer, presumably as a 14-year-old. Seriously, that's it.

Bypassing Hideki Matsui, not to mention Dallas Braden and many others, is an act of astonishing ignorance ... For four years at Berkeley, between the Daily Cal and the sports information office, I lived and died with Cal baseball. Covered every game and did the stats, home and away. The teams weren't that great, but the program had class, tradition and a lot of strong, silent support.

That silence was broken when it mattered, and an inconceivable loss has been averted. There won't be better baseball news all season.

Gonzalez, bullpen make slim lead stand up

Suzuki scores game's lone run on Twins miscue in sixth

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/9/2011 11:57 PM ET

MINNEAPOLIS -- The A's and Twins are experiencing similar offensive difficulties.

Not one of Oakland's big winter additions -- David DeJesus, Josh Willingham, Hideki Matsui -- entered Saturday's contest with an average above .235. Minnesota's intimidating quartet of Joe Mauer, Justin Morneau, Delmon Young and Michael Cuddyer brought in a combined .184 mark.

All of the above bats were more or less quiet yet again for the second of a three-game set on Saturday, making mistake-free pitching and defense all the more important.

The A's got the former and took advantage of Minnesota's inability to conquer either, as they squeezed out a 1-0 victory despite leaving 11 on base at Target Field.

Lefty Gio Gonzalez, coming off an exceptional seven-inning season debut, went six this time, shutting down the Twins and limiting them to just four hits while picking up his second victory. He struck out four and walked two in the 106-pitch effort, all the while lowering his ERA to 0.69.

Oakland righty Grant Balfour struck out the side in the seventh and got the first out in the eighth, and Brian Fuentes kept the Twins off the board the rest of the way as the A's improved to 3-5 overall and moved to 2-2 in one-run games this season.

"Their pitching shut us down," Minnesota manager Ron Gardenhire said. "Gio was pretty good. He was filthy with his breaking ball -- a hell of a breaking ball -- and a good fastball. He was as good as advertised."

Gonzalez retired the first eight batters he faced and, when staring down his first sign of trouble in the fourth, managed to escape a sticky situation with two outs and runners on the corners. He did more of the same in the fifth, when he escaped from the same scene, this time with no outs -- but not before handing his manager a scare.

The southpaw forced Alexi Casilla to ground out and jammed Denard Span, who launched a high popup to shortstop. Gonzalez hopped off the mound and appeared to be favoring his right ankle. That brought skipper Bob Geren and head trainer Nick Paparesta out for a visit to the mound.

"It was a scary moment," Geren said. "I really thought, 50-50, he was done. I waited to go out because I had to see who I would want in that situation. At that point, I wasn't even thinking of the bullpen."

Jerry Blevins was called upon to warm up, but it wasn't necessary, as Gonzalez stayed in the game and got Mauer to ground out and end the threat.

"That was big," Gonzalez said. "We wanted to minimize the damage. I was just out there attacking the zone and, even when I fell behind, I was going to my best pitch, curveball."

His gritty efforts came after Mark Ellis had told him not to fret if a run came across, that the offense would get him plenty support in the final four frames.

"It was a lie, obviously," Ellis said, with a laugh, "but I said, 'Don't worry about not giving up this one run because we're gonna score some runs.'"

"I just didn't want him to try to be so careful that it broke into a big inning where they got three or four runs. I wanted him to know he didn't have to be the hero. He could just go out and do his job, and he did it better than anybody could have asked."

The A's offense scattered a handful of hits against Twins starter Nick Blackburn, but couldn't capitalize on any of them through the first five frames before being handed some luck in the sixth. Kurt Suzuki singled with one out, advanced to second on a wild pitch and found his way home on a two-base throwing error by Casilla on Ellis' ground ball to break open the game.

"It doesn't matter how we got the run," Gonzalez said, "but we got it."

Blackburn's night ended following the sixth, as he left with no earned runs, five hits, three walks and two strikeouts.

Oakland loaded the bases in the seventh against Minnesota relievers Glen Perkins and Alex Burnett with one out, but Dusty Hughes put an end to the escapade by striking out Matsui and forcing Suzuki to line out to center. Oakland was 3-for-11 with runners in scoring position and has scored two runs or less in five of its eight contests.

"It's a stress reliever to know you don't have to score that many runs if you pitch like we have," Geren said. "Nobody's happy with the amount of runs we're getting. The offense is pulling hard for each other and grinding it out, it's just not happening right now. We're very fortunate to have the pitching we have."

That notion was extended to the bullpen, as Balfour and Fuentes came on to compile three shutout innings. It marked Fuentes' second save of the season and his first multi-inning save since Sept. 13, 2006, when he was with the Rockies.

"I asked two guys in the bullpen that normally go one inning to get three together, and I felt that was the best way to accomplish the win," Geren said. "Both did a heckuva job."

"I just felt like those were my two best guys and capable of throwing about 30 pitches each and, if we did it right, they could get nine outs between the two of them, and they did it."

Cahill, A's close to finalizing multiyear deal

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- The A's have reportedly reached agreement on a multiyear deal with All-Star hurler Trevor Cahill, pending a physical.

The A's have not confirmed the deal, as first reported by ESPN.com's Jerry Crasnick, and an announcement wasn't expected Saturday.

Cahill, 23, told MLB.com before Saturday's contest against the Twins that he was unaware a deal had been completed, though he noted he knew details were close to being finalized.

The A's right-hander is under contract with the team through the 2014 season and was set to go through his first arbitration process in the offseason. He was handed Opening Day starter duties this year after a breakout 2010 campaign, when he compiled an 18-8 record and 2.97 ERA in 30 starts.

Cahill, who is making \$440,000 this season, would become the fifth player whom the A's would hold under contract beyond 2011.

Oakland signed fellow starter Brett Anderson to a four-year, \$12.5 million deal last April and locked up catcher Kurt Suzuki for four years and \$16.25 million in July. Relievers Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes, meanwhile, are both under contract through '12 with a club option for '13.

McCarthy, Baker aim to keep offenses scuffling

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 4/9/2011 11:00 PM ET

Oakland manager Bob Geren can be a man of few words.

His analysis of his club's recent hitting woes is a perfect example.

"They're swinging at pitches they should swing at, not taking balls they should hit and not expanding [the zone] too much," Geren said.

They're just not scoring runs, producing just two in the first two games of this weekend's series against the Twins. After losing, 2-1, on Friday, the A's managed six hits in Saturday's 1-0 victory. On Sunday, they hope to add another win when

they send right-hander Brandon McCarthy to the mound in the series finale. The Twins will counter with right-hander Scott Baker.

The A's were expected to have an immediate burst of offense with the addition of Hideki Matsui, Coco Crisp and David DeJesus, but Oakland has only two homers, and both have come from Josh Willingham.

"You certainly can't tell your hitters to start hitting home runs -- that's not an effective strategy," Geren said. "But we'll take them."

It will be up to Baker to keep the Oakland offense in check Sunday. In his last outing, he allowed four runs on two homers over six innings against the Yankees.

He will have to pitch better this time around.

"I think the main thing for me was hitting the guy with two strikes, and the walk," Baker said of his outing against the Yankees. "So instead of a couple of solo home runs, you're talking about two two-run home runs, which is a big difference."

The difference for Baker on Sunday could be his track record of success against the A's. He is 4-0 with a 3.62 ERA in five starts.

As for McCarthy, he needed just 89 pitches in eight innings in his A's debut against the Blue Jays. He gave up four earned runs on eight hits with two strikeouts. It was his first big league start since 2009 season with Texas.

"He was great," Geren said. "I thought he did a great job going eight. That's what we saw in Spring Training. I was real happy with his outing -- very nice."

Athletics: The A's are also improving on defense. They played their fourth consecutive game without an error on Saturday, but still lead the Majors with nine. Last season, the club ranked fifth in the American League in fielding percentage at .984 and committed less than 100 errors for the sixth consecutive season.

- The A's went 3-6 against the Twins last season marking the first time they had lost the season series to Minnesota since 2007. Since moving to Oakland in 1968, the A's are 270-282 against the Twins.

Twins: Manager Ron Gardenhire hinted that Michael Cuddyer might get the start at second base Sunday. In 2010, Cuddyer saw action at first base, second base, third base, right field and center field for the Twins.

- Gardenhire knows one of the keys to a successful season is scoring late in games and winning games at home. He feels he has the team to do both.

"You just have to find a way," he said. "We always know those last six outs are always tough to get anywhere. At home, the crowd starts getting into it, starts getting worked up, then a hit goes there and everybody gets pumped up."

Worth noting

The Twins placed right-hander Kevin Slowey on the 15-day DL with right shoulder bursitis before Saturday's game against the A's. The club recalled right-hander Alex Burnett from Triple-A Rochester. ... The A's are close to finalizing a multiyear deal with All-Star hurler Trevor Cahill.

Gonzalez, Fuentes pitch A's past Twins 1-0

By Jon Krawczynski, AP Baseball Writer

MINNEAPOLIS — Gio Gonzalez was locked in a 0-0 duel with Nick Blackburn when the Minnesota Twins opened the fifth inning with two straight singles.

That's when second baseman Mark Ellis paid him a visit, telling the young lefty to not worry if he gave up a run or two. The Oakland Athletics' offense, Ellis told him, would get the runs right back.

"Which was a lie, obviously," Ellis said with a wry grin.

Gonzalez pitched six sharp innings and the Athletics' offense was just a little less futile than Minnesota's in Oakland's 1-0 victory over the Twins on Saturday night.

Gonzalez (2-0) allowed four hits with four strikeouts and two walks, which allowed the A's to overcome stranding 11 runners on base. Brian Fuentes earned his second save of the season with 1 2-3 innings of scoreless relief.

"We're very fortunate to have the pitching we have," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Nick Blackburn (1-1) allowed an unearned run on five hits with three walks and two strikeouts in six innings for the Twins, who continue to struggle with the bats.

The top four hitters in Minnesota's lineup went a combined 1 for 15 with a single and a walk. Minnesota has scored just 21 runs in its first eight games this season.

"We have a lot of run-producers that are supposed to be driving the ball for us," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "It's kind of a team thing. It's not an individual thing."

The Twins entered the night with the second-fewest runs in the AL, while the Athletics were just two runs ahead of them.

Fittingly, the only run of the game came when Kurt Suzuki scored on a throwing error by Twins shortstop Alexi Casilla in the sixth inning, which means no RBI was awarded in the game.

"Tight games like that are great," Gonzalez said. "They keep you on the edge of your seat, biting your nails."

With both teams struggling to score early in the season, the hitters seemed to be squeezing the bat a little tighter on a chilly night at Target Field.

The Athletics were a little aggressive early trying to get something going, and it cost them. Daric Barton tried to score from second base on a sharply hit single to left field by Josh Willingham, but Delmon Young's throw beat Barton to the plate by 5 feet to end the inning.

In the fifth, David DeJesus popped up to center field on a 3-0 pitch to end the inning, another sign that the A's might be pressing a little bit early in the season.

The Twins haven't exactly been an offensive juggernaut themselves, and they struggled again to generate much against another A's lefty. Brett Anderson shut them down for seven innings Friday before the Twins scored two in the eighth to squeak out a 2-1 win.

Gonzalez had them on ice Saturday night as well. The Twins hit just two balls out of the infield in the first four innings before leading off the fifth with singles by Danny Valencia and Luke Hughes to give them runners at the corners with nobody out. But Gonzalez refocused, getting Casilla to ground out to the pitcher, Denard Span to pop out to shortstop and Joe Mauer to ground out to second base to escape unscathed. Mauer is hitting .231 this season, Justin Morneau is at .185 and Young is hitting .179.

"He threw the ball really well," Ellis said. "He just gets better every time he goes out there."

The Athletics took a 1-0 lead in the sixth when Suzuki singled and advanced to second on a wild pitch, then scored when Casilla bounced a throw in front of Morneau at first base on a grounder by Ellis.

"We're all working hard and doing the best we can," Geren said. "We're all feeling positive about the pitching ... it's actually a stress reliever if you don't have to get a lot of runs if we're pitching like that."

NOTES: Gardenhire received his AL Manager of the Year award in a brief pregame ceremony. Gardenhire finished second in the voting five times before finally winning last year. ... Geren said RHP Rich Harden, on the disabled list with a strained lat muscle under his right shoulder, will throw to hitters on Monday. ... The Twins placed RHP Kevin Slowey on the 15-day disabled list with bursitis in his throwing shoulder.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Tacoma's offensive fireworks doom Cats

By Cassie Kolas / Sacramento River Cats

After late game offensive surges for Sacramento and Tacoma, the River Cats took the loss 4-2 on Saturday night at Raley Field.

The game was scoreless until the fifth inning when the Rainiers got on the board with an RBI line-drive single to center by infielder Scott Kazmar to score Carlos Peguero.

Tacoma scored again in the seventh after a throwing error by River Cats reliever Danny Farquhar and a shot to left field by Alex Liddi.

An eighth inning River Cats rally tied the game 2-2. Jemile Weeks opened the inning with a single, and Eric Sogard laid down a bunt single to third base. Outfielder Chris Carter solidified the inning with an RBI double to left-center field with no outs to score Weeks and Sogard.

The Rainiers answered in the ninth against reliever Vinnie Chulk. Outfielder Mike Wilson singled to start the inning and Carlos Peguero was hit by pitch. Kazmar then advanced the runners with a bunt. Jose Yopez then hit a dribbler up the middle that just got by Chulk, shortstop Sogard and second baseman Weeks and into shallow center field to score Wilson and Peguero.

The River Cats stranded eight runners, three in scoring position.

Sacramento starting pitcher Yadel Marti was strong in his first outing with an MLB affiliated team. He pitched 6.0 innings, struck out five and only allowed one earned run. The right-handed hurler defected from Cuba in December of 2008 and last year played for Veracruz of the Mexican League.

Marti went 1-0 with two saves in the 2006 World Baseball Classic while pitching for Cuba. He also pitched in the 2007 World Baseball Classic. Marti was signed to a minor league contract by Oakland on Aug. 6, 2010.

The series against the Rainiers continues Sunday at 1:05 p.m. where the first 2,500 fans receive a Team Coloring Poster.

Triples Lead Hounds Over Travs

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

For the second consecutive night, the RockHounds broke a 2-2 tie in the last of the fifth, this time going on to a 7-3 win, after a 10-2 victory on opening night.

Jermaine Mitchell led off the fifth with a triple to the left field corner, and Grant Green's flair single drove in the tie-breaking run. The same duo added to the 'Hounds advantage with a little "role reversal" in the seventh. This time, it was a Mitchell single and a Green RBI triple.

Carlos Hernandez went 6.0 innings for the win, allowing two runs on six hits, walking one and striking out four ... the win was his 16th as a RockHound ... Carlos is now 16-4 over parts of three seasons with the RockHounds.

Jared Lansford and Fautino de los Santos combined to pitch the final 3.0 innings last night, allowing one run on Ryan Mount's ninth-inning homer. In the season's first two games, five 'Hounds relievers have combined to pitch 8.0 innings, allowing one run on two hits with two walks and eight strikeouts.

Green has had two RBI in each of the season's first two games ... Oakland's #1 prospect, Grant is 3-for-7 on the young season, with a triple, a home run and four ribbies.

Michael Spina went 2-for-4 with a pair of singles and an RBI ... while it's FAR too early to look very deep into the Texas League leader board ... Michael leads the TL in batting (.625) and RBI (5).

Shane Peterson's first-inning double was his second in two nights ... "Pete" is 3-for-7 to open the year and has scored a league best five runs.

The RockHounds have a Grand Slam home run (Spina) and three triples (Green, Mitchell and Tyler Ladendorf) in two games ... you can go a month and not see that on a team's collective stat sheet.

In the season's first two games, 16-of-the-18 batters in the RockHounds line-up have scored a run, driven in a run, or both. Arkansas outfielder Roberto Lopez left Friday night's game in the last of the fifth due to a right ankle injury ... he has been placed on the club's disabled list.

Ports Bang Out 11-5 Win Over Modesto

Stocktonports.com

MODESTO, Calif. - It took the Stockton Ports more than 15 innings to score their first run of the 2011 season. After dropping the first two games of their opening weekend series to the Modesto Nuts, Stockton's bats came to life on Saturday night. The Ports hammered home 11 runs on 12 hits en route to an 11-5 win, their first of the year.

Stockton got the scoring started in a big way in the second. With the bases loaded and nobody out, Michael Gilmartin broke the ice with an RBI single to left to give the Ports a 1-0 lead. Connor Crumbliss followed with a sac-fly and Dusty Coleman came up next and hit a two-run triple down the right field line to give the Ports a 4-0 advantage. Two batters later, Max Stassi singled to left to drive in Coleman and make it a 5-0 ballgame.

Stockton added another run in the top of the third off Nuts starter Tyler Matzek (0-1), who had a rough go of it in his Cal-League debut. Matzek took the loss after lasting just three innings, allowing six earned runs on five hits while walking four and striking out four.

After falling behind 5-0, Modesto battled back in both the second and third innings. Mike Zuanich and Kent Matthes kicked off the second with back-to-back doubles to cut the Ports lead to 5-1. Two batters later, Matthes scored on an RBI groundout by Joe Sanders to make it a 5-2 game.

Modesto, trailing 6-2 in the bottom of the third, came up with another pair of runs off Ports starter Robert Gilliam (1-0). The Nuts got an RBI single from Eliezer Mesa and an RBI double from Zuanich to make it a 6-4 game.

Gilliam, however, would settle down and not allow a run over his final three innings. He earned the win in his Cal-League debut, going six innings and allowing four runs on eight hits while striking out three. He didn't walk a batter and retired the last four hitters he faced.

Stockton, after being shut down for 2.1 innings by Nuts reliever Leuris Gomez, scored three runs in the sixth off Chad Rose. Rose came on with the bases empty and one out in the sixth and yielded walks to Coleman and Michael Choice. Stassi came up with two on and singled to left, scoring Coleman and increasing Stockton's lead to 7-4. Two batters later, Walton hit a two-out single to left to score Choice and Stassi and give the Ports a comfortable 9-4 cushion.

Rose allowed another run in the seventh when Gilmartin tripled and scored on a wild pitch. Rose allowed four total runs on three hits while walking two over 1.2 innings of relief.

The Ports added a run in the eighth off Nuts reliever Coty Woods. Leonardo Gil doubled to left with two outs and scored on a Walton RBI single to right. Walton finished the night 2-for-3 with 3 RBI.

Modesto got the run back in the bottom of the eighth on Zuanich's second home run of the series to make it an 11-5 game. The home run came off Ports reliever Maxwell Peterson. It was the only run Peterson allowed in two innings of work.

Zuanich is now 8-for-10 in the series with two home runs and three doubles for Modesto.

Connor Hoehn came on in the ninth for Stockton and set the side down in order, nailing down Stockton's first win of the year.

The Ports will try and earn a series split in their series finale matinee with the Nuts on Sunday at John Thurman Field. Ports right-hander Ryan Doolittle (0-0, 0.00 ERA) will get the start for the Ports in his Cal-League debut. He'll be opposed by Nuts right-hander Parker Frazier (0-0, 0.00 ERA). First pitch is set for 1:05 p.m. PDT.

Bees Fight Back Twice For a 6-4 Win in Clinton

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

CLINTON, IA-1B Tony Thompson finished 3-5 with a home run and two RBI and RHP A.J. Griffin struck out 10 to lead the Burlington Bees to a 6-4 win over the Clinton LumberKings at Alliant Energy Field on Saturday night.

The LumberKings (1-2) scored two runs in the second inning against Griffin. 1B Tim Morris (1-3) led off the inning with a double and 2B Stefen Romero (0-2) walked. C Steven Baron (1-4) singled to score Morris and make it 1-0. LF Kevin Rivers (2-4) singled to load the bases and SS Anthony Phillips (0-2) lifted a sacrifice fly to left field to score Romero and make it 2-0.

Burlington scored two runs in the fourth inning to tie the game at 2-2. 3B Nino Leyja (1-5) and DH Douglas Landaeta (2-5) led off with back-to-back singles. LF Jose Rivero (1-5) singled Leyja across home plate and SS Yordy Cabrera (1-4) grounded into a fielder's choice to score Landaeta and tie the score.

Thompson powered the first home run of the season for the Bees, a solo shot over the left field wall in the sixth inning to give Burlington a 3-2 lead.

Griffin pitched six innings and allowed two runs on four hits, striking out ten LumberKings in a no decision.

After Thompson gave the Bees a 3-2 lead in the sixth inning, the LumberKings took a 4-3 lead on a two-run home run by Rivers. In the Burlington 8th, Leyja led off the inning by reaching first base on an error. Landaeta doubled Leyja across home plate and moved to third base on a fielding error by Clinton CF Matt Cerione.

It was Thompson who singled home Landaeta to make it 5-4. Thompson scored on a single by RF Royce Consigli (2-4) later in the inning.

The Bees and LumberKings finish their series on Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. RHP Blake Hassebrock (0-1, 5.96 ERA AZL A's/Vancouver Canadians 2010) gets the start for Burlington against RHP Brandon Mauer (0-1, 1.64 ERA AZL Mariners/0-1, 2.08 ERA Clinton LumberKings 2010) for Clinton.