

A's News Clips, Friday, April 15, 2011

Oakland A's fall quietly to Detroit Tigers, 3-0

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

The consistently solid offensive attack the A's generated on their nine-game road trip somehow didn't make it back home with them.

Oakland was shut out for the first time in the 2011 season Thursday night when unheralded Detroit left-hander Phil Coke shut them down for seven innings, and the Tigers won 3-0 before 11,129 at the Coliseum.

The A's managed just three singles, all of them off Coke, who was matched against Gio Gonzalez, the A's best starter so far this season. Gonzalez went six shutout innings, but control issues and a high pitch count kept him from going any further. The game unraveled once he departed.

In short, it was a rather depressing homecoming for the A's after they'd hit the ball pretty well during their 5-4 trip. They are now 1-3 at home.

"A little disappointing obviously with the offense tonight," manager Bob Geren said. "Gio threw the ball well enough to win."

Indeed, Gonzalez allowed just two scratch singles -- to Casper Wells in the first and Ramon Santiago in the fifth -- but exited after six innings as a result of six walks. Relievers Tyson Ross and Jerry Blevins also had trouble finding the strike zone as the A's wound up walking 11 batters (one intentional).

Gonzalez struggled with his control throughout the night, walking at least one batter in every inning but the third. He threw 103 pitches, only 53 for strikes. He also uncorked two wild pitches.

"I felt like I was just a little off," Gonzalez said. "It was one of those nights. But eleven walks or something like that? I'm a big part of those 11 walks, and I could have attacked the zone more because (all six walks) happened with two outs."

When Gonzalez did put it over the plate, the Tigers could do nothing with his offerings. They hit just three balls out of the infield and struck out six times against Gonzalez, who has allowed just one earned run over 19 innings in his first three starts (0.47 ERA).

But Coke was equal to and perhaps bit better than Gonzalez. The A's threatened in the first inning when Daric Barton drew a one-out walk, Conor Jackson singled and Barton took third on Josh Willingham's foul out. But Hideki Matsui grounded out to second to end that threat, and the A's didn't get another runner into scoring position the rest of game. They finished the game making 10 straight outs and 19 out of 20.

Coke (1-2) walked two and struck out two and was supported with a scoreless inning apiece by Joaquin Benoit and Jose Valverde to close out the game. The only Oakland base runners after the first were Kurt Suzuki in the second on a single, Barton in the third on a walk and Jackson in the sixth on his second single of the night.

"He just got us out," Willingham said. "He was moving the ball around, it had a little movement on it, throwing changeups. We didn't do a very good job as hitters tonight, but you have to give him credit."

Offensively, Detroit broke through against Ross as soon as Gonzalez left the game. Santiago, the No. 9 hitter, led off the seventh inning with a single, and Austin Jackson sacrificed him to second. After Ross retired Wells on a fly out, Ryan Raburn drilled a double off the wall in right-center to finally break the scoreless deadlock.

Ross (1-1) walked Jhonny Peralta and Brennan Boesch to open the eighth to end his night, and Jerry Blevins came on to load the bases by walking Brandon Inge. Santiago hit a sacrifice fly to left, and a second run scored on the play when Willingham threw to an unmanned third base and the ball rolled into the dugout for a two-base error.

Oakland A's update: Successful trip makes for joyous flight, close team

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Winning trip makes for joyous flight, close team

When the schedule first came out, it appeared the A's early nine-game trip might be pivotal to their entire season.

Having gone 5-4 on the trip against three solid clubs -- Toronto, Minnesota and Chicago -- the A's were in a buoyant mood returning to the Coliseum on Thursday night.

"It was probably the loudest flight home I can remember in years -- in a good way," manager Bob Geren said. "Guys were genuinely happy with the trip and how it finished."

The A's didn't win their fifth road game last year until May 11 and started the year 5-13 away from home en route to a 34-47 road record. Geren thinks the long early trip also helped with team bonding.

"A trip like that can do nothing but help," he said.

Coco Crisp surprised everyone when he came to the park with his hair unbraided, revealing a remarkable '70s-style Afro former major leaguers Oscar Gamble and Bake McBride would have been proud of.

Why the change?

"My head was itching," Crisp said.

Crisp said he'll keep the new look for the time being.

"Yeah, I don't know what else to do with it "... if I can get my shirt on," he said.

Infielder Adam Rosales, on the 60-day disabled list with a right foot stress fracture, got some encouraging news after a visit to Dr. Kenneth Jung, a Los Angeles orthopedic surgeon, for a CT scan Thursday. He's 90 percent healed and could be cleared to play within a month.

Closer Andrew Bailey, on the disabled list with a forearm strain, had a 25-pitch all-fastball bullpen session before the game, his second without incident. Bailey is not on a specific timetable for return yet, however.

"Today it was nice and easy, just getting the feel for the mound again," he said.

Reliever Michael Wuertz (strained left hamstring) pitched a one-inning simulated and could get a rehab assignment in Sacramento sometime in the coming week.

Mark Ellis picked up a hit before the game even started. The American League office reversed a three-base error call from last Saturday's game at Minnesota and awarded Ellis a triple.

Chin Music: Trippy over the trip, Coco's new look, the usual injury updates

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 4/14/2011 7:59PM

When the schedule first came out, the A's opening nine-game road trip loomed large as one that could be pivotal to their entire season.

Hence, having gone 5-4 on the trip against three solid clubs _ Toronto, Minnesota and Chicago _ the A's were in a buoyant mood returning to the Coliseum Thursday night.

"It was probably the loudest flight home I can remember in years _ in a good way," said manager Bob Geren. "Guys were genuinely happy with the trip and how it finished."

The A's didn't win their fifth road game last year until May 11 and started the year 5-13 away from home en route to a 34-47 record in opposing ballparks. Geren thinks the long early trip also helped with team bonding.

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Infielder Adam Rosales, on the 60-day disabled list with a right foot stress fracture, got some encouraging news after a visit to Dr. Kenneth Jung, a Los Angeles orthopedic surgeon, for a CT scan Thursday. He's 90 percent healed, and he could be cleared to play within a month.

"The CT scan from two months ago to now, there's definitely a huge improvement," Rosales said. "So it gives me something to be positive about."

Rosales is only running on a treadmill now but expects to expand his regimen in 2-3 weeks to lateral footwork and baserunning.

Closer Andrew Bailey, also on the disabled list, had a 25-pitch all-fastball bullpen session before the game, his second without incident. Bailey is not on a specific timetable for return yet, however.

"We're just kind of going as I feel and progressing forward each and every day," he said. "Today it was nice and easy, just getting the feel for the mound again."

Reliever Michael Wuertz pitched a one-inning simulated and could get a rehab assignment in Sacramento sometime in the coming week.

Mark Ellis picked up a hit before the game even started. The American League office reversed a three-base error call from last Saturday's game at Minnesota and awarded Ellis a triple. It's his 22nd career triple, tying him with Sal Bando on the Oakland all-time list. He's one behind three guys tied for fifth — Carney Lansford, Reggie Jackson and Billy North.

A's waste Gonzalez's effort, lose 3-0 to Tigers

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

All Gio Gonzalez did was get it done for six innings, a sign Oakland's hottest starting pitcher can succeed when his best stuff is AWOL. He wasn't his sharpest, his innings weren't his cleanest. But he finished his outing without yielding a run - somehow.

Just 53 of his 103 pitches were strikes, and he had just as many walks as strikeouts, six. Threw two wild pitches, too.

Yet no runs. That's how *good* he was.

When Gonzalez exited, the Tigers were grateful. They scored in the seventh off Tyson Ross, got issued 11 walks overall and took advantage of a sloppy bullpen and defense to beat the A's 3-0 before an announced Coliseum crowd of 11,129.

"If that's an off night, honestly I'll take it," manager Bob Geren said of Gonzalez.

A major problem for the A's was that Tigers starter Phil Coke not only matched Gonzalez scoreless inning for scoreless inning, but the lefty from Sonora (Tuolumne County) added one more to his column. By the time Detroit's bullpen arrived in the eighth, the A's were in a 3-0 hole.

They did next to nothing offensively, collecting three hits, one more than the Tigers and one beyond the second inning. Conor Jackson had two of the hits, Kurt Suzuki the other.

"Three hits," Geren said. "After the last couple of days I anticipated more."

So much for the good vibes carrying over to the homestand. The A's finished their 5-4 trip with four wins in five games, capped by a come-from-behind, 10-inning victory in Chicago on Wednesday.

The team was in a jolly mood returning to the Bay Area, Geren calling it "probably the loudest flight I can remember in years, in a good way."

That Gonzalez was on the mound further boosted the confidence. But in the first inning, with two runners aboard, Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui (7-for-17 with two homers in his previous four games) popped out and bounced out, respectively.

"You could tell we were a little beat up today, a little tired," Gonzalez said. "When I was in the sixth inning, my arm was dropping a little bit."

In the seventh, Ryan Raburn broke the scoreless tie with a two-out double, and it got messy in the eighth. The first three Detroit batters walked, courtesy of Ross (two) and Jerry Blevins (one), and Ramon Santiago hit what appeared to be a simple sacrifice fly to left-center.

Willingham's throw bounced into the A's dugout largely because third baseman Andy LaRoche wasn't covering the bag, and two Tigers scored. Willingham was charged with the error.

"These guys were being very patient," Gonzalez said. "They'd give you one of these first-pitch swings and miss them, and all of a sudden they wait the next four or five pitches. It's impressive. It was like a chess game. Every pitch was there but like a little hair off. Again, you live and you learn."

Another Tigers win would be manager Jim Leyland's 1,500th in his career.

Crisp's big-haired surprise

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Coco Crisp got home and let down his hair. Literally. The center fielder played Thursday's game with a giant afro after taking down his braids earlier in the day.

Asked if he were planning to stick with his new 'do, Crisp said, "Yeah. I don't know what else to do with it. ... if I can get my shirt on."

Once he carefully pulled on his jersey and put his cap on - same size as always, he said - he ran onto the field for batting practice. To the amazement of teammates and manager **Bob Geren**, who said, "A little retro there."

Oscar Gamble-style. Gamble was the outfielder/designated hitter whose 17-year career included the entire 1970s, when he sported the game's most amazingly large afro. Like Crisp, Gamble was a relatively tiny player and hit 200 home runs (Crisp has 67 in his 10th season).

Why the change, Coco? "My head was itching," he said.

Reliever **Grant Balfour** suggested Crisp should do a commercial for Head & Shoulders shampoo like Steelers' safety **Troy Polamalu**.

Long-awaited triple: Mark Ellis was awarded a triple five days after he hit the ball.

On Saturday, Twins center fielder **Denard Span** was charged with a three-base error, and the A's appealed the ruling with MLB, which viewed the replay Tuesday and made the change Thursday.

"I'm 1-for-1 already," Ellis said before the game.

With 22 career triples, he's now tied with **Sal Bando** for eighth place on the Oakland list.

Briefly: Relievers **Andrew Bailey** and **Michael Wuertz** threw off bullpen mounds again, and Geren reported all went well. Wuertz is closer to heading for a minor-league rehab assignment ... Infielder **Adam Rosales** had a CAT scan in Los Angeles and said he was told his fractured foot is 90 percent healed and that he's 2-3 weeks from "being more vigorous" and running the bases.

A's leading off

San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, April 15, 2011

Spotless: David DeJesus, who was out of the lineup with a .195 average and 0-for-9 funk, has a 251-game errorless streak, longest among active big-league outfielders. His last error was Sept. 15, 2008, with Kansas City.

Free passes come back to haunt A's

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com | 4/15/2011 2:45 AM ET

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Oakland A's hitters finally made some noise at the end of their nine-game road trip in back-to-back games against the Chicago White Sox.

But when the A's returned home Thursday night, their bats went silent.

As it turned out, that two-game offensive outburst -- they hit .288 to raise their batting average 11 points to .238. --- did not carry over into the first game of the homestand.

Tigers left-hander Phil Coke blanked the A's for seven innings on three hits, two singles by Conor Jackson and a single by Kurt Suzuki, and Oakland fell 3-0 to open the four-game series.

The A's wasted another strong outing by left-hander Gio Gonzalez, who pitched six shutout innings and lowered his ERA to 0.47 before giving way to the bullpen, which allowed all three Tigers runs.

"[I'm] just a little disappointed in the offense tonight," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Gio threw the ball well enough to win. ... Three hits. After the last couple of days, I anticipated more. Today we really struggled."

Coke baffled the A's on an assortment of offspeed pitches, along with an occasional low-90s fastball. Oakland put runners on first and third in the first inning after Daric Barton walked with one out and Jackson followed with a single. But Josh Willingham popped out to first baseman Miguel Cabrera in foul territory and Hideki Matsui grounded out to second.

That turned out to be the A's biggest threat all night.

Gonzalez thought the A's were tired after playing nine road games, including three straight extra-inning battles in Chicago.

Willingham simply credited Coke.

"He just got us out," Willingham said. "He was moving the ball around, a little movement on it, throwing changeups. He had a good changeup, a little sinker. You've got to give him credit. We didn't do a very good job as hitters tonight, but he got us out."

Tigers reliever Joaquin Benoit and closer Jose Valverde did the rest, each pitching one shutout inning without allowing a baserunner.

Entering the game, Gonzalez was 2-0 with a 0.69 ERA, sixth best in the Major Leagues, and had allowed just one earned run. He picked up against the Tigers where he left off Saturday in his last start against Minnesota, when he pitched six scoreless innings in a 1-0 A's victory.

Gonzalez wasn't his sharpest -- he walked six Tigers, matching his career high, and had two wild pitches -- but every time he got himself into a jam, he pitched his way out.

"Their guy is really good," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said of Gonzalez. "We're going to see three more like him over the next few days. He has a good, loose arm, a live fastball and a good curve. I've seen him before, but that's as good as I've seen him."

Leyland actually saw Gonzalez in the closest thing he's had to an off night this year.

"I felt like I was a little off," Gonzalez said. "I felt like my arm slot dropped just a little bit, but I just battled right through it. It was just one of those nights. Eleven walks [as a staff]? I was a big part of that. I just wish I could have attacked the zone more. It happened with two outs, so you live and learn."

Gonzalez threw 103 pitches, just 53 of them for strikes, and had Tigers on base in five of his six innings.

The A's bullpen, which held the White Sox without a hit for 4 1/3 innings in Wednesday's 7-4, 10-inning win, struggled against Detroit.

The Tigers took a 1-0 lead in the seventh, pushing the game's first run across against Tyson Ross. Ramon Santiago greeted Ross with a line-drive single up the middle and moved to second on Austin Jackson's sacrifice bunt.

Ross retired Casper Wells on a fly ball to right, but Ryan Raburn launched a run-scoring double high off the right-center field wall. Ross tried to throw a fastball past Raburn, the Tigers' No. 3 hitter, but his 92-mph offering caught far too much of the plate.

Tigers catcher Victor Martinez gave the A's a scare when he blasted a shot deep into the right-field seats but foul. He then grounded out, ending the inning.

Ross walked Jhonny Peralta and Brennan Boesch to start the eighth, ending his night. Left-hander Jerry Blevins came on and promptly walked Brandon Inge, loading the bases. Santiago made it 2-0 with a sacrifice fly to left fielder Willingham, plating Peralta. When Willingham's throw went into the A's dugout, Boesch came home on the error, making it 3-0.

"I just didn't have the command I was hoping to have out there," Ross said. "I just couldn't command the fastball, fell behind some hitters, had three walks or so. Putting guys on is never a good thing, especially in a tight ballgame like that."

Crisp unleashes old-school hairstyle

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

A's center fielder Coco Crisp typically wears his hair in tight braids, but he sported a huge Afro on Thursday, reminiscent of former Major Leaguer Oscar Gamble in the '70s.

Why so?

"My head was itching," Crisp said before the series opener against Detroit. "My braids."

Reliever Grant Balfour told Crisp he should get a shampoo commercial, joining Pittsburgh Steelers safety Troy Polamalu.

"Baseball needs somebody," Crisp said.

Asked about Crisp's new look, A's manager Bob Geren said, "Yeah, yeah, a little retro look. He got a big hit for us [Wednesday]. That was good to see."

Wuertz almost ready for rehab assignment

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Right-handed relief pitcher Michael Wuertz took another big step Thursday in his recovery from a left hamstring injury that has sidelined him since April 2.

Wuertz warmed up in the bullpen, and then pitched a simulated game off the Oakland Coliseum mound with outfielder Ryan Sweeney taking cuts.

"It went good," Wuertz said before the A's game against Detroit. "I felt good. I mean a little rusty, obviously. I haven't thrown off the mound once since that Opening Night, but overall I feel good. The most important thing was just testing the hamstring out, and it came out good. Fortunately, when I throw off the mound, it doesn't really bother me. We're making progress."

Barring a setback, Wuertz expects to go on a Minor League rehab assignment as early as Saturday.

Wuertz pitched a scoreless inning on Opening Night against Seattle, striking out two, but the next day he injured himself in the weight room. He went on the 15-day DL on April 6, retroactive to April 2.

"[I] just kind of tweaked it," Wuertz said. "[I] thought it might get better, but I guess I did a little more to it than I thought. It was sort of one of those fluke things. It's kind of tough sitting here, coming back from Toronto and sitting here watching our games, knowing that if this wouldn't have happened I'd be out there. But we had a good road trip and now we just kind of move on."

LaRoche forcing his way into A's lineup

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Andy LaRoche hit his way onto the 25-man roster with a sizzling Cactus League season, and now he's forcing his way into manager Bob Geren's lineup with his bat and glove.

LaRoche, hitting .368, was in the starting lineup at third base in place of the struggling Kevin Kouzmanoff for Thursday night's series opener against Detroit. This marks his seventh start -- three at shortstop, two at third and one each at second and first.

"He's been doing a good job," Geren said. "I'm going to get him in there. When guys are hot, you've got to keep playing them. Everything he's doing is right. So I'll find a way to keep him in there."

Kouzmanoff is hitting .171 and has made four errors. He was on the field early Thursday, getting some extra work with third-base coach Mike Gallego.

LaRoche has been impressive in the field, making just one error. At the plate, he's 7-for-19 with three doubles.

"It's definitely feeling good, but also with that there's some at-bats I feel I've given away or chased a bad pitch and given myself a bad hitter's count," LaRoche said. "I'm happy with the way things are going so far. I'd like to work on being able to drive the ball instead of being a base-hit guy, but I can't start trying to do too much, because that's what gets me in trouble. I have to stay within myself and then the doubles and home runs will start coming."

LaRoche's natural position is third base, but he's seen most of his action at shortstop, where he's displayed his powerful throwing arm.

"Honestly, I don't care where they play me, as long as I'm in that lineup," LaRoche said. "That's what really matters most to me. Whether it's at short, second, first, third, outfield, whatever, I don't really care. I feel I've gotten comfortable at the other positions. Obviously, third base is my natural position, so I feel fine there. I'm just happy to get in that lineup and happy to be able to contribute to this team."

No timetable for A's closer Bailey's return

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Injured closer Andrew Bailey pitched a bullpen session before Thursday night's game against Detroit, but said there is still no timetable for his return from the disabled list.

Bailey threw around 25 pitches, all fastballs, off the mound.

"[I] felt good," Bailey said. "[I'm] definitely staying on the right track."

Bailey opened the season on the DL with a strained right forearm. He was eligible to return on April 6. Asked if he still felt pain or discomfort, Bailey said, "It's a tough call. It's just the way it feels right now. You're trying to get better each and every time."

Bailey said he expects to stay on his "three-day progression" of playing catch, throwing long-toss and then pitching a bullpen session.

"So I assume in the next three or four days I'll throw another 'pen," Bailey said. "There's really no timetable. We're just going as we feel."

Worth noting

- The A's went 5-4 on their recent road trip, capping it with a come-from-behind 7-4 win over the White Sox in 10 innings on Wednesday. "It was probably the loudest flight home I can remember in years, in a good way," Geren said. "Guys were genuinely happy with the trip and how it finished. Guys are getting along perfectly. It's a really fun team, it really is, a great group of guys. I think that getting out on a long road trip early does let guys get out and have dinner together and spend a lot of time together at the park. A trip like that can do nothing but help."
- In a scoring change by the American League office, A's second baseman Mark Ellis was awarded a triple for a fly ball on April 9 at Minnesota that was initially scored a three-base error on Denard Span. The triple was Ellis' 22nd of his career, tying Sal Bando for eighth in Oakland history.
- The A's were shut out by Detroit for the first time since Aug. 23, 1993, a 9-0 loss at Tiger Stadium. That was a span of 152 games without being shut out, the longest in Oakland history against one team.

Tigers' Leyland one win from 1,500

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 4/15/2011 3:15 AM ET

Friday could be a big day for Detroit manager Jim Leyland.

It could be historic.

Following Thursday's 3-0 win against the A's, the veteran skipper needs one more victory to become the 19th manager in Major League history to reach 1,500 wins.

He's already in elite company.

Leyland's win total is second among active managers behind St. Louis' Tony La Russa, who has 2,644 wins and counting.

The question remains: Who will be the winning pitcher in Leyland's historical victory? Detroit starter Rick Porcello hopes he's the answer.

What's certain is that Porcello will need to pitch better.

After two starts, Porcello is struggling to find a secondary pitch to keep hitters from keying in on his sinker. Command of his slider and four-seam fastball could be the key to victory Friday.

Porcello gave up five runs on nine hits in five innings against the Royals in his last outing.

"I don't think my mix of pitches was [executed] very well, and then at times when I needed to make some pitches and locate some fastballs, I didn't do it quite well enough," Porcello said. "It's something I have to bear down on and focus on. It's inexcusable to not make the right pitch selection that I need to make to get those guys out."

So far, so good for Brandon McCarthy. The Oakland starter compiled 12 ground-ball outs and one fly-ball out and surrendered two runs over 7 1/3 innings in his last start against the Twins. He threw 73 of his 107 pitches for strikes and struck out five while walking none in his first win since 2009.

"Any time I go out there, [command] has got to be one of my strong points," McCarthy said. "I have to be able to hit my spots and move the ball around. I did a pretty good job of that [against Minnesota] and was able to stay consistent."

Tigers: The Tigers hit one double Thursday and had racked up at least two doubles in each of the first 12 games of the season. It was the longest streak since the Tigers hit at least two doubles in 13 games to start the season in 1993.

- Miguel Cabrera is hitting .350 with 41 doubles, one triple, 27 home runs and 109 RBIs in 117 games against the AL West in his career.
- Magglio Ordonez, who has missed the last three games because of bursa fluid collecting behind his right ankle, said he hopes to return to the field Saturday.

Athletics: Injured closer Andrew Bailey pitched a bullpen session Thursday, but said there is still no timetable for his return from the disabled list. Bailey opened the season on the DL with a strained right forearm. He was eligible to return on April 6.

- In a scoring change by the American League office, A's second baseman Mark Ellis was awarded a triple for a fly ball on April 9 at Minnesota that was initially scored a three-base error on Denard Span. The triple was Ellis' 22nd of his career, tying Sal Bando for eighth in Oakland history.
- The A's have committed four errors in their past three games after playing six consecutive games without an error. They set a club record with nine errors in their first four games this season.

Worth noting: Thursday's game marked the first of eight games between the clubs at the Oakland Coliseum this season. It's the first time since the start of divisional play in 1969 that the Tigers have been scheduled to play more than six games in Oakland in one season.

Gutierrez: A's road-built cohesion lost in Coco's hair

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - You couldn't have blamed the A's had they cried foul when they first saw their 2011 schedule.

Opening at home, against a division rival? Nice.

Followed up by a nine-game roadie in such cold-weather climates as Toronto, Minnesota and Chicago, none of whom, by the way, reside in the American League West? Not so nice. In fact, not nice at all. Daunting, in fact, for a reloaded club.

But the A's didn't grumble. Far from it. In fact, they lapped it up. Loved every minute of it. Used it as an introductory teaching tool, of sorts. All that was missing were the "Hi, my name is..." stickers applied to the front of their jerseys as they boarded the eastbound charter.

"Absolutely," said second baseman Mark Ellis. "A good long road trip is a great way to get to know your teammates, as far as coming together."

With seven players on Oakland's current 25-man roster that were not on the team last season, and with the A's scuffling out of the gate by dropping two of three to Seattle on opening weekend, the A's needed to get away.

And not in that cute Southwest Airlines-kind of way.

They needed time to gel, away from what can only be described as the distractions that come with being home. Something that not even six weeks of spring training in the Arizona desert can provide.

"Not only a nine-day trip," observed A's manager Bob Geren, "but they were all close games."

Consider: four of the nine went extra innings, including all three at Comiskey Park this past weekend.

Plus, every game but Sunday's series finale in Chicago was decided by two runs or fewer, and while the A's won by three, 7-4, they trailed by three entering the ninth inning.

"It was the loudest flight home in years," Geren added with a grin. "It's a really fun team. Getting out on a long trip early in the season, gives the guys a chance to get together, go out to eat, get to know each other.

"It can do nothing but help."

Especially if you win?

"Oh, absolutely," Geren said, with another smile.

Entering tonight's series opener against Detroit at the Coliseum - a flat 3-0 loss - the A's had won five of seven since starting the season 1-4.

Yet, there was no singular rite of passage during the trip. No "Aha" moment. No tales of the A's holding hands while singing Kumbaya in hotel lobbies or in Division Street bars.

"It just kind of develops," Ellis said. Still, the effect of being on the road - and coming home with a winning record of 5-4 against the Blue Jays, Twins and White Sox - well, that's as obvious as the homemade sign again hanging in right field at the Coliseum: "WOLFF LIED HE NEVER TRIED."

It's called "cohesion" and the A's found some and developed it on the road.

"Our confidence is high," said first baseman Daric Barton. "We're excited. It's fun."

"Everyone's kind of in a groove."

One teammate got paid, and paid for it with some good-natured ribbing.

Trevor Cahill's five-year, \$30.5-million contract extension was agreed upon in Chicago. The 23-year-old was then immediately clowned on Twitter by rotation mates Brett Anderson and Brandon McCarthy for his love of all things Star Wars.

Yes, the A's, after seeming so overwhelmed by the pressure of actual expectations for the first time since 2006, are comfortable in their own skin...if not their own hair.

Coco Crisp provided some levity today by letting his tightly-wound braids out. The result was an epic 'fro, a cross between Oscar Gamble and Angela Davis with a dash of Chevy Chase's seminal character "Fletch," when he dreamed of playing for the Lakers.

"I don't know what else to do with it," Crisp said.

So then why, exactly, are you so free-flowing at the moment?

"My head," he said, "was itching."

At least the A's are no longer itching to find some cohesion. They found themselves on the road. You just hope that with Thursday's shutout loss to the Tigers, they didn't get lost in Crisp's hair.

A's waste Gonzalez's effort

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — For the second straight start, Oakland pitcher Gio Gonzalez didn't allow a run. This time, the Athletics' left-hander didn't have anything to show for it.

Gonzalez extended his scoreless streak to 17 innings but combined with Oakland's bullpen to walk a season-high 11 batters, leading to two of Detroit's three runs in a 3-0 loss to the Tigers on Thursday night.

"I felt like I was a little off. I felt like my arm slot dropped just a little bit," said Gonzalez, who struck out six while matching his career-high of six walks. "It was just one of those nights. Eleven walks? I was a big part of that. I just wish I could have attacked the zone more."

Gonzalez had walked only six batters total in his previous two starts and was Oakland's steadiest pitcher early before taking a no-decision against the Tigers. He also threw two wild pitches before being replaced by reliever Tyson Ross to start the seventh.

A 15-game winner for Oakland in 2010, Gonzalez pitched six shutout innings against the Tigers to lower his ERA to an impressive 0.47.

"If that's an off night, honestly I'll take it," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "His fastball was running a little bit more toward the outside of the plate than normal. Sometimes when your ball runs away from you, it's a good thing if you can command exactly what it's doing. But it was a little bit more than normal and so he was making adjustments as he went."

The A's didn't exactly help Gonzalez much offensively.

Detroit left-hander Phil Coke and two relievers combined on a three-hitter and Ryan Raburn hit a two-out RBI double in the seventh inning to break a scoreless tie.

Ramon Santiago had two hits and drove in a run on a sacrifice fly in the eighth for Detroit. Manager Jim Leyland now needs one win to become the 19th manager in major league history to reach 1,500 for his career.

The Tigers managed only four hits, matching their season low, but held on behind Coke's second straight solid start after he opened the year in the bullpen. Coke, a Northern California native, pitched seven shutout innings and struck out two for his first victory of the season.

"Three hits," Geren lamented. "After the last couple of days I anticipated more. Today we really struggled. (Coke) had a decent sink and good changeup, and he seemed to mix his pitches well. There wasn't even really solid contact."

Conor Jackson singled twice for the A's, who were shut out for the first time this year.

The Tigers, who won their previous two games on walkoff hits, couldn't get anything going against Gonzalez but broke through after he departed.

Santiago greeted reliever Tyson Ross (1-1) with a sharp single to center and was sacrificed to second. After Casper Wells flew out to right, Raburn doubled hard off the wall in right-center. Santiago, who also singled in the fifth, scored easily.

That was all Coke (1-2) and Detroit's bullpen needed to slow down the surging A's.

Coke allowed only one Oakland runner past first base and retired 16 of the final 18 batters he faced. Joaquin Benoit pitched the eighth and Jose Valverde worked the ninth for his third save in as many chances.

After giving up Raburn's RBI double in the seventh, Ross walked the first two batters in the eighth. Jeremy Blevins replaced Ross and promptly walked Brandon Inge to load the bases, then fell behind 3-0 to Santiago.

Two pitches later, Santiago hit a sacrifice fly to left to score Jhonny Peralta. Oakland left fielder Josh Willingham threw to third base but no one was covering and the ball skipped into the A's dugout. Brennan Boesch, who was at second, was awarded two bases and scored to make it 3-0.

Overall, A's pitchers combined to issue a season-high 11 walks.

Notes: The A's got good news on two of their key relievers. Closer Andrew Bailey (forearm strain) threw a 25-pitch bullpen session without a setback while RHP Michael Wuertz (hamstring) felt fine after pitching a simulated inning. Both pitchers are on the disabled list but there is no word on when either might return. ... Oakland 2B Mark Ellis was awarded a triple for a ball he hit against Minnesota on April that was originally ruled an error. ... The A's are 1-4 in series-opening games this season.

Tigers walk all over A's in 3-0 win

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- It's a game like this that makes a baseball fan realize just how mediocre the Oakland Athletics can be when they play poorly.

Yet it also maddeningly shows how good the A's could be if they just played well every night.

Issuing 11 walks in this game, Oakland pitchers gave this contest away to the Detroit Tigers -- although, typically, the A's offense was nowhere to be found, either.

The 3-0 loss to the Tigers at the Coliseum tonight was particularly tough to endure for two reasons: 1) starter Gio Gonzalez didn't have his best stuff at all, but he battled through six innings without allowing a run; and 2) Detroit's starter, Phil Coke, was making just his third career start at age 28, but he had enough in the bag to limit the A's to just five baserunners in seven innings.

Tyson Ross relieved Gonzalez and immediately gave up two hits and a run to lose the game. Jerry Blevins followed him in relief, and the lefty promptly walked the first two batters he faced.

And when Blevins finally got an out -- a sacrifice fly by light-hitting Ramon Santiago, who also had two hits on the night for Detroit -- the defense failed on a basic throw back into the infield, letting yet another run score.

So, other than Gonzalez's solid start, everything else failed the A's tonight: the offense did nothing, the relief pitching lost the game late, and the defense made yet another error leading to an unearned run.

And as bad as Oakland was, they could have won this game, being tied 0-0 in the seventh inning. Not that the Tigers are any great team, but winnable games that get away late always hurt because it was there for the taking.

But you can't win if you don't score, so no matter how great the pitching is, the A's are still faced with that same problem: no offense.

Conor Jackson had two of the A's three hits on the night -- Kurt Suzuki had the other -- and Oakland got only one runner to third base all night -- Daric Barton in the first inning.

Including Jackson's two hits and Barton's two walks, Detroit's pitching was extremely dominant: the Tigers retired 18 of the final 19 Oakland batters on the night.

Maybe the game wasn't winnable after all, and the A's will never know.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Recker's walk-off sac fly lifts Sacramento

By Kyle Tucker / Sacramento River Cats

Anthony Recker helped Sacramento avoid a sweep with a game-winning sacrifice fly in the bottom of the 11th inning to beat visiting Las Vegas.

Recker's sharp line drive to center field scored Steve Tolleson from third base for a 2-1 victory, Sacramento's first extra-inning game of the season.

"I was just looking to get a pitch to drive in the outfield somewhere and get the run home," Recker said. "I faced (Las Vegas reliever Chad) Cordero the other night and had a good idea of what he was going to throw me."

After a three-and-a-half hour marathon, Sacramento was able to send the fans home happy, improving its record to 3-5 before heading on an eight-game road trip.

Sacramento Kings Rookie forward DeMarcus Cousins threw out the first pitch before the game.

"I've never played baseball before but I'm thinking about throwing it side-arm," Cousins said before stepping on the mound. He didn't throw it side-arm but he did paint the corner with a strike. "Do I get to hit now?" Cousins joked before taking pictures with a group of River Cats fans.

The River Cats got on the board in the fourth inning with back-to-back walks by Tolleson and Chris Carter. Both runners then advanced on a wild pitch by Las Vegas starter Brad Mills with Matt Carson at the plate. Carson was then called out on strikes, leaving runners on second and third with one out. Recker came through with a sacrifice fly to center field to score Tolleson for a 1-0 lead. That was all the Cats could do in the inning, leaving Carter stranded at third.

Sacramento starter Guillermo Moscoso cruised through 6.0 innings, giving up four hits and no runs while striking out three. Reliever Gabe DeHoyos made his third appearance of the season on his 31st birthday.

DeHoyos retired the first batter he faced, then got himself in trouble. He walked the next hitter Chris Woodward, followed by a one-out single by Adam Loewen, putting runners at the corners. Ryan Shealy then singled in Woodward on a soft single to left field. DeHoyos got out of the jam by a strikeout-throw out double play with a help from catcher Josh Donaldson, who caught Loewen trying to steal third.

Sacramento, after struggling offensively all night, looked like they would finally get something started in the ninth. Eric Sogard led off with a stand up double to left-center. That brought Tolleson to the plate with no out. Tolleson struck out swinging, bringing Carter up with one out and a man on second. Carter hit a broken-bat ground ball to third base that was fielded by Brett Lawrie. Sogard took off to third on contact and was able to dance around the tag and reach third safely. Carter reached base on an arrant throw by Lawrie.

This brought out Las Vegas Manager Marty Brown, who argued that Sogard went out of the base path to avoid the tag. Brown was eventually ejected after a heated exchange with the umpire, giving Cats fans reason to cheer. What looked like a promising rally came to a screeching halt with a force out at home followed by a Recker pop out.

Joe Bateman earned his first win of the season, striking out four and giving up two hits in 2.0 innings of relief. Matt Carson made the play of the game, throwing out the potential go-ahead run at the plate in the top of the 11th inning. The Cats used that momentum to rally in the bottom half and close out the series on a positive note. Sacramento now heads out on their first road trip of the season, starting in Tacoma on Friday night.

Pitching Dazzles As Hounds Shut Out Travs

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

RockHounds pitching struck out 10 (10K) and allowed just two hits (2H), adding up to 2-hit shutout as the RockHounds defeated the Arkansas Travelers, 3-0, Thursday night at Dickey-Stephens Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

Carlos Hernandez turned in his second consecutive quality start, going 5.2 innings, allowing only a walk and an infield single. Th in the left-hander improved to 2-0, 1.54 and is now 17-4 in his RockHounds career.

Neil Wagner pitched 2.1 innings in relief, surrendering only a bad-hop single while striking out three. He was dominating in the eighth, retiring the side on 10 pitches (nine strikes) with two strikeouts.

Jared Lansford earned the save, with the game ending on a tremendous defensive play. After a one-out walk to Mike Trout, Darwin Perez, sent a sharp grounder up the middle. Lansford deflected the ball slightly, and Tyler Ladendorf made a diving stop, flipping the ball out of his glove to Grant Green, who threw on to first base to complete the game-ending double play.

- Arkansas' two hits were both infield singles. Clay Fuller narrowly beat Green's throw to first on a chopper to short in the second and Angel Castillo's bad hop single deflected off third baseman Stephen Parker (originally ruled an error) in the seventh.

- The 'Hounds broke a scoreless tie in the sixth, scoring the game's only three runs. Michael Spina (single), Matt Sulentic (walk) and Petey Paramore (single) each drove in one run.

- The win came in the opener of the 6-game road trip, the RockHounds' first of the season.

- The RockHounds, 6-1, have the league's top record in the very young 2011 season, leading San Antonio by two games ... Frisco by three and Corpus Christi by four.

- Catcher Mitch Canham has been promoted to (Triple-A) Sacramento and (LHP) Lance Sewell has been activated from the disabled list.

Ports Win Home Opener

04/15/2011 2:41 AM ET

Stockton, Calif.-Stockton Ports fans got their money's worth on Thursday night as Stockton beat the Modesto Nuts 3-1 in the Ports home opener. Behind a strong performance by Ports starting pitcher Robert Gilliam pitched a strong game, allowing just one run on three hits through 7.0 innings to earn his second win of the season.

Gilliam's second win of the season came once again at the expense of the Nuts. Gilliam's only other start and win in the 2011 season was against the Nuts in Modesto, when the Ports blew out the Nuts 11-5. The right-hander looked solid through 7.0 innings, recording seven strikeouts and just one walk in the appearance, and kept himself out of jams by allowing just three hits.

While Gilliam's strong pitching performance kept the Nuts off the board, the Ports got to Modesto starter Tyler Matzek early. Matzek, the number one prospect in the Colorado Rockies farm system according to Baseball America, has struggled against the Ports. In their first meeting, the Ports took it to the lefty, scoring six runs in 3.0 innings to drive the top prospect's ERA up to a shocking 18.00. Matzek was able to lower that to a still alarming 9.95 ERA on Thursday, as he pitched 3.1 innings, giving up one earned run on two hits and four walks.

The Ports opened the scoring in the bottom of the third. Matzek got off to a shaky start in the inning, walking both Anthony Aliotti and Juan Nunez to put two men on base with no outs. It looked like Matzek might have been able to pitch himself out of the jam as he then got Conner Crumbliss to strike out swinging and froze Dusty Coleman. Unfortunately, this brought Stockton slugger Michael Choice to the plate. Choice made Matzek pay with a single up the middle to bring Aliotti home. Matzek was able to end the inning on the next batter, getting designated hitter Max Stassi to strike out swinging.

The Nuts would tie it up, and score their lone run in the sixth. Catcher Dallas Tarleton got the inning off to a quick start with a single up the middle and advanced into scoring position on a Angelys Nina groundout. Tarleton would come home as the

very next batter, Scott Robinson, hit a double to right-center field. The Nuts couldn't sustain the momentum, however, popping and lining out to end the inning, and the Nuts scoring for the evening.

The Ports responded quickly, tacking on the winning runs that same inning. Stassi reached base after getting dinged in the side by a pitch from Modesto reliever Alan DeRatt, who took the loss in the contest. Leonardo Gil, who had a strong night with two hits and a run scored, singled to advance Stassi to third. Stassi would not score, however, as Kent Walton would hit into a fielder's choice that saw Stassi tagged out at home despite plowing into the Nuts catcher. Gil and Walton would score two batters later as Aliotti once again got in on the scoring action, this time in the form of a two-RBI single.

The Ports closed the game out in strikeout fashion, as reliever Connor Hoehn struck out all three Nuts batters faced in the ninth inning, bringing all 4,008 Ports fans in attendance to their feet. Opening Night came to a close with a spectacular fireworks show presented by Jackson Rancheria Casino and Hotel.

The Ports look to continue their winning ways tomorrow at Banner Island Ballpark as they once again face off against the Nuts. First pitch is scheduled for 7:05 p.m., with gates opening at 6 p.m. The first 1000 fans through the gates receive Stockton Ports baseball caps presented by Jackson Rancheria.

Bees Win 5-1 on a Near "No-No"

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

BURLINGTON, IA-RHP A.J. Griffin (1-0) took a no-hitter into the 8th inning and the Burlington Bees (6-2) scored five runs in the 2nd inning to earn a 5-1 win over the Peoria Chiefs (3-5) before 463 fans at Community Field on Thursday night.

In the 2nd inning LF Jose Rivero (1-4) reached base on a fielder's choice and moved to second base on a single by RF Royce Consigli (2-3). SS Wade Kirkland (0-2) walked to load the bases.

C John Nester (1-3) lined a bases-clearing double to make it 3-0 Burlington.

After 2B Ryan Pineda (1-2) walked and CF Tyreace House (1-4) reached on an error, 3B Nino Leyja (1-4) hit a two-run single to make it 5-0.

Griffin retired the first nine hitters he faced. He surrendered one walk in the 4th and 5th innings before retiring six in a row, leading him into the 8th inning. Griffin struck out the leadoff batter LF D.J. Fitzgerald (0-2) and 3B Anthony Giansanti (0-3) reached on an error. C Sergio Burruel (1-3) singled into right field to break up the no-hit bid. Griffin retired SS Elliot Soto (0-3) before leaving the game in front of a standing ovation.

The Bees head to Quad Cities to begin a three-game series against the River Bandits on Friday night. RHP Blake Hassebrock (0-0, 0.00) starts on the mound for Burlington against RHP Seth Blair (0-0, 2.25) for Quad Cities. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:40 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com