

Seattle Mariners ace Felix Hernandez helps shut out Oakland A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

SEATTLE—Facing the hard-throwing Felix Hernandez on a chilly night is no hitter's idea of a good time.

In that context, the A's meager output Thursday night against the reigning American League Cy Young Award winner wasn't so surprising.

But the A's are out of mulligans after a 1-0 loss to the Seattle Mariners at Safeco Field. Regardless of weather or other variables, they must find a way to take care of business against teams such as the Mariners (7-13), who sport the worst record in the American League.

The A's wasted a four-hitter from Brandon McCarthy (1-1) and managed just five hits off Hernandez and two relievers. A's manager Bob Geren is fond of putting a cheery spin on close losses, but the disappointment was obvious in his voice.

"It's frustrating to get that kind of performance and not win a game," Geren said quietly.

After this four-game series with Seattle, the A's head to Anaheim for a three-game series against the AL West-leading Angels.

They'd do well to fatten up on the Mariners, who are batting a league-worst .224 as a team.

The A's lead the majors with a 2.52 ERA but rank second-to-last in the AL with 66 runs, an average of 3.47 per game.

The first-pitch temperature was 51 degrees, and the A's bats never thawed out against Hernandez (2-2), who allowed four hits over 72/3 innings with eight strikeouts and three walks.

"He's tough whether it's cold, warm, whatever," outfielder Ryan Sweeney said. "His change-up is like 90 (mph). It looks like a fastball and sinks at the last second."

With the A's sputtering offensively, their pitchers can't afford many mistakes.

McCarthy's came in the fourth inning, when he piped a 3-1 sinker that former A's player Adam Kennedy hit for a towering homer to right field.

"I had to come into his wheelhouse," McCarthy said. "Going against Felix, at-bats like that, you've got to do your best to avoid them."

The A's didn't advance a runner as far as third base.

Conor Jackson, who was supposed to play left field but was switched to first base when Daric Barton fell ill before the game, epitomized his team's frustrations.

He watched strike three in each of his first two at-bats. He came up in the eighth with two runners on and two outs, just as Hernandez was lifted for reliever Jamey Wright.

Jackson swung at the first pitch and hit into an inning-ending fielder's choice.

"It couldn't be a better situation for me," Jackson said. "I got a pitch to hit and didn't do anything with it."

Josh Willingham reached in the ninth on a leadoff single against Brandon League. He advanced to second on Sweeney's ground out, but Kurt Suzuki and Mark Ellis popped out to end it.

"Guys are battling, I know they are," Geren said. "But we've got to find a different gear. We're better than we're hitting. Performance is all that matters."

Oakland could have used all the thump it could muster against Hernandez. But regular designated hitter Hideki Matsui was out of the lineup. Geren called it a regular day off for Matsui and said Matsui was healthy.

Willingham served as DH, with Sweeney being inserted in left when Barton was scratched.

Chin Music: Some postgame thoughts

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/21/2011 11:30pm

A couple quick takes on the A's 1-0 loss to the Mariners, which had that all-too-familiar theme — outstanding pitching and not enough hitting.

- I'm noticing a different tone in manager Bob Geren's voice after some of these early-season losses. Normally he's one to put a positive spin on any sort of defeat, but he was very quiet and reserved tonight, clearly disheartened by his team's lack of run production. And he's had the same tone after other losses too. To state the obvious, the A's can't keep wasting pitching gems like the one they got from Brandon McCarthy tonight (four hits over eight innings).

"It's frustrating to get that kind of performance and not win a game," Geren said.

- Considering how much the A's struggled offensively tonight, I can't help but think Hideki Matsui should have found his way into the game at some point as a pinch hitter. The A's were one swing of the bat away from changing the game. I realize Matsui is a bit of a liability running the bases in a close game, but he's still got to make an appearance.

- I'm very interested to see how Tyson Ross fares in his first start of the season Friday night. And I'm just as curious to see Seattle starting pitcher Michael Pineda, a young stud who I've heard and read lots about. The A's will have their work cut out again ...

Chin Music: All-AL West road trip provides an early test

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/21/2011 6:46PM

It's only April, but any road trip made up solely of AL West foes is important for the A's. They begin a four-game series against the Mariners tonight, and then play three against the Los Angeles Angels, who found themselves alone in first place beginning play today. "It's an early run through the division, but you want to fare well," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It seems year to year that whoever does best in the division ends up winning."

Not that you would care much about this, but Safeco Field might have the coldest press box in the American League. It's just big and spacious and there's not a lot of warmth, so you have to game-plan with what you wear in here. I brought a heavy jacket, but I try to hold off on wearing it until the later innings. Once you put your jacket on, it's your last line of defense. When you start freezing in your jacket, forget about it. So I try to tough it out as long as I can. Grrrr

The A's draw a hard assignment tonight against Felix Hernandez, who is 5-2 with a 2.26 ERA at home against the A's in eight career starts (62 strikeouts in 55 2/3 innings). He also threw a five-hitter to beat them opening night at the Coliseum. But the A's counter with Brandon McCarthy, who has been a real pleasant surprise for Oakland at the back of the rotation. It's a quality pitching matchup to start this road trip ...

Hideki Matsui is out of the lineup, with Josh Willingham serving as DH and Conor Jackson getting a start in left field. Matsui is a .207 career hitter against Hernandez with one homer in 29 at-bats. Jackson is hitless in three at-bats against King Felix.

Michael Wuertz will pitch again for Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday. Wuertz gave up three runs on three hits with two walks in one inning against Reno on Wednesday. "Hopefully he'll pitch more efficiently," Geren said. "He hasn't been sharp yet." So the five lefties remain in the A's bullpen ...

The lineups, with Daric Barton just announced as a late scratch (no reason given).

A's – Crisp CF, DeJesus RF, Jackson 1B, Willingham DH, Sweeney LF, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS; McCarthy RHP.

Mariners – Ichiro RF, Figgins 3B, Kennedy 1B, Cust DH, Saunders CF, Olivo C, Peguero LF, Ryan SS, Wilson 2B; Hernandez RHP.

Oakland A's co-owner Lew Wolff mentioned as possible buyer of Los Angeles Dodgers

By Joe Stiglich, Contra Costa Times

A's co-owner Lew Wolff is being mentioned as a potential buyer of the Los Angeles Dodgers should the team be put up for sale.

Wolff, who lives in Southern California and has offices based there, denied having his eye on the Dodgers.

"I'm only interested in the A's—and getting above .500," Wolff told Bay Area News Group on Thursday.

The A's sit at 9-9 entering Thursday night's series opener at Seattle.

With Major League Baseball taking over control of the Dodgers from Frank McCourt for financial reasons, there's thought that commissioner Bud Selig could force McCourt to sell the team.

Some believe Wolff is a logical candidate to buy the Dodgers given his Southern California connections, and the fact his efforts to build an A's stadium in San Jose are stuck in neutral. Selig appointed a committee in March 2009 to recommend a stadium site for the A's, with no findings being made public.

ESPN's Buster Olney was among those who mentioned Wolff's name when discussing potential Dodgers buyers Thursday.

Felix Hernandez shuts down A's in 1-0 Mariners win

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The last time the A's made it to the postseason, they beat up on the Mariners but good during the regular season. If they're to do that again at any point, they'd like to see less of Felix Hernandez.

The reigning AL Cy Young Award winner worked 7 2/3 scoreless innings in Seattle's 1-0 victory Thursday night at Safeco Field, and he has defeated Oakland twice in a three-week span. The A's are 1-3 against last-place Seattle, a far cry from 2006, when they went 17-2 against the Mariners and won 93 games overall. Hernandez has won 10 of his past 12 decisions against Oakland.

A's starter Brandon McCarthy threw a complete game in taking the loss, allowing just a homer by onetime A's infielder Adam Kennedy.

"Any time you can play in the division, you need to scrape out wins, especially with the performance McCarthy gave tonight," Oakland's Conor Jackson said. "That's kind of tough to swallow."

Thursday night's game kicked off a stretch of 11 in a row against AL West opponents.

"The way we're going, sort of ebb and flow, up and down, we haven't caught fire," McCarthy said. "This would be a great week to put everything together, make some noise, move up in the standings. I think if we stick with what we're doing, we'll eventually get there."

Kennedy's homer came with one out in the fourth inning on a 3-1 sinker.

"I'd certainly like to have that at-bat back," McCarthy said. "I got behind him, and I had to go into his wheelhouse."

Kennedy said that he didn't realize McCarthy is throwing a sinker so much, adding, "My first at-bat, I wasn't ready for it. I rolled over it 3-2. So I was like, 'Don't do that again, idiot.' I tried to stay in there longer. I wanted to put the barrel on it, but I didn't want to try to pull it."

Over his past 14 2/3 innings, McCarthy has given up one run. He has a 2.10 ERA overall.

The A's recorded just one hit off Hernandez in the first five innings, a two-out single by Cliff Pennington in the third. Through the sixth, all three of their baserunners reached with two outs. Then, when Josh Willingham led off the seventh with a base hit, Hernandez got Ryan Sweeney to line into a double play.

Oakland was grateful to see Hernandez leave in the eighth with two on and two outs, especially Jackson, who'd struck out looking twice against Hernandez. But Jamey Wright took over and, with his first pitch, got Jackson to hit into an inning-ending force.

"That couldn't be a better situation for me," Jackson said. "Runners in scoring position in the eighth, and I got a good pitch to hit. I didn't do much with it."

The A's are batting .237 overall, and their 66 runs are the second fewest in the league.

"We've got to figure out how to get a run somehow, someday," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It's frustrating to get that kind of performance and not win a game. ... We have got to find a different gear somehow to jump start our offense."

Owning the A's

Felix Hernandez is 2-0 against the A's this year and has faced them 19 times in his career. His stats against Oakland:

CAREER

Rec**11-4**

ERA**2.61**

BAA.**228**

SO/9IP**8.5**

2011

Rec**2-0**

ERA**1.08**

BAA.**167**

SO/9IP**7.0**

Note: Since Josh Willingham's homer off Hernandez in the first inning of the season opener, the A's are 7-for-52 (.134) without a run in 16 innings against him.

McCarthy game log

Game-by-game stats for Brandon McCarthy, who is 1-1 with a 2.10 ERA:

Opp, Score	IP	H	ER	BB	SO	Dec
Blue Jays, L 7-6	8	8	4	1	2	ND
Twins, W 5-3	7 1/3	9	2	0	5	W
Tigers, L 8-4	6 2/3	6	0	1	7	ND
Mariners, L 1-0	8	4	1	1	6	L

No small feet for A's reliever - he's size 17

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Newest A's reliever **David Purcey** has set an Oakland record, at least during **Steve Vucinich's** 18 years as the team's equipment manager. Purcey has the biggest feet in that time.

Purcey wears size 17 spikes, and the A's haven't had a player above size 14; manager **Bob Geren** is a size 15, the previous Vucinich-era record holder. So when Purcey was traded to the A's from Toronto on Monday, the team had no spare white shoes in his size.

No problem for Vucinich, who dyed a pair of Purcey's Nike game spikes white, using two layers of spray. By Thursday, however, the black was peeking through in spots - a reverse scuff of sorts - and Purcey was talking to Nike's **Danny McCormack**, who previously worked in the A's scouting department, about a rush order on white spikes.

Purcey's turf shoes are even bigger than his spikes - he usually wears size 18. Purcey, who is 6-foot-5, said he's always been teased, called "Bigfoot," and it doesn't bother him.

"I'm used to it," he said. "I'm tall, so it's not like my feet are out of proportion. But it's not normal."

Wuertz stays put: **Michael Wuertz's** most recent rehab outing at Triple-A Sacramento wasn't as smooth as the A's would have liked, so the reliever will pitch there again Saturday. Wuertz, who is coming back from a hamstring strain, allowed three runs in an inning, and in three minor-league outings, he has a 21.00 ERA.

"Hopefully he'll be more efficient, get sharp," Geren said. "He hasn't been sharp yet."

Briefly: First baseman **Daric Barton** was a late scratch because of illness. **Ryan Sweeney** was inserted in left field, and **Conor Jackson** moved from left to first base. Barton is a career .327 hitter against Seattle. ... **Hideki Matsui**, a career .207 hitter against Seattle starter **Felix Hernandez**, wasn't in the lineup. **Josh Willingham** hit in the designated hitter spot. ... **Chris Carter** is out of action at Triple-A Sacramento with a thumb injury.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Tyson time: Tyson Ross makes his first start of the year tonight, joining the rotation with the league's best ERA. "They set the bar real high," Ross said. "I'm going to try to do the same thing as everyone else."

Drumbeat: Hideki Matsui not in A's lineup at Seattle tonight; Wuertz, Purcey items

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Safeco Field 4/21/2011 5:52PM

Hideki Matsui, the team RBI leader, won't start tonight's game against the Mariners, but he took no harm when going wiping out around third base yesterday; he told me he's fine. He's just not in there against Felix Hernandez. Well, if a hitter is going

to miss a game of a series, they usually don't mind missing King Felix. Matsui is a .206 hitter against him lifetime with one homer.

Here's the lineup behind Brandon McCarthy: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, DeJesus rf, Willingham dh, Jackson lf, Suzuki c, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Pennington ss

Michael Wuertz was expected here tonight in Seattle, but the A's have decided to leave him at Triple-A Sacramento until the results show he's a little sharper. He's got a 21.00 ERA in three minor-league rehab assignments and gave up three runs yesterday. He feels entirely recovered from a left hamstring strain, so I'm sure he's itching to get back.

When I went into the clubhouse today, Danny McCormack, who used to work in the A's scouting department but who now works at Nike, was standing by David Purcey's locker holding an enormous shoe. It turns out that Purcey wears a size 17 in spikes (Bob Geren says Purcey's turf shoes are even bigger - size 18) and the A's, of course, had no white size 17 set of spikes around. Equipment manager Steve Vucinich sprayed a pair of Purcey's black Nike spikes white - it took two coats - but the black is already showing through on the tips. So Nike is doing a rush special-order for Purcey, who told me that yes, he's heard "Bigfoot" a lot throughout his life. He's used to it.

I'd had several people ask about Joey Devine's absence from Sacramento; he went home to Georgia for the birth of his first child and rejoined the River Cats on Friday and was activated yesterday. I also get asked about Michael Taylor, who's at extended spring training with a wrist injury.

Has anyone had a chance to listen much to SportsRadio 95.7 FM, the A's new flagship apart from the game broadcasts and the pre- and post-game shows? I've had a few e-mails from A's fans with criticisms already, so I'm wondering if there's a consensus on some of the other programming during the day.

It's cold here at Safeco Field, and everyone here says it's been this way all season. Perhaps that explains Jack Cust's chilly start - he has not hit a home run, and he has one extra-base hit. He's batting .194.

A's have no answers for Felix in loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/22/2011 2:00 AM ET

SEATTLE—Expect the unexpected. That's essentially what A's fans have been trained to keep in mind when watching Oakland's offense during the first month of the season.

Unless Felix Hernandez is on the mound, that is. Then the notion is nonexistent, no matter the time of year, as Seattle's ace and very own 2010 Cy Young winner has made a habit out of shutting down the A's.

On Thursday, like clockwork, he continued that very trend, holding the green and gold to four hits in 7 2/3 shutout frames, spoiling an impressive eight-inning complete game from A's starter Brandon McCarthy, as Oakland dropped a 1-0 contest.

"It's frustrating to get that kind of performance and not win a game," A's manager Bob Geren said.

It marked the second straight loss for his club, which managed to move just three runners past first base and none to third the entire way, stranding seven total, including a runner on second with just one out in the ninth.

"Anytime you're playing a team in your division, you've got to scrape out wins no matter what, especially with the quality start McCarthy gave tonight," said Conor Jackson, who went 0-for-4. "It's a tough one to swallow. We knew with Felix out there it was going to be a low-scoring game, and we just didn't push anything across."

The A's struck out eight times and garnered three free passes against Hernandez, who now owns an 11-4 career mark—the wins are his most against any team—and 2.61 ERA vs. Oakland. More recently, he's 4-0 with a 2.00 ERA in his last six starts against the A's, who are still searching for a successful approach against him.

"Don't miss a good pitch, because you're probably not going to see one again," Jackson said. "He was just mixing up everything and not leaving much over the plate. It's nasty stuff."

"I was just trying to hit his fastball, but he throws me a lot of changeups, too," said Ryan Sweeney, who was also hitless. "It's weird. All of his pitches are almost the same speed. His fastball has a little more on it, obviously, but he throws his changeup at 90, and it looks like a fastball and just sinks at the last minute."

The Seattle right-hander, coming off a short five-inning outing against the Royals, tallied 126 pitches in the winning effort and left McCarthy with little room for error.

Making his fourth start of the season, McCarthy (1-1) matched Hernandez, minus a solo home run from former A's infielder Adam Kennedy with one out in the fourth inning. Otherwise, he surrendered just three other hits while fanning six and walking one.

"He was good," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "He's a different type of pitcher than I saw a couple years ago. He did a great job running that sinker to both sides of the plate all game long."

Except for one. And McCarthy, possibly his own toughest critic, was stuck on the 3-1 sinker to Kennedy that never strayed from the middle of the plate.

"It's an at-bat I'd like to have back," McCarthy said. "Just not a good at-bat. I got behind on him and have to come in on his wheelhouse with that pitch.

"Going in against Felix, you know with at-bats like that, you have to do your best to avoid them and do your best to keep zeros up there."

"He's not usually a sinkerball pitcher in the past," noted Kennedy, who grounded out in his first plate appearance. "I think now he's throwing a little more sinkers, which I wasn't as aware of in my first at-bat with the rollover. So I was being a little more conscious about staying down on it after that."

Oakland is 3-4 in one-run games this season following a 2010 campaign that saw it go 23-20 in such contests. Thursday's wasn't just about a pitchers' duel, but rather also about two teams struggling to produce much of anything at the plate.

The A's entered Thursday's matchup with a .241 team batting average, while Seattle brought in a .221 mark, which ranks last in the league. Following the loss, several caps were predictably and deservedly tipped to Hernandez, but no one in the Oakland clubhouse is ignorant to the club's overall offensive woes—no matter the opposing pitcher.

"Guys are battling, I know they are, but they have to find a different gear or something, jump-start the offense somehow," Geren said. "We're better than we're hitting, I know that, but we're not doing that, and performance is all that matters. We've gotta get it done. We've gotta do a better job of getting runs somehow."

The A's, in an early third-place standing with a 9-10 record in the American League West, are hoping those dreamy results come sooner rather than later next to a starting pitching staff that owns a Major League-best 2.52 ERA, as their next 10 games come against division opponents.

"This would be a great week," McCarthy said, "to put everything together and make some noise and get ourselves up in the standings."

Wuertz to pitch another rehab outing

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SEATTLE—A's right-hander Michael Wuertz is healthy, but not sharp enough to warrant a return to the club's active roster just yet, manager Bob Geren said on Thursday.

Wuertz, who was eligible to be reinstated from the disabled list on Tuesday after nursing a strained left hamstring, struggled in his third Minor League rehab outing on Wednesday with Triple-A Sacramento in Reno, giving up three runs on three hits and two walks with one strikeout in just one inning.

"He hasn't been sharp yet," Geren said.

As a result, Wuertz will make another rehab appearance for the River Cats on Saturday, when he's expected to "be more efficient" with a 40-pitch limit, Geren noted.

Wuertz is in the midst of his third career DL stint and has surrendered six runs and seven hits in three innings in the Minors. He had appeared in just one game with the A's prior to his injury, tossing one shutout inning with two strikeouts against the Mariners on Opening Night.

With the righty out of the mix, the A's are showcasing five left-handers in their bullpen.

Barton scratched from lineup with illness

SEATTLE—A's first baseman Daric Barton was a late scratch from Thursday's series-opening contest against the Mariners because of an illness, the team announced.

Conor Jackson, originally slated to start in left field, moved to first base in Barton's stead, while Ryan Sweeney was inserted into the lineup, playing left.

Barton, who played in 159 contests last season, entered Thursday tied with Hideki Matsui for the team lead in starts (17). The durable infielder ultimately came into the game in the top of the eighth inning, striking out against Felix Hernandez as a pinch-hitter for Kevin Kouzmanoff despite still not feeling well.

That was the only action Barton saw, though, as Andy LaRoche took over that lineup spot in the bottom half of the frame at third base.

Geren relieved by Braden's prognosis

SEATTLE—There's no telling when A's lefty Dallas Braden will pick up a ball again, but manager Bob Geren is relieved that the time will come without surgery.

"That's always good news," Geren said on Thursday. "It sounds like it's just what he said it was—a stiff shoulder. So he'll get treated, and we'll go from there."

Braden, stationed on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to Sunday, will stay in the Bay Area for treatment during the club's seven-game road trip through Seattle and Los Angeles. According to Geren, the team will "let him start feeling good and, when he does, start him back up again."

In the meantime, righty Tyson Ross will fulfill Braden's duties in a rotation that entered Thursday's game with a Major League-best 2.58 ERA. The hard-throwing youngster will celebrate his 24th birthday by starting Friday's contest in Seattle.

"I'm looking forward to watching him pitch," Geren said.

A's give Matsui routine day off in Seattle

SEATTLE—Oakland's string of 11 consecutive games against division opponents began Thursday in Seattle without its RBI leader, as manager Bob Geren elected to give Hideki Matsui a day off.

The A's skipper instead placed Josh Willingham, who is 2-for-19 over his past six games, in the designated hitter's slot.

Matsui owns a .302 career mark against Seattle, but just a .207 average when facing Thursday starter Felix Hernandez, against whom he's 6-for-29 with a home run.

The Japanese slugger has erased a slow start by going 12-for-40 (.300) with two home runs and eight RBIs over his past 10 games after a 4-for-25 showing during his first seven games. Overall, he's batting .246 with 11 RBIs.

Talented young righties face off in Seattle

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 4/22/2011

Mariners rookie starter Michael Pineda has made quite an impact in his first three starts of the season.

Opposing hitters, who are batting .197 against him, haven't been nearly as fortunate.

On Friday, Pineda takes the mound for a fourth time this season, this time against the A's. How will the young pitching sensation fare?

Well, here's what he has accomplished so far. Pineda is just the second Mariners pitcher to open his career with three consecutive quality starts. He's allowed five runs in 19 1/3 innings and is riding a two-game winning streak. Pineda has struck out 16 batters.

"He's very poised for a young starting pitcher at the big league level for the first time, and he's shown the ability to make adjustments out there as well," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "If you go through something that doesn't turn out the way you want and you learn from it and make adjustments the next time, that says a lot. Because it's a constant game of adjustments at this level."

Taking the mound for Oakland is Tyson Ross. The right-hander, who nearly earned a rotation job with a solid Spring Training, will start on his 24th birthday in place of injured southpaw Dallas Braden (stiff shoulder) on Friday. He didn't allow a run in two of his three relief outings this year.

"I'm excited," Ross said. "I'm looking forward to the opportunity to start again."

Ross went 1-4 with a 5.49 ERA last season.

"Last year, I learned I can pitch here at this level," he said. "I've watched a lot of guys and how they attack hitters, and I'm hoping to put that into practice."

He's not the only one. Oakland manager Bob Geren is optimistic and looking forward to watching Ross pitch.

"He had a great spring," Geren said. "He was obviously being considered for the rotation out of spring, and he's now getting that chance."

Athletics: The A's are 1-3 against the AL West, and manager Bob Geren knows how important the games are—even this early in the season. "You want to fare well," the skipper said. "It seems like whoever does best head-to-head ends up winning the division."

- Hideki Matsui, who leads the team with 11 RBIs, got the day off Thursday, but is expected back for Friday's contest.

- Daric Barton was a late scratch from Thursday's lineup because of an illness, but struck out as a pinch-hitter. Conor Jackson started in his place.

Mariners: The Mariners will continue to be without first baseman Justin Smoak, who is on the bereavement list following the death of his father on Tuesday in South Carolina. Milton Bradley was scratched from Thursday's game due to illness and his status is uncertain.

- Rookie Carlos Peguero made his second straight start Thursday in left field after being called up from Triple-A Tacoma to take Smoak's roster spot. He legged out an infield single for his first Major League hit.

Worth noting: Mariners reliever Shawn Kelley, who had partial Tommy John surgery on his elbow on Sept. 1, rejoined the Mariners Thursday and continues his rehabilitation. He's on schedule to be ready to pitch when his 60-day disabled list stint ends June 1. ... Oakland's Michael Wuertz, who was eligible to be reinstated from the disabled list on Tuesday after nursing a strained left hamstring, struggled in his third Minor League rehab outing on Wednesday and will make another rehab appearance at Triple-A on Saturday.

A's lose to Mariners, 1-0

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — Felix Hernandez took a shutout into the eighth inning and Adam Kennedy's home run was all the Seattle Mariners needed to beat the Oakland Athletics 1-0 Thursday night.

Hernandez (2-2), last year's Cy Young Award winner, allowed four singles, two by Cliff Pennington and one by David DeJesus and Josh Willingham.

He struck out eight and walked three before leaving after a season-high 126 pitches.

Jamey Wright took over in the eighth with two outs and Pennington on second and DeJesus on first. Conor Jackson grounded out on his first pitch to end the inning.

Brandon League pitched the ninth for his fourth save in four chances.

Gutierrez: A's wasting stellar starting pitching

Paul Gutierrez, *CSNCalifornia.com*

How long can this go on? Seriously.

How much longer can the A's continue to waste not just quality, but stellar starting pitching? The kind of starts that are the envy of baseball.

Before the A's 1-0 loss at Seattle tonight, I engaged in a playful debate, of sorts, with baseball analyst and former A's pitcher Greg Cadaret on CSN California's "A's Pregame Live." The topic -- who had the worst offense in the American League West?

Cadaret went with the Mariners; I took no pleasure in picking the A's.

And after the A's were blanked on a night when Brandon McCarthy limited the Mariners to the one run -- fittingly enough, on a solo home run by former A's infielder Adam Kennedy -- on four hits in eight innings, I still take no pleasure in my pick. Though results speak louder than debates, no?

Look at it this way: McCarthy, who was absolutely McFilthy again, lowered the A's starting staff's major league-best ERA to 2.13. But A's hitters are averaging a meager 1.8 earned runs against opposing starting pitchers.

That's not a wash; that's a crying shame.

But it's not really all that surprising. Not when the A's opened this four-game series in the Emerald City third in the AL West in batting average (.241) and total bases (220) and last in runs scored (68), home runs (eight) and, most disturbing of all in the Moneyball universe, on-base percentage (.306).

In dropping their second straight game, the A's again fell below .500 at 9-10.

Sure, the A's were facing the reigning Cy Young King in Felix Hernandez. And the right-hander has owned the A's in his career, entering the game with a 10-4 record against Oakland with a 2.77 ERA in 18 career starts.

This time, he gave up just four hits, all singles, including an infield hit, and only two runners made it to second base. Both of his victories this season are against, yup, your Swingin' (and missin') A's.

As @KingTweet4 asked me, "Whats more frustrating to watch, the A's lack of hitting or the Raiders inability to stop the run?"

I'll answer with this -- imagine being a starting pitcher for the A's.

A's owner Lew Wolff 'not interested' in Dodgers

Bill Shaikin, Los Angeles, Times, 4/21/2011

Although Bud Selig's takeover of the Dodgers on Wednesday could lead to a sale, Oakland Athletics owner Lew Wolff said Thursday he would not be a buyer.

"I'm not interested in the Dodgers," Wolff said.

Wolff had been speculated as a possible buyer because he lives in Los Angeles, although his primary financial backing comes from a San Francisco Bay Area family. The A's have been waiting for more than two years for Commissioner Bud Selig to decide whether they can move to San Jose. Within baseball circles, speculation arose that Selig might try to shepherd Wolff into ownership of the Dodgers rather than make him wait to see whether the Giants could be pacified into tolerating the A's in San Jose.

"My focus is deep into getting us a new venue for the A's," Wolff said. "That's where my long term is."

The leading figures within baseball that might bid on the Dodgers are considered to be Mark Attanasio, the owner of the Milwaukee Brewers, and Dennis Gilbert, a former agent and current Chicago White Sox executive. Both men live in Los Angeles; Gilbert led a group that failed in a bid to buy the Texas Rangers last year.

Gilbert is believed to have an investment group lined up for a possible Dodgers bid. Attanasio was en route to Milwaukee where the Brewers on Thursday signed outfielder Ryan Braun to a five-year, \$105-million contract extension.

Boston Red Sox Chairman Tom Werner, a Hollywood producer with a home here, told the Boston Globe he would not be interested in buying the Dodgers.

Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, previously has said he would consider exploring a Dodgers purchase but did not respond to an email seeking comment. Steve Garvey, the former Dodgers All-Star first baseman, remains interested in assembling an investment group to bid on the club.

Oakland A's Front Office Q&A: Farhan Zaidi P1

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Apr 21, 2011

Heading into their series with the Seattle Mariners, the Oakland A's are 9-9 and three games behind the Los Angeles Angels for first place in the AL West. The A's began the season with their sights on a division title. We spoke with A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi about the team's start. In part one, we discuss the defense, the rotation, pitch counts, Twitter, Rich Harden and more

OaklandClubhouse: How would you assess the team up through this point in the season?

Farhan Zaidi: On the one hand, we are certainly pleased with the great starting pitching that we've gotten. On the flip side, we are feeling a little fortunate that things aren't worse because obviously if it weren't for them, our record could certainly be worse. The defense has been well-below expectations, and nobody is really producing offensively. Certainly no one is off to a hot start. The bullpen has struggled a little bit.

The other thing that is just hard to control is our hitting with runners in scoring position. I think we are hitting around .210 or .215 right now [.216 through Wednesday]. Even though that feels like it has been an issue with this team the past few years, last year I think we wound-up hitting about -- I'll look it up -- .240 with runners in scoring position. The difference between hitting .210 and hitting .240 with runners in scoring position for us right now is five or six base-hits in games where

those could have made quite a bit of difference. That's the sort of thing that we think will pick up.

I think we are in between sort of being a little frustrated that we haven't been able to make better use of the starting pitching and feeling lucky that we are where we are, which is that we haven't really dug a hole for ourselves. On balance, I think there is a little bit more of a feeling of frustration because of the expectations for the team, but it's early. I don't think anyone is overly concerned. The positive is that we think the team has another gear and hopefully we shift into it soon and start playing better and hopefully get some separation from .500.

OC: Any explanation for why the defense has been so poor to start this season?

FZ: I think in the first couple of games, it was more of a flukish thing. Then when you get off to a poor start like that, guys can sometimes get a little bit tight and might be a little too over-anxious to make the right play or the clean play in the field. It can snowball a little bit. Our defense has been a lot better the past five or six games. We've had a few errors here and there sprinkled in, but it has generally been something like Brett Anderson tripping over the mound. Things like that are going to happen. Errors are never going to go to zero. But the infield has played much better and the outfield has made a number of nice plays – like David DeJesus' two plays [Wednesday versus Boston]. I think our defense is starting to emerge as the strength that we all believe that it is.

We were doing fine defensively in spring training. I don't think anyone anticipated that we would get off to a bad start [in that area], but when it happened, it snowballed a little bit. I think these past few games it has been better.

OC: Talking about the starting pitching, the strike-out numbers have been impressive, especially for Trevor Cahill. Did he make any adjustments to up his strike-out totals or do you think it is more of a function of him getting more comfortable in his third year in the league?

FZ: I think he's making a little bit more use of his secondary pitches. When he throws more sinkers, he is more of a contact-pitcher and that's what he is trying to do. We obviously don't want him to get totally away from that and pitch inefficiently. Getting deep into the game, like he has a couple of times, obviously has a lot of value. But I do think that he is using his change-up and his breaking ball more. At times when he needs a strike-out, he can go to those pitches, and that is very, very valuable.

Trevor is an interesting case. I think everybody knows what his Fielding Independent Pitching [FIP] stats are and how his ERA and numbers like that exceeded expectations based on his peripherals. At the same time, the gap between his peripherals and his raw numbers, it is very easy to see that gap being filled by potential. There is no reason that he can't have the kind of season that he had last year by becoming a better pitcher and growing into his potential. Which is what I think we are seeing this year.

That is some of what we were considering when we decided to have the conversation about signing him long-term. Even with the gap between his peripherals and his traditional numbers last year, we still had a lot of confidence in his ability long-term to grow into a top pitcher in the league.

OC: There were a lot of comparisons made between Cahill's contract and the one that Clay Buchholz signed maybe a week before. Was Buchholz's contract a factor at all in the negotiations?

FZ: With those contracts – because they go through arbitration years – there are so many comparables. If you look at Clay and Trevor's numbers on paper, their 2010 numbers and their career numbers are very similar. I think it was an instance of two teams working with two similar pitchers looking to do the same structured deal with the same comparables out there. There were a few deals done last year – Ricky Romero and Jon Lester – and we were basically working with the same group of comparables. So it's not surprising that we ended up with deals as similar as they are.

OC: Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez are off to terrific starts. Now that they are entering their third seasons, are you seeing a maturation process with both of them?

FZ: Yeah. I think the biggest part of the maturation for both of those guys is not trying to strike everybody out. These guys, they want the team to win and they want wins for themselves. They know that the best way for them to get those wins is to go deep into games. I think they recognize that we have a good defense and that we play in a good park for them. If they can pitch to contact a little bit and mix in a few of those under 10 pitch innings, they have a much better chance of getting into the seventh and eighth innings. They have done that a few times this year.

You might see the strike-outs go down – hopefully you'll see the walks go down. The one stat I expect to see improvement in this year is the innings pitched per start. They have a chance to be more efficient pitchers and get deeper into games this year. That will give them a better chance to get wins and will obviously increase the team's chances of winning.

OC: Brandon McCarthy has been something of a revelation at this point. Is he doing what you saw during winter ball or did

he make some additional adjustments after joining the organization?

FZ: I think Ron Romanick [the A's pitching coach] has done some good work with him. They talked about making a couple of minor mechanical adjustments and Ron also worked with Brandon on his change-up. Our big thing was that we knew what Brandon's track record was. And that goes back not just to what he had done in the big leagues, but even as a prospect in the minors. When you look at guys who have had 4:1 strike-out to walk ratios in the minors [like McCarthy did], those guys tend to be successful at the big league level.

We've always sought those guys out, whether it was Dan Haren or when we moved Dallas Braden up the ladder even during times when he wasn't necessarily viewed as a top prospect. Guys who miss bats and don't walk a lot of guys tend to do very well. They might morph into different types of pitchers. I don't think anyone would think of Dallas as a strike-out pitcher. It's a little bit of the same thing with Brandon. These guys who have good enough stuff that they struck-out a lot of guys at one point and certainly will get some strike-outs at the big leagues and at the same time pound the 'zone and use a few different pitches, those guys seem to do well.

With Brandon, it was the track record and seeing him in winter ball and seeing that he was healthy. That was enough for us to make an aggressive push to sign him.

OC: It's hard to mention McCarthy without thinking of his Twitter feed and his funny exchanges with Anderson and others. It seems like the A's organization is well represented on Twitter with player participation. Is that something that the front office tracks? Is there a team policy about Twitter?

FZ: I think it is great that players have a way to connect more directly with fans and for fans to have more access to players. We take it for granted because we are around these players all of the time and have access to them, but I think back to when I was a fan and I think it would have been a pretty cool thing to get these tweets about what guys are doing on the road or what guys are doing on their off time. As long as it is done in a way that doesn't compromise these guys personally or the organization, I think it is great. As a front office, you have to have some awareness of what is going on from the standpoint of fulfilling our responsibilities to the organization. But I think it is a great thing.

OC: Was McCarthy a free agent target because he is a Premier League soccer fan?

FZ: I know that he and Billy [Beane] have bonded over that common love they have. It's kind of nice to have another guy around who is interested in soccer but if I think back, I don't believe it was part of the recruiting process on either side. [laughs]

OC: When David Purcey was added to the roster this week, Rich Harden was moved to the 60-day DL. It seemed like there was this impression that that move meant Harden was likely to miss the entire season, but I don't get that sense based on the fact that he is supposed to throw again soon. The move was more about needing a roster spot than about a change in Harden's status right?

FZ: Yeah, it was more of a procedural move. Rich had been building up to being able to throw off of the mound and he got to the point to where he was going to pitch in that simulated game and he had a set-back. Not from a physical standpoint. He just didn't feel he was ready. At the same time, when that happens, you have to take a few days off and build back up in the throwing program. It was more of a situation of doing the math of how long it will take him to get built back up.

We've also learned that it's not the best idea with these guys to rush them through their rehab. To have them make one or two appearances [in the minor leagues] and then come back up isn't the best idea, especially for someone like Rich, who didn't have any sort of spring training at all. There is certainly no additional update or reason that he was put on the 60-day DL. It was more looking at the timetable that he was going to have to have a few appearances once he went out on his rehab and realizing that he probably wasn't going to be ready for another month or so anyway.

OC: When he does go out on a rehab assignment, do you anticipate him being built up as a starter or as a reliever or will that be roster-based decision at that time?

FZ: It will depend on where we are with the staff. When we were getting to the point where we were looking at [sending him out on a rehab], I believe his rehab assignment was going to begin around now. We were thinking we were going to use him as a reliever. That, of course, was before Dallas got hurt. If Rich was on a rehab assignment at this point, who's to say we wouldn't just say 'let's build him up as a starter to have the option of using him as a starter depending on how Dallas' recovery goes.'

The throwing program and everything and even the first couple of rehab appearances are the same whether he is a reliever or a starter. I think we won't have to make that decision for another two or three weeks.

OC: Tyson Ross has now moved into Braden's spot in the rotation. Are you concerned at all since he has only thrown five

innings since spring training and hasn't made a start yet? Will he be on a pitch and innings limit early on?

FZ: I don't think he's fully stretched out but I don't think it is a huge concern. He had some longer appearances in spring training and it hasn't been that long since he had some longer outings. I don't think he's going to be able to go over 100 pitches, but he should be able to give us, hopefully, five or six innings.

OC: There have been a number of starters who have gone well above 100 pitches already this season. Are you concerned about that work load long-term?

FZ: I think part of our ability to do that has been because of these off-days and that we have kept everyone on-turn and have been able to give everyone extra days' rest. That has definitely helped us use starters deeper into games and have higher pitch counts.

The pitch count philosophy isn't based on looking at how many pitches a pitcher has thrown in one start. You have to look at what he has done over two-start or three-start or four-start stretches. Certainly those guys who have gone over 110 pitches will have to be watched a little bit more closely in the second and third starts they make after that, but I think that the extra rest that these guys have gotten and the way they feel physically right now, it's not a big concern.

Oakland A's Front Office Q&A: Farhan Zaidi P2

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

Apr 22, 2011

In part two of our interview with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi, we discuss the A's bullpen, the acquisition of David Purcey, the defensive futures of Chris Carter and Adrian Cardenas, the outlook for Jemile Weeks and more...

OaklandClubhouse: Turning to the bullpen, David Purcey joined the team and the bullpen this week. What kind of role do you envision for him? Is he a lefty specialist? A longman?

Farhan Zaidi: A lot of times, the role gets dictated by performance. He's a guy who had a pretty decent year out of the bullpen last year. He isn't really a lefty specialist if you look at his splits. Certainly from a stuff standpoint, he has enough fastball and he can get into righties. I think his role is going to be dictated partly by need and partly by performance. The better he pitches, the more confidence the manager will have to use him in key situations.

He certainly throws hard enough and has the stuff that you hope he can eventually creep towards the end of games. We have a number of other guys obviously who can fill those roles, but that was the thinking in going out and getting him is that he is a guy who we always liked who made a decent transition to the bullpen. We weren't really spooked by the bad start he had this year. When we got Craig Breslow off of waivers [in 2009], he was off to a really poor start. Sometimes those bad starts are kind of flukish and can create an opportunity.

OC: Purcey pitched well against the A's when you were in Toronto. Was that part of the evaluation?

FZ: I think it sort of got the coaches excited because that is what they tend to go on, if they have seen the guy recently and he pitched well. For [the front office], this type of decision is more based on the guy's track record and that sort of stuff. I think, if anything, seeing him throw well got the coaches excited because it was a guy they had some familiarity with.

OC: I guess he lasted longer than Ryan Langerhans, but Daniel Farquhar didn't last long with the organization. What was that conversation like when you guys had to tell him he was headed back to Toronto?

FZ: I honestly don't know because I wasn't part of that conversation, but I think if it were another team it would be pretty hard to take. My sense is that when players get traded, you can spin it both ways – 'those guys didn't want me' or 'there is another team out there that wanted me.' Sometimes guys take it harder. I think we can lose sight of as front office people – and even as fans – that it's tough when you have to go to a new place and learn a whole new set of people and have a whole new set of teammates. Just from a personal standpoint, getting traded is tough. For him, going back to a place where he is going to know the guys he's playing with and he knows the organization, there is already some comfort level there. The big part of the trauma probably isn't there for him.

OC: Was trading Farquhar a case of not liking what you saw with him or was it that that was what the Blue Jays required to get Purcey?

FZ: Not at all. For us to trade a player, the player has to be asked for. We don't get to dictate who we trade. We can't say

'we want this player and this is who we will give you for him.' It just doesn't work that way. They asked about him because they knew him and they liked him when they traded him to us last winter. He was obviously off to a very good start this season with Sacramento, but Purcey is a guy who we thought of as being already somewhat established in the big leagues as a reliever and stuff-wise, it was comparable. It was no slight on what we had seen from Farquhar. If anything, it sort of speaks to what the Blue Jays thought of him that he was the guy they were looking to re-acquire.

OC: How would you assess the bullpen thus far? They've had some rough outings, but have looked good in other instances, especially when considering they have been without Andrew Bailey. Have they given you what you expected of them?

FZ: Losing your closer is really tough because it has a cascading effect on everybody. **Brian Fuentes** was really brought in to be a set-up man. Our vision was to have Grant Balfour and Fuentes as match-up set-up guys and Breslow, **Brad Ziegler** and Jerry Blevins as guys who you could mix-and-match in the sixth and seventh innings, and certainly Michael Wuertz was a guy who could fit into that group, as well.

Without Bailey, everyone has sort of moved up. Fuentes has been the closer, for the most part, and at times you don't get to use the closer in a match-up way like you would use him if he was pitching in the eighth. Balfour has been extended in a couple of outings, trying to bridge between the sixth and eighth innings to get to the closer. I think these guys, because of the injuries to Bailey and to Wuertz, have been a little bit over-extended.

I think they are capable of better when we put them in their roles. Some of the other guys [have been impacted], too. Breslow is off to somewhat of a slow start. Blevins has been good, but he had a little bit of a struggle with his command a couple of outings ago. I don't think we are seeing any of these guys in peak form yet, even though the results have actually been okay.

In their defense, because we have played so many close games, things are magnified. No bullpen is perfect, but when these guys make a mistake, it seems like it costs us a game. Just like the starters, they are dealing with little margin for error. Overall, the bullpen has been solid. When we start getting guys back and guys can go back to the roles that we envisioned for them, I think we will have some room for improvement.

OC: Turning to the minor leagues, I saw that Chris Carter left Sacramento's game [on Wednesday] early. Was that because of an injury?

FZ: I heard that he had a little bit of an issue with his thumb on a play when I guess he ran into a wall on. I don't really know any details beyond that.

OC: He's been playing first base lately, I think probably because Wes Timmons is on the DL. Do you still see a future for him out in left field? I know he was off to a rough start defensively out there.

FZ: I think he's more comfortable at first base. With the struggles he had out in the outfield during spring training and then getting off to a slow start with Sacramento, it's probably been a good thing for him confidence-wise to be where he is most comfortable in the field. When we have a fuller roster [in Sacramento] – and at some point **Sean Doolittle** is going to figure into the mix there too – we may have to revisit having him there. In the long run, if you look at our team in the long term, putting him in the outfield would have a lot of value.

It has sort of worked out because I think it has been to get Chris comfortable in the field and hopefully get him going at the plate. And the team has needed it. I think might behoove us, once we have the roster flexibility on that team and he gets going offensively, it will be worth revisiting given how the big league team projects in the future.

OC: Another guy who hasn't played a whole lot of defense but has been hitting well is Adrian Cardenas. He is sort of a man without a position right now and has been DHing a lot. Where do you see him fitting in down-the-road?

FZ: The positions he has played the last couple of years have been second and third. Part of [why he has been DHing] is that that Sacramento team has so many infielders that are being rotated through that spot. Whether it is Steven Tolleson in there or Josh Horton. Even Adam Heether is actually an infielder by trade and he has been playing a lot of outfield just because there has been that necessity.

Timmons, quite frankly, is another guy who is really more of a second-base, third-base guy who has been playing first out of necessity as well. I don't think I've even mentioned Eric Sogard, who has been playing everyday at short, again out of necessity.

The way that Adrian has been swinging the bat, I don't think that is going to limit him to DH. It's partly been a function of the other guys on the team and needing to get other guys reps at other positions. The other thing I hadn't mentioned is that we tried to get Josh Donaldson a few games at third, as well. And that's a way to get **Anthony Recker** in the line-up, and he really deserves playing time as well. I think that [Sacramento manager] Darren Bush has his hands full trying to mix and

match these guys in the line-up. We are only 13 or 14 games in. He has DH'd a lot so far but I think in the long run he is going to wind-up playing a lot of second and third base.

OC: Are you encouraged by how Cardenas has looked offensively? It's been hard for him to get off to a good start the last two times he has been with Sacramento.

FZ: Yeah. You can talk to yourself both ways on Adrian. On the one hand, you can say 'this is a guy who has 400 at-bats at Triple-A,' but on the other hand, he's only 23 and he hit a lot better his second go-around in Sacramento last year. The innate hitting ability has always been there with him. It is very encouraging to see him getting off to this good start. It is that kind of hitting ability that is the reason we put him on the [40-man] roster in the first place. Hopefully he keeps it going and keeps those numbers up. When you look at what he did in Double-A as a 22-year-old last year – the focus with him when you talk about him as a prospect is often so much on the fact that he didn't do the same thing at the Triple-A level – but at his age and what he did at Double-A, this performance isn't a surprise. It's really in-line with what he has done at all of the other levels.

OC: Jemile Weeks is off to a good start. He hasn't played that much at any level with all of the injuries. Are you feeling like if he puts together a good year this year and can stay healthy, you are confident that he's had enough experience that he can crack a big league roster next year?

FZ: Absolutely. He's starting this season in Triple-A and anybody who starts a year in Triple-A should have designs on being in the big leagues the next year, if not before that. Jemile has been as good as anybody on that team. He's gotten off to a really good start. He had a terrific camp. He played with a lot of energy. There's just so much ability there that if he plays with that kind of energy and stays healthy, when you watch him play, you have no doubt that you are watching a big leaguer. It's exciting.

It's still early. He has a lot of season left to keep the energy level up and the health. It was a little bit aggressive to move him up to Triple-A because he doesn't have a ton of Double-A time and his numbers at Double-A weren't great, but he's made that look like the right decision thus far.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento pulls off seven-run comeback

By Kyle Tucker / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento's bats caught fire in the eighth and ninth innings, putting up five runs and sealing the dramatic comeback victory over host Reno.

The River Cats' offense continued to stay hot and showed a gritty performance on Thursday night, prevailing 11-10 at Aces Ballpark.

The River Cats' bullpen was cool under pressure and allowed just one run in the last five frames after starter Yadel Marti surrendered nine runs (seven earned) and had his night cut short after 3.1 innings pitched.

The collective effort by the bullpen allowed the offense to chip away and climb all the way back from seven runs down.

Josh Horton hit a three-run home run in the sixth inning, his first of the season. The blast gave Sacramento hope, and at that point a comeback was in sight.

Eric Sogard had a big night at the plate, going 3-for-5 with three RBIs, including a clutch two-run single that tied the game at 10 in the eighth.

Jai Miller led off the Sacramento ninth with a lead-off walk and represented the go-ahead run. Reno reliever Rafael Rodriguez then balked with Josh Donaldson at the plate, giving Miller a free pass to second. Donaldson then drove in Miller by lining a double to left field, putting the Cats ahead for the first time all night and capping the monumental comeback.

Willie Eyre earned the win by tossing 3.0 innings in relief. Eyre gave up just one earned run and struck out four, bringing his ERA down to a microscopic 0.68.

Manager Darren Bush saw a collective effort by his offense. Each hitter had at least one hit. Jemile Weeks, Adrian Cardenas, Sogard and Donaldson led the way with multi-hit games.

The Aces wasted no time getting the offensive outburst started in the first inning on a two-run home run by Cole Gillespie, his first of the season. Reno put up nine runs through the first four frames, but that wasn't enough as Sacramento stormed back to score 11 runs in the final six innings.

Reno and Sacramento combined to rack up 28 hits and 21 runs Thursday night. A good old-fashioned slugfest is what fans witnessed on a chilly night in Northwest Nevada. The River Cats now lead the series 2-1 and look to keep the bats hot Friday behind Travis Banwart (0-1, 4.35). Reno looks for the series split sending Matt Torra (1-0, 1.50) to the mound.

Hounds 'Deck'ed on Series Opener

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Citibank Ballpark - - -

San Antonio has been mistreating the baseball through much of the 2011 season, scoring a combined 49 runs in two of their victories. The Missions got key hits from their top two run producers Thursday night, but they also "slapped some serious" leather, making two plays that each saved a run in a 5-3 win in the opener of a 4-game series at Citibank Ballpark.

With the win, San Antonio gains a share of first place with the 'Hounds 13 games into the season.

- Cody Decker's 2-run double in the sixth tied the game at 3-3, scoring Jaff Decker and James Darnell. Jaff (no relation to Cody) then drove in Beamer Weems in the eighth with a triple to right-center, and that swing would be the game-winning RBI.
- In the fourth, Michael Spina ripped a 2-run home run to left-center, giving the 'Hounds a 2-0 lead. Blake Tekotte then robbed Stephen Parker of extra bases with a sensational catch in dead center just short of the wall. It was the second time in four games Parker has been the victim of a genuine, ESPN-caliber "web gem." Springfield's Alex Castellanos took away a bases loaded double with an over-the-shoulder catch, one step from the wall in right last Sunday.
- In the fifth, Kyle Blanks made a tremendous play on Shane Peterson's sharp shot to the right side. Blanks, the former SA Mission now with the Texas League club on a Major League re-hab assignment, tossed to pitcher Eddie Kunz to complete the play. Kyle played for the Missions in 2008 and, at age 21, hit .325 with 20 HR and 107 RBI. Editor's note: For what it's worth, I thought he was clearly the Texas League Player of the Year and voted that way. He has played 87 games in the Major Leagues with the Padres in 2009 and 2010.

Next Game: RockHounds vs. San Antonio Missions

Friday, April 22 - 7 p.m. at Citibank Ballpark

San Antonio Probable Starter

Rob Musgrave (LH 1-0, 3.48 in two starts)

RockHounds Probable Starter

Shawn Haviland (RH 0-1, 4.22 in two starts)

Walton hits for cycle in Stockton win

By David Heck / Special to MLB.com

Kent Walton knew he was a triple away from the cycle Thursday, but he never thought he would get another chance to step in the batter's box.

Until the Stockton Ports sent 10 batters to the plate in the eighth inning, that was.

Walton tripled to lead off the ninth inning, giving him the first cycle of his career and in all of pro ball this season. The 24-year-old outfielder also drove in two runs and scored twice as Class A Advanced Stockton outlasted the Lancaster JetHawks, 13-10.

"I'm pretty stoked," said Walton, who was selected in the 23rd round of the 2009 Draft. "It was my first one ever. I was pretty excited.

"[The win] absolutely makes it sweeter, because then you feel like you can celebrate with the team. It was a whole team effort."

Already having homered and singled in the game, Walton doubled with one out in the eighth. Though he was aware that he was only a triple away from the cycle, he did not think it was a real possibility.

"I honestly didn't think I was going to get another chance because I think I was in line to be the sixth or seventh batter [in the ninth] until we ran the table in the eighth inning," Walton said.

But the Ports batted around in the eighth, scoring six runs and giving Walton the opportunity in the ninth.

"I knew that I had to get the triple, but I was just looking for something I could hit hard," Walton said. "I thought I got it out. It was a no-lose [situation], because it didn't go out but I still got a triple, so it feels good either way."

Knowing he had squared up the ball but unsure of where exactly it would land, Walton put his head down and set his sights on third base.

"Right when I hit it, it didn't matter where the ball went, I was going to go for three," Walton said. "I'm actually glad Coach stopped me at third, because there was a chance for an inside-the-park home run. I was just running, not thinking at that point."

Walton raised his average from .219 to .297 with his performance. He had not hit a homer or a triple this season until Thursday.

"I've been working a lot with my hitting coach [Brian McCarn] and manager [Webster Garrison]," Walton said. "They've been helping me get my rhythm at the plate. I've been swinging better, and tonight I got some pitches to hit. It was the first time I've felt on time for an entire game all year."

Walton said the feat ranks among his most memorable athletic performances.

"This is probably No. 1," he said. "I see [cycles] on ESPN two or three times a year. I've always dreamed of it. I've been close in the past, a homer away or triple away. It's just cool to get one."

Bees and Timber Rattlers Postponed

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees and Wisconsin Timber Rattlers game was rained out on Thursday at Community Field. The game will be made up as part of a doubleheader at Community Field on Friday night at 5:30. Fans that have tickets for Thursday's game may exchange them at the Community Field Box Office for tickets of equal or lesser value to any remaining home game during the 2011 season.

The Bees and Timber Rattlers twin-bill will have the following pitching match-up. In game one RHP Matt Miller (0-1, 8.68) gets the start for Wisconsin against LHP Jacob Brown (2-0, 1.64) for Burlington. In game two it will be RHP Del Howell (0-0, 5.40) for the Timber Rattlers against RHP Blake Hasebrock (1-0, 0.00) for the Bees. Pre-game coverage begins at 5:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com.

