

Kevin Kouzmanoff ignites A's offensive awakening

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

SEATTLE -- Kevin Kouzmanoff made himself a topic of conversation Saturday night -- for the right reasons.

Erratic defense and inconsistent hitting have marked Kouzmanoff's first month of the season. But the third baseman stood front and center in the A's 9-1 victory over the Seattle Mariners, and that was no small feat.

Oakland had lots of hitters vying for the spotlight in a bust-out game for the offense. After being shut out over the first two games of this four-game series, the A's notched their season high in runs.

They batted around in a five-run sixth that broke the game open. That inning accounted for more runs than the A's had scored in their previous three games combined.

Kouzmanoff launched a three-run homer to highlight the sixth-inning rally and finished 2 for 4 with four RBIs, nearly doubling his season RBI total (five) coming into the game.

He entered the night hitting .200, and he's made four errors in 19 games.

"Everybody knows I've started off slow," Kouzmanoff said. "I just continue to get my work in and try to keep it simple. Tonight I got a couple pitches that I normally don't handle and actually put the barrel of the bat on the ball."

Kouzmanoff, who batted eighth, wasn't the only one doing damage at the bottom of the order.

Shortstop Cliff Pennington, the No. 9 hitter, swatted his first homer of the season, a two-run shot in the fourth.

The A's won't be picky about where their power comes from. They entered the night tied with Minnesota for fewest homers in the majors.

"This is a good offense and we're going to score runs," Pennington said. "Normally you get a few guys hot and a few guys not. We just had everybody 'not' at the same time."

Before the game, A's manager Bob Geren identified Pennington and leadoff man Coco Crisp as two hitters who were showing signs of turning the corner.

On cue, Crisp went 3 for 5 with two RBIs, including a run-scoring double in the third off Jason Vargas (0-2) that got the A's on the board. That snapped a 20-inning scoreless streak, Oakland's longest since a 25-inning streak from June 18-21, 2006.

Later in the inning, Crisp should have scored from second on Conor Jackson's single, but Crisp held up at third on a communication mix-up with third-base coach Mike Gallego.

"As many close games as we've been playing, you had a feeling like, 'Don't come back to haunt us,' " Geren said. It didn't.

The A's offensive outburst made things easy for Trevor Cahill (3-0), who threw six innings of one-run ball despite what he described as mediocre stuff.

For at least one night, an A's starter didn't have to be perfect to collect a "W."

"It takes pressure off with a 9-1 lead," Cahill said. "Your main goal is don't walk anybody and prevent a rally."

Cahill got a big assist on Adam Kennedy's double in the bottom of the first.

Jackson, playing right field, started a 9-4-2 putout that nailed Chone Figgins, who was trying to score from first on the hit.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki made a nice play on a short-hop relay throw from Mark Ellis and applied the tag.

A's update: When paternity leave calls Kurt Suzuki, club will get help

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

SEATTLE -- Kurt Suzuki's wife, Renee, is due to give birth to their first child Tuesday in the Bay Area.

Suzuki plans to be there for the delivery, so the A's figure to be without their starting catcher for at least a portion of this seven-game road trip that concludes Wednesday against the Angels.

His absence could be lessened by the new paternity leave policy that Major League Baseball installed this season. Players can be away from the team for 1-3 days, and during that time, teams can call a player up from the minors to take his roster spot.

In previous years, a player who left for the birth of a baby stayed on the active roster.

Suzuki, who will welcome a daughter, said he's not sure how long he'll be away.

"It'd be a lot easier if I was at home, but you can't really plan these kinds of things," he said before Saturday's game at Seattle. "I'll get back to the team as soon as I can. But like I said, you never know what the situation is going to be."

Assuming Suzuki uses paternity leave, A's manager Bob Geren said the team intends to call up an extra catcher from the minors. Regular backup Landon Powell should get most of the innings in Suzuki's absence.

"Landon is doing a good job," Geren said.

Josh Donaldson and Anthony Recker have done most of the catching for Triple-A Sacramento. Donaldson is hitting just .159 and Recker .235, but Donaldson might get the nod based on his previous major league experience.

Closer Andrew Bailey (strained right forearm) continues along the comeback trail -- slowly.

He threw 35 pitches off the mound Saturday but will throw another bullpen session before facing hitters.

Bailey hasn't pitched in a competitive situation since hurting his arm in a March 14 spring-training game, so he'll require a minor league rehab assignment. Based on his current progression, he doesn't figure to return before the second week of May.

"He wants to be in there tomorrow," A's pitching coach Ron Romanick said. "But he has to go through the process."

David DeJesus, who was hitting .346 (9 for 26) over his past seven games, wasn't in the lineup against Mariners lefty Jason Vargas.

Chin Music: Conor Jackson in right field as A's try to break through vs. Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/23/2011 5:36PM

The weather is absolutely perfect in Seattle right now as the A's take batting practice, but the temperature is sure to drop big-time as the night wears on. Still, it was nice to sit in the dugout while the A's were hitting and not freeze. ...

A's manager Bob Geren said last night that he planned to start both Conor Jackson and Andy LaRoche tonight against Seattle left-hander Jason Vargas. But only Jackson is in there, playing right field in place of David DeJesus (who is actually hitting .346 over his past seven games). Geren said he thought about giving Cliff Pennington a day off and playing LaRoche at shortstop, but he likes the way Pennington's swing has looked lately.

The lineups:

A's -- Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Jackson RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS; Cahill RHP.

Mariners – Ichiro RF, Figgins 3B, Kennedy 1B, Cust DH, Saunders CF, Rodriguez SS, Gimenez C, Peguero LF, Wilson 2B; Vargas LHP.

–Andrew Bailey threw a 35-pitch bullpen session. All indications are he continues to progress well, but pitching coach Ron Romanick said Bailey will throw at least once more on the side before facing hitters.

That's all for now ...

Drumbeat: Andy LaRoche isn't in vs. left-hander; A's closer Bailey throws well

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Safeco Field 4/23/2011 5:10PM

Manager Bob Geren said after last night's game that both Conor Jackson and Andy LaRoche would be in tonight's lineup, but LaRoche is not, as it turns out. Geren said he'd considered putting LaRoche in for shortstop Cliff Pennington, a switch hitter, but he decided with groundball pitcher Trevor Cahill on the mound to leave Pennington at short.

Kevin Kouzmanoff bats right, and Geren tends to try to get his lefty hitters out against left-handers such as tonight's starter for Seattle, Jason Vargas, but Kouzmanoff's .200 average is the low among A's starters. (He has plenty of company not many ticks above him, of course. Coco Crisp is hitting .213, Pennington .222, Josh Willingham .224, Daric Barton .227). But it's safe to assume that, like Pennington, Kouzmanoff is in there because of the groundball pitcher. His defense hasn't been great, it's true, but he's generally a better fielder than LaRoche, at least most seasons.

Andrew Bailey threw a 35-pitch bullpen session, and he's making significant progress in getting back to 100 percent. Pitching coach Ron Romanick said, "It comes out like rockets, you know? He wants to be in the game tonight." The A's are being careful with their two-time All-Star, though. Romanick believes Bailey will throw one more side session before throwing to hitters, an even more conservative schedule than had been expected. His return is unlikely to be until next month.

Here's the lineup; the left-handed hitter out of the lineup tonight is outfielder David DeJesus. DeJesus is one of the few A's hitters swinging a relatively hot bat - he is hitting .346 over his past seven games. Barton, on the other hand, is 1 for his past 18; he told me before tonight's game that he needs to stop thinking so much. I remember Jason Giambi always saying that thinking too much can really hurt you at the plate. Sometimes that see-the-ball, hit-the-ball approach really is the best. Barton says he's tried everything else, so now he'll go with thinking less.

A's make offensive breakthrough, beat Mariners 9-1

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Coco Crisp drove in the A's first run since Wednesday with a third-inning double Saturday night, ending a 20-inning scoreless streak. But when he held up around third instead of scoring later in the inning, and then was stranded there, it appeared as if the offensively challenged A's might be one-and-done.

"At the time, it was like a bad-dinner feeling in your stomach," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Like, 'I hope this doesn't come back to haunt us.' "

Instead, the A's swung wildly the other way, prospering after three weeks of quiet bats, with a 9-1 victory over the Mariners at Safeco Field. It was a season high for runs scored, and Oakland also ended a three-game losing streak.

The A's were powered by the two men at the bottom of the batting order, Nos. 8-9 hitters Kevin Kouzmanoff and Cliff Pennington, who combined for four hits, two homers, six RBIs, four runs, a walk and a stolen base.

"This is a good offense," Pennington said. "We're going to score runs. It's just hard when everyone is not swinging at the same time."

Before the game, Geren said that he had considered starting backup infielder Andy LaRoche in place of Pennington, with Seattle sending left-hander Jason Vargas to the mound.

Geren said that he decided on Pennington because A's starter Trevor Cahill is a groundball pitcher, and, Geren said, he also thought Pennington was starting to swing the bat well. Pennington agreed, saying that he has been working on "getting back to being me, letting the ball get deep," and he thought he'd had some good at-bats the first two games of the series.

Geren has left slumping Kouzmanoff at third, hoping that regular at-bats might get him going. Entering the day, he had the lowest average among A's hitters, at .200, and his on-base percentage was an abysmal .203, thanks to zero walks (versus 12 strikeouts).

Pennington said that Kouzmanoff, too, was having better at-bats, and, he said, "From the left side of the infield, us two have to do something. When we both get hits, it's fun to talk to each other."

Crisp's two-out double off Jason Vargas in the third sent in Mark Ellis and halted the seventh-longest scoreless streak in A's history and their longest since being shut out for 25 innings in June 2006. Then after Daric Barton walked, Conor Jackson singled to right. Crisp sped around third - and braked suddenly. He had heard third-base coach Mike Gallego yelling for Barton to stop at second base, and Crisp thought that Gallego wanted him to stop.

"That was bizarre," Geren said. "Another one I haven't seen before."

The following inning, Kurt Suzuki drew a one-out walk, and with two outs, he stole second. Kouzmanoff sent him home with a single, and Pennington cracked a homer to left, his first of the season. In the sixth, the A's batted around and scored five runs, three coming on Kouzmanoff's second homer of the season.

Crisp and Jackson had multi-hit nights, and every member of the A's lineup reached base. Cahill worked six innings and allowed seven hits, one walk and one run, and he struck out two.

Breaking out

After getting shut out their first two games in Seattle, the A's won the third game of the series with some timely hitting:

Stat	Gms 1-2	Game 3
Runs	0	9
Hits	12	12
BA	.190	.324
RISP	0-for-12	6-for-11
XBH	0	4

New diet has A's Brad Ziegler feeling zestier

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Reliever **Brad Ziegler** has yet to allow an earned run in eight appearances this season, and one reason for that, he believes, is his diet.

Ziegler was placed on a food-allergy diet during the offseason and discovered that he doesn't tolerate dairy, eggs or gluten well. Since switching to soy milk and cutting back on whole grains, plus adding vitamin and mineral supplements, Ziegler said he feels much better.

Ziegler said he is also being treated for asthma, a disease he had as a child but thought he'd outgrown. He found out he had probably learned to compensate for decreased lung function but that it would improve with treatment, and it has.

"I feel fresh in between outings," he said. "I have a higher energy level than I've had the past two years. I feel great right now."

Ziegler has allowed six hits, two walks and two unearned runs this season, and he has seven strikeouts in 7 1/3 innings. He worked the seventh inning Saturday, an unusual move with an eight-run lead after having worked 1 1/3 innings the night before. Manager **Bob Geren** said he wanted Ziegler and **Craig Breslow** to get back-to-back outings and build on good outings the previous night.

Bailey's 'rockets': Andrew Bailey (forearm strain) threw a 35-pitch side session, and, pitching coach **Ron Romanick** said of Bailey's fastball, "It comes out like rockets, you know?" Romanick said Bailey is likely to throw one more side session before facing hitters.

Briefly: Michael Wuertz (hamstring) pitched a perfect inning with two strikeouts at Triple-A Sacramento. The A's have not yet decided if he needs another minor-league outing before coming off the disabled list. ... The A's made several fine defensive plays. In the first, **Conor Jackson** and **Mark Ellis** hooked up to throw **Chone Figgins** out at the plate, with catcher **Kurt Suzuki** making a good catch on a short hop and then a quick tag. Jackson made a lunging catch on a foul ball by Figgins in the second, and Ellis turned a slick 4-3 double play in the seventh.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Minute ERA: Brett Anderson, today's starter at Seattle, has the third-lowest ERA in the league, at 1.63. He also has some sparky numbers against the Mariners: a 1.97 career ERA, including 1.13 at Safeco Field.

Bay Area again a pitchers' paradise

Al Saracevic, San Francisco Chronicle

I'm a firm believer that a newspaper should foster discussion and debate, preferably involving bar stools, pint glasses and at least one participant named Lou.

It's what we're here to do. We get the conversation started. So, in an effort to stoke the coals of conversation this morning, let me say this: In all their years of Bay Area cohabitation, the Giants and A's have never had such good pitching at the same time. I speak primarily of the starting pitching on the current teams, but one could extend the hypothesis to the bullpens if you want to dust off your baseball almanac.

Think about it: The Giants are coming off a championship season during which their pitchers combined for a league-low ERA of 3.36.

They threw 17 team shutouts and led the league in strikeouts per nine innings (8.2). The scary thing is, this was the third-youngest staff in the National League, with an average age of 27.9. Only the Marlins and Padres were younger.

The A's matched the Giants pitch for pitch. Their staff led the American League with an ERA of 3.56 and the secondlowest WHIP (1.276 hitsplus- walks/innings pitched). They also threw 17 team shutouts, three of them complete games.

Scariest of all, the A's were even younger than the Giants, averaging 26 years.

This year, both teams are keeping pace with a few hiccups on the Giants' side.

Through Friday, the A's led the AL with a 2.60 ERA. The Giants had a relatively high 3.62 ERA, but that's influenced quite a bit by big numbers from **Madison Bumgarner**, **Barry Zito** and **Brian Wilson**.

The top of the Giants' rotation has been solid.

On Monday in Colorado, **Tim Lincecum** took a nohitter into the seventh inning, eventually giving up three hits and striking out 10. The next night, **Jonathan Sanchez** gave up two hits over 6 1/3 innings. Both outings resulted in wins.

While Sanchez was shining in Colorado, the A's **Brett Anderson** was pitching eight innings of shutout ball against the Red Sox, capping a fivegame stretch for A's starters during which they had an 0.27 ERA. That's flat-out filthy.

Has the Bay Area ever seen such an arms race? It's a fun question to debate.

A few years come to mind immediately, most notably 1989, when the two squads met in the World Series only to be shaken up by Loma Prieta. The A's pitchers seemed unbeatable.

Dave Stewart, Bob Welch, Mike Moore, Dennis Eckersley. The Giants' pitching was a little more forgettable.

Rick Reuschel, Don Robinson and **Scott Garrelts** giving way to **Steve Bedrosian** and **Craig Lefferts** in the 'pen. No contest in my mind.

The Giants didn't hold up their end of the argument in 1989.

How about 1971? Both teams lost in the League Championship Series, with the A's sporting a 3.05 ERA and the Giants not far behind at 3.32. It was also a time that both teams had marquee names at the top of the rotation, the A's featuring **Catfish Hunter** and **Vida Blue**. The Giants had an aging **Juan Marichal** and **Gaylord Perry**. Great star wattage there, but not the depth we have today. The A's No. 4 starter, **Dallas Braden**, threw a perfect game last year. Then again, the relatively obscure **Chuck Dobson** went 15-5 for the '71 A's. And they also had a young kid named **Rollie Fingers**.

The sleeper year might be 2002, when both teams again made the playoffs and the Giants lost Game 7 of the World Series to the Angels. When you look at the numbers, the Giants' pitching was better than you might think. At the height of the steroid era, the Giants ranked second in the league with a 3.54 ERA. All five starters — **Livan Hernandez, Russ Ortiz, Kirk Rueter, Jason Schmidt** and **Ryan Jensen** — had from 12 to 14 wins. Across the bay, the A's led the AL with a 3.68 ERA and were a bit more top-heavy.

Barry Zito went 23-5 and won the Cy Young Award. **Tim Hudson** won 15 games and **Mark Mulder** won 19.

I'll let you and your pal Lou look up some other names and numbers for the sake of argument. The early '80s could be worth examining. And what about 1968, the year of the pitcher?

Whichever way you cut it, the two Bay Area baseball teams have never had so many good, young pitchers with such huge potential. One can dream of it lasting for years, with locals debating Lincecum versus **Trevor Cahill** with the same passion New Yorkers debated **Willie, Mickey** and the **Duke**. That will depend, in large part, on whether the A's are willing to hold onto their talent for once.

But while we're waiting, I have two more questions: 1. If you were to make one starting rotation out of this year's teams, who's your five?

2. What's your all-time Bay Area starting five? **Golly, Gaels:** Did **Randy Bennett** get a raise we didn't hear about?

That might explain the policy change at St. Mary's when it comes to its basketball season ticket holders. The college recently unveiled a "Priority Seating Program" that requires season-ticket holders to make a significant donation to the athletic department if they want to purchase their season tickets.

Bill Johnson of Walnut Creek has had two season tickets for years. He told me they cost him \$800 last year.

This year, he says, St. Mary's is charging him \$1,900.

Johnson wrote to St. Mary's assistant athletic director **Tom Carroll** with his concerns and received a pretty straightforward answer. "The Priority Seating Program will benefit fans and most importantly student athletes by providing additional resources to fund scholarships, facility improvements and other competitive needs," wrote Carroll, who could not be reached for comment as the school was closed for the Easter holiday. "I apologize that this program may affect your standing as a season ticket holder."

There you have it. It's going to cost you more to root for the Gaels at McKeon Pavilion this season. Here's hoping they use the extra money to keep Mr. Bennett happy.

Lil' Papi: It was a sweet scene at the Coliseum last week, as the Red Sox gathered to take batting practice and the stadium seats slowly filled with the Boston faithful.

Folks were wearing red and blue jerseys with names like " **Yastrzemski**" and " **Varitek**" on their backs.

On the field, **David Ortiz** and **Kevin Youkilis** took turns pounding the ball in the cage.

And every time they came out, they were immediately accosted by a young kid wearing a replica Ortiz uniform.

It was Big Papi's 6-year-old son, **D'Angelo**, who would beg the two big hitters to throw him pop flies by the dugout in between their turns.

Over and over, Lil' Papi would chase down the high pops and fire the ball back to his dad. According to some Red Sox staffers, the little guy has been a fixture around the team and has become a minor celebrity in Boston.

It made me think what a thrill it must be to grow up the son of a big leaguer. I'm sure there's a lot of travel and time apart, but can you imagine hanging out on the field, shagging flies when you're 6 years old? All I know is the only one with a bigger smile than the kid was his Papi.

Sadly, owners of Bay Area teams remain in place

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Stunned by **Bud Selig's** takeover of the Dodgers, sports-team owners everywhere are asking their lawyers, "Does this mean I might be held accountable for my incompetence, greed and arrogance?"

What's this world coming to?"

Relax, fellas. Bud (Repo Man) Selig won't be seizing any other teams soon. He should take over the Mets, because owner **Fred Wilpon's** supercozy dealings with **Bernie Madoff** threaten huge embarrassment and financial ruin.

But Selig and Wilpon are buddies.

No other sports commissioners are pondering takeovers.

That's sad news for many Raiders and 49ers fans, who in recent years have clamored for NFL Commissioner **Roger Goodell** to seize those teams, in the best interests of football and the home fans.

The clamor eased when the Raiders soared to mediocrity last season and the 49ers hired a potentially legitimate coach in January. Still, plenty of fans would love to see **Al Davis** and

Jed York evicted from their castles by decree of the commissioner. Many supporters of the A's would say, "Don't forget about us!"

Dream on, fans.

No job in America has lower standards of performance or a higher reward for ineptitude than owning a pro sports team. If you want to hold onto your job at Jiffy Lube, you must show that you know the difference between motor oil and prune juice, and that you can locate your rear end with both hands.

There are no such highfalutin requirements for keeping your job as owner of the Pirates, Clippers, Raiders, 49ers or A's. Do you have a pulse? If not, do you have an heir? Cool, party on.

Meanwhile, a moment of sympathy for the deposed **McCourts**, who accomplished the impossible, getting themselves 86'd from the owners' club. Now they must go into the world and find real jobs.

Jiffy Lube is out. Congress, maybe?

Deep thoughts, cheap shots & bon mots ...

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

I was down on the 49ers' plan to bring back **Alex Smith**. Then general manager

Trent Baalke presented a logical argument in favor of Smith: "He understands this building."

Worth repeating. "He understands this building."

Then maybe Smith won't let the door hit him in the butt.

Fox Sports is reporting that some NFL players may have sandbagged their baseline concussion tests, to make it easier to return to action if they have a concussion. If the report is true, I say the hell with it, let 'em all play without helmets and be done with it.

Aloha, fact-checking: In a recent column, I wrote that ex-Warriors coach **Don Nelson** claims **Chris Mullin** refused to talk basketball with him. Wrong! It was then-owner

Chris Cohan who (according to Nelson) changed the subject every time Nelson tried to talk about the team or the league. Says Nelson via e-mail: "Chris Mullin and I talked openly and on a frequent basis." Mahalo, Kahuna.

In New Jersey, **Dwight Gooden**, driving high on cocaine, hits another car. Gooden has his 5-year-old child in the back seat without a seat belt.

Gooden gets probation. **Barry Bonds** must be muttering, "And they want to put me in prison for giving a rambling answer about steroids?"

What if **Bruce Bochy** and **Brian Sabean** had shown as much patience with **Brandon Belt** as they showed last season with **Pablo Sandoval**, who, astoundingly out of shape, hit .214 in September and October (counting postseason)?

Tim Lincecum has entered a **Ryan/Koufax/Blue** type of neighborhood, where you have to watch his every outing (Saturday's notwithstanding) so you don't miss a you-knowwhat.

It's worth noting who ended Lincecum's no-hit bid Monday: **Carlos Gonzalez**. The Giants cannot forgive **Billy Beane** for trading Gonzalez (and **Huston Street**) to the Rockies for **Matt Holliday**. A's fans cannot forget that one, either.

Barry Zito's foot injury might have postponed a decision on his status as starter.

Quietly noted in the wake of Zito's foot injury was the mysterious loss of 3 to 4 mph from his already-not-so-fastball.

"We're very much aware of" the drop, Bochy said.

In Los Angeles, there is talk of coaxing **Peter O'Malley** back into the Dodgers' ownership role. He's the guy whose Dodgers quietly and efficiently excluded blacks from positions of authority for decades. His dad built Dodger Stadium with two drinking fountains for 56,000 fans. Let them drink beer.

I trust Giants fans to have enough class to ignore the prompting of the KNBR afternoon guys, who called for a wild standing ovation for Atlanta utilityman **Brooks Conrad**.

Like most of us, Conrad is merely a fringe guy trying to make it.

SCOTT OSTLER: SUNDAY PUNCH KNUCKLEHEAD OF THE WEEK

Bud Selig

The commissioner struck like lightning in taking over the Dodgers. Why?

"The Dodgers have been one of the most prestigious franchises in all of sports," Bud Selig said, "and we owe it to their legion of loyal fans ..." Meanwhile, the distressed A's remain in limbo, awaiting the findings of Glacier Bud's blue-ribbon committee studying alternative stadium sites. The committee set sail 25 months ago and hasn't been heard from since then. Selig is planning to form a search-and-rescue committee. Too bad the A's are not one of the most prestigious franchises in all of sports, with a legion of loyal fans.

A's emphatically end scoreless drought

Pennington, Kouzmanoff launch homers to give Cahill victory No. 3

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/24/2011 2:16 AM ET

SEATTLE -- Runs have been at a premium for an offensively challenged A's team this year.

The A's struggled again on Saturday. Only this time, they struggled to make outs.

Homers from Cliff Pennington and Kevin Kouzmanoff highlighted Oakland's long-awaited offensive outburst in Seattle, as the A's put an end to a 20-inning scoreless drought with a 9-1 victory over the Mariners.

"It was nice to see the offense have a big night," said manager Bob Geren.

A relaxed Geren wasn't so at ease a couple of hours prior in the third inning, when it appeared that his club was geared for another night of frustration -- except it turned out to be an incident at which he could only laugh about following a big victory.

With two outs, Coco Crisp on second and Daric Barton running at first, Conor Jackson singled through the second-base hole. Crisp made his way toward the plate, looking to easily score, but third-base coach Mike Gallego showed a stop sign, as a confused Crisp eased his way back to the bag at third, leaving the bases loaded in a one-run game.

As it turns out, Gallego's red light was not for Crisp, but for Barton. And neither scored in the inning.

"It was bizarre," Geren said. "I've never seen that before. Very, very strange play. At the time, it was sinking. It was like a bad-dinner feeling in your stomach, when you're thinking, 'I hope that doesn't come back to haunt us.'"

"We felt good, we were having good at-bats," Pennington said. "It wasn't like it was the only opportunity we'd have. We felt like we missed something, but that there would be more."

Much more, as the strange scene ultimately represented the calm before a much-needed offensive storm. The nine runs marked a season-high for the A's, who entered the contest averaging just 3.3 runs per game -- second-lowest in the American League to the Twins.

Pennington's two-run shot, his first of the year, capped a three-run fourth inning against Seattle starter Jason Vargas to break open a 1-1 game, while Kouzmanoff's long ball -- a three-run homer to left off reliever Josh Lueke -- sparked a five-run sixth frame.

"Everybody in the starting lineup reached base," Geren said. "We were showing some power from the eighth and ninth spot. That's a real positive."

It's also, apparently, a conversation starter.

"It's fun, because Kouz and I are next to each other all game long," Pennington said. "When we get hits, it's fun to talk to each other. When we're not, neither one of us want to talk."

Geren noted before Friday's game that he had seen an improved swing from Pennington, who was batting .278 over the past nine games after hitting just .160 (4-for-25) over the first 10 games of the season.

"I've put in some work, and this whole series I've felt good, kinda getting back to being me a little bit, letting the ball travel a little better," Pennington said. "I had some good at-bats against Felix [Hernandez] the first night and a couple last night, and tonight some fell in, so it was nice."

Fell in?

"Fell in over the fence," Pennington said, smiling.

The A's came in off back-to-back shutouts for the first time since May 13-14 at Cleveland, and they extended an 18-inning scoreless streak by two frames before Crisp plated Mark Ellis in the third.

Crisp was one of a large handful of players who had been struggling at the plate, evidenced by a .213 mark he carried into the contest. The veteran outfielder tallied a pair of RBI doubles as part of a three-hit night, one which saw the A's rack up 12 hits, and the club got a solid showing from starter Trevor Cahill to snap a season-high three-game losing streak.

Oakland's output offered an easy win to Cahill, who gave up one run on seven hits with one walk and two strikeouts while tossing 100 pitches -- 56 for strikes -- in six innings of work.

"When the ball is in the strike zone, it has a lot of movement, so you've really got to concentrate on barreling it up, and he's good at what he does," said Seattle's Adam Kennedy.

The A's right-hander was admittedly not at his best, but he had a little leeway.

"I wouldn't say I had my sharpest stuff, but I battled through it and made pitches when I needed to," Cahill said. "It was real good to see the offense come out swinging like that. I didn't feel that great, and for them to take some pressure off, score that many runs, it definitely helped out a lot.

"Hopefully we can get into a groove, score some more tomorrow and keep it going."

Vargas lasted just five innings and dropped to 0-2 on the season after surrendering six runs on six hits and three walks while fanning three as the victim of a rare offensive surge from his opponents.

In time, many believe, it might not be so rare.

"This is a good offense, and we're going to score runs," Pennington said. "We had everyone not swinging well at the same time. Normally, we have three or four guys hot and three or four guys not, and we just all were not at the same time. I don't think we're too worried about it.

"We're starting to feel pretty good, so hopefully that can roll for the next couple days."

Bailey throws 'rockets' in bullpen session

If all goes well, A's closer could be cleared to face live hitters

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- A's closer Andrew Bailey, who is out with a right forearm strain, threw a 35-pitch bullpen session Saturday afternoon in Seattle and may only need one more session before being cleared to face live hitters.

"It comes out like rockets, you know?" said A's pitching coach Ron Romanick. "He wants to be in the game, but he has to go through the process."

That process includes another three-day cycle that involves a simple round of catch, long toss and, ultimately, another bullpen session. At the end of that sequence, the club will decide if the right-hander is ready to throw to hitters and undergo a Minor League rehab stint.

If all continues to go well for Bailey, the A's could get him back in early May.

Worth noting

Reliever Michael Wuertz (strained hamstring) fanned two in a scoreless inning of work for Triple-A Sacramento in his fourth rehab appearance on Saturday. The right-hander tossed 18 pitches, 10 of which were strikes. There is still no word on when Wuertz will rejoin the A's.

Pitching well, Anderson closes A's set in Seattle

By Nick Kosmider / MLB.com | 4/24/2011 1:23 AM ET

If the A's can continue to provide the kind of run support for their pitching staff that they provided in a 9-1 win over the Mariners on Saturday at Safeco Field -- as opposed to scoreless outputs in the series' first two games -- opponents in the American League West could be in for headaches.

The A's will aim to provide similar support to Brett Anderson (1-1) in search of a series split on Sunday against Doug Fister (1-3).

On most days, a pair of homers and two RBI doubles from Coco Crisp would be more than enough cushion for Anderson, who has given up just five earned runs in 27 2/3 innings this season.

The 23-year-old left-hander gave up just four hits, while striking out eight and walking one, in eight innings during his past outing against the Red Sox. He is part of a rotation that has helped the A's tread water while the offense finds its groove.

"What can you say, man?" Daric Barton said after Anderson's start against Boston. "The pitching's unbelievable. I think we're in it every game. There hasn't been a game where our pitching staff hasn't kept us in it, and our offense is coming around and we're playing well as a team. Obviously, our staff is our strength right now."

Fister, who enters with a 3.60 ERA, finally broke through with a win against Detroit, benefitting from a 13-run outburst.

Before that start, the Mariners had scored just two runs while Fister was in the game in his first three starts.

His teammates hope such an offense performance will repeat itself in future starts for Fister, who is 3-1 with a 2.73 ERA against the A's at home.

"I love playing behind him," said shortstop Brendan Ryan. "He works quick and defenses love that. And he's a little fiery. When you get a double-play situation, he's pounding his glove saying, 'This ball is coming to you.' I like that. I like seeing the energy and passion. It makes you want to make that play even more."

Mariners: Cust trying to rebound

Mariners designated hitter Jack Cust said Saturday that he enjoys playing against his former team. He donned Oakland green and gold from 2007-10.

"Not only is it a team I played for for a while, but it's also a team in your division," Cust said. "Any time you're playing division games, it's a little more. Not that every game isn't, but these are games you can't get back, playing head to head like this."

Cust, hitting .179 entering Sunday's series finale, is trying to get his stroke going against any opponent. The veteran said he thinks he may have begun to find his proper timing during his at-bats on Friday after experimenting with the positioning of his front leg.

"I do a leg kick sometimes, I do a toe tap, I do a traditional load, sometimes I get my foot down real early," Cust said. "I've hit well all those ways, so when I get to scuffling, I start trying which one is going to feel good, which is going to get me out of it."

A's: Kouzmanoff searching for hot streak

Kevin Kouzmanoff has been no stranger to slow starts during his Major League career, and this season has been no different. He entered Saturday's game with a .192 average (10-for-52).

But the A's hope his performance in the team's 9-1 win over the Mariners could mean Kouzmanoff is beginning to shake his typical early season doldrums.

Kouzmanoff drove in four runs, including three on a home run in the sixth.

"I'm a slow starter, and I've always had to dig myself out of a hole every season," Kouzmanoff said. "I think, in the long run, it all evens out. Some guys start out slow and then have a hot month. Right now, I'm just trying to find a groove and be consistent, try to get good pitches to hit."

Worth noting

Trevor Cahill's seven-hit, one run performance in Saturday's win over the Mariners means A's starters have surrendered just 10 runs in 58 innings over the past nine games. The starting staff has 53 earned runs in 185 2/3 innings, the top mark in the Majors. ... Crisp's RBI double in the third broke up a streak of 20 consecutive scoreless innings in Seattle. The club record is a 31-inning streak in 1991.

Major League: A's @ Mariners: Pregame notes

Jane Lee, mlb.com

Bob Geren said last night he'd likely hand Conor Jackson and Andy LaRoche starts today against Seattle lefty Jason Vargas, but LaRoche isn't in the lineup and Geren mentioned that, after some thought of giving Cliff Pennington a day off, he'd stick with the regulars on the left side of the infield since groundball heavy-hurler Trevor Cahill is on the mound. Geren also mentioned that he wants to keep giving Kevin Kouzmanoff consistent at-bats to help him find a groove at the plate.

Kouzmanoff isn't the only one struggling these days. But Geren feels there are a handful of guys — he noted Matsui, Pennington and Ellis — who are showing good signs at the same time, which is exactly what this team needs. Sometimes one or two hot hitters can get the rest of the guys going.

Tonight's lineups:

A's: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Jackson RF, Willingham LF, Matsui DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS

Mariners: Suzuki RF, Figgins 3B, Kennedy 1B, Cust DH, Saunders CF, Rodriguez SS, Gimenez C, Peguero LF, Wilson 2B

A's rout Mariners, 9-1

By TIM BOOTH, ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — Cliff Pennington didn't wait for something better to come, taking advantage of a situation that has eluded Oakland during its recent scoring struggles.

One pitch after a potential inning-ending diving catch became an RBI single for Kevin Kouzmanoff, Pennington hit a two-run homer, part of Oakland's season-high scoring output in a 9-1 win over the Seattle Mariners on Saturday night.

Kouzmanoff and Pennington — hitting eighth and ninth in the A's order — provided the big blows with each hitting homers in key moments.

"It's fun because we're next to each other the whole game," Pennington said. "When we're both getting hits, we talk to each other. When we're not, neither one of us want to talk."

But the biggest breakthrough for Oakland came in the third when Coco Crisp ripped the first of his two RBI doubles, snapping a 20-inning scoreless streak for the A's.

Crisp's two-out double into the right-center field gap off Seattle starter Jason Vargas (0-2) scored Mark Ellis with the A's first run since the ninth inning on Wednesday against Boston. The A's were shut out in the first two games of this series by Felix Hernandez and promising rookie Michael Pineda, the first time Oakland was held scoreless in consecutive games since May 2008 and prompting plenty of questions about an offense that was already lagging toward the bottom of the American League.

There wasn't going to be a third straight shutout as Trevor Cahill (3-0) got plenty of support.

"This is a good offense and we're going to score runs," Pennington said. "It's just a week where we had everybody not swinging it well at the same time. Normally you have three or four guys hot and three or four guys not, and we just kind of were not at the same time. We're not too worried about it. Everybody is going to do what they do."

Oakland didn't just sit on a 4-1 lead. Pennington ripped his first homer of the season in the fourth, a two-run shot into the A's bullpen in left field.

Oakland added five in the sixth inning, knocking Vargas from the game. The A's sent 10 batters to the plate, highlighted by Kouzmanoff waiting on reliever Josh Lueke's 1-2 breaking ball and hitting it just over the hand-operated scoreboard down the left field line for his second homer of the season.

Kouzmanoff finished with four RBIs — nearly doubling his season total entering the night. He got lucky in the fourth when his line drive to center field was misplayed on a diving attempt by Michael Saunders, who was in position on the dive to make an inning-ending grab, only to see the ball glance off the top of his mitt. It was ruled a single that scored Kurt Suzuki, and Pennington made Seattle pay.

"Our energy level has been good, it just seems like when you're not getting hits or runs, it looks down, but if you're in there it was pretty much the same," A's manager Bob Geren said. "The guys had more smiles because they were having some success, but the energy level has been good all year."

Crisp added another RBI double in the sixth inning and finished with three hits, after going hitless in his previous nine at-bats, and Conor Jackson had an RBI single.

That was more than Cahill needed, even though the right-hander wasn't at his best. Cahill escaped trouble in each of the first two innings, then settled down to retire 15 of his final 17 batters. He struck out two and walked only one.

Cahill was helped by his defense early, no play bigger than Suzuki fielding a short-hop relay throw from Ellis and tagging out Chone Figgins trying to score on Adam Kennedy's double in the first.

"For a catcher, that is not an easy play to make," Geren said.

Even after Figgins was cut down, Seattle had runners on second and third, but Cahill got Saunders to ground out to end the inning.

Meanwhile, Vargas saw his losing streak extended to nine straight decisions dating back to Aug. 14, 2010. "There needs to be a little more sense of urgency out there for me," Vargas said.

Minor League News

Weeks' blast kick-starts Sacramento victory

By Cassie Kolas / Sacramento River Cats

A Jemile Weeks home run opened an explosive first inning as the River Cats beat Tucson 4-2 on Saturday night at Raley Field.

The River Cats didn't waste time putting runs on the board in a 36-minute first inning, during which all nine River Cats batters saw an at-bat.

Weeks hit his first homer of the season. Eric Sogard walked and Steve Tolleson singled on a fly ball to former River Cat Aaron Cunningham, who played right field. After Sogard and Tolleson stole second and third, Cardenas knocked home the pair with a line drive single for a 3-0 lead.

The Padres put together a third-inning rally when catcher Guillermo Quiroz doubled, Logan Forsythe singled and Jesus Guzman singled on a line drive to score Quiroz.

Tucson rallied again in the top of the sixth, with a Cedric Hunter double that scored Anthony Rizzo to bring it to a one-run ballgame.

The River Cats had an answer for Tucson's rally. The answer was Anthony Recker's first home run of the season on the first pitch dealt by Padres reliever Samuel Deduno in the top of the seventh.

Starting right-hander Graham Godfrey recorded seven strikeouts and allowed two earned runs in 5.2 innings pitched.

The Sacramento bullpen played a key role in Saturday night's win, as the Padres faced Vinnie Chulk, Michael Wuertz, Fernando Cabrera and Trystan Magnuson. The relief staff didn't allow any runs from Padres batters in 3.1 innings.

Magnuson recorded his first save of the season after tossing one inning, striking out one and allowing no hits in the ninth.

With the win, the River Cats improve their record to 10-7. Sacramento has won eight of 10 games.

The series continues at 1:05 on Sunday at Raley Field with Josh Outman (0-0, 9.00) facing Jon Leicester (0-0, 2.57).

Missions Offense Flies High On Saturday

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Citibank Ballpark - - -

The San Antonio Missions defeated the RockHounds, 21-8, Saturday night. More remarkable than the score itself is the fact that the output was "nothing new" for the Missions, and the 21 runs weren't even a season high. Perspective:

- The RockHounds scored eight runs on 11 hits, including four home runs, and lost by 13 runs.
- The winning pitcher went 5.0 innings, allowing six runs (five earned) on nine hits ... a 9.00 ERA for the night.
- With two on and two out in the top of the third, the RockHounds led, 2-1. By the end of that half-inning, the score was San Antonio 8, RockHounds 2.
- After a run scored on a two out, bases-loaded error in the third, keeping the inning alive, Jaff Decker capped the 8-run inning with a Grand Slam home run. The night before, Jaff was 0-for-5, all on strikeouts. He would hit another home run, this one a 3-run shot, in the fifth, totaling seven RBI for the night (his 23 ribbies lead the league).
- On Friday, Jaff and Cody Decker (no relation) went a combined 0-for-9, with seven strikeouts and a ground into double play. On Saturday, they were a combined 5-for-12, with three home runs, a double and eight RBI.
- The best hitter in Minor League Baseball entering Saturday's game, James Darnell, went 1-for-5 and his team still scored 21.
- The game's last home run, a 3-run shot by San Antonio's Blake Tekotte, came off RockHounds infielder Jason Christian.
- "Only" 21 runs? The Missions had already scored 23 at Tulsa (23-10, April 11) and 26 against NW Arkansas (26-5 at San Antonio April 15). That's seventy (70) runs in three games ... through the first 15 games of the season.
- Michael Spina's home run was his third in as many nights in the series.
- Shane Peterson has been called up to Triple-A Sacramento, and the RockHounds wish him great success. Shane was a part of both the 2009 Texas League championship club and last year's South Division Championship team.
- Outfielder Kent Walton has been promoted to the RockHounds from (Advanced-A) Stockton. A teammate of RockHounds' third baseman Stephen Parker at BYU, Kent hit .317 with one home run and nine RBI for the Ports before his promotion.

Straily Stellar As Ports Ground JetHawks 5-0

04/23/2011 10:30 PM ET

LANCASTER, Calif. - Shutout's come few and far between at hitter-friendly Clear Channel Stadium in Lancaster. On Saturday night, however, Stockton Ports starter Dan Straily (2-1) built on his successful start in the California League as he blanked the Lancaster JetHawks over six innings and helped the Ports to their first shutout victory and first series sweep in a 5-0 win.

As quickly as Stockton's momentum was halted in the top of the first, it picked back up again. After a leadoff single from Michael Gilmartin, Dusty Coleman struck out swinging and Gilmartin was thrown out on the same pitch trying to steal-a double play leaving the bases empty with two down. Michael Choice came up next and got the Ports going again with a single to right-center. Leonardo Gil followed with a double to right-center, scoring Choice and giving the Ports a 1-0 lead.

Anthony Aliotti came up next and singled to left, scoring Gil to make it 2-0. After Rashun Dixon walked, Mitch LeVier doubled to right to score two more runs and give the Ports a 4-0 advantage.

The Ports would add a run in the third on a one-out single from Aliotti, scoring Choice who'd singled to start the inning and giving the Ports a 5-0 lead.

All five Stockton runs were charged to JetHawks starter Andrew Robinson (1-2), who took the loss after going five innings and allowing nine runs on five hits while striking out four and walking one.

Meanwhile, Straily kept pounding the strike zone and putting away JetHawks hitters. After Jay Austin reached on a passed ball after striking out in the first, Straily retired the next three in succession. In the third, Austin reached base again on an error made by Coleman at short with one out. Straily then tried a pick-off throw to first and it went wide of the bag. Austin tried to advance all the way to third on the throwing error, but Gilmartin, Stockton's second baseman, retrieved the ball and threw Austin out at third. After back-to-back two-out singles, Straily got Kody Hinze to pop out to short to end the inning.

Straily would earn the win in one of the toughest places in the league to pitch, going six scoreless innings and allowing four hits while walking one and striking out five.

Jose Guzman (SV, 2) took over in the seventh and tossed three perfect innings to close out the ballgame. Guzman struck out three in his outing, including two in the ninth to earn a three-inning save.

Stockton's offense would be shut down over the final four innings by JetHawks reliever Zach Grimmett, who retired 12 of the 14 batters he faced, allowing just one hit over his four innings of work.

Going back to their Cal-League Championship Series in 2008, the Ports have now won 18 of the last 21 games versus the JetHawks.

Having won four straight, the Ports will have an off-day on Sunday. Stockton will begin a seven-game homestand on Monday night at Banner Island Ballpark as they welcome the Lake Elsinore Storm to town for four games. Robert Gilliam (2-1, 5.30 ERA) will be Stockton's scheduled starter for Monday night's contest, with the first pitch set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Bees Sweep Doubleheader, Now 12-3

By Jon Versteeg, Burlingtonbees.com

BURLINGTON, IA- LHP Jacob Brown (3-0) tossed six innings and gave up just two hits to lead the Burlington Bees to a 3-1 win over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (5-8) in game one of a doubleheader at Community Field. In game two Bees RF Jose Rivero (1-3) hit a walk-off triple to beat the Timber Rattlers 1-0 before 516 fans on Saturday night.

IN game one the Bees scored two runs in the first inning against Wisconsin RHP Matt Miller (0-2). 2B Nino Leyja (1-2) walked and moved to third base on a single by LF Douglas Landaeta (1-3). 3B Tony Thompson (1-3) singled and advanced all the way to third base on a fielding error by Wisconsin RF Franklin Romero, Jr. Landaeta scored on the error for a 2-0 lead.

Wisconsin scored an unearned run in the fifth inning against Brown, who came into the game in the second inning in relief of RHP Seth Frankoff. The right-hander from Raleigh, NC started the game to get an inning of work in because of the high number of rainouts for the Bees over the last week.

Burlington scored a run in the fifth inning. Leyja hit a triple and scored on a wild pitch for a 3-1 lead.

In game two Wisconsin LHP Del Howell and Burlington RHP Blake Hassebrock engaged in a pitcher's duel. Hassebrock scattered two hits and two walks over six innings in a no decision.

Howell took a no-hitter into the seventh inning when 3B Tony Thompson (1-3) singled to lead off the inning and Rivero followed with the triple.

The Bees will take Sunday off and start at three-game series against the Beloit Snappers in Beloit, WI on Monday night. RHP A.J. Griffin (2-0, 1.37) gets the start for Burlington against a yet to be announced starting pitcher for Beloit. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com.