

A's News Clips, Friday, April 29, 2011

A's eager to see hitting game kick into higher gear

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Despite the new faces added to their lineup this season, the A's are still trying to fix an old problem.

Thus far they've proven to be as poor an offensive team as in 2010, when they ranked near the bottom of the American League in most key hitting categories.

After adding hitters such as Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham and David DeJesus over the winter, it was assumed the A's would complement their standout pitching with better run support.

To this point, it hasn't happened.

The A's entered Thursday ranked 13th out of 14 American League teams in runs (85), 12th in batting average (.236), 11th in on-base percentage (.305) and 13th in home runs (11).

Now would be a good time for the A's to find their hitting stroke, with the AL West-leading Texas Rangers arriving for the start of a four-game series Friday.

"It's definitely time," Ellis said. "You've got to continue to do your work, and sooner or later, you know you're going to come out of it. But you'd like to do it sooner rather than later if you want to help your team win ballgames."

Willingham and Matsui, the A's 4-5 hitters, lead the team in RBIs with 13 and 12, respectively. But they're hitting just .234 and .241, respectively.

DeJesus, who bats third, is hitting .232. He was pinch-hit for in the seventh inning of a tie game Sunday in Seattle, which says a lot in itself.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki (.243), Ellis (.200) and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff (.222) all were expected to benefit from dropping in the order and having less pressure on them, but that hasn't been the case so far.

A's general manager Billy Beane said he's not overly concerned right now.

He points to the first-rate starting pitching the A's saw on their recent road trip, including the Seattle Mariners' Felix Hernandez and Michael Pineda and the Los Angeles Angels' Jered Weaver and Dan Haren.

Also, Beane noted that the A's have played 16 of their first 25 games on the road.

As for his team's poor hitting, Beane added:

"It's a concern only if it goes on the whole year. These guys have a track record. I don't think you press any panic button in April. If you were asking me this question in June, I might have a different answer."

Some of the A's hitters typically get off to cold starts, suggesting a turn for the better could be in store.

Matsui's .269 career average in April is his lowest for any month, and his 22 total homers in April are tied with September for his lowest in any month. Kouzmanoff's career numbers across the board in April -- .225, seven homers, 42 RBIs -- are his worst for any month. Ellis is a .246 hitter in April, .234 in May.

But a major league scout, who requested anonymity, said he sees the A's as a team that generally lacks impact hitters, and that those who would be considered impact guys are on the downward slope of their careers.

Right now, the A's are just looking for more offense to support a pitching staff that entered Thursday with a major-league best 2.78 ERA.

"I think the quality of our at-bats has been better, and it's just a matter of time before we start getting better results," A's hitting coach Gerald Perry said. "It's a long season and things turn around quick."

Ron Washington keeps Rangers on winning course

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The last time Ron Washington was in the Bay Area, his Texas Rangers team was in the World Series, playing the Giants.

The former A's infield coach is only now starting to savor that experience. Washington, the Rangers' manager, said his offseason was so hectic after winning the American League pennant, that he never had a chance to reflect on the achievement.

"It was quick," Washington said of his winter. "It was busy. It wasn't until we got our rings that I was able to really able to think about it, and to enjoy what we accomplished. The ring brought back all the memories, though, the struggles to get there, what we went through. "

Washington will spend the next four days at the Coliseum with his first-place Rangers, who look somewhat different than the club San Francisco beat last fall. Gone is start starter Cliff Lee, along with slugger Vladimir Guerrero. New to the team is Adrian Beltre, purred unsuccessfully by the A's each of the past two offseasons. He's off to a terrific start for Texas, with seven home runs and 21 RBIs, but his acquisition made for a tense situation when franchise stalwart Michael Young was asked to change his position for the third time in his Rangers career. Young requested a trade, setting in motion a strange cycle of rumors and at points, some ill feeling.

"I think it was just one of those communication things," said A's starter Brandon McCarthy, who spent the past five years with the Texas organization. "I know (general manager) Jon Daniels, and I know Mike, and I respect both of them. They are both good people. I think things just got muddled."

Though trade talk never died down entirely, all appears well when it comes to clubhouse unity, and Young is batting .337 with 16 RBIs, among the league leaders in both categories.

"Michael is a team player and all he wants to do is win," Washington said. "He's here and his attitude is the same, he's dealt with everything as best as he could, and I'm trying to get him on the field as much as possible. He's not going to make any waves."

"He's been through a couple of position changes, he been through a lot of losing seasons, and he keep doing what he does," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "I respect him as much as anyone in the game. He's the kind of guy you want representing your organization."

The Rangers' bigger issues now are injuries. AL MVP Josh Hamilton is out for another month or more with a broken right arm, All-Star closer Neftali Feliz is out with shoulder inflammation. The team is also missing pitchers Tommy Hunter, Brandon Webb, Scott Feldman and Darren O'Day, but the Rangers' starters have among the most victories in baseball, with 13.

"Our young guys haven't been touted as much as the A's," Washington said. "But they've had opportunities, they've matured and they understand what it takes. They are certainly getting after it."

Washington had a lot of people from his days with the A's rooting for him last fall, and his ascent to the top was all the more remarkable considering some personal issues the year before, when the Rangers kept him in place as manager after he admitted to one-time cocaine use.

"It was fun to see Wash get so much recognition last year," Ellis said. "He's survived all of it and he's flourished. It was really rewarding to see."

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Newest model: Kurt Suzuki, the first A's player ever to go on the new paternity list, and his wife, Renee, welcomed their first child, Malia Grace, 8 pounds, 3 ounces. Suzuki is expected to rejoin the team today.

Individuality core of Romanick's philosophy

By David Ely / Special to MLB.com 4/28/2011

ANAHEIM -- One of the key questions the Athletics faced at the start of the season was whether the departure of pitching coach Curt Young would affect their young staff.

Young, who left during the offseason to take the same position with the Boston Red Sox, ran the A's staff for seven years, and under his tutelage, Oakland posted some of the best pitching numbers in the American League. Last year, the A's led the AL in ERA (3.56) and shutouts (17), while also posting a league-best 4.03 ERA during Young's stint in Oakland.

The new man in charge, Ron Romanick, was a part of some of that success as the club's bullpen coach from 2007-10, but this year marks his first as a pitching coach in the Majors.

Judging by the results from the first couple of weeks of the season, though, the transition has been an easy one for Romanick.

Through 25 games, the A's own the top ERA in the Majors (2.66) and are tied for fourth in batting average against (.234) while giving up the fewest homers in the AL (14).

"I started out as a pitching coach in the Minor Leagues [with the Seattle Mariners], and then I became a [Minor League] coordinator," Romanick said. "It's my fourth year up here. So this is the most familiar thing, just being a pitching coach. That's what I've always done. It's nice running a staff again like this, especially this talented of a staff."

In addition to maintaining Oakland's status as one of the top staffs in baseball, the 50-year-old Romanick also has shown the ability to make adjustments on the fly when he sees something out of whack with one of his pitchers.

When the A's traded for reliever David Purcey on April 18, Romanick suggested his new left-hander position himself on the third-base side of the mound as opposed to the first-base side, which he felt had contributed to Purcey's slow start in Toronto.

In five appearances with the Blue Jays, Purcey allowed three runs in 2 1/3 innings for an 11.57 ERA. He's has not given up a run in 4 1/3 innings with the A's.

"As soon I made those adjustments, just everything felt like it started to click," Purcey said. "It's been a big help for me.

"It just changes all of the angles. Since I was missing off the plate away to a right-hander, all of a sudden, you're hitting the corner. I don't have to really drive the ball in on a right-hander. I'm already right there; I just have to stay on line. So it's been really helpful to me just to make the adjustment. It's really improved my game a lot."

Then, after Tyson Ross struggled in his first start of the season on Friday, as the Mariners burned him to the tune of three runs on four hits and four walks in 4 1/3 innings, Romanick spent the following days reminding his 24-year-old right-hander to slow down his delivery.

Another tweak, another positive result. Ross tossed seven scoreless innings and walked just one batter on Wednesday in the A's 2-1 extra-inning victory over the Angels.

What works for Romanick is how he approaches each pitcher as an individual case and crafts a plan accordingly. There's no one-size-fits-all philosophy.

"A professional in all sense of the word," Purcey said. "He researches, he gets background. Like even before I showed up, he was like, 'Yeah, I watched film on you.' And then he asked what I felt I was doing wrong."

Purcey continued: "He does a great job talking to the players and getting their feedback on things. And from what I've gotten from him so far is that he's definitely into helping each pitcher individually. It's not like there's a set way to throw for everyone."

Gio Gonzalez described Romanick as open-minded and said he constantly searches for answers whenever someone has a specific pitching question.

"He's not one-track minded, not one style of pitching only," Gonzalez said. "He definitely has variety. He watches, he learns. He studies everything that we need to learn, and he's definitely a big help for us."

Romanick's individualized style extends to how he relates to his pitchers in the clubhouse. With Rich Harden, it's cars. He talks about watches with Brandon McCarthy.

Gonzalez likes to get on him about music. A Seattle native, Romanick prefers grunge and classic rock.

"The days I pitch, I always have my iPod on," Gonzalez said. "So I always try to mess with him and put some Lady Gaga on or something like that."

Romanick spent three years as a pitcher for the California Angels from 1984-86, compiling a 31-29 record and a 4.24 ERA. After that, his career path took a minor detour.

Romanick spent about eight weeks during the 1989-90 winter as a professional golfer on the Sunshine Tour in South Africa. There, he played against a then-amateur Ernie Els, David Feherty and a young John Daly.

Romanick also was in South Africa the day Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

"That was really something, just to be part of that," Romanick said.

Romanick said he qualified for about half of the tournaments during his brief stint on the tour, but he didn't make many cuts.

"I turned a lot of 68s into 73s, and that's why I'm back coaching again," he said.

While Romanick said he can still chase par, he doesn't have the time or energy to do much golfing these days. When he does make it out to a course, it's usually reserved for a special occasion, like a round at Pebble Beach or another "bucket list" course.

Romanick sees a lot of similarities between golf and pitching. The same body posture runs parallel between the two sports.

"Pitching is an individual activity within a team sport," Romanick said. "And golf ... you're in direct control over a lot of things, similar to pitching. And as soon as you let go, the elements take over."

"Pitch to pitch, shot to shot, all of that stuff is very similar. ... So a lot of it translates over."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Cats swat six homers, win 13-inning thriller

By Kyle Tucker / Sacramento River Cats

The River Cats held off host Las Vegas on Thursday night in a wild game that saw plenty of offense.

Sacramento sealed the 13-9 victory by scoring four runs in the 13th inning on three home runs. Anthony Recker's second home run of the game opened the inning, and Adam Heether and Steve Tolleson followed with blasts of their own to add needed insurance. Sacramento improved to 7-2 on the road as both teams combined to score 22 runs on 33 hits.

Jemile Weeks came up a single short of hitting for the cycle. Weeks went 3-for-6 with a double, triple and a home run. Weeks also drew a walk with the bases loaded in the ninth inning that tied the game at eight. He has reached base in each game he has started in this season.

The Cats improved to 7-2 on the road this season while having struggled at Raley Field, posting a 5-7 record.

Bobby Cramer took the hill for Sacramento, his first start of the season for the Cats after the A's optioned him to Triple-A. Cramer was roughed up, lasting only 2.0 innings, giving up four runs on five hits, while striking out four.

Jai Miller got things started for the Sacramento offense, blasting a three-run homer in the first inning. Miller continued his tear as of late by driving in his team-leading 19th RBI and sixth home run.

Both teams traded blows all night, launching nine combined home runs.

Anthony Recker led off the second inning with a solo home run, his second of the season.

Brian Jeroloman answered with a solo shot of his own in the second, getting Las Vegas on the board for the first time.

Dewayne Wise tied the game in the third by hitting a three-run homer, his first of the season.

Jemile Weeks then led off the fifth inning with a solo home run. This was Weeks' second home run of the season, both of which have led off an inning. Eric Thames homered for the 51s in the seventh, a three-run shot that pulled Las Vegas within two.

RockHounds take win in wild game

Midland Reporter Telegram

The Midland RockHounds had 15 hits and turned five double plays to outlast Corpus Christi in a wild 12-8 victory at Citibank Ballpark on Thursday night.

With the victory, the RockHounds (12-8) win the four-game series with the Hooks 3-1 and finish the eight-game homestand 4-4. The RockHounds hit the road for eight games beginning today with a four-game series at San Antonio.

Five RockHounds had multiple hits, led by Jermaine Mitchell, who was 3 for 4 with a triple, two RBI, a walk and two runs scored. Mitchell, the RockHounds' leadoff hitter, finished the homestand going 17 for 29 with eight walks and 13 runs scored.

After the RockHounds scored two runs in each of the second and third innings, they broke the game open with a six-run fifth inning to take a 10-2 lead. Tyler Ladendorf and Grant Green each had two-run doubles, Petey Paramore added an RBI single and Stephen Parker chipped in with an RBI double.

The Hooks, who had 16 hits in the game, would not go away and had a five-run seventh to cut the RockHounds lead to 10-7. The Hooks had eight of their hits in that inning with the big one coming from T.J. Steele, who had a two-run single. The Hooks probably could have scored a few more runs if it wasn't for the RockHounds turning one of their two 6-4-3 double plays.

The RockHounds added two insurance runs in the seventh to preserve the win for Ethan Hollingsworth (2-1).

Kyle Greenwalt (1-2) took the loss for the Hooks (8-12).

The fireworks weren't limited at the plate on Thursday as RockHounds hitting coach Tim Garland was ejected by third base umpire Stu Scheurwater in the eighth inning after Yusuf Carter struck out swinging.

PORTS FIGHT BACK

By [Jason Anderson](#), Stockton Record

STOCKTON - Ports shortstop Dusty Coleman didn't look like the most imposing figure while jawing with 6-foot-9, 275-pound Lake Elsinore Storm pitcher Matt Lollis, but Coleman wasn't going to be ordered around after the right-hander drilled him in the back with a fastball.

Coleman had words with Lollis after being hit by a pitch in the third inning, promptly stole second base and came around to score the go-ahead run, helping the Ports beat the Storm 6-4 on Thursday before 1,705 at Stockton Ballpark.

"Whenever you have a little scuffle with a guy, it's always nice to get the better end of the deal and get the win," Coleman said.

Coleman hit the ground hard after getting hit by Lollis with one out in the third. They exchanged words as Coleman made his way to first base.

"They got mad because I was walking to first base," Coleman said. "I wasn't going to get up and jog right after I almost got hit in the head. The pitcher was yelling at me to get to first."

Coleman was not intimidated.

He stole second on the next pitch. As Coleman slid safely into second, Ports slugger Michael Choice and Storm catcher Jason Hagerty went nose-to-nose near home plate and had to be separated by umpires and coaches. Hagerty felt Choice obstructed his throw to second.

"That's a simple rule," Choice said. "If you're standing in the batter's box, you're fine. He's complaining to the umpire because he's falling all over the place. He popped off and said some words, so I popped off back."

Home plate umpire Gabe Martinez issued warnings to both teams.

Choice battled before swinging through a high fastball for the second out, but Coleman still managed to make Lollis pay. Coleman advanced to third on a passed ball and scored when Leonardo Gil reached base on an error by Storm third baseman Edinson Rincon, giving the Ports a 3-2 lead.

The Ports added another run when Ryan Lipkin hit an RBI single to left in the fourth. Lake Elsinore cut Stockton's lead to 4-3 in the fifth, but Mitch LeVier delivered a two-run single in the sixth after hitting a solo homer in the second.

Bees Battle Back For a 6-4 Win

By Jon Versteeg, [burlingtonbees.com](#)

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (14-5) scored three runs in the eighth inning to come back for a 6-4 win over the Kane County Cougars (7-14) in the opener of a three-game series at Community Field on Thursday night.

The Cougars scored a run in the first inning on a sacrifice fly by SS Gerard Hall (0-4). They took a 1-0 lead against Burlington LHP Jacob Brown.

RF Royce Consigli (1-2), batting in the "two spot" in the lineup, hit a solo home run over the right field wall in the third inning to tie the game at 1-1. 2B Nino Leyja (2-5) followed with a single and stole second base. 3B Tony Thompson (1-4) hit an RBI single to score Leyja and make it 2-1.

In the fourth inning RF Julio Aparacio (2-3) hit an RBI double to tie the game at 2-2.

3B Ryan Stovall (2-5) led off the fifth inning with a solo home run against Brown. LF Brian Fletcher (2-3) followed with a triple and scored on a single by C Ryan Jenkins (1-4) . The Cougars took a 4-2 lead.

In the sixth inning Burlington SS Yordy Cabrera (2-4) led off the inning with a triple and scored on a double by 1B Josh Whitaker (3-4) to bring them within one run 4-3.

Cabrera led off the eighth inning with a single and scored on a double by Whitaker to tie the game at 4-4.

After C John Nester and CF Tyreece House struck out, Consigli was issued an intentional walk and Leyja hit a fly ball to left field that was dropped.

The Bees and Cougars continue their series on Friday morning in a special 11:30 a.m. start. It's DARE Day at Community Field. The pitching match-up is as follows: RHP Leonel Santiago (2-2, 5.03) for Kane County against RHP Blake Hassebrock (1-0, 0.00) for Burlington. There will be no broadcast of the game on Friday morning.