

Oakland A's starter Brett Anderson pounded by Texas Rangers

By Carl Steward, Contra Costa Times

After a month in which their starting pitching was pretty much all there was to talk about in a positive vein, it was weird to see the A's end April with a certified mound stinker.

It was particularly strange to see the stench emanate from an outing by Brett Anderson, who through his first five starts had posted a 1.56 ERA with just four walks and no home runs allowed in 342/3 innings.

All those great Anderson numbers went by the wayside in an 11-2 thrashing by the Texas Rangers on Saturday at the Coliseum. The left-hander gave up seven earned runs, walked four, hit a batter and served up three homers, including back-to-back shots by Nelson Cruz and Mike Napoli in a four-run fifth inning that broke open a one-run game. Cruz's was a three-run blast.

"It was pretty much a perfect storm of everything bad," Anderson said. "Stuff was bad, command was bad. Just a bad day."

Anderson said he had little inkling warming up in the bullpen that things would go so off-track.

"I felt OK," he said. "But once I got out there, it was probably the worst stuff I've ever had dating back to high school. It was terrible, almost embarrassing or comical how bad it was."

Anderson (2-2) gave up Adrian Beltre's first-inning RBI double, then surrendered his first homer of the year in the third, a two-run shot by Michael Young.

He bailed himself out of a bases-loaded, one-out jam in the fourth with a comebacker double play but opened the fifth by surrendering four straight hits -- hard singles by Young and Beltre, followed by a long homer to Cruz down the left-field line and Napoli's blast over the center-field wall.

Anderson recorded three straight outs to finish the inning, but his day was done: 90 pitches, only 53 for strikes. His season ERA soared to 2.95.

"He obviously didn't have the stuff he usually has," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "He'll just have to get back on the saddle again and get 'em next time. When things are out of whack, they're out of whack. It was one of those days where you have to battle and try to get through it."

The A's missed a chance to go over .500 for the month with the loss. Instead, they finished April 13-14 largely as a result of an area that has been their unquestioned team strength -- starting pitching. Oakland starters came into the game leading the major leagues with a 2.47 ERA with just eight homers allowed.

"It was a little bit out of character for our starters to have a rough game like that," manager Bob Geren said. "They've been on such a nice streak, and Brett himself has been outstanding. But today, it was a struggle from the beginning. He never found a rhythm or a groove. It was a rough outing, but it was the first one in a long time. Just throw that one out, and I'm sure he'll be back and his next start will be fine."

One thing stayed in form: the anemic nature of the A's offense. Texas starter Colby Lewis came into the game with a 1-3 record and 6.95 ERA. But he went a season-high eight innings against the A's, allowing just six hits and a walk and striking out six. The only runs he allowed were solo homers to Suzuki, his second of the year, and Josh Willingham, his fourth.

"We felt like we could get more runs than we did," Geren said. "We had a couple loud contacts, a couple of homers, but we didn't string anything together at all."

Oakland A's update: Rickey Henderson adds finishing touches to bobblehead -- dirt

By Carl Steward, Contra Costa Times

Rickey Henderson made a special request for his first-ever bobblehead day with the A's -- the team can make the head as big as it wants, but there has to be some dirt on his uniform.

"That's one thing I asked them to do," Henderson said Saturday. "I've seen a lot of bobbleheads, and they all seem by their uniforms like they haven't been playing the game. So I told them to put a little dirt on mine to make sure it looked like I was playing."

Henderson said his mother, Bobbie, would never allow a clean bobblehead into her house.

"If I bring that bobblehead home to my mom, she'll go, 'Take that back because you ain't dirty,' " he said.

The first 20,000 fans in attendance Saturday received a facsimile of the dirt-stained Rickey recreating his record-breaking stolen base pose, and the Hall of Famer demonstrated he still has some Coliseum drawing power. Oakland had its third-largest crowd of the season -- 27,285.

"It's great," Henderson said. "It goes to show you the great fans that were always backing me when I was playing are still showing their appreciation by coming out to support me."

Henderson said this was the first time he's ever been honored with a major league bobblehead. He's had two in the minors - with the Modesto A's and the San Diego Surf Dawgs.

The A's missed a chance to finish April over .500 with Saturday's loss to the Texas Rangers. But a 13-14 opening month may not be that bad considering the A's hit so poorly (.237 with just 13 home runs), led the American League in errors and didn't have injured closer Andrew Bailey.

"You can look at it two different ways: We're fortunate to be where we're at because we've had a few injuries, and we haven't swung the bat well," manager Bob Geren said. "Or you could look at it that we really underachieved offensively, and we played way below what we need to play defensively. A glass half-empty guy could say with the pitching we've had, we should be better than .500. So it's kind of a mixed bag."

Center field Coco Crisp missed his third straight game with a quadriceps injury but ran the bases close to 100 percent in pregame warm-ups. When asked after the game if he was ready to play, he said yes.

"Whatever they say, I'll go along with the program," Crisp said.

Second baseman Mark Ellis was a late lineup scratch because of illness. He is expected to return today.

Chin Music: Weird finish to April for A's, offense still needs to pick it up

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 4/30/2011 5:22PM

In for Joe Stiglich today, who picked the right day to be off ...

This game wasn't exactly over from the start, but it sure seemed like it the way Brett Anderson was pitching. You could sense he didn't have it early on, as he walked three batters in the first two innings after surrendering just four in his first 34 2/3 innings over five starts. Anderson couldn't find his breaking ball and consequently had to try to locate his fastball, which didn't work so well. Michael Young, Nelson Cruz and Mike Napoli all smacked impressive home runs, impressive all the more considering Anderson hadn't given a long ball all year before Saturday.

It was a thud of an April ending for the A's starting staff, which came into the final day of the month leading the majors in ERA at 2.47 with just eight home runs allowed. In short, these guys have been great, particularly the new Big Three of Trevor Cahill, Anderson and Gio Gonzalez. But good pitchers have bad days from time to time, and hopefully, this was just a blip on Anderson's season radar screen.

If the A's starters falter, this team is in trouble, because the club is offering precious little else to get excited about. The offense came into the game hitting .237 with just 11 home runs. The defense had committed an AL leading 27 errors. Those two areas have to get better.

That said, the A's got through April just one game under .500 despite the defense, offense, the absence of Bailey and the fact that they played 16 of their 27 games on the road. It could be a lot worse. In May, they'll play 17 of their 30 games at home and 7 of those 13 road games are close — three in SF, four in Anaheim.

Coco Crisp looked decent running the bases before the game, and I asked him afterward if he was ready to play. Albeit sullenly, he said yes. "Whatever they say, I'll go along with the program," Crisp said.

Mark Ellis scratched with a minor bug Saturday — maybe it's .191-itis — but expected to be back in the lineup Sunday.

Gio Gonzalez on the hill today to try and restore order for the rotation.

Rangers beat Anderson, A's 11-2

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Judging by Brett Anderson's news conference following the A's 11-2 loss to Texas at the Coliseum on Saturday afternoon, the left-hander does not have a future in the candy-making business.

That is, he's not good at sugar-coating.

"It was pretty much a perfect storm of everything bad," Anderson said. "Stuff was bad. Command was bad. It's just a bad day."

Anderson gave up seven runs on nine hits - including three homers - in five innings.

"That's probably the worst stuff I've ever had, dating back to high school," Anderson said. "It was just terrible. It was almost embarrassing or comical, how bad it was."

Anderson brought a 2-1 record and a 1.56 ERA into Saturday. He now has a 2-2 record and a 2.95 ERA.

"It was just terrible," he said. "I had no feel for my breaking ball. Obviously, I pitch off my breaking ball. It was just rolling in there."

Anderson tied three personal highs he clearly would have preferred not to come close to tying: home runs allowed (three; also against the Yankees on April 22, 2009), earned runs allowed (seven, also against the White Sox on Aug. 14, 2009) and walks allowed (four, done twice previously).

Near the end of his outing, Anderson said that he "was just kind of all over the place, searching for outs. Just pretty much terrible."

In his five starts before Saturday, Anderson had issued a combined total of four walks and had not given up a homer.

In contrast, Texas right-hander Colby Lewis brought a 1-3 record and a 6.95 ERA into Saturday. In his three previous outings, all losses, Lewis allowed 14 earned runs - and seven homers - in 16 innings.

Said A's manager Bob Geren of Lewis: "He'd been off a couple of poor starts, actually, and I felt like we'd get more runs than we did."

Lewis, who pitched for the A's in 2007, limited Oakland to two runs - solo homers by Kurt Suzuki and Josh Willingham - on six hits in eight innings. Lewis struck out six and walked one.

"He changed speeds," Suzuki said about Lewis. "He's got some deception. He's a guy (who) throws strikes. He's going to make you swing the bat."

Lewis' season numbers improved to 2-3, 5.70.

Willingham's homer cut the A's deficit to 3-2 in the fourth but before Anderson recorded an out in the fifth, the game was, for all intents and purposes, decided.

Michael Young, who hit a two-run homer in the third, led off the fifth with a single. An Adrian Beltre base hit preceded Nelson Cruz jumping all over an Anderson pitch and sending it several rows deep into the stands beyond the 330 sign in the left-field corner.

Cruz's seventh homer of the season made it 6-2, Texas. The next batter, Mike Napoli, took Anderson deep to right-center.

"The only thing I can take solace in," Anderson said, "is that it's going to be better next time."

Rickey Henderson bobblehead a big hit

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer, San Francisco Chronicle

Twenty years ago today, the A's Rickey Henderson surpassed **Lou Brock** as baseball's career stolen-base leader. Henderson swiped third against the Yankees for No. 939.

Saturday was Rickey Henderson Bobblehead Day at the Coliseum. Looking at the huge lines that had formed outside the gates by 10:30 a.m., a good portion of the 27,285 fans were at least as interested in being among the 20,000 who received bobbleheads as they were in the Rangers and A's.

The bobblehead depicts Henderson triumphantly holding a base aloft. His uniform has dirt on it, per Henderson's instructions.

"I told them, put a little dirt on mine, make sure that (it looks) like I'm playing the game," he said, "because if I bring that bobblehead home to my mom, she'll go, 'Take that back because you ain't dirty. You (weren't) playing.' "

Henderson, 52, made that comment in the A's dugout about a half-hour before he threw a ceremonial first pitch. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2009 after amassing 1,406 steals. He hasn't played in the majors since '03 - though he still gets the itch.

"Sometimes when I sit around and look at the game and things (aren't) going right," he said, "I just think, 'Just let me put on the uniform and go out there and take a chance.' "

"I think that's just because I love the game so much."

May 1, 1991, also rates as one of the most significant days in the Rangers' history. Only hours after Henderson broke Brock's mark, **Nolan Ryan** no-hit the Blue Jays for his seventh career no-no.

Ellis sick: **Mark Ellis** was feeling under the weather Saturday, so the second baseman was a late scratch from the lineup. **Kevin Kouzmanoff** replaced Ellis in the seventh spot in the order, with **Andy LaRoche** moving from third base to second. Kouzmanoff struck out in all three of his at-bats. After the game, Ellis said he felt better and expects to play today.

A's leading off

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle

Scoring change: Credit Daric Barton with a double on his third-inning drive Friday night that originally was ruled an error on Texas center fielder Julio Borbon. That change adds an earned run to C.J. Wilson's line.

Drumbeat: Mark Ellis ill; Rickey Henderson bobblehead tribute

A's notes from Steve Kroner, covering today's game for The Chronicle and SFGate. 4/30/2011 1:28PM

Mark Ellis originally was in today's starting lineup, but the second baseman is under the weather and was replaced in the lineup by Kevin Kouzmanoff, who will play third, with Andy LaRoche moving from second to third.

The lineup against Texas right-hander Colby Lewis: DeJesus, CF; Barton, 1B; Jackson, RF; Willingham, LF; Matsui, DH; Suzuki, C; Kouzmanoff, 3B; LaRoche, 2B; Pennington, SS. Brett Anderson is on the mound.

Today is Rickey Henderson Bobblehead Day. A's manager Bob Geren played with and against Henderson. In his pregame news conference, Geren offered these thoughts on Henderson:

Playing against him, I just remember all the pressure that he put on the defense, on the pitcher, on the catcher. You didn't ever want to walk him; he had like a .400 on-base percentage. But if you just challenged him because you were worried about walking him, then he'd hit a home run against you.

So, he was, in my opinion -- and I'm sure it's many other people's opinion, too -- the best leadoff hitter of all time. I mean, without a doubt. I don't even know who you could even make a comparison with. I don't even know who would be in his league; that's how much I thought of him.

And, the years, the amount of time he did this. He didn't just do this for four or five years. He did it for decade after decade. He still looks like he could play. He's in great shape. I enjoy being around him when he comes around the club, helps some of the younger guys. It's a great day here to celebrate Rickey and everybody get a bobblehead of a Hall of Famer.

MLB's rule on rainouts is all wet

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/1/2011

Around these parts, games rarely are postponed because of rain. Just as well. Home teams have too much authority in the decision-making, and it can become shady stuff, a matter of gamesmanship over which the visiting team has no input.

On Wednesday at Wrigley Field, the Rockies thought they could complete their threegame series, especially because the weather wasn't as bad as it was Monday, when nine innings were played. But the Cubs decided against it, a premature call that proved wrong and now has consequences for the Rockies.

After a 54-minute rain delay, the Cubs announced the game was postponed — to boos at the not-so-friendly confines.

Rain was in the forecast, and it did drizzle for a short period but not enough for a postponement.

It should be noted the Cubs were starting **Casey Coleman** (7.43 ERA in three starts), while the Rockies, who won the first two games of the series, were countering with **Jhoulys Chacin**, who had a 2.67 ERA and blanked the Cubs at Coors Field on April 15.

So now the Rockies must return to Wrigley and play June 27 on their way from New York to Denver. It's a homefield advantage that shouldn't be.

Rule 3.10(a) states the home team "shall be the sole judge as to whether a game shall not be started because of unsuitable weather conditions or the unfit condition of the playing field" with exceptions such as the second game of a double-header or a late-season game with playoff implications.

(One other exception is that if it's the final series of the year in a city, which it was for the Rockies, the ump's would make the call. But in recent years, because some final series have been so early in the season, that usually has applied to series after the All-Star break.) MLB grants these powers because the home team understands local weather issues and hears from area meteorologists, plus it can weigh fans' concerns.

Fair enough. But if umpires don't have final say, it's easy for the home team to manipulate the system for its own benefit, an issue that probably should be further examined by MLB. Currently, umpires don't have authority to call a game until after it begins.

Five days before the Wrigley Field affair, Cardinals manager **Tony La Russa** followed rule 3.10(a) to one-up the Reds in St. Louis. Expecting rain shortly after game time, La Russa started a reliever, **Miguel Batista**, while **Dusty Baker** had one of his top starters, **Edinson Volquez**, warm up.

Sure enough, the game was delayed after Batista's sixth pitch. Once it resumed, two hours and 10 minutes later, the Cardinals pitched scheduled starter **Kyle McClellan** and the Reds used a reliever, **Matt**

Maloney, who was rocked (Cards won 4-2) and then sent to the minors.

Supposedly, McClellan was told an hour before the scheduled start he'd be held back.

Baker and the umps said they heard closer to game time that rain wasn't expected until nearly an hour after the first pitch. But it came after two minutes. Baker said if he were given more information, Volquez wouldn't have warmed up and could have been used after the delay.

La Russa said the two sides got the same info.

Either way, if the umps had more input in the process, it wouldn't be such a mess.

BASEBALL SUNDAY

THE BULL PEN

By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/1/2011

Baltimore's **Luke Scott** homered off Boston's

Josh Beckett, flipping his bat and admiring the flight of the ball. Beckett, not the first pitcher to be annoyed by Scott's antics, yelled at him as he circled the bases and said later, "Those things have a way of working themselves out." Not so far. Scott is 10-for-23 with three homers off Beckett.

The Indians are in first place despite two of their best hitters (**Carlos Santana** and **Shin-Soo Choo**) slumping horribly, two of their top starters (**Fausto Carmona** and **Carlos Carrasco**)

going 3-4 with a 5.07 ERA and two guys in their season-opening rotation (Carrasco and **Mitch Talbot**) on the disabled list.

According to the Chicago Tribune, the White Sox have had the fewest homegrown established players (three or more seasons in the majors) since 2001: one. The Rockies have the most (16), and the A's rank fourth (10). The Giants are in the middle of the pack (seven).

While **Vladimir Guerrero** hasn't drawn a walk this season,

Jack Cust has drawn four with the bases loaded, 18 in all.

Astros broadcaster **Milo Hamilton** criticized St. Louis' **Lance Berkman**, suggesting he wasn't in shape his last two seasons in Houston but got in shape entering free agency. "And now," Hamilton said in a radio interview, "a team you didn't even know, a manager you didn't play for, you felt it was your responsibility to get in great shape?" To be fair, Berkman was slowed by calf and knee injuries the previous two years.

Imagine if Berkman were doing this for the A's, who pursued him to be their designated hitter. When last in the Bay Area, Berkman was hitless in a series in San Francisco, leaving him with a .214 average with no homers and one RBI through eight games.

Since then, he's hitting .475 with eight homers and 21 RBIs.

Deals with Pirates have been steals

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/1/2011

John Bowker was designated for assignment Thursday. If you're a Pirates fan, you might be wondering about that **Javier Lopez** trade.

In fact, you might be wondering why the Pirates would keep picking up the phone when anyone from the 415 calls. Especially if **Brian Sabean** appears on Caller ID.

With a hand from Pittsburgh general managers and the players they sent to San Francisco, the Giants have gone to two World Series in nine years.

Last year's championship run got a boost from Lopez, who arrived in the July 31 deal that shipped Bowker and **Joe Martinez** to Pittsburgh. Martinez is pitching for Cleveland's top farm team, Triple-A Columbus.

Freddy Sanchez was supposed to be damaged goods when obtained from Pittsburgh on July 29, 2009. Nobody remembered that when he hit .360 in the NLCS and collected four hits in Game 1 of the World Series.

For Sanchez, Sabean gave up prospect **Tim Alderson**, who struggled so mightily as a starter that he's now in Double-A Altoona's bullpen.

Sanchez and Lopez came courtesy of Pirates GM **Neal Huntington**.

On July 30, 2001, Huntington's predecessor, **Dave Littlefield**, was kind enough to trade **Jason Schmidt** (and

John Vander Wal) to the Giants for outfielder **Armando Rios** and pitcher **Ryan Vogelsong**. Schmidt was the most intimidating starter in the World Series season of 2002.

Homers hurt Anderson in loss to Rangers

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/30/2011 8:06 PM ET

OAKLAND -- A's lefty Brett Anderson gave away three home runs to the Rangers on Saturday, marking the sixth time he's surrendered multiple long balls in a game in his career.

That career spans 55 starts, and Anderson can't remember any of the first 54 playing out as badly as Saturday's showing, which included a career-high-tying seven earned runs and four walks in just five innings in an 11-2 loss to Texas.

"It was probably the worst stuff I've ever had dating back to high school," Anderson said. "Just terrible. It's almost embarrassing and comical."

Before Saturday, the long ball had typically been a rare sighting in Oakland.

The A's entered the contest having only hit 11. Their starting pitchers, meanwhile, had done their part in offering up just eight. Both numbers -- measured on different spectra, of course -- represented the fewest in the Majors.

Oakland added two to its slowly growing total against Texas hurler Colby Lewis via solo shots from Kurt Suzuki and Josh Willingham, their second and fourth of the season, respectively. But it was Anderson bumping up the other number -- courtesy of a two-run homer from Michael Young, a three-run shot from Nelson Cruz and a solo blast from Mike Napoli -- that proved costly.

"It was pretty much the perfect storm of everything bad," Anderson said. "Stuff was bad, command was bad, just a bad day."

In his previous five outings, Anderson had managed to stay away from the homer and had given up a combined six earned runs. He had also walked just four total and no more than one in each outing. But he said he was without his bread-and-butter pitch -- his lethal breaking ball -- and had no command of a usually crisp fastball.

As a result, the 23-year-old lefty is now 1-3 with a 6.49 ERA in six career starts against the Rangers, who are 11-3 this season when tallying at least one home run.

"We came in and faced another tough pitcher and wanted to make sure we had a better approach as a team," said Texas' Young, who watched Friday starter Trevor Cahill pitch seven shutout innings. "Without getting too specific, we just wanted to bear down and attack pitches in the zone, have a game plan and stay with it.

"We know he's a very good pitcher. We wanted to make sure we swung at strikes. The last thing we want to do when facing a good pitcher is help him by chasing pitches out of the strike zone."

Young's home run in the third inning was the first Anderson allowed in 36 2/3 frames to open the season.

"A little bit out of character for our starter to have a rough game like that," A's manager Bob Geren said. "They've been on such a nice streak. Brett, himself, had been outstanding. Today, it was a struggle from the beginning. His strike-to-ball ratio was down from normal, and his strikes weren't as crisp and in as great a location as normal.

"He had to fight through it and never really found a rhythm or a groove. It was a rough one -- the first one in a long time, so we throw that one out."

Oakland's loss put the club at 13-14 to close out the month of April, as the defeat prevented it from entering May above the .500 mark -- a topic of which Geren dissected before the first pitch was even thrown on Saturday.

"You can look at the month two different ways," he said. "If you want to be a glass half-full guy, you could say to play near .500 without hitting at all is a great sign. Or you could say with the pitching we had, if you're a glass half-empty guy, we should be better than .500. It's usually in the middle, and we fully anticipate swinging the bats better and playing better defense.

"Our pitching has been fantastic, so to keep that pace up for five more months isn't something we can't do, but it's something we can't rely on. We have to pick it up offensively and defensively to help them."

That very notion, that Oakland's starters -- despite boasting a 2.77 ERA -- can't carry all the weight, that a sluggish offense needs to be anything but that, was on display just hours later.

Aside from Suzuki and Willingham's home runs, the A's collected just four other hits against Texas starter Colby Lewis, who gave the Rangers eight solid innings of work while striking out six and walking just one to earn his second win of the season.

"He had been coming off a couple of poor starts, so I thought we'd get more runs than we did," Geren said. "We had a couple loud contacts, but we didn't string anything together at all."

"He changed speeds," Suzuki said. "He's got some deception. He's going to throw strikes, make you swing the bat, make you put the ball in play, and we just really didn't do a whole lot of that today."

Anderson, meanwhile, found a small dose of comfort following a day during which "everything bad that could go wrong did."

"The only thing I can take solace in is that it's going to be better next time," he said.

Rangers, A's turn the page to May

By John Schlegel / MLB.com | 4/30/2011 8:52 PM ET

As April turns to May, the top rung on the American League West standings belongs to the defending division and AL champion Rangers, but their pursuers remain in reasonably close proximity.

Among them are the A's, who after an 11-2 defeat at the hands of the Rangers on Saturday are back to three games behind Texas. The A's are in third place, with the Angels holding on to second.

The Rangers and A's square off again Sunday in the third game of a four-game division matchup, with A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez taking the mound against Rangers lefty Matt Harrison after the teams split the first two games.

Entering May, the Rangers have been in first place for all but three days this season -- the Angels led the other three -- and they haven't been more than 1 1/2 games out of first since April 29, 2010. After a 9-1 start, they have gone 7-10. Their 16 wins rank third in franchise history for April, tying 1996 and behind 1998 (17) and 2000 (18).

The A's, meanwhile, have a first month behind them that provided very mixed results and the type of record (13-14) one might expect from that. Their pitching -- Saturday's blowup aside -- remains among the Majors' best, and they've kept afloat despite several injuries and underachievement.

"If you want to be a glass half-full guy, you could say to play near .500 without hitting at all is a great sign," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Or you could say with the pitching we had, if you're a glass half-empty guy, we should be better than .500. It's usually in the middle, and we fully anticipate swinging the bats better and playing better defense."

Gonzalez is coming off a duel with red-hot Angels starter Jered Weaver in which he allowed the Angels to score four earned runs in five innings of work, his second straight outing allowing that many runs.

Harrison, meanwhile, entered his last start ranking sixth in the Majors in ERA but came out of it with a 3.56 mark after the Blue Jays touched him for seven earned runs in three innings, the second-shortest outing of his career. Two of the runs scored on bases-loaded walks.

"I understand when I've had bad starts in the past, they can roll over to two, three in a row," said Harrison, who still leads the AL with a 1.20 road ERA. "I plan on getting back on track to my first four starts -- be aggressive, attack the hitters and make them put the ball in play. I'd rather do that than walk guys."

Rangers: Feliz making progress

- Closer Neftali Feliz took another step closer to his return Saturday, when he threw 28 pitches in a bullpen session prior to the game at Oakland.

Although manager Ron Washington has said he'd probably like to see Feliz have one outing in a Minor League rehab setting, the Rangers haven't decided whether that's the course of action they'll take with last year's AL Rookie of the Year.

If he continues to have no problems with the inflammation that emerged in his right shoulder, Feliz could be ready to return when his 15-day stint on the DL is up on Friday.

- With two hits Saturday, Michael Young finished April with 38 hits -- tied for third most in the season's first month in franchise history. Ivan Rodriguez had 42 and Juan Gonzalez had 39 in 1998.

Athletics: Crisp misses another game

- Center fielder Coco Crisp missed his third straight game Saturday, nursing a tight left quadriceps. He hasn't played since Tuesday, when he came out of the game in the third inning. Prior to that, he'd collected three hits in three straight games.

Crisp went through running drills on Saturday morning and was expected to test his quad near 100 percent after going at 75 percent on Friday.

- With Brett Anderson picking off Mike Napoli on Saturday, the A's already have nine pickoffs on the season. Anderson leads with five. The A's led the Majors with 27 pickoffs in 2010.

Worth noting

The Rangers are 5-3 in their last eight games vs. the AL West after starting out 4-0. The A's are 5-7 vs. the division

A's pay tribute to Rickey with bobblehead

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- While 20,000 Rickey Henderson bobbleheads roamed around the Coliseum on Saturday afternoon, the real-life version of baseball's speedy Hall of Famer sat in the A's dugout and was all smiles on his day of honor.

"It's great," Henderson said. "It goes to show you the great fans that follow you, the ones that have been around since back in my playing days, and I appreciate their support."

The game's all-time stolen base leader, who has served as a Spring Training special instructor for the A's over the last two seasons, also threw out the first pitch Saturday. A perfect toss down the middle of the plate to Coco Crisp showcased a dose of Henderson's remaining abilities.

"The years, the amount of time he did this for, it's amazing," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He still looks like he could play. It's a great day here to celebrate Rickey -- everyone can get their bobblehead of a Hall of Famer.

"I always feel like I could go out there and put a uniform on and play," Henderson said. "Sometimes when I'm sitting around and looking at the game and things aren't going right, I say, 'Let me just put on a uniform and go out there and take a chance at it.' I think it's just because I love the game so much.

Feeling ill, Ellis scratched from A's lineup

OAKLAND -- Feeling under the weather, A's second baseman Mark Ellis was scratched from Saturday's lineup against the Rangers.

Ellis was replaced by Andy LaRoche, who has started 11 games this season at four different positions, including three at second. It marked LaRoche's first start since April 17 and his first appearance since April 21.

The utility infielder carried a .267 batting average into Saturday's contest against Texas right-hander Colby Lewis. LaRoche was 5-for-13 (.385) when facing southpaws this season, compared to just a .176 average (3-for-17) against righties entering Saturday.

Ellis is 1-for-21 over his past five games, a rough period during which he's watched his batting average drop to a season-low .191.

Crisp out for third straight game with tight quad

OAKLAND -- A's outfielder Coco Crisp, nursing a tight left quadriceps, was held out of his third straight game on Saturday, but he continues to make progress, manager Bob Geren said.

Crisp, who hasn't played since Tuesday, participated in a series of running drills on Saturday morning and was expected to test his quad near 100 percent after going at 75 percent on Friday.

The 32-year-old outfielder, whose 2010 campaign was interrupted by injury three times, was pulled from Tuesday's game in the third inning after sustaining the quad soreness while sprinting to first base on a ground ball.

Crisp had three consecutive three-hit games leading up to Tuesday and was 1-for-1 with a first-inning single when he exited the contest. He leads the A's with 26 hits and a .286 batting average and is second in the Majors in triples (3) and fourth in steals (8).

In Crisp's stead, David DeJesus received another start in center field. Josh Willingham played left and Conor Jackson started in right field.

Worth noting

- Manager Bob Geren said lefty Dallas Braden (shoulder) is undergoing range-of-motion exercises and reported "some improvement" on Friday. There is still no timetable for when the southpaw will begin throwing again.

• A's closer Andrew Bailey, who threw a successful bullpen on Friday, could face live hitters as early as next week, Geren said.

A's lose to Rangers, 11-2

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Brett Anderson hadn't had a day like this since high school. The Oakland left-hander's curve ball was flat and his fastball didn't move much.

No matter how many adjustments the Athletics' ace made, the Texas Rangers kept pounding out hits — and home runs.

Anderson surrendered three home runs, including back-to-back shots to Nelson Cruz and Mike Napoli in the fourth inning, and saw his modest two-start winning streak end during an 11-2 loss to the Rangers on Saturday.

"It was just terrible," said Anderson, who matched his career high with four walks. "I had no feel for my breaking ball, which is my bread-and-butter pitch. I was just making stuff up to get deeper in the game, and that didn't work too well. It was just a bad day."

Oakland's starters went into the game leading the majors with a 2.47 ERA but Anderson (2-2) never found his rhythm and was gone after five innings.

By then, Texas had clubbed three home runs and a double off the lefty — four of the Rangers' 14 hits on the afternoon.

"It was probably the worst stuff I've ever had dating back to high school," Anderson said.

Anderson, who hadn't allowed a home run in eight consecutive starts before getting pounded by Texas, gave up nine hits while striking out three.

"Today was a struggle from the beginning," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "It was his command. When he went away it was running off, and sometimes when he came in he'd leave it down the middle. He tried to make in-game adjustments where he tried different things and he never really found a groove."

That was critical on a day Texas starter Colby Lewis was stellar.

Lewis (2-3) pitched eight strong innings and allowed six hits with a season-high six strikeouts to win for the first time since April 2. The right-hander, who lost his previous three starts while getting one run or fewer of support, allowed solo home runs to Kurt Suzuki and Josh Willingham but was otherwise stellar.

"He did everything he wanted to do with his pitches," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "He was able to put that fastball where he wanted, and when he can do that, all his other stuff is outstanding. The only pitch he made a mistake on all day was the hanging ball to Suzuki."

It didn't matter because the Rangers repeatedly pounded Anderson then scored four unearned runs off Oakland reliever Jerry Blevins in the ninth.

A day after getting 11 hits — all singles — Texas had five extra-base hits off five Oakland pitchers and finished with 14 hits overall, one shy of its season-high. Every starter except Mitch Moreland had at least one hit and seven players had at least one RBI.

Texas scored once in the first then took a 3-1 lead in the third on Michael Young's first home run of the season. His two-run shot in the third ended a power drought that extended back to last Sept. 25.

Before muscling up against Anderson, Young had managed to drive in 17 runs without a home run — the third-most by a player in the bigs since 1946.

Texas then chased Anderson with two runs in the third and four in the fifth when Cruz and Napoli hit their back-to-back homers. It's the first time this season the Rangers hit consecutive homer runs.

Oakland managed just seven hits while failing in its attempt to get above .500 for only the second time this season.

Lewis, who appeared in 26 games for the A's in 2007, relaxed with the lead and cruised to the win. He retired 15 of the final 18 batters he faced following Willingham's homer in the fourth and didn't walk anyone until the eighth.

It was Lewis' longest outing since a complete-game win over Houston last June 19.

Brett Tomko pitched the ninth for Texas.

Suzuki's homer on a 2-2 pitch from Lewis in the second tied the game. Suzuki's solo shot, only his second home run of the season, came two days after the birth of the Oakland catcher's first child.

The A's committed their AL-leading 25th error in the ninth, which led to three unearned runs.

NOTES: Oakland 2B Mark Ellis was a late scratch due to the flu. ... CF Coco Crisp did some running but sat out a third straight game for Oakland with tightness in his left quadriceps. ... Two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey (forearm strain) is scheduled to throw a bullpen session Sunday and could face hitters as early as next week, according to A's manager Bob Geren. ... A crowd of 27,285 was on hand for Rickey Henderson Bobblehead Day. The Hall of Famer, who spent time with the A's as an instructor in spring training each of the past two years, also threw out the ceremonial first pitch. "He was in my opinion, and I'm sure in other people's opinion, the greatest leadoff hitter of all time," said Geren, who played two seasons with Henderson while both were with the Yankees in 1988-89. "I don't even know who would be in his league. He still looks like he could play." Several members of the Rangers requested the Henderson bobblehead dolls, too.

Rangers soar behind Anderson's struggle on the mound

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 5/1/2011

Oakland, CA – Millions of people experience a bad day at the office but for lefty pitcher Brett Anderson it was day he did not want to remember. Things got off to a rough start rather quickly for the A's. Elvis Andrus walked and advanced to second base due to a poor decision made by Adam LaRoche.

While many tried to wrap their brain around why Andrus was not tagged out, the focus returned back to Anderson as he collapsed on the mound. Nothing could save him from the embarrassing performance he displayed as Oakland lost 11-2 to the Rangers.

"A perfect storm of everything bad," said Anderson. "Stuff was bad, command was bad, just a bad day." "It was probably the worst stuff I've ever had dating back to my days in high school."

Brett gave up a career-high-tying seven runs (all earned), nine hits, four walks, hit a batter and three home runs (two back-to-back) in five innings. In five starts he had posted a 1.56 ERA with just four walks and no home runs in 34 2/3 innings. Anderson recorded three straight outs to finish the inning, he had 90 pitches, only 53 for strikes.

"It was out of character for starters to have a rough game like that," manager Bob Geren said. "They've been on such a nice streak and Brett himself has been outstanding." "But today, it was a struggle from the beginning, he never really found a rhythm or a groove."

The beginning of the game was better than the ending. Andre Beltre doubled giving the Rangers their first run top of the first frame. Kurt Suzuki responded with his second home run of the season bottom of the second and tied the game. The excitement continued when Michael Young hit a two-run homer bringing Texas back in front. Bottom of the fourth, Josh Willingham notched his fourth home run on a 1-0 pitch and the A's are now down by 1.

This would be the closest Oakland would come for the remainder of the game. Nelson Cruz three-run homer was predicted by manager Ron Washington before the game. Cruz hit his second home run in 19 games. Mike Napoli followed with another home run to increase the lead 7-2. That was the first time the Rangers hit back-to-back home runs this season.

"We just need a big hit," Washington said. "One big hit, that will take care of everything."

Not sure what crystal ball Texas is looking through but their "big" hits continued through the ninth inning. Both Ian Kinsler and Yorvit Torrealba hit doubles bringing in runners on base. But the crucial run that may have changed the way this game ended was the play during the first inning. LaRoche fielded the ball as Andrus began running to second but stopped to anticipate his move. He threw to first for the out and was safe at second which allowed him to score on Beltre's double.

"It was a mental mistake," Geren said. "The goal is to get in front of the runner to force him out." "The out at second would've been a better decision than going to first."

Mark Ellis was scratched from the line-up prior to the game with an illness. Otherwise that play would've been done differently being that Adam is usually the third baseman. But the costly errors for Oakland were not the main ingredient to their loss. Colby Lewis on the other hand won his second win of the season striking out six and walking one in eight solid innings.

Notes – 20,000 people began lining up at 6am to receive free Rickey Henderson bobbleheads before the game. It's amazing how many people in various generations remember the "Man of Steal"! A former MLB player who held the record in stolen bases was moved by the fans continued to support.

"This is the first time in the Majors that a bobblehead has been done for me to my knowledge! It's great to know that fans follow me and have backed me throughout my career. To still show their appreciation is just a blessing. I always feel like I can out there and play because I love the game so much. I stay close and travel with the team keeping a close eye to how they're doing each year."

A's get the hits and win over Rangers

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 4/30/2011

Oakland, CA – What appeared to be a lack of hitting for the Oakland A's changed quickly when they returned home to face the Texas Rangers. Opening a four game series the A's didn't know what to expect facing the American League Champions.

Oakland found its missing link when the hits started rolling in. Bottom of the fifth frame both Conor Jackson and Josh Willingham hit doubles to give the A's a 2-0 lead. But not before Kurt Suzuki's RBI single to put Oakland on the board with their first run.

Suzuki was reinstated from paternity leave on Friday after the birth of his daughter. He missed Wednesday's game against the Los Angeles Angels, catching a 6am flight from Anaheim back to Oakland to be with his wife. With only a couple of hours of sleep, Kurt wasted no time making an impact on his return.

"I was probably more tired than I thought I was, Suzuki said. "I kind of hit a wall in the fifth inning."

Taking game one of the series the A's defeated the Rangers 3-1. A night that started off rocky for Trevor Cahill who gave up three walks in the first inning and loaded the bases. But was saved by David Murphy's ground out (4-3) to get out of jam.

Cahill allowed seven hits, walked four and struck out four in seven innings. Texas was 0-for-3 off him with runners in scoring position and 0-4 on the night. He is now 7-2 with a 2.27 ERA in 10 career starts against the Rangers. That is the seventh lowest ever by an opponent with a minimum of 10 starts against Texas. Cahill picked up his fourth win of the season.

"They're one of the best offenses in baseball," Cahill said. So when people come up and say you've had a lot of success against them, you don't really think that." They have a lot of guys that can hurt you, I think a lot of it is that you face them so many times, you start to learn their strengths and weaknesses." "So, far I've stuck to my strengths!"

In an almost perfect night for Oakland, the Rangers avoided a shutout in the ninth inning. Elvis Andrus singled on a ground ball to right field and advanced to second base while Michael Young was at bat. Young then singled on a line drive to center scoring Andrus for Texas only run. Closer Brian Fuentes next pitch was fly out and that was the ball game.

The Rangers had 15 base runners with 11 hits and four walks but they did not have an extra-base hit. They were 1-for-5 with runners in scoring position and they left 12 runners on base. Not expected from a team that is known for having a great offense with power hitters. The last time the Rangers faced the A's, they celebrated after clinching their first A.L. West Division Championship since 1999.

"The last time we saw this team, they won the A.L." said manager Bob Geren. "I think they know we want to compete and we are both playing well." "This was a good win for us, especially taking game one of the series."

The early struggles for Oakland have been equal in both offense and defense. The A's are batting .236 (200 for 847) on the season, which is the sixth lowest average in the Major Leagues and hitting .204 (46 for 225). They have committed at least one error in 11 of their last 15 games and have a total of 15 over that span.

"We could improve on everything," said Mark Ellis. "When you're not in first place everything needs adjusting, we can be better at getting hits, batters on base and improving our defense."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Miller's three-run triple carries Sacramento

By Cassie Kolas / Sacramento River Cats

With the bases loaded in the fifth inning, Sacramento center fielder Jai Miller hit an explosive three-run triple to clear the bases and secure a River Cats win 5-4 over the Las Vegas 51s on Saturday night at Cashman Field.

This game saw all three of the River Cats catchers in the starting lineup. Anthony Recker played behind the plate, Josh Donaldson at third and Mitch Canham as designated hitter.

The 51s got started against Sacramento right-hander Josh Outman in the first inning. Right fielder DeWayne Wise reached first base on a throwing error from first baseman Shane Peterson, and stole second base. Outman then walked left fielder Eric Thames. Designated hitter Travis Snider singled on a line drive to right field to earn the first run of the game, scoring Wise.

Las Vegas rallied again against Outman in the third inning. Thames singled on a ground ball to center and Snider singled. First baseman Ryan Shealy knocked in Thames with a line drive to right field, bringing the score to 2-0 in favor of Las Vegas.

Third baseman Josh Donaldson answered the 51s two runs with a two-run home run in the fourth inning to score catcher Recker, and tie the game 2-2.

The 51s took the lead in the fourth inning on a Wise single to center field, but the River Cats took their first lead of the game in the fifth inning with Miller's three-run triple to bring home Eric Sogard, Steve Tolleson and Matt Carson, and bring the score 5-3.

Reliever Fernando Cabrera had a strong 2.0 innings of work in the sixth and seventh as he struck out four, and only surrendered one hit and one walk.

Outman got his first win of the season, and relief pitcher Trystan Magnuson got his second save for the season after a scoreless ninth inning.

The River Cats improve their record to 14-9, and take the first three of the four-game series in Las Vegas. The win over the 51s extends their losing streak to 10.

Right-handed hurler Guillermo Moscoso (1-1, .266) will take on fellow right-hander Mike MacDonald (1-0, 3.72) as the River Cats finish up their series against the 51s at 12:05 p.m.

Missions knock in 12 hits to beat RockHounds

Staff Reports, Midland Telegram Reporter

SAN ANTONIO -- After being held in check on Friday, the San Antonio Missions got back to putting up the big offensive numbers they've become known for early in the Texas League season with an 8-4 victory against the Midland RockHounds at Wolff Stadium.

The Missions (15-7) racked 12 hits in the win with seven going for extra bases, including five doubles and two home runs.

The RockHounds (12-9) actually jumped on the Missions first, though, scoring three runs in the top of the opening fram. A Grant Green double plated Jermaine Mitchell for the first run and Michael Spina -- his team-high sixth of the year -- hit a two run homer to give the 'Hounds a 3-0 advantage.

A two-run homer top San Diego Padres prospect Jaff Decker pulled the Missions within a run in the bottom of the first.

The Missions moved out in front for good in the fourth. Vince Belnome singled to plate James Darnell to tie the game and two-RBI double by Beamer Weems brought in Belnome and Sawyer Carroll, giving San Antonio a 5-3 lead.

Tyler Ladendorf was plated by a single by Mitchell in the top of the fifth to cut the deficit to one run until a two-run homer by Cody Decker made it 7-4 San Antonio in the bottom of the inning, putting the game well out of reach for Midland.

The RockHounds and Missions meet for the final game of a four-game series at 7 p.m. today in San Antonio.

Ports Doubles Do The Trick

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports gave their fans something to be excited about on Saturday evening, defeating the Bakersfield Blaze in a 6-4 come-from-behind win.

Former A's great, Dave Stewart was on hand to witness the victory, as he threw out the first pitch and signed autographs for the Ports faithful most of the evening.

The Ports would fall behind early, giving up a solo home run in the second and two more runs in the third. In the second, Ports starting pitcher, Rob Gilliam gave up a home run to Carson Weems on a 2-1 pitch. The home run was Weems only hit of the evening, as he struck out twice and flied out to round out his evening. The Blaze ground out two more runs in the third, behind a solid double from right fielder Stephen Hunt.

Ports fans would have to wait until the fourth inning before the Ports would score. Their patience was rewarded, as the Ports put four hits and three runs on the board in the inning. Dusty Coleman started the inning off with a bang, blasting a double off the mini-monster wall. Michael Choice advanced Coleman to third as he grounded out. Leonardo Gil then brought Coleman home on his own double that got past diving Blaze third baseman, Eric Campbell. An Anthony Aliotti groundout put Gil in scoring position for Max Stassi. Stassi hit the third double of the inning to bring in Gil. Myrio Richard then hit a big single, which allowed Stassi to score, beating in the long throw from Hunt, which got away from Weems, and allowed Richard to advance to second. The inning ended with a 3-3 tie as Ryan Lipkin grounded out.

The Ports would jump to a 4-3 lead in the sixth. Richard once again got in on the scoring action, hitting the Ports fourth double of the evening to bring home Aliotti, who had singled to start off the inning.

The Blaze would tie it up in the eighth. Righty reliever Connor Hoehn came in to attempt to earn his fifth save of the season. Hoehn promptly gave up a towering home run to Yasmani Grandal to start his evening. Hoehn managed to get out of the inning without further damage, getting the next two batters to ground out and end the inning with a strikeout. While Hoehn was unable to earn the save, he would be awarded the "W" in the game.

The Ports would hit the game-winning run in the eighth, off a bloop single by Lipkin. With Richard and Mitch LeVier on base, Lipkin hit a pop fly into very shallow outfield. Three different Blaze players converged on the ball, and at the last moment, all three watched the ball fall between them and onto the ground. Richard, who already had two RBI in the game, scored his first run to put the Ports up for good.

The Ports would tack on the insurance run on a strange play. With LeVier on third, second baseman Conner Crumbliss struck out swinging. Fortunately, Weems was unable to control the ball and he dropped it, allowing Crumbliss to take off for first, and LeVier to cross home plate. LeVier was clearly confused by the play, hesitating a moment before slowly taking off for home, and raising his hands as if to say he didn't know if he could head home on the play. He could, the run counted, and the Ports put enough distance between them and the Blaze to secure the win.

The Ports look for their second series sweep of the season tomorrow, as they close out the Bakersfield series at 2:09 p.m. on Sunday. Gary Daley Jr. will get the start for the Ports.

Cougars Escape With a 5- 1 Win

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

BURLINGTON, IA- The Kane County Cougars (8-15) scored four runs in the ninth inning to break a 1-1 tie and win 5-1 over the Burlington Bees (15-6) before 614 fans at Community Field on Saturday night.

Kane County took the lead in the third inning on a solo home run by CF Alex Llanos (2-5). He smacked a pitch from RHP A.J. Griffin over the left field wall for a 1-0 lead.

Burlington tied the game in the eighth inning. 1B Josh Whitaker (1-4) hit a leadoff double and moved to third base on a sacrifice groundout by LF Douglas Landaeta (1-2). He scored on a "suicide squeeze" single by SS Wade Kirkland (2-3) for a 1-1 tied score.

The Cougars scored four runs in the ninth inning on a grand slam home run by Llanos. He finished with five RBI on Saturday.

The Bees now welcome in the Peoria Chiefs for a three-game series starting on Sunday afternoon. It's Louisa Communications Kids Day! All kids 12 and under get in free (when accompanied by a paid adult) and get to run the bases after the game brought to you by Louisa Communications. It's also Faith Day! Bring your Church bulletin on Sunday home games and get \$1 off up to four general admission tickets. The pitching match-up is as follows: LHP Austin Kirk (2-1, 2.00) for Peoria against RHP Josh Bowman (2-0, 3.26) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 1:40 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 and online at gobees.com.

2011 Bees tickets are on sale now! To purchase season tickets, bonus books or single game tickets, please give the Bees a call at (319) 754-5705, go online to www.gobees.com, or stop by the box office at Community Field during normal business hours.