

Coco Crisp's hairstyle and bat make impression in the Oakland A's win over the Texas Rangers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Center fielder Coco Crisp returned to the A's lineup Sunday, once again sporting an outrageously large Afro underneath his baseball cap.

Eye-catching as it was, Crisp's impact in the leadoff spot is what should really have A's fans talking.

His leadoff double ignited a three-run first-inning rally, and the A's never looked back in a 7-2 victory over the Texas Rangers on a sun-drenched afternoon at the Coliseum.

"What you want to do as a leadoff hitter is get on base," said Crisp, who missed three games with tightness in his left quadriceps. "It definitely felt good after a few days off to come back and, right off the bat, get something going."

For a team that typically wins in nail-biting fashion, this one was free of tension. Credit the timely hits the A's strung together early with men on base.

They chased Texas starter Matt Harrison (3-3) after just 12/3 innings and built a 6-0 lead by the end of the third.

That paved the way for left-hander Gio Gonzalez (3-2) to get back in the win column. He regained the sharpness missing in his previous two starts, striking out seven and holding the Rangers to two runs over 62/3 innings.

The loss dropped the Rangers into a first-place tie with the Los Angeles Angels in the American League West. The A's, who have taken two of the first three in this four-game series, are two games off the pace.

Crisp, who drove in a run with a second-inning single, also

wore the Afro in an April 14 game against the Detroit Tigers, going 0 for 4 that day. The retro look offered better luck Sunday.

The Coliseum Jumbotron displayed a graphic of Crisp referring to him as "FroCo."

"I think it's awesome," A's designated hitter Hideki Matsui said through his translator. "But I don't know if I want to have Afro hair."

Crisp had his hair pulled back in a pony tail for batting practice. He playfully suggested that manager Bob Geren prefers that more conservative look.

"The guys were like, 'You spend all that time taking your braids down, you might as well let it flow,' " Crisp said.

The A's entered the day hitting .199 (48 for 241) with runners in scoring position, second-worst in the majors. But they started the game 4 for 7 in that category and finished it 6 for 16.

After Crisp doubled to lead off the first and Daric Barton walked, Conor Jackson drove them both in with an opposite-field double. Kurt Suzuki scored Jackson with a one-out single for a 3-0 lead.

Jackson, a reserve outfielder, was in the lineup for a fifth straight day. It will be hard to take him out considering he's hitting .360 (9 for 25) with seven RBIs over his past seven games.

With regular right fielder David DeJesus swinging a cold bat, perhaps Jackson will see more time in right.

"Definitely he's earning his playing time," Geren said of Jackson. "When a guy is swinging it the way he is, he deserves to stay in there."

Andy LaRoche, who started at third, doubled in the second inning and scored on Crisp's single.

A throwing error from Texas shortstop Elvis Andrus put Suzuki on base to lead off the third and opened the door to a two-run rally that made it 6-0.

Texas has committed six errors through the first three games of this series, and the Rangers' 25 errors are tied with the A's for second-most in the majors.

Oakland A's update: Dallas Braden's return to the clubhouse boosts Gio Gonzalez

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez was back in top form Sunday and snapped a personal two-game losing streak.

It just so happened that teammate Dallas Braden, currently on the disabled list, was back with the team after not being present for Gonzalez's two defeats.

Coincidence?

Gonzalez talks often about the impact that Braden, a fellow lefty, has on his game. The two often talk pitching strategy, and Braden lends wisdom before and during Gonzalez's starts.

"I did blame the last two starts on Dallas Braden," Gonzalez joked after a 7-2 victory over the Texas Rangers.

Braden was away getting his injured left shoulder examined April 20, when Gonzalez allowed eight hits and four earned runs in a 5-3 loss to Boston.

Braden didn't travel on the team's last road trip and Gonzalez was not sharp in a 5-0 defeat to the Angels on April 25.

Braden was in the clubhouse before Sunday's game but not available for comment. Gonzalez took the mound and was dialed in with his fastball and curve, allowing two runs on five hits in 62/3 innings.

It's tough to measure how much of that turnaround -- if any -- is attributable to Braden. But Gonzalez doesn't deny his teammate's impact.

"I don't want to ride Dallas Braden's banner," Gonzalez said. "But it's good to have him around. He's a fighter, and you want to follow in those steps."

There's no timetable for Braden's return from shoulder inflammation.

Indications are the A's will be without closer Andrew Bailey for at least two more weeks.

Bailey threw another bullpen session Sunday with a batter standing in. Assuming he comes out of that OK, he'll throw live batting practice in a few days and a simulated game a few days after that, manager Bob Geren said.

A minor league rehab assignment would follow at some point.

"I don't really know how many appearances I'll need before pitching in the big leagues," Bailey said. "But I'd say a few, since I really didn't have a spring training."

Bailey injured his forearm March 14 in his second exhibition appearance.

Hideki Matsui scored his 1,500th career run -- combined between the major leagues and his Japanese career -- in the third inning.

For comparison's sake, 69 players have scored 1,500 runs strictly in the major leagues.

Chin Music: Andrew Bailey's return is still down the road; Coco Crisp back in A's lineup

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/1/2011 12:45pm

Here's the pregame lowdown from the Coliseum, as the A's try to rebound from Saturday's shellacking ...

—As you've noticed, the news has been vague on closer Andrew Bailey ever since he's been on the disabled list. It remains that way, though we got a little more detail today. Bailey threw another bullpen session this morning, and if he comes out of it OK, he'll throw a batting practice session in a few days, possibly Wednesday. Manager Bob Geren said Bailey likely would throw a simulated game after that, and then the A's would decide when he begins a minor league rehab assignment. How many outings would he need to be ready to join the major league club? "I don't really know how many appearances I'll need before pitching in the big leagues, but I'd say a few since I really didn't have a spring training," Bailey said. It's easy to forget that Bailey pitched in just two exhibitions before suffering his forearm strain.

Long story short, it's going to be at least two weeks before Bailey rejoins the A's bullpen. So it's up to Brian Fuentes and the other relievers to hold down the fort until then. Going hand in hand with that, the A's would really benefit from their starters continuing to pitch deep in games. Entering today, Oakland's starters were tied for fourth in the majors in innings pitched (172 2/3).

—Coco Crisp returns to the leadoff spot after missing three games with tightness in his left quadriceps. David DeJesus is sitting against left-hander Matt Harrison and DH Hideki Matsui was dropped to the sixth spot. Andy LaRoche, despite a shaky day defensively Saturday at second base, gets a start at third in place of Kevin Kouzmanoff.

The lineups:

A's – Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Jackson RF, Willingham LF, Suzuki C, Matsui DH, Ellis 2B, LaRoche 3B, Pennington SS; Gonzalez LHP.

Rangers – Kinsler 2B, Andrus SS, Young DH, Beltre 3B, Cruz LF, Napoli 1B, Murphy CF, Torrealba C, Moreland RF; Harrison LHP.

Dave Newhouse: A's may have new hometown hero

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist

BASEBALL LIVES UP to all of its endless prose and poetry when there is a hometown hero. There's nothing more personal for baseball fans than a homegrown prospect who grows into stardom right before their eyes.

The Oakland A's have been lucky this way with Rickey Henderson and Dave Stewart, two Oakland kids. And Dennis Eckersley, who grew up in Fremont, was born in Oakland.

Perhaps the A's have discovered a new hometown hero in pitcher Tyson Ross, who attended Northern Light School and Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, then went to UC Berkeley.

What makes a hometown hero even more heroic is a hometown heart.

And there was Ross returning Thursday to Northern Light in the Oakland hills to put on a baseball clinic for kids, and to relive his boyhood dream.

"It's a rare opportunity to pitch for the team I grew up cheering for," he said.

Ross' first sign of heroism occurred Wednesday in Anaheim. He pitched seven scoreless innings against the Los Angeles Angels as the A's won in 10 innings, 2-1. He walked one, gave up four hits, threw 76 pitches and looked masterful.

When sidelined pitcher Dallas Braden (shoulder tightness) returns to the starting rotation, Ross may head back to the bullpen or Triple-A ball in Sacramento. For the A's are deep in starting pitching.

However, at 24, the 6-foot-6, 240-pound Ross looks ready to start for somebody. And it would be a shame to trade away this hometown kid.

Ross revisited Northern Light last week after the school had offered his services in a raffle. He couldn't have been more at home with those kids if he lived in a tent on Northern Light's property.

"This school groomed me into who I am today," he said. "I still carry the values they taught me as a youngster."

Ross was both at ease and egoless Thursday, playing catch with a big grin, and gently offering advice on fundamentals, while dressed in shorts and a Cal sweatshirt.

Joining him was former A's and Giants pitcher Vida Blue, who has "adopted" Northern Light after finding it as enjoyable a school environment as Ross discovered as a student there in the 1990s.

Before the clinic, Ross and Blue sat in a classroom and talked pitching.

"When you get in this business," said Blue, "you find another gear in your system. That's what I noticed (Ross) has at the big-league level. That's where the confidence starts."

Blue counseled Ross about "getting over the anxiety of looking over your shoulder and seeing the manager has three guys warming up. You're allowed to pitch out of jams, and that means the manager has confidence in you."

Blue, 61, offered sage advice. He won 20 games three times, was a seven-time All-Star Game selection, and was the American League's Cy Young Award winner and Most Valuable Player in 1971.

"Just be yourself, that's all," he told Ross. "All that other stuff -- options to Sacramento -- you can't control anyway. It'll weigh on you if you let it."

Ross shook his head affirmatively.

"I hear what he's saying about that different gear," Ross said. "It's everything -- confidence in yourself, digging down deep to find that something extra."

While Blue threw fear-inducing heat, Ross relies on movement and control. If he does become a cult figure in Oakland, surely his uniform number will become marketable. For he wears 66, matching his height.

Would he covet hometown hero status?

"Oh, definitely," he said. "It would work out too perfect. I remember Rickey Henderson coming out to my Little League games every now and then and sitting in the stands. I thought that was the coolest thing ever."

Ross also "had faith the whole time" that the Cal baseball program would be saved, and he was right.

Something else that's pretty cool.

A's cruise to 7-2 win over Rangers

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

No offense to David DeJesus or Mark Ellis, who assumed leadoff duties during Coco Crisp's three-game absence, but the A's aren't at their best without Crisp atop their lineup.

Shaking off tightness in his left quadriceps, Crisp returned to the field Sunday and heavily involved himself in a 7-2 victory over the Rangers in front of 15,178 fans at the Coliseum and nearly as many seagulls.

"I probably could've stayed in the game in Anaheim," said Crisp, recalling his third-inning exit Tuesday, "but with a leg injury and me being a guy whose legs are a huge part of his game, I've got to make sure those bad boys are OK."

The bad boys seemed perfectly fine.

Crisp was at full speed when igniting rallies in each of the first two innings, doubling to begin a three-run first and singling home a run in the second. It was 6-zip through three, and pitcher Gio Gonzalez put it in cruise control to give the A's a 2-1 series lead entering today's matinee finale.

Eighteen days after Crisp took down his braids and sported a huge Afro, he did it again, this time with more success. He was 0-for-4 in a loss to Detroit on April 14, but he felt peer pressure to let out his hair before returning to the lineup Sunday.

"First off, it was exciting to have the run support," Gonzalez said. "Second of all, Coco's hair - wow. He was going with that ponytail look, and a couple of players got on him and said you gotta give the Afro a second chance, bring it back. I don't think we'll see braided hair for quite a while now. We'll see the 'Oscar Gamble.' "

Fine with Coco.

"The guys were saying, 'Man, you took all that time taking your braids out, you might as well let it flow,' " Crisp said. "So I did. It worked out. It was fun. Kept the guys loose. We were able to pull out the win. Not necessarily because of the Afro."

There were other reasons. Such as Gonzalez's 6 2/3 innings of two-run ball. Conor Jackson's latest offensive contributions, including a two-run double in the first. Two more hits from new daddy Kurt Suzuki, who's swinging from cloud nine since the birth of his daughter. A two-hit effort by Andy (another day, another position) LaRoche. And an RBI double by Hideki Matsui, who scored his 1,500th career run, counting his time in Japan.

By the end, the only question was whether the seagulls were going to let the game conclude.

When Ian Kinsler popped to center field in the ninth inning, it appeared Crisp nearly lost the ball in the birds. He said later it was the sun that bothered him. Not that the flock didn't present a concern. Or at least a bad memory.

Two years ago in Cleveland, Crisp charged a single off Shin-Soo Choo's bat in the 10th inning, hoping to throw out Mark DeRosa, but the ball hit a seagull before Crisp could make a play. DeRosa scored, and Crisp's Royals lost 4-3.

"I had a run-in with a seagull before in Cleveland," Crisp said, "so today I'm watching a seagull eat a potato chip, and three other ones swoop down and try to eat it. I was, like, 'C'mon, man, don't do this. We're up five runs here.' "

The A's won the game, and the birds allowed the players to exit before taking over the field.

A's Gio Gonzalez thrives with Dallas Braden back

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Gio Gonzalez opened the season with three strong starts, then struggled his next two - when his spiritual adviser was missing.

"I did blame **Dallas Braden** for the last two games," cracked Gonzalez, who apparently benefited from Braden's reappearance Sunday, surrendering two runs and five hits in 6 2/3 innings to beat the Rangers. "Today, having him on my side, it was great to have the corner guy in your ring."

Braden hasn't been with the team full time because of his shoulder inflammation, but he was there for Gonzalez's latest outing, providing the usual pregame pep talk.

"Not to ride the Dallas Braden banner," Gonzalez said, "but it's always fun to have Dallas around. It kind of changes momentum of the game. He's a fighter."

In Braden's absence, talks about opposing hitters with **Trevor Cahill** simply didn't cut it, Gonzalez said.

"Well, I'll tell you this: Cahill's definitely not a hype guy," Gonzalez said. " 'OK, Cahill, let me sit this one out. I'm good. Thanks anyway.' "

With Braden around, Gonzalez is 3-0 with a 1.05 ERA in four starts. Without Braden, he's 0-2 with a 6.55 ERA.

Briefly: The A's finally are talking about closer **Andrew Bailey**, on the disabled list all season with a forearm strain, throwing to hitters. Manager **Bob Geren** said the first session could come midweek. "I don't know how many appearances before I pitch in the big leagues. I'd say a few since I really haven't had spring training," said Bailey, who initially will throw all fastballs to hitters. He's throwing curves, but only on flat ground. ... Through his interpreter, **Hideki Matsui** called **Coco Crisp's** new do "awesome," adding, "I don't know if I want to have Afro hair." ... The Rangers are 7-11 following their 9-1 start. ... The A's are 9-2 when scoring four or more runs, 5-12 when scoring three or fewer.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Let the sun shine: The A's are 8-3 in day games, 6-11 at night. Nothing new. Last year, they were 35-21 during the day (second-best record in the AL) and 46-60 at night (fourth worst). Good thing for them today's scheduled first pitch is 12:35 p.m.

Drumbeat: Andrew Bailey eyes hitters

John Shea from the Coliseum . . . 5/1/2011 12:29pm

Closer Andrew Bailey finally can look ahead to throwing to someone other than a bullpen catcher. After his latest off-the-mound session in the bullpen, it became known that he'll soon face hitters. "That's the next step," said Bailey, who has been on the DL all season with a strained right forearm.

Bailey, who appeared in just two spring training games, will face hitters at least a couple of times before beginning a minor-league rehab assignment.

"I don't know how many appearances before I pitch in the big leagues. I'd say a few since I really haven't had spring training," Bailey said.

The latest bullpen session was a big step because, "It's more about baseball. It's not, 'How did that one feel?' It's more about, 'Was that a good pitch?' I kind of got over a hump in that regard."

Asked about possibly being overanxious to get back in a game, Bailey said, "I want to be out there. Trust me. It's nice to be around the guys and hanging out, but when that phone rings, you still get the adrenaline rush."

Coco Crisp, feeling he has overcome his tight left quadriceps, is back in the lineup for the first time since Tuesday.

The lineup: CF Crisp, 1B Barton, RF Jackson, LF Willingham, C Suzuki, DH Matsui, 2B Ellis, 3B LaRoche, SS Pennington. Gonzalez on the hill.

Gio, Coco, 'fro steal show as A's top Rangers

Gonzalez throws 6 2/3 sharp innings; Crisp cracks two hits in return

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com | 5/1/2011 9:24 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Center fielder Coco Crisp was back Sunday, and so was his '70s-style Afro.

His A's teammates hope both stick around for a while after Crisp ignited their offense in a 7-2 victory over the Texas Rangers.

After missing three games with a sore left quadriceps, Crisp returned to the top of A's lineup and led off the bottom of the first with a ringing double to left, sparking a three-run rally. He drove in a run in the second with a sharp single to left, making it 4-0 and giving left-hander Gio Gonzalez more than enough offensive support to pick up his third win and snap his two-game losing streak.

"First off, it was exciting to have run support," Gonzalez said. "And second off, Coco's hair, wow. He kind of like gave it a second chance. He was going with that ponytail look and a couple of the players got on him and said, 'You know what, you've got to give a second chance for that Afro. Bring it back.' And it worked. I don't think he's going to braid his hair for quite a while now. We're going to be seeing the Oscar Gamble for a while. Keep it, Coco. It's going to work for you."

Crisp said he'll keep the retro look for at least Monday's series finale against Texas, but if he keeps hitting the way he did Sunday, the Cleveland Indians may have to fear the 'fro when they come to town Tuesday for a three-game set.

"It feels good," Crisp said of being back in the lineup. "Obviously, that's what you want to do as a leadoff hitter is get on base. I guess I have to get a hit to get on base since I'm not drawing walks. But it definitely felt good after a few days off to come back and right off the bat get something going."

Crisp said that A's manager Bob Geren wasn't a huge fan of his big hair, but that could change if he keeps stinging the ball.

"Skipper, I think he's digging the ponytail," Crisp said. "The braids are the best, obviously, but ... the Afro, after I got the two hits today, I guess anything goes. As long as you're getting on base, you can go out there with a half-bald head or long hair or whatever.

"[Geren] was pushing me toward the ponytail, but the guys were like, 'Man, you spend all that time taking your braids out, you might as well let it flow. I did, and it worked. We were able to pull out the win, not necessarily because of the 'fro but because Gio pitched a great game and our hitters hit today.'"

The A's needed a win after suffering an 11-2 loss to the first-place Rangers on Saturday. Gonzalez needed a bounce-back game after two rough outings. After his first three starts this season, Gonzalez was 2-0 with a 0.47 ERA and looked all but unbeatable. Then he lost to the Red Sox and Angels, as his record fell to 2-2 and his ERA rose to 2.70. He gave up eight hits and four earned runs each time, lasting six innings against Boston and five against Los Angeles.

Gonzalez said a few video sessions with pitching coach Ron Romanick helped get him turned around. It also helped to have veteran pitcher Dallas Braden, his mentor and motivator, back in the dugout after missing Gonzalez's last two starts while rehabbing his injured throwing arm.

"He was definitely talking about more of a mental approach than it was mechanical for me," Gonzalez said of Romanick. "We did sit down and watch a little bit of video of my last couple starts then watched last year's video and put them together. We figured out what was going on. Again, it was more like staying back and slowing down the mechanics. My last two starts was more rushing.

"I did blame my last two starts on Dallas Braden, so he's getting credit for those," Gonzalez joked. "Today, having him on my side, it's always great to have the corner guy in the ring. It was fun to go out there and attack the zone and build confidence, especially with a team like this that was swinging hard. Any mistake, they would have definitely made you pay for it."

Gonzalez allowed just five hits and two runs over 6 2/3 innings. He struck out seven and walked just two, improving his record to 3-2. He improved his career record against Texas to 4-1 and his mark in Oakland against the Rangers to 3-0.

Gonzalez didn't allow a hit until the fourth inning when Texas shortstop Elvis Andrus' leadoff blooper down the right-field line fell in for a single in front of hard-charging right fielder Conor Jackson.

The Rangers didn't score until the sixth when Andrus doubled to left-center, went to third on a wild pitch and scored on Michael Young's single to left.

"He's always got good stuff," Rangers center fielder David Murphy said. "From the left side, he's tough crossing with his fastball. He's got velocity, and his curveball is as good of one as any left-hander in the league. You know what's coming, but he's tough. He just beat us. It's tough to get in a hole early and try to fight back against a guy like that."

Gonzalez gave the A's a scare in the fourth inning when he lunged to his left for Young's hot shot up the middle and wound up on the ground in pain. When he got up, Gonzalez stretched both arms into the air, then rubbed his left side, as trainer Nick Paparesta examined him. Gonzalez tossed a few pitches to see if he was OK, and then retired the next two Rangers to get out of the inning.

"He cramped up a little bit in the side," Geren said. "Sure, when a guy's pitching that well, any of our pitchers, you don't want to see anything like that. It's a little bit of a scary moment, but he reassured both Nick and myself that he was OK."

The A's jumped on Rangers starter Matt Harrison for three runs in the first inning. After Crisp led off with a double and Daric Barton worked a walk, Jackson ripped a double down the right-field line, bringing both runners home. Jackson tagged up and went to third on Josh Willingham's flyout to right field, and he scored when Kurt Suzuki grounded a single through the hole past Andrus.

The A's made it 4-0 in the second and knocked Harrison out of the game. With one out, Andy LaRoche doubled down the left-field line then moved to third on Cliff Pennington's groundout. Crisp then lined an RBI single to left, scoring LaRoche.

"It was a good day all around for us," LaRoche said. "Obviously Gio went out there and did a phenomenal job like he has most of the season. It was great to get some run support and get on them early. Instead of pitching from behind, we were pitching with the lead the whole game. That's great for our pitchers. It takes a lot of pressure off them. It's a big win for us after coming off a very lopsided loss yesterday."

The A's entered the game hitting an anemic .237, but with the calendar flipped to May, they seemed to hit the switch and put a charge into their offense. They pounded out 11 hits against the Rangers. Crisp, Jackson, Suzuki and LaRoche each had two-hit days. Both Jackson and Suzuki drove in a pair of runs. The A's didn't go deep, but they had five doubles, one each from Crisp, Jackson, LaRoche, Barton and Hideki Matsui, who also scored the 1,500th run of his career, spanning his years in Japan and the Major Leagues.

Crisp, of course, was the catalyst.

"He was really hot before he got hurt," LaRoche said. "He came back and it was like he didn't even miss a beat. Second pitch of the game, double. Next at-bat, first pitch, RBI. It's good to have him back."

Not to mention his Afro.

Bailey could face hitters this week

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Injured A's closer Andrew Bailey threw another bullpen session on Sunday, and it's likely that he'll throw to hitters by mid-week for the first time since suffering a right forearm injury on March 14 in a Spring Training game against Cleveland.

"Hitters are in the future, obviously," Bailey said before his teammates faced the Rangers. "That's the next step. I'll probably take a couple days off and see how it feels, maybe just go see some hitters with all fastballs. Still got to take it slow. It's coming along.

Bailey saw progress during the bullpen session.

"It felt really good," he said. "Each and every time, it's getting better. It's all good, it's coming along well. Now, I'm more concerned with baseball rather than health. That's kind of where I'm at. It's not every time I'm throwing it's, 'Well, how'd that one feel? How'd that one feel?' It's more about, 'Was that a good pitch?' I kind of feel I got over a hump in that regard."

Bailey said he has been throwing curveballs off flat ground and hopes to throw some off the mound in a week or so.

"I'm very optimistic," he said. "It's like a blown-out hamstring. You've just got to take your time and, one day, it just feels good. Now it finally feels good, and now it's start getting ready to face hitters and keep going with that. I don't really know how many appearances I'm going to need before I can pitch in the big leagues, but I would say a few, since I really haven't had a Spring Training."

Bailey has been on the 15-day disabled list since March 30, retroactive to March 15.

Barring a setback, Bailey's next step would be to throw off the mound to hitters taking batting practice.

"And then you would probably repeat that again with more of a game-type simulation to it," A's manager Bob Geren said. "The normal progression that we've used and had success using."

Crisp raps two hits in return to A's lineup

OAKLAND -- A's center fielder Coco Crisp and second baseman Mark Ellis returned to the starting lineup on Sunday for the club's 7-2 win over the Texas Rangers.

Crisp missed the past three games with a sore left quadriceps that he injured Tuesday in the third inning against the Angels while running to first base after hitting a ground ball. Ellis missed Saturday's game against Texas because of illness.

"He tested out yesterday and felt pretty good," A's manager Bob Geren said of Crisp. "Got the approval to play today. We're happy about that. He's been obviously a big part of our offense when he's out there. I'm happy that it was just a few days. Initially, that's what we thought, and it looks like we were correct."

Crisp singled in the first inning, pushing his hitting streak to five games. He scored later in the frame and finished the day 2-for-5 with an RBI..

Ellis, who batted seventh, said he was feeling much better Sunday than Saturday when he showed up at the Coliseum. He went 0-for-4, leaving three men on base.

"I had a little bit of it the night before, but when I got here, I thought I'd feel better," Ellis said before Sunday's game. "Just never got better."

Ellis said it was tough to miss Saturday's game, especially on a beautiful day with a good crowd when his club was facing the first-place Rangers.

"But it's a long season," Ellis said. "You've got to be right for the rest of the season. You don't want to set yourself back any further by doing something stupid. It was definitely something I had to do."

Worth noting

- Left-hander Dallas Braden has yet to throw since leaving his April 16 start against Detroit after five innings with left shoulder stiffness, but Geren said Braden will resume throwing soon.

"He's going to test it out pretty soon. I'm not sure exactly what day," Geren said. "In the short term, relatively soon, he's going to get out and test it out."

Braden is on the 15-day disabled list, retroactive to April 17.

- Utility infielder Andy LaRoche started at third base for the fifth time this season, in place of Kevin Kouzmanoff, going 2-for-3. This was LaRoche's 12th start of the season -- three at shortstop, three at second base, one at first base and five at third. Geren said he was going to have LaRoche start at third on Saturday but moved him to second when Ellis was scratched because of illness.

Kouzmanoff finished the weekend hitting just .208, but Geren said he has been showing signs of busting out of his slump. Before going hitless in back-to-back games against Texas, Kouzmanoff went 7-for-24 (.292) in his previous eight games.

"He's starting to come around," Geren said.

- The A's finished the month of April with an ERA of 2.79, tops in the Major Leagues. This marks the first time they've finished April with an ERA under 3.00 since 1989 (2.90). This is the A's lowest ERA through April since 1981 (1.89).
- A's designated hitter Hideki Matsui reached a milestone when he scored a run in the third inning of Sunday's game against Texas. It was Matsui's 1,500th career run, combining his games played in Japan and in the Major Leagues. Matsui doubled home Kurt Suzuki, moved to third on a fielder's choice and scored on Cliff Pennington's single.

Young hurlers look for rebounds in series finale

By Doug Miller / MLB.com | 5/1/2011 9:49 PM ET

Rangers lefty Derek Holland and A's righty Brandon McCarthy are young pitchers with a lot of upside, and they're both coming off starts they wish they could have back.

Holland, who is 1-1 with a 6.86 ERA in his last three starts, allowed five runs in five innings in his last outing against the Blue Jays. The Rangers ended up winning the game, 7-6, and he got a no-decision, but he said he understands what has gone awry lately and what he needs to do better -- re-establishing his fastball.

"I just got a little more aggressive with my soft stuff and they hurt me," Holland said of Toronto. "I need to make sure I play to my strengths."

McCarthy, who pitched for Texas from 2007-10, gave up a season-worst seven runs on 14 hits in a loss to the Angels in his last start. His 5 1/3 innings marked his shortest outing of the season. McCarthy also threw two wild pitches in that outing, his first since 2007 when he was with Texas.

McCarthy said he'll learn from what he did wrong in that game.

"I don't necessarily think I had the right approach with some of the guys, and that was kind of an issue facing the Angels," McCarthy said. "I don't know how much that would translate to another team. Just some pitches here and there that could have been better just in important counts and important situations.

"If I can make better pitches there, that game's completely different. It's not something I sat back and stayed up all night and worried about. It's just one you can cross off as a few bad pitches, a little bit of bad luck and just kind of one of those days."

Rangers manager Ron Washington said McCarthy's success prior to the Angels game doesn't surprise him.

"For me, the key to McCarthy is health," Washington said. "We had an idea he could pitch like this but we couldn't keep him healthy. Oakland has kept him healthy. He always had his fastball, a great changeup and a good breaking ball. We just couldn't keep him healthy. They've been able to keep him healthy. So far, he's doing a great job."

Rangers: Napoli taking advantage

- Of Mike Napoli's 12 hits in 2011, nine have gone for extra bases (three doubles, six homers), including the last seven (three doubles, four homers), since a third-inning single on April 9 (Game 2) in Baltimore. Napoli has three homers and seven RBIs in his last eight games.
- Shortstop Elvis Andrus is 7-for-17 in his last four games and has hit safely in seven consecutive games at .333 (10-for-30), matching his longest streak of the season (April 16-22). He has also hit safely in 13 of his last 14 games at .322 (19-for-59) to rise from .167 to .257.
- Third baseman Adrian Beltre is 11-for-37 (.297) in his last 10 games and is batting .313 (25-for-80) over his last 30 games to raise his average from .107 to .259. Beltre has four homers and 13 RBIs in his last 14 games.

A's: Just one away

- Second baseman Mark Ellis has recorded 200 career doubles and is one double away from tying Carney Lansford for eighth-most in Oakland history. Meanwhile, Hideki Matsui scored one run in Sunday's game and now has a total of 1,500 runs scored in his career between the United States and Japan.
- The A's have committed 25 errors this season, which is the second most in the Majors. They have committed at least one error in 12 of their last 18 games (16 total over that span) since going a season-high six games without an error.
- The A's are 4-4 in one-run games this year. They have had 12 of their 28 games this season decided by two runs or less and are 6-6 in those games. They are 3-3 in extra-inning games.

Worth noting

- Holland is 1-1 with a 2.63 ERA in six career games (three starts) against Oakland. His career ERA against Oakland is the lowest against any opponent he has faced more than once and over a full run lower than the next closest club (Seattle: 3.81 in seven games, three starts). Holland was 1-0 with a 1.15 ERA in three games (two starts) against Oakland in 2010 and was 1-0 with a 0.82 ERA as a starter.
- Daric Barton has played 387 games at first base in his career, tying Bruce Bochte for fourth-most in Oakland history.

Gio gets early help in A's win

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Conor Jackson had two hits and two RBIs, Gio Gonzalez pitched into the seventh inning to snap a three-start skid and the Athletics snapped out of their scoring slump in a 7-2 win over the Texas Rangers on Sunday.

Leadoff hitter Coco Crisp added two hits in his return to the lineup and Kurt Suzuki had two RBIs to help the A's score more than six runs for only the fourth time this season. They knocked out Rangers starter Matt Harrison (3-3) in the second inning.

Gonzalez (3-2) scattered five hits with seven strikeouts over 6 2-3 innings to win for the first time since April 9. The left-hander didn't give up a hit until the fourth inning and allowed only three runners past second base.

Michael Young and Ian Kinsler drove in runs for Texas, which committed three errors and lost for the fifth time in seven games.

Gonzalez held down the Rangers a day after Texas shelled Oakland ace Brett Anderson for seven runs and nine hits in five innings.

Despite falling awkwardly on the mound after Elvis Andrus hit a sharp grounder up the middle in the fourth, Gonzalez never ran into serious trouble and stayed unbeaten over his last four starts against the Rangers.

It was Oakland's offense — and Texas' shoddy defense — that made the biggest difference.

Crisp provided a spark after sitting out three games with a sore left quadriceps while Jackson continued his recent tear. Jackson is hitting .360 with four extra base hits and seven RBIs over his last seven games.

The Rangers didn't help themselves defensively, either. The three errors led to two unearned runs.

Crisp doubled on Harrison's second pitch of the game and scored on Jackson's two-run double down the right field line. Suzuki singled through a drawn-in infield to give the A's a 3-0 lead.

Crisp, back hitting leadoff in Oakland's lineup after missing three games with a sore left quadriceps, made it 4-0 with a two-out, RBI single in the second.

Harrison, who lasted just three innings in his previous start against Toronto, was gone two batters later after Daric Barton doubled and Jackson walked to load the bases.

Reliever Dave Bush struck out Josh Willingham to end the threat but the Rangers never recovered from the rough start.

Harrison's quick exit marked the third straight game in which he's struggled after opening the season with consecutive wins over the Red Sox, Orioles and Yankees.

Harrison's earned run average has spiked from 1.23 to 4.59 since then, and his loss to the A's was his first in four career starts against Oakland.

The A's added two runs off Bush in the third after Suzuki reached on a throwing error by shortstop Andrus to open the inning. Hideki Matsui followed with a run-scoring double then scored on Cliff Pennington's two-out soft single to center.

Gonzalez did the rest, holding the Rangers scoreless until the sixth when Andrus doubled, took third on a wild pitch and scored on Young's single to left.

Typical of Texas' day, first baseman Mike Napoli tumbled hard into the Rangers dugout while chasing Jackson's foul ball in the seventh but was unable to make the catch and lay on the ground for a few moments. He returned but Suzuki singled in Willingham two batters later to make it 7-2.

Notes: The run scored by Matsui in the third was the 1,500th of his career combined between Japan and America. ... The Rangers are 1-2 on this seven-game, two-city road trip ... Daric Barton played in his 387th game at first base for the A's, tying Bruce Bochte for fourth-most in franchise history. ... RHP Ryan Tucker threw a scoreless inning for Texas after making his Rangers debut on Friday.

Gio and 11-hit offense pound Rangers in 7-2 win

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 5/1/2011

(OAKLAND) -- The Oakland Athletics received a lot of good fortune today from the baseball gods, as they ripped five doubles on their way to a 7-2 win over the Texas Rangers.

Well, "ripped" might not be the right word.

Three of those doubles -- a flare into right field by Conor Jackson in the first inning, a seeing-eye double down the left-field line by Andy LaRoche in the second inning and a beautifully-splayed slapper down the third-base line by Hideki Matsui in the third -- were hardly ripped, but they did a lot of damage as the A's scored six runs in the first three innings to salt this one away early.

Coco Crisp, sporting his Oscar Gamble hairdo again, led off the first for Oakland with a truly-ripped double to left-center field, and the A's never looked back. They scored four runs off Texas starter Matt Harrison to chase him in the second, and overall, Oakland collected 11 hits while also benefitting from three Rangers' errors.

Meanwhile, Gonzalez worked 6 2/3 innings, giving up only two runs while striking out seven for his third win of the year. He retired the first six batters of the game, didn't give up a hit until the fourth inning and threw 105 pitches before giving way to Brad Ziegler in the seventh.

Gio also got offensive support from Kurt Suzuki's two hits and two RBI. In these three games against Texas -- his first appearances since the birth of his first child last week -- Suzuki has four hits and four runs batted in.

With the win, the A's moved back to within two games of first place, jointly held now by the Rangers and the Los Angeles Angels. Oakland will have a chance to win its third game of this four-game set tomorrow afternoon at the newly-renamed Overstock.com Coliseum.

It also gets the A's back to .500 again on the year, a place they knew all too well last year -- having been at that plateau a team-record 33 times during the 2010 season -- and seem to be re-visiting again a lot this year (seven times already).

Oakland truly could use a win Monday to get up on the right side of that even ledger.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

First-place Cats fall in Vegas, return home

By Veronika Tafoya / Sacramento River Cats

Sunday marked the first day of a new month and the end of a four-game win streak by the River Cats, who fell to Las Vegas 9-3 at Cashman Field. The River Cats, who have won 12 of 17 games, return home Monday for an eight-game homestand.

The 51s, desperate to break a 10-game losing skid, took a 4-0 lead in the second inning.

River Cats right-hander Guillermo Moscoso loaded the bases in the second inning as Adam Loewen and Chris Woodward singled and Jonathan Diaz walked with one out. Moscoso then gave up a hit to Scott Podsednik that scored Loewen and Woodward, leaving two runners on with two outs. The battery continued as Brett Lawrie smacked a triple that bounced off the left-field wall and scored Diaz and Podsednik, ending the second inning with Las Vegas leading 4-0.

Some of that offensive hunger rubbed off on the River Cats by the next inning. Eric Sogard hit a solo home run to right field, the first of the game. Tolleson drew a walk, then advanced to second on a base hit from Matt Carson, but the rally fell short with a strikeout by Jai Miller.

The 51s were dead set on moving runners through the bases, with Travis Snider setting the example in the third. Snider singled on a grounder, then snatched second base as Chris Woodward was at the plate. Woodward later hit a single that sent Snider to third. Finally, a fly ball double by Budde brought home Snider and Woodward, pushing Las Vegas' lead even further to 6-1.

Lawrie doubled in the fourth, then moved to third on a wild pitch by Moscoso with Dewayne Wise at the plate. Lawrie later scored on a Wise single. Wise was caught stealing second on a throw from catcher Josh Donaldson to end inning.

River Cats reliever Joe Bateman stepped in during the sixth, hoping to add on to his 2.0 perfect innings pitched Saturday. Things didn't fare as well for Bateman on Sunday, as walked Diaz, gave up a single to Podsednik and allowed a run by Diaz off of a Lawrie single that increased the 51s lead to 8-1.

The River Cats offense seemed to be cursed by pop outs, hitting five by the top of the sixth. Las Vegas starting pitcher Brett Cecil retired 10 of 11 batters halfway through the sixth inning.

Adrian Cardenas, playing left field for the day, got a solo home run on a 0-1 pitch, and Anthony Recker followed up with a double in the seventh inning. Sogard singled to score Recker and bring in the third run of the game for the River Cats.

After giving up those two runs, Cecil was replaced by 51s reliever Danny Farquhar who threw the last pitch to get Tolleson out and bring another Cats' rally to a close. Cecil pitched 6.2 innings, walked two batters and gave up three runs, two of which were solo home runs, and had five strikeouts.

Joey Devine threw a perfect inning to replace Bateman in the seventh. Vinnie Chulk continued to keep the 51s offense on ice in the eighth.

Sacramento ends the four-game series with three wins over Las Vegas. The River Cats will kick off an eight-game home stand series, starting with four games against the Salt Lake City Bees, on Monday at 7:05 p.m.

Missions continue RockHounds' woes

Midland Reporter Telegram

SAN ANTONIO -- The San Antonio Missions broke a late game tie with the Midland RockHounds with three runs in the seventh and two more in the eighth for an 11-7 victory Sunday at Nelson Wolff Stadium.

The RockHounds had a 6-5 lead before San Antonio tied it in the bottom of the fifth on an RBI single by James Darnell.

It was tied at 6 in the seventh before the Missions' potent offense went to work against Paul Smyth (1-1). It all started when Kyle Blanks reached on a throwing error by shortstop Grant Green. Then after James Darnell and Cody Decker singled to load the bases, Vince Belnome singled against RockHounds reliever Trey Barham to score Blanks. Ali Solis then doubled to bring in two more runs for the Missions for a 9-6 advantage.

The Missions added two more insurance runs in the eighth. Blake Tekotte scored on a double steal with Sawyer Carroll. After Carroll reaches third on a throwing error by catcher Yusuf Carter, he scores on a throwing error by third baseman Stephen Parker trying to throw out Darnell at first base on a grounder.

Kent Walton hit a solo homer in the ninth for the 'Hounds.

No Sweep for Stockton

By Kirstie Haruta / Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports were looking to sweep a three-game series against the Bakersfield Blaze today, and for seven innings, it seemed like the likely outcome. But the Blaze wouldn't go down so easily. They took the lead late in the game, winning it a close 8-7.

Starting pitcher for the Ports Gary Daley, Jr. held the Blaze hitless through four innings, throwing only 35 pitches in that time.

The Ports, facing Blaze starter J.C. Sulbaran, took the lead in the bottom of the 3rd. Catcher Juan Nunez singled to left-center and was brought in on a home run by shortstop Dusty Coleman.

The Ports' bats kept working in the bottom of the 4th. Left-fielder Myrio Richard hit a single to centerfield, but got himself tagged out at second. After designated hitter Mitch LeVier flew out, right-fielder Rashun Dixon walked, and Nunez singled. Second baseman Michael Gilmartin brought them both in on a triple to centerfield. Sulbaran would give up five runs on six hits in 3.2 innings before being replaced on the hill by Doug Salinas. Gilmartin would score on a wild pitch to centerfielder Michael Choice, giving the Ports a 5-0 lead before the inning was over.

In the top of the 5th, right-fielder Stephen Hunt broke up Daley, Jr.'s no-hitter with a double to left field. First baseman Chris Richburg then reached first on a throwing error by Gil. Hunt would score on a single by catcher Mark Fleury.

In the bottom half, the Ports would get that run back. Gil hit a lead-off triple to right-center, followed by a walk for first baseman Anthony Aliotti. Richard grounded into a double play, but it allowed Gil to score. LeVier doubled to right-field, but was left on base after Dixon struck out.

Daley threw through the 6th inning, giving up just one run on two hits, before Max Peterson took to the mound. After a scoreless 6th inning for both teams, and a scoreless 7th for the Blaze, Tyree Hayes took the mound for Bakersfield, Salinas having given up one run on two hits in 2.1 innings. The Ports would then gain one more run on a solo home run by Aliotti - his first of the season.

Going into the top of the 8th with a 7-1 lead, the Ports were faced with a huge offensive effort from the Blaze. Centerfielder Welinton Ramirez walked to start the inning, followed by back-to-back singles by left-fielder Josh Fellhauer and shortstop Brodie Greene, the latter allowing Ramirez to score. Designated hitter Yasmani Grandal would fly out, bringing up third baseman Eric Campbell, who hit a three-run home run to center. With the Blaze now only trailing 7-5, Scott Deal would come in to replace Peterson after his 1.1 innings, where he gave up four runs on three hits. Deal would strike out second baseman Henry Rodriguez, and give up one more single to Hunt, before striking out Richburg to end the inning.

But the damage had been done, and the Ports gained no extra runs in the bottom of the 8th. The Blaze kept fighting in the top of the 9th. In a two-out rally, Fellhauer singled to right field, and Greene drew a walk. Grandal singled, allowing Fellhauer to score. Campbell was then hit by a pitch to load the bases for Rodriguez, who brought Greene and Grandal in on a single, giving the Blaze the 7-8 lead. Jeff Lyman came in to replace Deal, who had pitched 1.1 innings, giving up three runs on four hits. Lyman got Hunt to fly out to end the inning.

With a last chance to take back the lead, Choice struck out swinging, bringing Gil to the plate. Gil singled, and Conner Crumbliss came in to pinch-run. Aliotti drove one to left field, but was playable by Fellhauer for the second out. Richard singled to right field to keep things alive, but the game ended on a deep fly out to centerfield by LeVier, and the 7-8 score in favor of the Blaze stood.

The Ports head to Inland Empire next to take on the 66ers in a four game series. RHP Murphy Smith will take the mound tomorrow to start the series.

Bees Win 4-3

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (16-6) scored three runs in the sixth inning to earn a 4-3 win over the Peoria Chiefs (12-11) before 476 fans at Community Field on Sunday afternoon.

The Chiefs opened the scoring with two runs in the fifth inning. 1B Richard Jones (1-4) hit a solo home run to lead off the inning against Burlington RHP Josh Bowman. 3B Elliot Soto (1-3) followed with a single and moved to second base on a single by C Sergio Burreuel (1-3). 2B Pierre LePage (1-3) reached on a fielder's choice and Soto advanced to third base. He scored on a single up the middle by SS Arismendy Alcantara (1-3) to make it 2-0.

The Bees pushed a run across home plate in the fifth inning. SS Yordy Cabrera (2-3) singled and LF Douglas Landaeta (2-3) doubled.

In the sixth inning 3B Tony Thompson (1-4) hit a two-out double and RF Jose Rivero (1-3) walked. Cabrera hit a two-run double to give the Bees a 3-2 lead.

LF Douglas Landaeta (2-3) hit an RBI single to score Cabrera to give the Bees a 4-2 lead.

RHP Chris Mederos (3-1) pitched two scoreless innings to pick up the win.

The Bees and Chiefs continue their series on Monday evening at 6:30 p.m. It's Dollar Monday Presented by Miller Lite. Adult general admission tickets are just \$2 and senior/student general admission tickets, hot dogs, popcorn, and cans of Pepsi

products are just \$1 sponsored by Miller Lite and Everything That Rocks KQ92. The pitching match-up is as follows: RHP Robinson Lopez (1-0, 5.29) for Peoria against RHP Tyler Vail (0-0, 0.00) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 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.