

A's News Clips, Tuesday, May 3, 2011

Hideki Matsui's homer wins it for A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 5/3/2011

Left fielder Josh Willingham was busy demolishing a Gatorade bar, so he didn't witness the biggest moment of the A's season as it began unfolding Monday.

No matter.

His ears told him all there was to know about Hideki Matsui's walkoff homer that beat the Texas Rangers 5-4.

"I took a bite of my bar and heard the crack," Willingham said. "I looked up and saw the ball and knew it was a home run."

Matsui, the man known as "Godzilla," ended things quickly in the bottom of the 10th, crushing the first pitch from left-hander Darren Oliver deep over the right-field wall.

It marked Matsui's biggest highlight in an A's uniform, and it put an exclamation point on a morale-boosting four days for his club, which moved within a game of first place in the A.L. West. The Rangers and the Angels share the division lead.

The A's took three of four from Texas, the defending American League champion, and they did it Monday with a weapon the Rangers themselves are better known for -- the long ball.

The A's connected for three homers -- one from Kurt Suzuki, a tying blast from Willingham in the eighth and Matsui's no-doubter in the 10th, the team's first walkoff homer of 2011.

Matsui was mobbed by jubilant teammates as he crossed home plate.

"Definitely the most exciting game of the year," A's manager Bob Geren said. "I've never seen this group this animated after a win. I hope they didn't hit their head on the dugout. That ball came off the bat, and it was loud."

Few people were present to experience the excitement, however.

An announced crowd of 9,193 showed up to the Coliseum on a rare Monday afternoon game -- the smallest turnout for an A's home game since they drew 8,874 on May 3, 2010. That also came against the Rangers.

On Monday, there was plenty of evidence pointing toward an A's defeat.

Starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy committed two errors -- both on bunt plays -- that contributed to four unearned runs for Texas. The A's left nine men on base and finished 1 for 12 with runners in scoring position.

But more so than in any other game this season, they found a variety of ways to cross home plate.

Cliff Pennington executed a safety squeeze that scored David DeJesus in the second inning.

Willingham smoked a double off the wall in right-center in the fifth to put runners on second and third. Matsui followed with an RBI ground out that pulled the A's to within 4-3.

Willingham later hit a hanging changeup from Arthur Rhodes deep into the left-field seats to make it 4-4 in the eighth.

McCarthy left after six innings, and five A's relievers combined for four shutout innings.

That included Grant Balfour's high-wire act in the top of the 10th, when he walked the bases loaded but struck out pinch hitter Yorvit Torrealba to strand the runners.

Matsui, hitting just .242, connected for his third homer of the season -- and first in front of the home fans -- to end it.

"Timing-wise, it might have been a little late to hit (a homer) at home," Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon. "But to be able to hit it in that fashion and help the team win, I'm just happy."

The A's moved back over .500 at 15-14, and McCarthy noted the significance of taking three of four from the Rangers, considered the A.L. West favorites by many entering the season.

"Hopefully it takes some of the edge off them in our mind, that we can stay with anybody as long as we do the things we're supposed to."

Oakland A's update: Dallas Braden tests shoulder; doctor visit might be next

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Left-hander Dallas Braden tested his injured shoulder by playing catch Monday, but the session did not go well.

Braden was not around to address the media after the A's 5-4 victory over the Texas Rangers, but general manager Billy Beane spoke briefly.

"It went so-so. 'So-so' would be kind," Beane said about Braden's throwing. "He's probably going to contact the doctor."

Braden has been sidelined since leaving an April 16 start with a shoulder problem. He was examined April 20 by Dr. Lewis Yocum, who diagnosed him with inflammation but no structural damage.

That was relatively good news, but it appears Braden isn't close to returning to the starting rotation.

Braden didn't return a phone call seeking comment.

Tyson Ross, who pitches Tuesday night's series opener against the Cleveland Indians, has made two starts filling in for Braden. Ross is likely to stay in the rotation for a while, particularly if he pitches as well as he did Wednesday against the Los Angeles Angels, when he threw seven shutout innings.

The A's played Monday's game in the afternoon partly to accommodate the Rangers' travel schedule, and partly as an experiment to see how many fans would come out.

The announced crowd of 9,193 was Oakland's smallest of the season. Most of their Monday home games are played at night, and those also typically draw poorly.

"I guess you can't really expect a huge crowd on a Monday considering most people are working," third baseman Andy LaRoche said. "But the fans we do have out there, I give them credit. They're great the whole game."

Hideki Matsui, who hit a game-winning homer to beat Texas, responded tongue-in-cheek when asked what it was like playing in front of such a small crowd.

"After today's performance, hopefully we'll have 100 more people coming to the game tomorrow," Matsui said.

Center fielder Coco Crisp, who returned Sunday after missing three games with a quadriceps injury, was held out again as a precaution.

"It's just a day off," Crisp said. "I'm not quite 100 percent."

Closer Andrew Bailey (strained forearm) will face hitters for the first time Wednesday.

The Rangers might be gone, but the A's don't catch a break with the Indians coming in. Cleveland brings a major league-best 19-8 record into the three-game series.

Inman: Hideki Matsui finally makes impact for Oakland A's

By Cam Inman, Oakland Tribune columnist

Hideki Matsui found a way to fill at least one seat Monday in the Coliseum.

It was in the near-empty bleachers beyond right field, where he sent a first-pitch fastball for a game-winning home run.

"After today's performance, hopefully we'll have 100 more people coming to the game tomorrow," said Matsui, whose solo blast in the 10th capped the A's 5-4 comeback win over the Texas Rangers before a season-low crowd of 9,193.

If he keeps hitting home runs, Matsui will give fans a reason to return all summer, and wasn't that the A's sales pitch for this season, anyhow?

Up until one swing at this rare Monday matinee in Oakland, Matsui had not pumped up the heart of the A's order.

Up until that home run, he had gone 164 at-bats between home runs in The O.C. (aka the Oakland Coliseum/Overstock.com Coliseum).

"We know what he could bring," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We've seen him, unfortunately, on the other side beat us.

"He means a lot to our lineup in terms of his presence. Having a veteran presence in the lineup makes everyone around him comfortable."

And how's that working out for the A's, exactly? Only utility infielder Andy LaRoche has a batting average over .300.

Matsui entered Monday with a .245 batting average and two home runs. In batting practice, he sent only two pitches over the right-field wall, barely.

"As far as batting practice," Matsui said, "don't focus on hitting home runs."

Neither do most A's in actual games. They are a power-challenged club that is led by its top-notch pitching staff.

But the A's got three home runs on a rare, non-holiday Monday matinee, solo shots also coming from Kurt Suzuki in the fourth and Josh Willingham in the eighth.

"When Josh hit the home run and we tied up the game, it became a must-win situation," Matsui said.

Matsui entered his final at-bat 0 for 4, having grounded out four times. His batting average resembled a light-hitting shortstop rather than a designated hitter with a home-run legacy that spans the globe.

"I don't know if today's at-bat will be a key to a turnaround. That remains to be seen," Matsui said. "I'm happy I was able to help my team."

That help came in the form of his 496th career home run -- combining his totals from 10 years in Japan and nine seasons in Major League Baseball.

He certainly hasn't forgotten those Japanese roots, especially after last month's devastating earthquake and tsunami.

"Hopefully through today's performance, it brought energy, hope and positive feelings to the people who were victims in Japan," Matsui said.

That answer came in response to a question posed by the 20-some Japanese media covering his every move.

Another off-the-field question was posed to Matsui: In light of his earlier stint with the New York Yankees, what was his reaction to Osama bin Laden's death?

"I don't think I'm in the place to really comment about that," Matsui responded.

Of all American sports venues that hosted games Monday, it's hard to imagine one as light on patriotism as the Coliseum. The national anthem came from a recorded version by Huey Lewis and The News. No chants of "USA! USA!" rang out, nor any rendition of "God Bless America."

But the crowd -- which looked about half of its announced 9,193 -- soaked up the sun while also rooting and heckling like any other fans across America.

The final celebration came at home plate, where Matsui got mobbed by teammates until Geren hunted him down for a hug.

"To have a game like this, and walk off in style like that, it helps in the standings, it helps psychologically and it helps in a lot of different ways," Geren said. "With Hideki's one swing, it put a great finish to the game and series."

For the A's sake, that ending better be the start of more heroics from Matsui and an offense that needs to break out more often.

Chin Music: Coco Crisp out of the lineup again, A's say it's precautionary

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/2/2011 12:08pm

It's a perfect afternoon for baseball at the Coliseum. I have no idea what kind of crowd will show up today, a rare non-holiday Monday afternoon game. But it's a potentially big game for the A's no matter how many people witness it. Taking a four-game series from Texas, the AL West favorites, would provide a healthy dose of momentum. And that could be helpful considering the surprising Cleveland Indians -- with a majors-best 19-8 record -- roll into town Tuesday for a three-game series.

--After a big game yesterday, Coco Crisp is back out of the lineup. A's manager Bob Geren said the team is treating Crisp's sore quadriceps carefully. "We're just being cautious with him," Geren said. "We're monitoring how the game goes. He had high exertion yesterday with a lot of running, and we have to be cautious." With a night game tomorrow following today's day game, Geren said the thinking was that Crisp could get a bit of extra rest and be ready for Tuesday's series opener with Cleveland. Crisp played down the situation. "I'm perfectly fine," he told me. "It's just a day off. I'm not quite 100 percent." Geren added that Crisp was available off the bench if needed.

Does it concern you that Crisp is sitting again? Judging by how he played yesterday, the leg can't be bothering him too much. If occasional rest now is going to help him be ready to play regularly for the long haul, it's probably a smart idea.

--David DeJesus is playing center field in place of Crisp, with Conor Jackson getting another start in right. I asked Geren if he considered playing Ryan Sweeney in center since DeJesus has struggled a bit hitting. Geren said Sweeney would get some playing time soon with the A's facing a string of right-handed starters coming up.

--Other injury updates: Andrew Bailey will pitch to hitters for the first time Wednesday, and Dallas Braden played catch this morning, but we didn't get a report on him yet.

The lineups:

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

Rangers -- Andrus SS, Moreland 1B, Young 2B, Beltre DH, Cruz RF, Murphy LF, Davis 3B, Teagarden C, Borbon CF; Holland LHP.

Hideki Matsui's homer lifts A's over Texas 5-4

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Right off the bat, Hideki Matsui's blast to lead off the 10th inning left no doubt that it was heading out of the park.

"If you saw it or if you heard it, you knew it was going to be way back," A's infielder Andy LaRoche said. "We were all bum-rushing the field."

Matsui smoked the first pitch he got from left-hander Darren Oliver into the seats above the scoreboard in right to give Oakland a 5-4 win over Texas and a victory in the four-game series against the Rangers.

Texas remained tied for the division lead with the Angels, who lost at Boston. The A's are a game back.

"Obviously, it's nice to win it hitting a walk-off home run, but they are going to be formidable rivals going down the season," Matsui said of the Rangers through translator Roger Kahlon. "I'm happy to be able to come out with a win."

Matsui's drive, No. 496 of his career combined between the major leagues and Japan, was the first walk-off homer of the season for Oakland, and it was Matsui's first home run of the season at the Coliseum.

"Timing-wise, it might have been a little bit late to hit one at home," Matsui said.

As far as the A's were concerned, the timing was perfect. Oakland fought back from a 4-2 deficit to tie the game in the eighth on Josh Willingham's home run, and then the team endured the tension of the top of the 10th, when Grant Balfour walked the bases loaded only to end the inning by striking out pinch-hitter Yorvit Torrealba.

"He beared down when he needed to, and Matsui wasted no time in getting us home," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said.

Suzuki hit Oakland's first home run of the day, a solo shot on an 0-2 pitch from lefty Derek Holland in the fourth inning. It was an unusual day for the A's, who entered the game second-to-last in the league in homers with 13 - they hit three out, but also bunted a ton.

Cliff Pennington's safety squeeze in the second inning sent in David DeJesus with Oakland's first run. Pennington also bunted in the fourth, LaRoche had a bunt single the same inning, and Mark Ellis had a sacrifice in the ninth.

"We scored in a variety of ways," Willingham said. "Penny laid down a great bunt. We hit three home runs, but it's important to score those kinds of runs. We're not going to hit three home runs a lot. But it was nice to do that."

Willingham leads the A's with five homers and 16 RBIs, Matsui has three homers and 15 RBIs, none bigger than Monday's.

"Fantastic," Willingham said. "To come back and win it like that was very, very exciting."

"I've never seen this group as animated," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "Guys were jumping high - I hope they didn't hit their heads on the dugout roof."

"This just lets (Texas) know what we can do. We respect their talent, and they respect our talent, but to walk off in style like that helps us in the standings and helps us psychologically. ... A big boost in a lot of ways."

Oakland A's starter helps Rangers with errors

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Brandon McCarthy allowed no earned runs Monday against his former team - but he did give up four unearned runs, all the result of his own two errors.

McCarthy misplayed two bunts, one in the third inning and one in the fifth, and the Rangers scored twice in each inning.

"I don't expect that out of myself," McCarthy said. "If someone's going to give you an out, you've got to take them."

McCarthy allowed six hits and two walks and he struck out four in six innings. The A's bullpen provided four scoreless innings, allowing only one hit in the process (along with **Grant Balfour's** three walks).

"That's what you need when the starter doesn't go too deep and doesn't do too good a job," McCarthy said.

Braden's day not good: Dallas Braden played catch Monday for the first time since coming out of an April 16 start with left shoulder inflammation, and general manager **Billy Beane** indicated the session did not go as well as hoped.

"So-so," Beane said. "And so-so would be kind."

Beane said that Braden probably will be contacting Dr. **Lewis Yocum**, whom he visited last month, about further tests.

Hot in Cleveland: The Indians arrive in town for a three-game series that opens tonight. After finishing last year with 93 losses, Cleveland has the majors' best record (19-8). The Indians entered the day leading the league in runs, with 146, but by the end of the game in Oakland on Monday, the Rangers had tied them.

Briefly: After going 2-for-5 Sunday, **Coco Crisp** was off Monday, a precaution to make sure that the tightness in his left quadriceps does not return. "We need him for the long term," said manager **Bob Geren**, who anticipates that Crisp will be in tonight's lineup. ... **Andrew Bailey** (forearm strain) will throw a simulated inning, facing hitters, Wednesday. He's likely to do so at least one more time before going on a rehab assignment.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Remains of the day: The Monday day game drew a season-low 9,193. After hitting a walk-off homer, Hideki Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon, "Hopefully, after today's game, there will be 100 more people coming to the game, maybe."

Drumbeat: A's outfielder Coco Crisp off as precaution; Dallas Braden plays catch

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 5/2/2011 12:05pm

Coco Crisp did a lot running yesterday, so he's not in the lineup today as a precaution - he's just coming off some left quad tightness, and the team wants to make sure he's healthy for the longterm. It's sort of a maintenance day, as they say in hockey (since that's what I've been covering lately).

Crisp told me that he believes he's available if needed, and manager Bob Geren said it will depend on game situations. I got the impression Geren would like to stay away from Crisp if he can, though - he mentioned that tomorrow's game is not until the evening, so he'd basically be off from the end of yesterday's day game to tomorrow night.

Dallas Braden was going to play catch this morning for the first time since going on the DL with left shoulder inflammation, and it sounds as if he did so before any of us, Geren included, went out on the field, so there's no official word yet on how it went. They would not allow him to throw the ball at all if he wasn't discomfort-free, though. I'll get an update after the game and it certainly will be in tomorrow's A's notebook in the paper.

Here's the lineup: Ellis 2b, Barton 1b, Jackson rf, Willingham lf, Matsui dh, Suzuki c, DeJesus cf, LaRoche 3b, Pennington ss

I asked Geren how he sees the third-base spot, since LaRoche is swinging the bat well, and he responded by saying that LaRoche will continue to play all over. Considering that Mark Ellis isn't hitting so well, either, that's not too crazy, and Cliff Pennington isn't lighting it up, either. The difference at third is that Kevin Kouzmanoff also is struggling defensively.

Going into the season, David DeJesus was considered the other leadoff possibility if Crisp wasn't in the lineup, but the A's are facing a left-hander, Derek Holland, and DeJesus, too, has gotten off to a slow start (.222). I'd say that once he gets it going, it's safe to assume he'd get some starts in the leadoff spot were Crisp unavailable.

Monday day game, the oddities of the baseball schedule. I cannot imagine there will be many people here. It's almost game time, and it looks like a couple thousand so far.

Godzilla's walk-off shot gives A's series win

Willingham goes deep in eighth to tie; Matsui delivers in 10th

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 5/2/2011 8:55 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Just over 9,000 fans wandered into the Coliseum gates for a rare matinee showing between the A's and Rangers on Monday.

Some were gone by the time the 10th inning rolled around more than three hours later, but Hideki Matsui is hoping they'll all be back the next day, after the designated hitter launched a walk-off shot off Texas reliever Darren Oliver in the bottom of the 10th inning to secure a 5-4 A's victory.

"Hopefully there will be 100 more people coming to the game tomorrow," Matsui joked, through translator Roger Kahlon, after the win.

Matsui's shot to right field -- his third of the season but his first at the A's home park -- came on the first pitch from Oliver, against whom he owned a 1-for-10 career mark. It followed Josh Willingham's game-tying long ball in the eighth off another grizzled veteran, Arthur Rhodes.

"I've faced [Oliver] several times in the past, so I have a pretty good idea of what kind of pitches he throws, so I was looking for a fastball, and I pretty much got it where I expected," Matsui said.

"I was trying to get ahead with a fastball," Oliver said. "That's pretty much it. The old guys let us down today. More often than not we're going to get the job done, but today wasn't our day."

Rather, it was a day for Oakland to celebrate what manager Bob Geren deemed "the most exciting game of the year," as he watched his club take three of four from the defending American League champions while improving to 15-14 on the season and moving within 1 1/2 games of first place in the AL West.

"I've never seen this group that animated and excited after a win," Geren said. "Guys were just jumping high. I hope they didn't hit their head on the dugout. That ball came off the bat and it was loud. That was a thrill."

"If you saw it or heard it, you just knew," said third baseman Andy LaRoche, who enjoyed a 2-for-4 day. "It was a no-doubter. I was the first one on the field, jumping up and down."

"Matsui wasted no time in getting us that win," Kurt Suzuki added.

It marked the club's first walk-off of the season and the third of Matsui's career. The Japanese slugger, who scored the 1,500th run of his career (between the U.S. and Japan) just one day prior, narrowed in on the 500 home run mark with Monday's game-changing blast, his 496th.

LaRoche commented that even though he hasn't experienced as much communication with Matsui as he'd like, "It was the most excited I've seen him so far this season."

"He doesn't get excited too often," LaRoche said. "Just normally goes about his business."

The thrilling win wiped away a two-error day from A's starter Brandon McCarthy, whose miscues led to four unearned runs in an otherwise respectable six-inning performance that included six hits, two walks and four strikeouts against his former team.

McCarthy's pair of errors gave Oakland 27 on the season, which ties the club with Houston for most in the Majors, and almost prevented the A's from claiming the four-game set.

"It was an up-and-down day, pretty much a story of a few bad pitches in places where I shouldn't have made them," the right-hander said. "The errors, if someone is giving you an out, you gotta take them. Outside of that, for not really having a great outing, the way the guys battled back and got runs was really nice to see. I think we needed a win like that."

McCarthy was handed a 1-0 lead in the second thanks to an RBI squeeze bunt off the bat of Cliff Pennington against Texas starter Derek Holland. But he gave that lead right back in the third, when he surrendered a leadoff walk to Taylor Teagarden and bobbed a sacrifice bunt from Julio Borbon to put two runners on base.

An Elvis Andrus forceout wiped away Teagarden, and another forceout from Mitch Moreland put Borbon on third and Moreland on first with two outs. Michael Young doubled both of his teammates home as the Rangers took a 2-1 lead.

Suzuki, swinging with a newfound momentum following the birth of his daughter, Malia, knotted the game at 2 in the fourth with a solo shot to left field. The A's catcher is now 6-for-16 with two home runs and five RBIs since being reinstated from the paternity leave list on Friday.

Texas pulled away in the fifth by posting a two-spot -- aided by another error from McCarthy, this time on a bad throw -- but an RBI groundout from Matsui in the bottom half of the frame narrowed the Rangers' lead to one.

Willingham forced a tie in the eighth thanks to his fifth long ball of the season -- a leadoff shot to left field off Rhodes -- and finished the day 2-for-4. The A's outfielder has hit safely in seven of his past nine games and is batting .333 with two home runs and six RBIs over that span.

Oakland utilized six pitchers in the effort, including righty Grant Balfour (2-1), who was ultimately awarded the win after escaping a bases-loaded jam -- the result of three walks -- in the top of the 10th.

"I thought Grant was outstanding today," McCarthy said. "He did a great job pitching out of that."

Monday's effort, which brought about multiple ways of scoring, not only sent a message to the A's about their own talents, but sent one to the Rangers as well.

"It lets them know what we can do," Geren said. "I think they obviously respect our talent, and we respect them -- as they are the defending AL champions -- but to have this type of game and walk off in style like that definitely helps in a lot of different ways -- psychologically and in the standings."

"I think we're starting to play division games that we need to win," Willingham said. "These are series we need to win. Hopefully we see dividends of this win in September."

Braden to see doctor again about shoulder

Left-hander has less-than-favorable results after playing catch

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Dallas Braden appeared to take a step forward in his rehab on Monday by playing catch for the first time, but the results of that outing weren't favorable.

The lefty now appears geared for another doctor's visit for further examination to receive clearer answers about a stiff shoulder that put him on the 15-day disabled list on April 18.

"He had some discomfort throwing, and we will probably send him back to see [Lewis] Yocum," A's general manager Billy Beane said.

Braden initially paid a visit to Yocum, a noted orthopedic surgeon, in Los Angeles on April 20, when he was told he suffered no structural damage and wouldn't need to undergo a surgical procedure.

Rather, the hurler was encouraged to simply rest and rehab to calm inflammation in his shoulder. Braden has been doing just that, including range-of-motion exercises, and had noted gradual improvement, which led to Monday's unsuccessful session of catch.

Braden, 27, was 1-1 with a 3.00 ERA in three starts this season before the onset of his injury, yielding 18 hits while racking up 15 strikeouts and five walks.

It marks the third career DL stint for the southpaw, whose spot in the rotation has been temporarily filled by young right-hander Tyson Ross.

Crisp held out on Monday as precaution

OAKLAND -- A's outfielder Coco Crisp was held out of Monday's starting lineup for the four-game series finale against the Rangers as a precautionary measure by manager Bob Geren, who is easing Crisp back slowly after he missed three games because of a tight left quadriceps.

Crisp, who initially suffered the injury while running to first base in Tuesday's game in Anaheim, returned to the field for Sunday's 7-2 win over the Rangers, going 2-for-5 with an RBI while sporting what's become a popular Afro look, which was gone by Monday morning.

"Coming back from an injury, we're just being cautious with him," Geren said. "We'll monitor how the game goes. He was at a pretty high exertion yesterday -- a lot of running. So we just need to be cautious with him for the long term, and we felt like today was the day to do that."

The A's skipper noted he fully anticipates Crisp back in the leadoff spot for Tuesday's series opener against the visiting Indians. The veteran outfielder "could be available" for Monday's game, Geren said, but only if the situation deems it necessary.

In Crisp's stead, Mark Ellis was inserted into the leadoff spot, while David DeJesus started in center field, batting seventh against Texas lefty Derek Holland.

On Sunday, Crisp led off the bottom of the first with a ringing double to left, sparking a three-run rally, before driving in a run in the second with a sharp single to left.

Bailey set to face hitters on Wednesday

OAKLAND -- With a large handful of successful bullpen sessions behind him, rehabbing hurler Andrew Bailey is set to face hitters for the first time on Wednesday.

Bailey, 26, has been sidelined since mid-March with a right forearm strain. The right-hander is expected to face hitters at least twice before embarking on a Minor League rehab assignment.

If all goes well with both ventures, the A's closer could potentially return to the team by the middle of May.

With Bailey out of the mix, Oakland's bullpen has still managed to allow one earned run or fewer in each of its past 13 games. In seven of those, the relief corps hasn't surrendered a single run. The A's bullpen is third in the American League and seventh in the Majors with a 2.78 ERA.

LaRoche plays again for struggling Kouzmanoff

OAKLAND -- With regular third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff struggling on both offense and defense, Andy LaRoche received his second straight start at third base and his sixth of the season on Monday.

LaRoche has now started 13 games this year at four different positions and entered Monday's matinee boasting a .324 average. LaRoche has four hits in his past seven at-bats, including a pair of doubles.

"[LaRoche has] been swinging the bat," A's manager Bob Geren said, "so we'll continue to keep him in there."

Kouzmanoff, meanwhile, is hitless in his past five at-bats. However, he has hit safely in eight of his past 12 games and is 9-for-36 (.250) with five RBIs over that span after going 7-for-41 (.171) over his first 13 games. Kouzmanoff has committed six errors, the most in the Majors among third basemen.

Geren was asked about the third-base situation on Monday morning, but the A's skipper said he'll continue to play LaRoche at each infield position in an effort to hand other regulars a day off here and there, indicating that the team still views Kouzmanoff as its primary third baseman.

"I'll just mix and match," Geren said. "[LaRoche] will help everywhere."

Worth noting

The A's, who have utilized 22 different lineups through their first 29 games of the season, had David DeJesus batting seventh with Texas lefty Derek Holland on the mound on Monday. DeJesus entered the contest batting .125 against lefties, compared to a .258 mark when facing right-handers.

A's hoping to cool off red-hot Indians

By Spencer Fordin / MLB.com | 5/2/2011 9:25 PM ET

Get them on the road, and get them early. Those are the only strategies that have worked for Cleveland's opponents in this young season, and they're tactics that Oakland may have to use in Tuesday's series opener. The Indians, off to their best start in more than a decade, are just 6-6 in their first 12 road games this season.

By contrast, Cleveland is 13-2 at home and has won 13 consecutive games at Jacobs Field, the team's longest streak since 1996. The Indians just haven't been able to sustain that torrid pace on the road, where they have one series victory (over Seattle), one series split (against Kansas City) and two series losses (to Los Angeles and Minnesota).

"They're on a nice little roll right now, have some confidence and are scoring a lot of runs," A's manager Bob Geren said.

"They've been playing extremely well at home, so we'll see what happens when they come to our park."

Indians outfielder Shin-Soo Choo said no matter where Cleveland plays, the Indians take the field with confidence.

"Home, away -- it doesn't matter for us," said outfielder Shin-Soo Choo. "Everybody has confidence in the team. The pitching is good, hitting is good, defense is good. I have a lot of confidence, and I think everybody thinks the same thing."

The Indians will come to Oakland on the strength of a successful homestand that saw them achieve successive series sweeps against the Royals and Tigers, and they've held at least a share of first place in the American League Central every day since April 7. Oakland, on the other hand, is languishing near .500 and hoping to pick up some momentum.

"We wanted to play good at home and we did, because the West Coast is always tough," said manager Manny Acta. "We're going on the road and facing good pitching, but we accomplished what we wanted to do at home. Let's go to the West Coast and battle over there."

Cleveland will go with Fausto Carmona on Tuesday, and he'll be trying to continue his team's recent run of success on the mound. The Indians have seen their rotation go 14-3 with a 2.92 ERA in their past 25 games, a formula that has allowed them to post a 13-2 record when scoring first and a 15-1 mark when they're able to outhit their opponents.

Carmona has completed at least seven innings four times for Cleveland, and he's delivered four quality starts since getting hit for 10 earned runs in his season debut. Acta was encouraged by what he saw from Carmona in his most recent start -- an 8-2 win over the Royals -- and hopes to see him repeat it on Tuesday.

"He got into the zone and pounded the strike zone with that sinker," said Acta. "He had very good separation between his changeup and his fastball. ... That was the key. He threw 21 out of 27 first-pitch strikes. That's very, very, very good."

The A's will counter with Tyson Ross, who made three relief appearances before moving into the rotation. The 24-year-old was knocked out in the fifth inning of his first start, and Oakland went on to lose that game by a 4-0 margin. Ross showed improvement the next time out, shutting out the Angels for seven innings en route to a no-decision.

Indians: Sizemore doing his part

Grady Sizemore may have missed the first 16 days of the season while recovering from his knee injury, but he's surely made a fast impression upon his return to the Cleveland lineup. Sizemore went 0-for-4 in Sunday's victory, but will enter the Oakland series with a .340 batting average, 10 runs and nine RBIs since returning to the lineup.

"I'm pretty impressed, seeing him on an everyday basis, how a guy who's not 6-4, 240 [and] how the ball comes off his bat," said Acta of Sizemore, who has an extra-base hit in eight of his 12 games this season. "He has terrific bat speed. That's what it's all about in this game. The ball just makes a different sound when it comes off his bat."

A's: Crisp expected to return

Outfielder Coco Crisp was held out of Monday's lineup as a precautionary measure because of his recent battle with quad tightness, but is expected to return to his usual leadoff spot for Tuesday's series opener. Crisp missed three games before playing Sunday and going 2-for-5 with an RBI.

- Andrew Bailey (right forearm strain) is scheduled to face hitters for the first time on Wednesday. The 26-year-old has been out since mid-March and is expected to face hitters at least twice before beginning a Minor League rehab assignment. If all goes well, the A's closer could potentially return to the team by the middle of May.

Worth noting

The Indians set a franchise record by notching 18 wins in April. ... Cleveland is off to its best start since 1999, when it also leapt out to a 19-8 record. ... Oakland finished April with a 2.78 ERA and saw its rotation pitch to a 2.76 mark, the best of any Major League starting staff. ... The Indians already have five series sweeps this season.

Major League: Braden likely to see doctor again

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 5/2/2011 1:27pm

Dallas Braden's morning session of catch didn't go so well, an A's official said, so he'll probably pay another visit to a doctor for further examination of his stiff throwing shoulder. Braden wasn't on the last trip and he hasn't really made himself available to media in recent days, so it's hard to gauge his own thoughts on what could be going on with the shoulder or how everything has been feeling. He had been undergoing a series of range-of-motion exercises last week, which seemed to all go well, considering he was cleared to play catch today. But now, with news that he might go to the doctor, it appears Braden is back to square one with no clear indication of when he might be able to start pitching again. In the meantime, the A's will keep relying on Tyson Ross in that fifth spot of the rotation. Ross is slated to start tomorrow night against the visiting Indians.

Matsui's walk-off HR in tenth inning delivers big win for A's

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- The hometown team did its best to lose a game today, but the visiting Texas Rangers wouldn't take the gifts the Oakland Athletics kept giving them.

And in the end, Godzilla saved the day for the A's.

Hideki Matsui hit the first pitch of the bottom of the tenth inning from Rangers reliever Darren Oliver out of the park on Monday afternoon to give the Oakland A's a 5-4 win over first-place Texas -- delivering a big series win for the home team as they took three games out of four in this series against the defending American League champions.

The A's gave away all four runs to Texas this afternoon, thanks to two errors by starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy. The Rangers have one of the best offenses in the AL, and gifting them runs is not a recipe for success.

But Oakland kept fighting in this one, demonstrating some impressive grit -- three solo home runs made a difference for the A's in this game, although Texas also did its part to help Oakland stay in this one with some mistakes of their own.

Kurt Suzuki tied the game at 2-2 in the fourth inning, notching his fifth RBI of the series. Josh Willingham tied the game at 4-4 in the eighth inning, his second home run of the series.

And Matsui -- hitless on the day in four previous trips to the plate -- showed just why he was the 2009 World Series MVP with his flair for the dramatic.

Winning is the best deodorant, and Oakland can be proud of fighting hard to win this game today in spite of their own mistakes. McCarthy's goofs aside, the hitters were 1-for-12 with runners in scoring position in this matinee, so the A's left a lot of runs get away with those nine stranded runners.

But they still found a way to win, and that can't be underestimated.

We know this team has flaws -- that's been covered, so this was win that demonstrated the A's can beat one of the best teams in the league even on a bad day.

And confidence like that is hard to come by.

Five relievers did some dirty work today, fighting their own struggles to keep Oakland within striking distance: they put six base runners on in only four innings, but they didn't give up a run.

Then, Willingham and Matsui supplied the key hits in the late innings.

And now the A's stand one game behind the Rangers in the standings, with perhaps a chance to do more than they should be able to do in 2011 with this roster of mediocrity (starting pitching excluded, of course).

Sure, this game may end up meaning nothing in the long run -- or it may end up being very symbolic if Oakland can find a way to scratch its way to the top of the AL West come late September.

Either way, the flawed A's -- and make no mistake, this is a deeply-flawed team no matter what results they produce on a day-to-day basis -- can hang in the weak division they play in this season.

And as the 2010 World Series champions showed, anything is possible if you can just get to October.

A's win in 10th on Matsui's walk-off HR

By JANEY MCCAULEY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Hideki Matsui would much rather have hit his first home run at home in the Coliseum weeks ago.

Yet Oakland's new designated hitter could hardly complain about how the clout finally came — even if an announced crowd of 9,193 was all that saw him do it during a rare Monday matinee.

Matsui clobbered the first pitch of the 10th inning from Darren Oliver and sent it deep into the right-field seats for a game-winning homer, lifting the A's to a 5-4 victory over the Texas Rangers.

"Hopefully after today's game there will be 100 more people," Matsui quipped.

Grant Balfour (2-1) walked three batters in the top of the 10th to load the bases for pinch-hitter Yorvit Torrealba, who struck out swinging on the right-hander's 30th pitch.

Josh Willingham hit a tying home run leading off the eighth against Texas reliever Arthur Rhodes, and the A's took three of four from the reigning AL champions.

Matsui's clout against Oliver (1-3) was the third of the season for the slugger and Oakland's first walkoff homer of 2011. He added an RBI groundout in the fifth.

"If you saw it or heard it, you knew it was way back there," A's teammate Andy LaRoche said of the winning drive.

Texas has lost six of eight and 12 of 19 following a 9-1 start.

Michael Young hit a two-run double and a sacrifice fly but the bullpen couldn't hold a one-run lead for Texas starter Derek Holland, who allowed eight hits and three runs in seven innings.

The Rangers were hoping to gain some momentum from the series finale heading into a three-game series at Seattle in which Texas will miss Mariners ace and reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Felix Hernandez.

"We're not where we want to be but we're not going to panic either," manager Ron Washington said. "It was real tough. I thought we played hard, things just didn't fall into place."

Oakland's Kurt Suzuki homered for the second time in three games and went 6 for 16 with two homers, five RBIs and three runs scored during the series. The first-time father was activated from the paternity leave list before Friday's opener with the Rangers following the birth of daughter, Malia, on Thursday.

Matsui is batting .242 in his first season with the A's and still finding himself at the plate.

"The adjustments are ongoing on a daily basis," he said. "That's what I have been doing and it's what I will keep doing."

Young and Adrian Beltre had back-to-back sacrifice flies in the fifth but Texas couldn't bounce back from a 7-2 loss Sunday. Washington sat second baseman Ian Kinsler and used third baseman Beltre as the designated hitter to give him a day off his legs.

Brandon McCarthy, facing Texas for the first time since 2006, allowed four runs and six hits in six innings, struck out four and walked two.

The A's overcame two more errors — both by McCarthy — that gave them an AL-leading 27, one more than the Rangers after Texas also had one Monday. Oakland is also tied with Houston for most errors in the majors.

"We've been up and down through April," McCarthy said. "To start May like this is something we needed. The bullpen was outstanding. They stood up and got my back."

David DeJesus put the A's ahead when he scored on a safety squeeze bunt by Cliff Pennington in the second. Suzuki hit his third home run leading off the fourth.

Oakland third baseman LaRoche did his part to keep himself in the lineup with a pair of base hits. He batted 6 for 11 during the four games with Texas.

A's center fielder Coco Crisp had the day off as a precaution after he returned Sunday from a three-game absence with tightness in his left hamstring.

Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be An American" blared between the first and second innings a day after President Barack Obama announced the death of terrorist Osama bin Laden. A's public address announcer Dick Callahan asked fans to "Raise their Budweisers" in appreciation for those who serve our country. One female fan sported a short-sleeved flag shirt.

Notes: Rangers RHPs Tommy Hunter and Neftali Feliz will be sent on rehab assignment to Double-A Frisco on Wednesday. Hunter, on the 15-day disabled list all season with a right groin strain sustained in spring training, got through a bullpen session Monday at extended spring training in Arizona with no issues. He will start for the RoughRiders on Wednesday and go three or four innings. Feliz threw a bullpen in Oakland. Sidelined since April 23 with right shoulder inflammation, he will pitch an inning of relief Wednesday for Frisco. ... Injured A's closer Andrew Bailey (strained forearm) will throw to hitters on the field Wednesday. ... Oakland LHP starter Dallas Braden played catch for the first time since being placed on the 15-day DL with a shoulder injury April 18.

Inside and outside the lines, Part XVIII (1986-1988)

EV PARKER, Napa Valley Register

By the mid- and late 1980's, the resurgence of the minor leagues gave their operators an independence that had not been seen for many years.

And that fact was not lost on major league owners, who had saved those leagues from extinction with a "Players Development" contract that preserved a part of Americana at a price not at all to the liking of the new "high rollers" who were buying Major League teams.

The renewal of the "Players Development" agreement was on shaky grounds, but as time would tell, nothing — or no one — could wreck our "Grand Old Game."

Not even the lords of the game, or the owners who fought with each other, or the players and their union and agents, because each year — despite rising ticket prices — the fans "outside the lines" kept coming.

Despite free agency and scores of young millionaires inside the lines of a major or minor league diamond, Major League Baseball's attendance drew 47 million customers in 1986 — and rose to 52 million in '87 and 53 million in '88.

Free agency had shifted the balance of power from the old and once all-powerful franchises like the New York Yankees, Brooklyn Dodgers, Boston Red Sox, Detroit Tigers and St. Louis Cardinals, and once-pathetic teams like the New York Mets, Minnesota Twins and Oakland Athletics were beginning to appear on center stage.

1986

In the Class A California League, the Ventura County Gulls featured a kid named Roberto Alomar who led the league with a .346 batting average, and the boy was on his way to glory.

But, the team had a problem. They played their home games on Ventura's college field, where no whiskey, wine, or beer could be served, and that was a pity — because, in missing the chance to see Alomar play, the fans who stayed home missed rooting for a future Hall of Famer.

On May 22, the Hawaii Islanders of the Triple-A Pacific Coast League demolished the Phoenix Firebirds 31-5.

But, the Firebirds, over the course of the season, did get even. They won the PCL's Southern Division crown, and the Islanders — in the same conference — finished next to last.

That's retribution with a capital "R."

Bo Jackson, a football All-American and Heisman Trophy winner, decided to try his hand at professional baseball and signed on with the Kansas City Royals on June 21.

Bo, a natural athlete, soon learned that it was easier to avoid a 300-pound lineman than a "bean ball" thrown at speeds over 90 miles per hour.

In the major leagues, the once-laughable Mets — who did have one miracle Worlds Series ring to boast of — were no joke any longer.

With Jesse Orosco saving and winning three games in the National League's playoffs, they beat the Houston Astros in six games, the last one a 16-inning affair.

In the World Series, the Mets faced an almost impossible task. The Boston Red Sox, who had defeated the Angels in the American League playoffs, were loaded with talent.

The boys from Boston had great pitchers led by Roger Clemens and "Oil Can" Boyd, as well as sluggers like Don Baylor, Wade Boggs, Dwight Evans and Jim Rice.

In a World Series unlike all others, the Mets' Gary Carter, Keith Hernandez and Ray Knight led the way.

In the sixth game of the series, Mookie Wilson's dribbler between the legs of first baseman Bill Buckner — of Napa High School fame — gave the Mets new life.

Home runs by Knight and Darryl Strawberry in Game 7 gave the New York Mets a world championship that no one inside or outside the lines predicted.

1987

On April 8, a firestorm of criticism for racially insensitive remarks on ABC - TV saw Los Angeles Dodgers General Manager Al Campanis resign on the spot.

Early in the '87 season, Tom Seaver, known in Shea Stadium once as "Tom Terrific," abandoned his comeback plans and called it a day after 20 great years of pitching.

Tom, once known by old New York fans as the "second coming of Christy Mathewson," retired after 20 great seasons with the New York Mets, Cincinnati Reds and the Chicago White Sox and his records were legion.

He compiled a 311-205 won-lost record, struck out 3,640 batters, and his earned-run average of 2.86 was one for the ages.

Fresno's Tom Seaver was one of a kind.

On Aug. 31, a catcher on the Williamsport Bills of the Double-A Eastern League pulled off the play of the year — maybe the play of the century — and it would go down in baseball history as "the old potato trick!"

With a Reading Phillies runner on third base, Dave Bresnahan, the Bills' backup catcher, in the next-to-last game of the season, pulled a concealed shaved potato out of his catcher's glove.

He threw it over the head of his team's third baseman, and the sphere was last seen heading down the left field line.

The delighted Phillies runner on third base happily headed for home plate, only to be greeted by Bresnahan — with a real baseball in his hand — and the startled runner was tagged out.

But the umpire, not amused, ruled the runner safe. Bresnahan was given an error and the league fined him \$50.

The next day, the last day of the season, the lords of the Cleveland Indians, who owned the Williamsport team — a bunch of old fogies outside the lines — fired Bresnahan, and that was that. Or was it?

On that last day, the Williamsport owner hired the kid for one more day.

The team announced that admission for the final game would be only \$1, including a shaved potato which Bresnahan would sign.

And that he did, with a great line — "This spud's for you!"

In the major league playoffs, the St. Louis Cardinals won the National League crown over San Francisco, paced by Willie McGee's speed and bat.

Even Will Clark's .360 batting average couldn't save it for the boys in orange and black trim.

The Minnesota Twins copped the American League flag in five games, roughing up the toothless Detroit Tigers — thanks to Bert Blyleven's two pitching gems and the .412 batting mark of Tom Brunansky.

In the 1987 World Series that followed, the surprising Twins beat the Cardinals in a full seven games.

This time it was on the great pitching of Frank Viola, who won two of the games, with Blyleven chipping in with another.

The Twins brought Minnesota's first World Series championship to their loyal fans.

1988

On March 16, Arnold "Jigger" Statz died at the age of 90, and the Pacific Coast League (PCL) lost a living legend.

Jigger, in a long and colorful career, had played in 3,473 games, and had come up to the plate 3,473 times.

He played for the PCL's Angels and he played in the "biggs" because the offers were too hard to pass up.

But be it major league ballparks in Brooklyn, Boston or New York City, Jigger's heart was only in California, and that's where he always returned.

The movie "Bull Durham" opened in theaters coast to coast in the spring of 1988, and millions of baseball and movie lovers got the chance to see what it was really like in "the bushes."

Thanks to Kevin Costner, the minor league veteran just holding on, and Tim Robbins — a kid with talent, but no real heart for the game — and a baseball groupie in Susan Sarandon, we got a small sample of what minor league baseball is all about.

In the National League playoffs in '88, the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the always dangerous New York Mets in seven hard-fought games.

Tim Belcher, a Dodger hurler, won twice.

Orel Hershiser won a game, and in all, supplied 24 innings of great pitching that defeated a Mets team that had won 100 regular season games.

The Mets came close, but no cigar!

The American League playoffs saw the powerful Oakland Athletics sweep the Boston Red Sox in four games.

That happens when a team is loaded with sluggers like Jose Canseco, Dave Henderson, Carney Lansford, Mark McGwire and Dave Parker, and let's never forget the pitching of Dave Stewart.

In the 1988 World Series — the first all-California showdown, I might add — the smart money was on the powerful boys in green and gold, the Oakland Athletics.

Few baseball experts outside the lines gave Dodger Blue much of a chance.

But, inside the lines, miracles happen, and once again that miracle arrived.

The Dodgers showed millions of baseball mavens that the "Grand Old Game" begins and ends with pitching.

Hershiser stopped the A's in their tracks with superlative pitching in a series that went five games.

Orel won two of those games, and a rarely used slugger named Mickey Hatcher delivered unexpected batting support.

That's not to mention a hobbling Kirk Gibson's memorable home run off Oakland's Hall of Fame closer, Dennis Eckersley, in Game 1.

When the dust had settled on that "Field of Dreams," Dodger Blue had won its seventh baseball championship.

Folks from Beverly Hills in California to Bedford Avenue in Flatbush, Brooklyn let out an old Dodger cheer.

Crisp's return right on time for A's win

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 5/2/2011

Oakland, CA – Third day of the series and the A's are back in control. Plenty of offense as Oakland got hits from almost all of their starters. They gave their pitcher enough breathing room as they handed the Rangers a 7-2 loss.

One day after Texas offense dominated, the A's bounced back behind Gio Gonzalez's spectacular performance. Snapping a two-game losing streak Gonzalez poised and astute allowed no runs through four innings.

"First off, it was exciting to have run support," Gonzalez said. "I wanted to slow down, not rush, stay back and attack the strike zone." "It always helps to have seven runs, it builds confidence especially against a team like this."

Improving his record to 3-2, he gave up five hits, two runs (all earned), two walks and struck out seven in 6 2/3 innings. But a humble Gonzalez won't take all of the credit and thanked his teammates for the runs earned knocking out pitcher Matt Harrison in the third frame. Harrison gave up six hits, four runs (all earned), two walks and one strike out. He is now 0-3 with an 11.23 ERA in the last three starts.

"Great win, Gio was outstanding," said manager Bob Geren. "He had a great breaking ball game, it was great to see the offense get hits, we had a lot of doubles."

Coco Crisp sparked a three-run rally in the bottom of first inning with a double. Harrison walked Daric Barton before Conor Jackson hit a two-run double. Crisp then hit a single RBI to give Oakland a 4-0 lead. After missing three games with a sore left quadriceps, Coco returned to the lineup donning his retro "Afro". Not that it was distraction but more of a good luck charm considering his fellow teammates encouraged him to rock the 70's look.

"Coco's hair, WOW," Gonzalez said. "He was going with the ponytail look and a couple of players got on him saying 'you know what, you've got to give the afro a second chance'." "Bring it back and it worked, I don't think he's going to braid his hair now." "We're going to see the Oscar Gamble look for awhile, keep it Coco, it's working for you."

During the third inning Kurt Suzuki fielded an error at first base and reached second. Hideki Matsui doubled followed by Cliff Pennington's single to bring in two more runners giving them a 6-0 lead. Texas fell flat, the bullpen nor defense had anything to stop Oakland's offense.

The Rangers got a little bit of action top of the sixth when Elvis Andrus doubled and advanced to third on a wild pitch. He scored on Michael Young's single to left field. Ian Kinsler also doubled on a fly ball to center and Yorvit Torrealba scored giving them their last and final run of the game.

The A's didn't produce any home runs but went deep with eleven hits and five doubles from Crisp, Daric Barton, Jackson, Adam LaRoche and Matsui. Conor has been impressive and deserves to stay in the lineup. He's earning his playing time by safely getting hits in five of his last eight games with two hits today. Hideki scored his 1,500th run of his career from his years in Japan to the Major League.

"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, it's a big win for us coming off

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

River Cats remain hot behind Sogard blast

05/03/2011 12:56 AM ET

By Michael Morris / Sacramento River Cats

Eric Sogard's three-run homer in the seventh inning propelled Sacramento to a 5-1 victory over Salt Lake on Monday night at Raley Field.

The Bees have played well on the road, winning six of eight games as the visitors entering Monday. The River Cats, on the other hand, had struggled at home, winning only five of 12 games by the river entering Monday.

River Cats right-hander Yadel Marti entered the game looking for his first win of the season. Before tonight, Marti had a 5.49 ERA and no marks on his record. Salt Lake starter Eric Junge, who started two games against Sacramento last year (0-1, 9.00 ERA), came into this one with a 0-1 record and a 4.62 ERA. Both pitchers allowed eight hits on the evening, but it was Marti who came out the winner.

Two former River Cats currently play for Salt Lake. One of the league's hottest players, Jeff Baisley, has had a great start for Salt Lake batting .404 with seven homers and 25 RBIs. The River Cats held him in check, keeping him to a single on the night. The other River Cat turned Bee, Kevin Melillo, is currently on the disabled list.

The River Cats took a 1-0 lead in the second inning after Shane Peterson singled home Josh Donaldson.

Salt Lake scored two innings later, tying it up 1-1 when first baseman Efen Navarro hit into a fielder's choice.

Both teams were unable to bring anybody in until the seventh inning when Josh Horton flied out to left, bringing in Adrian Cardenas for a 2-1 River Cats lead. That one-run lead lasted seconds as Sogard hit the first pitch he saw for a three-run homer to shut the door on Salt Lake.

Reliever Willie Eyre took over for Marti in the eighth. Eyre, who struck out three in 2.0 innings of work, has been a bright spot in the River Cats bullpen. Eyre has a 0.89 ERA and has allowed just nine hits this season keeping batters to a .129 batting average so far this season.

The River Cats move to 15-10 on the season and will face the Bees again Tuesday. Bobby Cramer, who was playing for Oakland before being added to the River Cats on April 28, will start for Sacramento.

Missions complete 4-game sweep of RockHounds

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter Telegram

SAN ANTONIO -- San Antonio center fielder Daniel Robertson hit for the cycle as the Missions scored six runs in the sixth and the eighth innings to rout the Midland RockHounds, 17-6 Monday at Nelson W. Wolff Municipal Stadium.

The win completed a four-game sweep of the RockHounds by San Antonio at home, and the Missions have won seven of the eight games played with Midland this season.

Robertson began his night with a triple to start the bottom of the first, then hit his second home run of the season on his next at-bat in the bottom of the third that put his team up 2-0. His next hit came in the bottom of the sixth on a line drive single that scored two of his team's six runs in the inning, which ended with them up 11-2.

Robertson completed the cycle in the bottom of the eighth with a bases clearing double in the Missions' second six-run inning. Robertson went 4 for 6 on the night and drove in six runs.

Midland was doomed by a slow start, mustering just two hits off Matthew Buschmann in five scoreless innings to start the game. When the RockHounds finally got two runs to close the gap to 5-2 in the sixth, the Missions responded with the first of their two six-run innings.

Buschmann got the win for San Antonio, while Midland's Shawn Haviland dropped to 0-3 with the loss.

The RockHounds (12-12) begin a four-game series at Corpus Christi today.

Coleman Slams Ports To 5-1 Victory

05/02/2011 10:30 PM ET

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. - All it took was one swing of the bat from Dusty Coleman on Monday night at Arrowhead Credit Union Park. With the bases loaded and two down in the second inning, Coleman launched a Buddy Boshers (0-3) offering

deep over the left field fence, giving the Stockton Ports a 4-0 lead en route to a 5-1 win over the Inland Empire 66ers in the teams' first meeting of the season.

Coleman's grand slam in the second inning was made possible by a two-out error. With one on and two down, Ryan Lipkin hit a ground ball to third that was booted by 66ers third baseman Jon Karcich. Following the error, Boshers walked Michael Gilmartin, then gave up the grand slam to Coleman to give the Ports a 4-0 lead. Coleman's hit would be Stockton's last until the 7th inning.

Ports starter Murphy Smith (1-2) pitched around one-out singles in each of the first two errors, and pitched around two errors he committed himself in the third. At one point-from the final out of the third to the first out of the sixth-Smith retired eight batters in a row. The stretch was broken up by a one-out walk drawn by Rian Kiniry, who would steal second and score on a two-out double from Kole Calhoun to cut the Ports lead to 4-1.

Inland Empire's lone run was the only blemish on an otherwise impressive ledger for Smith, who went six innings and allowed four hits while striking out three and walking one while earning his first win of the season.

The Ports got the run back in the 7th. After Boshers retired 10 in a row coming into the frame, Lipkin and Gilmartin singled and doubled, respectively, to put runners at second and third and chase Boshers from the contest. Michael Piazza came on in relief and retired the next three batters in order, but the second batter he faced, Michael Choice, was retired on a sac-fly to right that scored Lipkin from third to make it a 5-1 ballgame.

Boshers would suffer his third loss of the season, going six-plus innings and allowing five runs (one earned) on five hits while striking out three and walking four.

AJ Huttenlocker pitched a scoreless 7th and 8th for the Ports, and Jose Guzman slammed the door shut in the 9th by striking out the side.

Inland Empire's bullpen-a combination of Piazza and Mike Kenney-combined for three perfect innings to end the game for the 66ers.

Ports manager Webster Garrison was ejected in the third inning after arguing that Max Stassi had foul-tipped a ball in and out of the glove of 66ers catcher Jose Jimenez. Plate umpire Brett Terry ruled that Jimenez had squeezed the foul-tip for the third strike.

The Ports and 66ers will play the second game of their four-game set on Tuesday night in San Bernardino. Fabian Williamson (2-2, 9.30 ERA) will toe the slab for Stockton, opposed by right-hander Ariel Pena (2-1, 5.26 ERA) for Inland Empire. First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Bees Escape Escape With a 3-2 Win

05/02/2011 11:19 PM ET

By Jon Versteeg

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (17-6) scored a run on a throwing error in the ninth inning to walk off with a 3-2 win over the Peoria Chiefs (12-12) before 569 fans at Community Field on Monday night.

The Bees scored two runs in the second inning. RF Jose Rivero (1-3) singled and SS Yordy Cabrera (2-4) singled Rivero to second base. Both runners executed a double steal to move into scoring position.

1B Josh Whitaker (0-1) hit a sacrifice fly to right field to score Rivero and make it 1-0. Cabrera scored on a wild pitch for a 2-0 lead.

The Chiefs scored a run in the third inning. 2B Pierre LePage (1-3) doubled and moved to third base on a single by RF Rubi Silva (3-4). 1B Richard Jones (0-3) hit a sacrifice fly to left field to score LePage and make it 2-1.

Peoria tied the game with a run in the seventh inning.

The Bees scored the winning run in the ninth inning thanks to some aggressive base running and good fortune. Whitaker walked and went to second base on a sacrifice bunt by C John Nester (0-3). CF Tyreece House (3-5) flew out to right field and Whitaker advanced to third base on the throw. A throwing error from RF Rubi Silva allowed Whitaker to score on the play.

The Bees and Chiefs finish their series on Tuesday morning at 11:30 a.m. It's Honor Roll Day with area middle school and high school students in attendance. The pitching match-up is as follows: RHP Su-Min Jung (0-0, 0.00) for Peoria against LHP Jacob Brown (3-0, 1.93) for Burlington.