

A's News Clips, Monday, May 9, 2011

A's Tyson Ross finally rewarded for another strong start

By Joe Stiglich jstiglich@bayareanewsgroup.com

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Tyson Ross was tossing his 6-foot-6 frame all over the Kauffman Stadium infield on Sunday. It was a more active day than usual defensively for the A's young right-hander.

But his stellar pitching is starting to look routine. Ross held the Royals to two runs over six innings, and Oakland jumped ahead early and kept building on its lead in a 5-2 victory over the Kansas City Royals.

Making his fourth start in place of the injured Dallas Braden, Ross, 24, continued rounding into form as a major league starter. He has allowed a combined three earned runs over his past three outings, though Sunday was the first time in that span he was rewarded with a victory.

"He's attacking the zone and getting ahead in counts," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "When he's doing that, his stuff is comparable to anyone else in the rotation."

The A's ebb-and-flow season rolls on. They took two of three from the Royals and moved one game above .500 for the fifth time.

They have yet to reach two games above .500 and will try to sustain some momentum when they begin a three-game series Monday against the Texas Rangers in Arlington. They're tied for second place with Texas at 18-17, two games behind the Los Angeles Angels.

Some heady defensive plays helped the A's, including one wacky sequence starring Ross (2-2) in the second inning.

Second baseman Mark Ellis made a diving stop on Eric Hosmer's grounder and tried getting a force on base runner Jeff Francoeur. But Ellis' flip got past shortstop Cliff Pennington and rolled into shallow left field.

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff had to track the ball down, and with no one covering third, Ross made a mad dash to the bag as Francoeur tried to advance. Kouzmanoff fed a perfect throw to Ross, who made a diving tag on Francoeur and went sprawling to the ground.

"I don't know any other pitcher who could make that play," A's manager Bob Geren said. "(Ross) is such a good athlete. He should have been filtering that way, but not necessarily covering. He blazed from out of nowhere, like a horse in a horse race."

Ross didn't heap quite so much praise on himself.

"It was a foot race, and I'm not too fast," he said. "I looked at the situation and realized I've got to bust my butt to get over there."

Ross made another nice play in the fourth, fielding Hosmer's comebacker and catching Alex Gordon in a rundown between second and third.

Conor Jackson (3 for 5) had an RBI single as the A's scored twice in the first. Kouzmanoff, who came in 9 for 20 against Royals starter Jeff Francis (0-4), homered in the sixth for a 3-0 lead.

Kansas City closed to within 3-2 in the bottom of the sixth, aided by a Ross error, when he made an errant flip to first while falling to the ground as he retrieved another comebacker.

But right fielder David DeJesus prevented further damage that inning, throwing out Wilson Betemit at second as Betemit made too wide a turn around second after Mitch Maier's single.

"(Those plays) don't show up in the score book, but they may have been the difference in the game," Geren said.

The A's, not particularly adept at padding leads, gave themselves some cushion Sunday. Coco Crisp delivered an RBI single in the eighth for a 4-2 lead, and Suzuki homered in the ninth.

Oakland A's notebook: Texas Rangers bats plenty potent, even without Josh Hamilton, Nelson Cruz

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Josh Hamilton and Nelson Cruz are both injured, so neither will be in the Texas Rangers' lineup during their three-game series with the A's.

That provides only so much comfort to Oakland right-hander Trevor Cahill, who takes the ball Monday night in the series opener at Rangers Ballpark.

The A's, who took three of four from the Rangers in Oakland last week, want to pick up where they left off. Cahill knows a challenge awaits even though he won't face Hamilton, the 2010 AL MVP who's sidelined by a fractured right arm. Cruz is nursing a quadriceps injury.

The Rangers are third in the AL in runs (163) and second in homers (40) and still boast dangerous hitters such as Michael Young, Adrian Beltre and Elvis Andrus.

"I faced them the day after they clinched (the division title) last year. None of their starters played and I got shelled," Cahill said before Sunday's win over Kansas City. "There is no 'B' lineup with them."

Cahill was tagged for 12 hits and seven runs on Sept. 26, and the Rangers indeed rested most of their regulars after clinching the AL West crown the previous day.

But Cahill should have confidence. He threw seven shutout innings in a 3-1 victory over Texas on April 29, and he's 7-2 with a 2.27 ERA in 10 career starts against the Rangers.

"I'll go in trying to keep guys like Andrus off base and keep the ball down to the guys who can go out of the yard," Cahill said.

Many players swung pink bats to raise awareness for breast cancer on Mother's Day. A's pitcher Brandon McCarthy wore pink cleats.

McCarthy is the only Athletic under contract with Under Armour, the official cleat of Major League Baseball and the only shoe manufacturer licensed to allow their players to wear pink cleats.

McCarthy started Saturday but wishes he could have taken the mound in the eccentric footwear.

"I was hoping for a rainout so I could pitch in them," he said.

Sunday marked the 43rd anniversary of Catfish Hunter's perfect game against Minnesota. Last Mother's Day, Dallas Braden tossed the second perfect game in A's history.

No such history came Sunday.

Closer Andrew Bailey (strained forearm) will throw in a simulated game Tuesday.

Chin Music: Does getaway day success bode well for A's?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/8/2011 10:35am

The A's are 9-4 in day games and 8-2 in the last game of a series. So are good things in store for Oakland in this afternoon's series finale against the Royals? They need to rebound after last night's deflating loss. Tyson Ross takes the hill coming off strong starts in his previous two outings. ... It's a warm afternoon in Kansas City, but there's a pretty strong breeze blowing, so I'd think the heat shouldn't be too much of a factor.

--Hideki Matsui is sitting against Royals lefty Jeff Francis, and reading through the lines during Bob Geren's pregame media session, Matsui could sit Monday as well. Geren said he'd stack his lineup with right-handed hitters against Texas lefty C.J. Wilson. Matsui is hitting .275 against right-handers, .171 vs. lefties. Last night, his two doubles were one of the few offensive bright spots for the A's. But they both came with the bases empty.

–Kevin Kouzmanoff is starting at third for the second straight day. He's 9 for 20 w/two homers against Francis. "When you're trying to get somebody going, there's nothing better than doing it with a guy he's had success against in the past," Geren said.

–Conor Jackson is back in the lineup at left field, with Josh Willingham the DH. I didn't mention it in this morning's stories, but Jackson's left shoulder apparently was bothering him more than he let on after his collision at first base Friday night. Geren said after that game that he was planning to give Jackson a day off Saturday anyway, but it sounds as if Jackson needed a day to recover. "We're very fortunate it wasn't anything more serious," Geren said.

–You'll see lots of A's players swinging pink bats today to raise awareness for breast cancer on Mother's Day. And pitcher Brandon McCarthy will be wearing pink cleats. McCarthy is the only Athletic who wears Under Armour cleats, the official cleat of Major League Baseball. According to A's equipment manager Steve Vucinich, only players contracted with Under Armour can wear the pink cleats. Too bad McCarthy isn't pitching today. It's an interesting look ...

The lineups:

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

Royals – Getz 2B, Cabrera DH, Gordon LF, Francoeur RF, Hosmer 1B, Betemit 3B, Maier CF, Pena C, Escobar SS; Francis LHP.

Kouzmanoff and Ross power A's past Royals, 5-2

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

On a slant play, Kevin Kouzmanoff led Tyson Ross perfectly, and Ross caught the ball in stride and dived toward the line.

Touchdown, A's!

Because this is baseball, the play actually was ruled 4-5-1, one of your more unusual putouts and one that showed that Ross, the 24-year-old raised in Oakland, has all-around game.

In the Raiders' 5-2 victory over the Chiefs on Sunday - check that: A's over Royals - Ross and Kouzmanoff teamed up to catch Jeff Francoeur trying to sneak in to third base. More than that, Ross pitched six solid innings and Kouzmanoff snapped out of a 2-for-20 funk with two hits, including a home run.

"I actually felt like a football player there, making a pass on the run," Kouzmanoff said.

The A's won the series and moved above .500, but the postgame dialogue centered on the second-inning play, something that could never be rehearsed. Francoeur was at first base when Eric Hosmer grounded what was scored as a single to Mark Ellis, whose throw to second bounced into short left field. Kouzmanoff, the third baseman, darted for the ball, prompting Francoeur to head for third.

Alertly, Ross headed there too. Kouzmanoff hit Ross, who outraced Francoeur to the bag and dived to tag him out.

"I saw Tyson out of the corner of my eye," Kouzmanoff said. "I had no choice but to go over and get the ball. It was a good thing Tyson picked up on that because he hustled over there. It was actually a pretty fun play."

An important one, too. Instead of runners at the corners and no outs, the Royals had a man on first and one out. Ross retired the next two batters and cruised through five innings before surrendering two runs in the sixth.

It wasn't enough to overcome an A's offense that broke out for 12 hits, including three by Conor Jackson and solo homers by Kouzmanoff in the sixth and Kurt Suzuki in the ninth. Ross tossed his third straight quality start, and relievers Michael Wuertz, Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes each threw a scoreless inning.

Manager Bob Geren said of Ross' second-inning maneuvering, "I don't know any other pitcher who could make that play." Ross said he never played football "except in P.E.," and Kouzmanoff said his only experience was as a defensive end his junior year in high school.

"I did everything in my power to get over there. It was a footrace, and I'm not too fast," said Ross, who might get a different opinion from Francoeur. "I saw (Kouzmanoff) get the ball, and we kind of looked at each other. I realized I had to bust my butt to get over there, and he gave me a good feed. Lucky I'm tall (6-foot-6). I was able to cut him off."

Kouzmanoff entered with a .195 average and boarded the charter to Dallas at .209. It was news that he finally got hits, but it wasn't news that he took apart the Royals' starter. He's now 11-for-23 with three homers and seven RBIs off Jeff Francis.

Asked which was more cool, his home run or his throw, Kouzmanoff said, "It was nice to keep that run off the board."

Dodgers' Ethier flashed glimpses as A's farmhand

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Anyone who watched outfielder **Andre Ethier** play in the A's farm system might not have been shocked about his 30-game hit streak.

"The streak's incredible, but no one ever denied he was a good hitter," said reliever **Brad Ziegler**, Ethier's minor-league teammate in 2004 and part of 2005.

"When I got called up to Double-A, it seemed like he was hitting .400 the whole time," said **Daric Barton**, speaking of the 2005 Midland RockHounds.

Ethier was Texas League MVP that year and MVP of the All-Star Game. He drove home the winning run, robbed **Alberto Callaspo** of a homer and also won the All-Star home-run derby.

Six months later, the A's traded him to the Dodgers for outfielder **Milton Bradley**, who helped Oakland reach the 2006 ALCS.

"All his actions at the plate were so smooth," Ziegler said. "He worked hard and is reaping the benefits."

Barton added, "He used the whole field and was selective. Thirty games, that's impressive. It's impressive to get a hit in five or 10 straight games."

Briefly: The A's are one game above .500 for the fifth time this season. They've never been two games up. They're 9-2 in series finales and 10-4 in day games. ... **Hideki Matsui**, who doubled twice Saturday, was out of the lineup against lefty **Jeff Francis**, and manager **Bob Geren** hinted Matsui could sit tonight against Texas lefty **C.J. Wilson**. ... Geren said he hadn't heard from MLB about **Josh Willingham** bumping umpire **Bill Miller** on Saturday. ... **Andrew Bailey's** simulated game is scheduled for Tuesday. ... Sunday marked the 43rd anniversary of **Catfish Hunter's** perfect game in 1968, and Mother's Day provided a reminder of **Dallas Braden's** perfecto last year. ... Ziegler had three moms in attendance - his own

(**Lisa**), his grandmother (**Betty**) and his sister (**Melissa**), a mother of twin babies. His family is from Odessa, Mo., about 20 minutes from Kauffman Stadium.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Super hero: Ex-Royals outfielder David DeJesus was signing autographs when a fan tossed him one of the street banners that hangs near ballparks, picturing him in Royals gear. Gio Gonzalez turned it into a cape and ran onto the field.

On Matsui's stats, who's counting?

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The A's mention **Hideki Matsui's** combined stats from Japan and the major leagues in their media guide and press notes and on their scoreboard. When Matsui collected his 2,500th "career hit" on April 3 and scored his 1,500th "career run" on May 1, it was announced over the Coliseum PA system. He's four shy of his 500th "career homer."

Anything wrong with that?

The A's don't think so. Neither do the Mariners, who document the combined efforts of **Ichiro Suzuki**.

"It's a great personal milestone," A's PR chief **Bob Rose** said. "In the professional baseball world, Matsui has had a very unique career."

There's another sentiment.

Amaury Pi-Gonzalez, a Spanish broadcaster for 34 years, calls it "just plain misinformation" and asks why stats from the Latin American winter leagues aren't similarly counted. Pi-Gonzalez has written it's a money issue, Japanese players generating a ton of revenue for MLB.

Another difference: Baseball in Japan and here is a summer sport.

Coco Crisp of the A's is quick to congratulate Matsui after each of these milestones, saying, "That's still a solid league over there. They're phenomenal players. Combined with what he did over there and over here, it shows his longevity. Not a lot of people do that."

In interviews, Matsui is appreciative of the fans' response but plays down the milestones.

Mays bridged Negro Leagues, MLB

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

KANSAS CITY — On **Willie Mays'** 80th birthday, I walked into the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, hoping to find a classic Mays memento.

It didn't take long.

On a wall offering the timeline of the Negro Leagues was a photograph of the 1948 Birmingham Black Barons after they won their league title to earn a spot in the Negro League World Series.

It's a celebratory shot of the Black Barons enjoying themselves and their achievement in a corner of their clubhouse, ballplayers with dreams of playing in the major leagues — this was one year after **Jackie Robinson** broke the color barrier — but at this moment all about sharing a bond as teammates and friends at a time in American history that won't be forgotten, thanks in part to this museum in Kansas City's historic Jazz District.

In the photo, behind older euphoric teammates, is a young, almost expressionless Mays, perhaps trying to comprehend the significance of it all. Willie was heading to the first of his five World Series.

Yes, five. Before 1951, 1954 and 1962 with the Giants and 1973 with the Mets, there was 1948 with the Black Barons. As a 17-year-old. Not yet the Say Hey Kid. Just a kid. It was the 11th and final Negro League World Series.

The Black Barons lost in five games to **Buck Leonard** and the Homestead Grays, and Mays had a hand in Birmingham's win, hitting a ninthinning single to end Game 3.

Three years later, he was in the other World Series as a 20-year-old New York Giant.

He's one of just four players appearing in both a Negro League World Series and major-league World Series. The others: **Monte Irvin, Larry Doby** and **Satchel Paige**.

Down the hall, another shot of Mays in a Giants uniform appears among former Negro Leaguers who reached the majors and made the Hall of Fame: **Ernie Banks, Hank Aaron, Roy Campanella**, Robinson and Doby. Mays' picture rises above the rest.

Mays' time in the Negro Leagues was brief, unlike many legends who didn't reach the majors. A fascinating indoor field at the museum includes life-size bronze statues at every position, and check out this lineup — which would've been the greatest in history: **Josh Gibson** ("the greatest home run hitter of all time," blares the PA recording) at catcher, Leonard at first, **John Henry "Pop" Lloyd** at second,

Judy Johnson at short, **Ray Dandridge** at third, an outfield of **Cool Papa Bell, Oscar Charleston** (he was Mays before Mays) and **Leon Day**, with Paige pitching. **Martin Dihigo**, a legend from Cuba, is the hitter standing at home plate and **Buck O'Neil** the manager. This is the 100th anniversary of O'Neil's birth (he died at 94) as well as Gibson's (he died at 35, three months before Robinson's debut).

O'Neil, a longtime member of the Kansas City Monarchs, was instrumental in establishing the museum, which has struggled since his death and is seeking memberships at nlbm.com. **Bob Kendrick**, an O'Neil confidant, was named this year as president, with a mission to make the museum more financially stable.

BASEBALL SUNDAY

THE BULL PEN

By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Tim Hudson pitched a game that would make **Tim Lincecum** take notice. In Hudson's one-hit shutout Wednesday, he threw first-pitch strikes to 26 of 29 Brewers (90 percent, highest for any starter this year). Of his 102 pitches, 74 were strikes, and he was behind in the count for eight pitches.

By comparison, in **Francisco Liriano's** no-hitter against the White Sox on Tuesday, the Twin threw first-pitch strikes to just 11 of 30 batters, 37 percent. Hudson's was the classic.

That Boston marathon featuring 13 innings, 445 pitches, five hours of baseball and 2½ hours of rain delay ended at 2:45 a.m., the latest a game ended in Fenway Park history. The Angels' team bus exited at 3:30 a.m. (and returned a few hours later for a day game), and Red Sox manager **Terry Francona** slept in his office.

Fans in San Francisco hold up "Fear the Beard" signs in honor of **Brian Wilson**. In Philadelphia, someone held up a sign that read, "Nice Beard, Stupid." It was in honor of **Jayson Werth**, who returned to Philly last week after joining the Nationals in the offseason.

Nice job by the Tigers signing **Al Alburquerque** out of the Dominican winter league. He has a swing-and-miss mid-80s slider that breaks like a curve, and the proof is 18 Ks in 101/3 innings.

With **Bengie Molina** out of baseball, Pirates catcher **Chris Snyder** is the slowest big-leaguer, according to the Wall Street Journal. "Any press is good press. I'll take it," said Snyder, who has zero steals in 611 games. Bengie swiped three bags in 1,362 games.

Ross, A's deal Royals first home series loss

Pitcher also helps himself with nice defensive play

By Robert Falkoff / Special to MLB.com | 5/8/2011 7:50 PM ET

KANSAS CITY -- The A's have come to expect that Tyson Ross will get the job done with his right arm. On Sunday, Ross got the job done with his legs, too.

Besides delivering six solid innings in a 5-2 victory over the Royals, Ross showcased his athleticism in the second inning by sprinting for third to cover the base and diving headlong to retire Jeff Francoeur on a zany play that helped Oakland keep Kansas City at arm's length.

Pitchers don't often give up their bodies the way Ross did. Maybe it was just the spark that Oakland needed to finish the job and take two-of-three in the weekend series.

After the A's had grabbed a 2-0 lead in the first, Francoeur led off the Royals' second with a single. Eric Hosmer hit a smash to second baseman Mark Ellis' right and a diving Ellis made an off-balance throw to second which sailed astray. Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff backed up on the play, which left his base unprotected.

Francoeur took off toward the open base, but Ross came to the rescue by dashing from the mound area, accepting Kouzmanoff's throw and diving to make the tag on Francoeur.

"I don't know any other pitcher who can make that play," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He closed like a horse in a horse race. I had a feeling he was going to get the out, but I was just hoping he didn't hurt himself. It's a dangerous play for a pitcher, but the athleticism kicks in."

The Royals lost another key baserunner in the sixth after Mitch Maier's RBI single off Ross brought Kansas City within one at 3-2. Wilson Betemit rounded second too far on the play and right fielder David DeJesus threw behind Betemit for the outfield assist.

"David's a pretty smart player," Geren said. "Those plays don't show up in the scorebook, but they can make the difference in the game."

The A's (18-17) were heads up all day in handing Kansas City its first home series loss this year. They managed to rev up the offense a bit, highlighted by Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki homers. But the recipe for victory always starts with strong starting pitching and Ross was up to the challenge.

Ross had a three-hit shutout going until the sixth and the bullpen unit of Michael Wuertz, Grant Balfour and Brian Fuentes took it from there.

"I ran into a little trouble in that sixth inning, but I pitched deep enough into the game to get it to the pen and give us a chance to win," Ross said.

Ross laughed about the foot race with Francoeur in the second.

"I'm not too fast," Ross said. "I just did everything in my power to get over there. Kouz gave me a good feed. It comes with the territory. Once you throw the ball, you're a defender like everybody else."

Ross was given some practice throws after his dive at third base, but said he wasn't injured.

"That was more for the trainers, so they could see I was OK," Ross said.

The Royals (18-16) came away impressed by Oakland's young right-hander.

"He's darn good," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "That kid banged strikes with quality stuff. Their pitching staff is pretty formidable."

Conor Jackson and Kouzmanoff, who used to thrive against Jeff Francis in the National League West, did it again on Sunday. Jackson went 3-for-5, including an RBI single in the first. He's now hitting .421 against Francis for his career.

Kouzmanoff homered off Francis in the sixth to give Oakland a 3-0 lead. He is now hitting .478 lifetime against Francis.

"It put us up [by three] and I felt like there was a little comfort there," Kouzmanoff said. "I was just trying to get something up in the zone."

The A's have been one game above .500 on five occasions and they'll try for a 2011 high-water mark on Monday when they open a series against Texas. After the Royals closed within 3-2, the Oakland tack-on runs in the eighth and ninth took some pressure off the bullpen.

"We were fighting up there," said Suzuki, who homered off reliever Louis Coleman in the ninth. "We were battling. We obviously haven't been swinging the bats the way we can, but we found ways to get some runs on the board today in the latter part of the game."

Pennington, A's strive to raise awareness

By Robert Falkoff / Special to MLB.com

KANSAS CITY -- By taking his cuts with a pink bat on Sunday, A's shortstop Cliff Pennington took special satisfaction in knowing that he was doing his part to promote the cause for breast cancer awareness.

"I think it's awesome that we get to do our little part," Pennington said.

On Mother's Day, Pennington was among the hundreds of players around Major League Baseball who used a pink bat to demonstrate support for the breast cancer cause. The game-used Louisville Slugger pink bats will be auctioned exclusively on MLB.com at a later date to raise additional funds for Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

"So many people have been affected by it," Pennington said. "It's a major problem and we want to do what we can to raise awareness and raise funds for research. Hopefully, the pink bats that we use on this day trigger that awareness."

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who homered with a pink bat in Sunday's 5-2 win over the Royals, applauds the effort that Major League Baseball has made in helping to enhance breast cancer awareness.

"It's good that we acknowledge it," Kouzmanoff said. "There's more to life than baseball. Health is the most important thing. It's good that we're out here swinging pink bats and wearing pink wristbands. Whatever we can do to help the cause."

Jackson enjoys grand return to A's lineup

KANSAS CITY -- Two days after his shoulder-to-shoulder collision with Royals catcher Matt Treanor, A's left fielder Conor Jackson was back in the lineup on Sunday. It turned into a grand return.

Jackson went 3-for-5 with a run batted in as the A's knocked off Kansas City, 5-2, to claim the series.

Jackson's left shoulder temporarily went numb on Friday night when Treanor ran into him trying to beat a throw with Jackson playing first base. Jackson held onto the ball for the final out of Oakland's 3-2 victory. Jackson initially went to the ground in pain. He later said he absorbed a stinger and, after a day of rest on Saturday, Jackson was ready to go in the series finale.

"It's good news," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It was a scary moment when that happened. We were all thrilled to win the game, but it didn't look like he'd be back in there the next day. We're fortunate it wasn't anything more serious. That was pretty good impact."

Jackson's 3-for-5 day lifted his average to .291. He has one homer and 11 RBIs.

Willingham hasn't heard from MLB on ejection

KANSAS CITY -- Josh Willingham doesn't feel he did anything to warrant repercussions from Major League Baseball after the A's left fielder was ejected by home plate umpire Bill Miller on Saturday night.

Willingham was at the plate with a runner at third and two out in the eighth inning of a 3-3 game. When Willingham was called out on strikes, he spun around and argued with Miller before the umpire signaled the ejection.

Asked if he made contact with the umpire, Willingham said:

"He threw me out because I threw my helmet. When he threw me out and he turned back toward me. ... if we touched, we touched. I don't think I initiated the contact. I didn't go up and chest bump him or anything. Just trying to have a polite conversation with him."

Willingham was in the lineup on Sunday as the designated hitter in the series finale against the Royals.

"When a player or coach is ejected from a game, they get notification from the league at some point," manager Bob Geren said. "You find out then, if there's a fine, what the fine is. Usually, it's all done at one time."

Wilson, Cahill kick off AL West battle in Texas

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 5/8/2011 7:39 PM ET

The Rangers are the defending division champions, but there does not appear to be a clear favorite in the race for the American League West title this season.

The Angels lead the division by two games. The Rangers and A's are tied for second place, two games behind them, and the Mariners are only four games out of the lead.

On Monday, the A's will play the Rangers in the first of three games to kick off a busy week in Arlington. The Angels will follow the A's into Texas later this week.

"I don't think the division will be won or lost in the next six games," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "It's only May, but it would certainly be good to play well."

The A's won three of four against the Rangers in Oakland, and the Angels won two of three against the Rangers in Anaheim this season. Overall, the Rangers are 6-7 against the AL West this year.

Moreover, Sunday's 12-5 loss to the Yankees was the Rangers' sixth loss in their last eight games.

"We're not playing good ball right now," the Rangers' Mike Napoli said. "We know it. We need to get out there and have good energy and make plays. Just get back to what we do -- first and third, run the bases and just be aggressive. Just get out there tomorrow and try to win the Oakland series."

The Rangers will send staff ace C.J. Wilson to the mound Monday. The A's will counter with Trevor Cahill.

Wilson beat the Mariners with a complete-game performance on Wednesday. He has 34 strikeouts in his last 30 innings, and his only loss of the season was a 3-1 defeat against the Athletics on April 29 in Oakland.

Cahill has allowed one earned run or fewer in six of his first seven starts. He limited the Indians to one run and five hits through seven innings on Wednesday in his last start.

"Because there is so much pitching in the division, anybody can have an opportunity," Washington said.

Athletics: A's struggling with errors

- Defense continues to be an issue in Oakland. The A's had played five consecutive games without an error before Sunday. The club is among the Major League leaders with 28 errors this season. They have made an error in 14 of their last 25 games.
- The A's lead the Major Leagues with 10 pickoffs. Last year, the A's led the Majors with 27 pickoffs.

Rangers: Andrus stealing with great success

- Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus is 10-for-10 in steal attempts this season. He has been successful in 18 straight steal attempts (including postseason) since last being caught in Game 1 of the 2010 ALDS on Oct. 6 at Tampa Bay.
- Center fielder Julio Borbon left Sunday's game with cramps in his legs. He expects to be ready to play on Monday against Oakland. He is riding an eight-game hitting streak.

Worth noting

- Rangers closer Neftali Feliz has been successful in 17 straight save opportunities going back to last season. That is now the longest active streak in the Majors after Heath Bell's 41 consecutive saves streak came to end for the Padres on Friday night.
- Michael Young has 21 four-hit games, tying him with Rafael Palmeiro for the second most in Rangers history. Ivan Rodriguez had 23.
- The A's are 9-2 thus far in series finales and 10-4 in day games. They are 15-1 when leading after eight innings.
- Oakland has now been a season-high one game over .500 five times.

Kouzmanoff, Suzuki homer to lead A's past Royals

By DOUG TUCKER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki each homered for the A's and Conor Jackson collected three hits to help Tyson Ross win his first game in four starts Sunday, 5-2 over the Kansas City Royals.

Ross (2-2), who moved into the rotation last month when Dallas Braden went on the disabled list, went six innings and gave up two runs on six hits, with three walks and four strikeouts. He has not allowed a home run in 28 2-3 innings.

Brian Fuentes pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his ninth save in 11 opportunities.

Third baseman Wilson Betemit's throwing error let Coco Crisp reach base to start the game, and Daric Barton followed with a double. Jackson's RBI single made it 1-0 and then Josh Willingham brought Barton home with a fielder's choice grounder.

Kevin Kouzmanoff's home run off winless starter Jeff Francis with two out in the sixth put the A's on top 3-0. Suzuki added a solo shot in the ninth off Louis Coleman.

Francis (0-4) was charged with three runs on eight hits in 6 1-3 innings. He walked one and struck out one.

Ross took a 3-0 shutout into the sixth but got in trouble with a throwing error when he tried to scoop Melky Cabrera's infield single to first.

Cabrera wound up on second and scored on Eric Hosmer's two-out double, the rookie first baseman's first major league RBI. Wilson Betemit walked and then, in a bang-bang play, Hosmer raced home on a single by Mitch Maier and scored a split-second before Betemit was tagged out at second on a strong throw from right fielder David DeJesus.

Reliever Blake Wood gave up a single to Mark Ellis and walked Cliff Pennington before Tim Collins came out of the bullpen and gave up an RBI single to Crisp with his first pitch in the eighth, making it 4-2.

The A's took the series two games to one. It was the first home series loss of the year for the Royals, who had three runners thrown out on the bases.

NOTES: This was the 43rd anniversary of Catfish Hunter's perfect game. Only 6,298 fans were on hand to see Hunter beat the Twins 4-0 with the AL's first perfect game in 46 years. ... Braden, on the DL with a sore left shoulder, is scheduled to meet with specialists in Florida and New York this week. ... After committing 27 errors in their first 29 games, A's were errorless in five straight until Ross' bad scoop in the sixth. ... Ross has not allowed a home run since June 20, 2010. ... KC DH Billy Butler got his first day off of the season.

A PERFECT MEMORY, ONE YEAR LATER

By [Bob Highfill](#), Stockton Record, 5/9/2011

STOCKTON - Peggy Lindsey has a video she never will grow tired of watching.

It's a recording of her grandson, Dallas Braden, pitching a perfect game for the Oakland Athletics.

"I watch it every once in a while," she said. "It's like it's happening again."

Lindsey, who lives in Stockton, said she can't believe it's been a year to the day since Braden became only the 19th pitcher in Major League Baseball to retire all 27 batters he faced in a game. The feat was incredible. It also was poignant, the stuff movie scripts are made of, because it came on Mother's Day, an especially important day for Braden, whose mother, Jody Atwood, who was also Lindsey's daughter, died from cancer in 2001 when Braden was a senior at Stagg High.

Lindsey, 69, said she felt Atwood's presence when she embraced Braden on the field moments after the Tampa Bay Rays' Gabe Gross grounded out to shortstop to end the perfect game on a bright afternoon at the Oakland Coliseum.

"The first thing that came to my mind when Dallas and I got together was why isn't Jody here to share this with us," Lindsey said. "I think she's always been uppermost in his mind. They were very close. She should have been there with us."

Unfortunately, Braden wasn't on the A's active roster this Mother's Day. The 27-year-old left-hander was placed on the 15-day disabled list on April 18 with shoulder stiffness. He was examined two days later by Los Angeles orthopedist Dr. Lewis Yocum, whose tests revealed no structural damage. However, a throwing session on May 2 didn't go as well as hoped, and Braden, who could have come off the DL last Tuesday, was examined again by Yocum on Wednesday. After receiving no clear-cut answer, he is now seeking a second opinion.

Attempts to reach Braden to speak about the anniversary of his perfect game and his shoulder weren't successful. Susan Slusser, the A's beat writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, wrote in her blog last Tuesday that Braden is worried about the shoulder. "I hope that he gets some clarification about any other possibilities - or some concrete reassurances about why he's feeling so very off," Slusser wrote. "He's usually a life-of-the-party kind of guy, but this shoulder problem has him very down."

Lindsey said she and Braden haven't spoken much about the situation.

"He doesn't want me to worry, but he doesn't realize I worry more when I don't know about it," she said. "He's pretty stressed about it, but he's taking care of it. He knows that's what he has to do."

While on the disabled list, Braden has traveled from his home in Stockton most every day to the A's facility in Oakland for treatment.

Braden's perfect game thrust him into the national spotlight. His outgoing personality and sense of humor played well in the media. Lindsey said her grandson handled the attention beautifully. To her, he is the "same, great kid he's always been."

"Dallas took it all in stride," she said. "I don't think it's changed him at all."

This Date in Baseball

By Times-Dispatch Staff

May 9

1984 — The Chicago White Sox and Milwaukee Brewers battled for 8 hours, 6 minutes in the longest major league game. After playing 17 innings the previous day, the teams met again before a regularly scheduled game, making the total 34 innings for two days. Harold Baines homered off Chuck Porter with one out in the bottom of the 25th for a 7-6 victory. Tom Seaver won both games for the White Sox.

1999 — Marshall McDougall hit six consecutive homers and knocked in 16 runs — both NCAA records — in Florida State's 26-2 rout of Maryland. The second baseman opened with an RBI single, then hit six straight homers.

2006 — Tampa Bay prospect Delmon Young was suspended for 50 games without pay by the International League for throwing a bat that hit a replacement umpire in the chest. IL president Randy Mobley said he believed the suspension was the longest in the league's 123-year history. The suspension is retroactive to April 27, the day after Young tossed his bat in a Triple-A game while playing for Durham.

2008 — Tampa Bay's James Shields pitched a one-hitter and posted his second shutout in his past three starts in a 2-0 win over the Angels.

2010 — Dallas Braden pitched the 19th perfect game in major league history, a dazzling performance for the Oakland Athletics in a 4-0 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays. He struck out six in the 109-pitch performance, throwing 77 strikes in his 53rd career start.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento plows past Colorado Springs

By Veronika Tafoya / Sacramento River Cats

Matt Carson hit a go-ahead home run in the fifth inning and Sacramento beat Colorado Springs 5-3 on Mother's Day at Raley Field.

Sacramento drew three walks in the second inning off Colorado Springs starter Sean White, who gave up the first run of the game on a balk that scored Josh Donaldson.

Colorado Springs, which was shut out Saturday night and scored only two runs in the first game of the series, answered in the third by taking the 2-1 lead with an Eliezer Alfonzo home run. It was Alfonzo's first at-bat in a Sky Sox uniform this season.

Sky Sox infielder Eric Young Jr. tried to keep the inning alive by stealing second, his 10th stolen base of the year.

Sacramento felt the need to copy cat in the third inning, with Matt Carson stealing second base and later scoring on a double by Adrian Cardenas, who led the team in batting average (.346) heading into Sunday's game.

Sacramento starter Bobby Cramer hit two batters in the fifth inning, putting both Alfonzo and Charlie Blackmon on base before being replaced by reliever Joe Bateman, who escaped the threat. Cramer pitched 4.2 innings and allowed two runs off of four hits and struck out three batters.

The River Cats broke a 2-2 tie with Carson knocking out a solo home run in the fifth, his fifth homer of the season. Anthony Recker then picked up a double, stole third base and then scored on a Shane Peterson bunt single.

Sacramento saw four different pitchers from Colorado Springs through six innings, during which they drew five walks and struck out once. Combined, Sky Sox pitchers gave up 10 hits and four runs to Sacramento by the seventh inning. Willy Taveras scored a run for the Sky Sox in the seventh, but it would be their last.

Sacramento, on the other hand, wasn't finished: Josh Horton scored the final run of the game on a Wes Timmons single, giving the Cats a 5-3 victory. Timmons got his first hit since returning from the disabled list May 7 with a single in the first inning.

"I could have gone a lot more games without hitting anything," said Timmons, who finished 3-for-4 and is hitting .320. "But I mostly just feel blessed to be healthy enough now to compete at this level."

Sacramento aims to sweep the series against the Sky Sox on Monday at 12:05 p.m., with right handers Travis Banwart (0-2, 4.10) of Sacramento and Alan Johnson (1-1, 1.62) facing off in the final game of the homestand.

RockHounds top Frisco in final at-bat

Oscar LeRoy, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Ethan Hollingsworth admitted he probably didn't have his best stuff on Sunday afternoon, but it was sure good enough against the Frisco RoughRiders.

Hollingsworth had one of his best outings of the season with eight strong innings and then Kent Walton singled home Stephen Parker in the bottom of the ninth inning as the RockHounds defeated Frisco 2-1 on a sunny and hot Mother's Day at Citibank Ballpark.

Hollingsworth, who ended up getting a no decision, was sharp from the start as he didn't allow a hit until there were two outs in the fourth inning. He scattered three hits through eight innings and the only run he allowed came on a home run to left field by Davis Stoneburner in the fifth inning. He also struck out six and walked one.

"I was getting quick outs early and with this heat it helps to get into the dugout and keep the team in the game," said Hollingsworth, who lowered his ERA from 4.85 to 3.97 and threw 63 of his 94 pitches for strikes. "I was able to spot my fastball pretty well, mix some changeups and slider. The guys behind me made a lot of great plays and the defense was great. It was a full team win that everybody talks about."

RockHounds starting pitching this season hasn't been very consistent and that includes Hollingsworth, who didn't even make it through the fifth inning in two of his last three starts -- both of which resulted in losses for the 'Hounds.

"This should give me big confidence especially after having pretty poor outings in two of my last three games," he said.

Midland manager Steve Scarsone thought Hollingsworth was "outstanding."

"He was very economical with his pitches, he kept the ball down and he had a nice tempo going. He took charge of the game," Scarsone said.

The 12 groundball outs Hollingsworth induced on Sunday matched the number he had in a 4-3 win over Springfield on April 17 but Scarsone said Sunday's overall performance was probably the right-hander's best of the season.

And the RockHounds needed a strong starting performance on the mound as Frisco right-hander Carlos Pimentel was just as tough. Pimentel scattered four hits and allowed one run over 6 2/3 innings. The only run Midland scored against him came in the second inning when Matt Sulentic singled and later scored on a sacrifice fly to right field by Petey Paramore.

"(Pimentel) did a similar job," Scarsone said. "He used multiple pitches, kept us off balance and was able to get the outs when he needed them. It was a great day for pitchers."

The game stayed tied at 1-1 until the ninth inning.

After Paul Smyth (2-1) pitched a perfect ninth with two strikeouts in relief of Hollingsworth, it set up the heroics for the Midland offense in the bottom of the frame.

Stephen Parker led off the inning with a single. Then after a Jeremy Barfield groundout which moved Parker to second base, Matt Sulentic was intentionally walked by Tyler Tufts. That's when Kent Walton delivered a single on an 0-2 pitch which scooted just past second baseman Stoneburner into right field, allowing Parker to come around to score the winning run.

"They were all fastballs so I took the first one and then (Tufts) came back in a couple of times and I fought off a good two-seamer and I was just lucky enough to get the barrel on the ball right there," Walton said.

While Walton celebrated, he knew that this win wouldn't have been possible without the strong work of Hollingsworth.

"That was amazing," he said. "That's the first time I think I've seen someone in Double-A in the 2 1/2 weeks I've been here dominate a game like that. He worked down in the zone, got a lot of groundballs and did a good job."

Oscar LeRoy can be reached at oleroy@mrt.com

'HOUND BITES: With the victory, the RockHounds and Frisco have split the first two games of a four-game series and improves Midland's record to 15-15 and 10-6 at Citibank Ballpark. ...Both the RockHounds and the Frisco RoughRiders were wearing the uniforms of their parent clubs, the Oakland A's and Texas Rangers, respectively. ...Some recent transactions for the RockHounds include: Pitcher Fautino De Los Santos was promoted to Triple-A Sacramento; pitcher Lance Sewell was released by the Oakland A's organization; and pitchers Justin Souza and Jon Meloan joined the RockHounds from extended Spring Training. De Los Santos was 0-0 with three saves and 2.89 ERA. Sewell was 0-0 with a 10.89 ERA in seven innings of work. Souza is coming off a fractured elbow and has spent time in Midland during the 2009 and 2010 seasons. Meloan missed all of last season with an injury but has major league experience with the Dodgers (2007), Indians (2008) and A's (2009).

TODAY'S PROBABLES: The RockHounds host Frisco in the third game of a four-game series at 6:30 p.m. as Midland is expected to start RHP Justin Murray (0-4, 6.00) against LHP Richard Bleier (0-0, 0.00).

PORTS' WINNING STREAK HALTED AT FOUR GAMES

By The Record

After roaring for four days, the Stockton Ports' bats finally fell silent on Sunday. The Lake Elsinore Storm avoided getting swept and halted Stockton's winning streak at four with a 4-0 win at the Diamond before 3,333 fans. The Ports had scored 36 runs and pounded out 51 hits in their four wins, but starter Matt Lollis (2-4) and three Lake Elsinore relievers combined on the seven-hit shutout.

Stockton starter Fabian Williamson wasn't able to match the zeroes, allowing eight hits and four runs in six innings. Williamson didn't allow a run for the first four innings, but Edinson Rincon led off the fifth with a home run, Nathan Freiman followed with a double and Jonathan Galvez followed with another home run. That was enough for Lollis, who allowed four hits in five innings while striking out five.

The Ports had a few chances to score, but left 10 runners on base, while going 1 for 10 with runners in scoring position. The biggest missed opportunity came in the top of the fifth when Max Stassi flew out to right field with the bases loaded and two outs. Stockton's final rally came in the seventh when Michael Gilmartin struck out and Dusty Coleman grounded out with runners on first and third.

The first-place Ports (20-11) will have today off before hosting a four-game series against the Modesto Nuts beginning at 7:05 p.m. Tuesday. The Ports are 12-5 on the road, but 8-6 at Stockton Ballpark so far this season.

Bees Win 5-2 in Clinton

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

CLINTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (22-7) scored five runs on 10 hits to win their fourth consecutive game and snap their "streak" of seven consecutive one-run games with a 5-2 win over the Clinton LumberKings (9-22) on Sunday afternoon at Alliant Energy Field. The Bees scored a single run in the first inning against Clinton LHP James Paxton. CF Tyreece House (1-3) led off with a single and moved to second base when RF Royce Consigli (2-4) walked. 2B Nino Leyja (0-3) walked to load the bases. DH Jose Rivero (0-2) hit a sacrifice fly to right field to score House and make it 1-0. In the second inning LF Douglas Landaeta (1-3) singled and went to second base on a sacrifice bunt by C Daniel Petitti (0-3). House reached base on an error and Landaeta scored for a 2-0 lead Clinton touched up Bees LHP Jacob Brown (4-0) for two runs in the third inning. CF Matt Cerione (1-4) hit a two-run single with the bases loaded for a 2-2 tied score. Burlington scored a run in the sixth inning thanks to a throwing error by Clinton 3B Ramon Morla. 1B Josh Whitaker (3-5) singled and moved to second base on a single by 3B Wade Kirkland (1-4). Petitti reached on a throwing error and Whitaker scored to make it 3-2. The Bees added an insurance run in the seventh inning. Consigli led off the inning with a single and went to second base on a sacrifice bunt by Leyja. SS Yordy Cabrera (1-4) singled home Consigli for a 4-2 lead. The Bees and LumberKings finish their three-game series on Monday night at 6:00. The pitching match-up is as follows: RHP Blake Hasebrock (1-0, 0.64) for Burlington against a yet to be announced starter for Clinton. Pre-game coverage begins at 5:40 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR 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 (319) 754-5705, go online to www.gobees.com, or stop by the box office at Community Field during normal business hours.