

A's News Clips, Tuesday, May 17, 2011

Oakland A's top Los Angeles Angels in 10 innings

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The hearty souls that showed up to Overstock.com Coliseum to watch Monday night's game were rewarded with quite an ending.

Kurt Suzuki raced home from third on Mark Ellis' chopper to the right side to give the A's a 5-4 victory over the Los Angeles Angels in the bottom of the 10th.'s

Ellis' bouncer went to Howie Kendrick, who had come in from left field to give the Angels five infielders. After Fernando Rodney's wild pitch put runners on second and third and one out, Angels manager Mike Scioscia went with just two outfielders for Ellis' at-bat.

Kendrick fielded the ball off Ellis' bat and threw wide of the plate as Suzuki made a headfirst slide.

That concluded a game in which first pitch was delayed 1 hour, 25 minutes because of rain.

"What a great finish to a tough game," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Conditions were tough. We had a lead, blew a lead. The big hits. It was just a great game all the way around."

The announced crowd was 11,061, but it appeared that less than half that many fans were on hand for the 8:30 p.m. first pitch. Puddles were visible in left and right field as well as on the warning track.

The A's were down 4-3 and down to their last strike before rallying to tie the game 4-4 in the bottom of the ninth.

Daric Barton delivered a two-out RBI single on a 2-2 pitch from Angels reliever Jordan Walden that scored Coco Crisp. Crisp had singled with two outs and stole second to get into scoring position.

It was the first A's home game delayed by rain since a May 19, 2006, contest against the Giants.

The A's appeared to be facing their first home rainout since a May 5, 1998, game against Detroit was washed out.

A steady downpour fell in the hours leading up to the originally scheduled 7:05 start time, and the start was delayed three different times.

"It was just dead," Ellis said of the atmosphere. "It was not a fun game to play, but to come out and get a victory is huge. If you're going to be out there, you might as well win."

Batting practice was canceled and A's players milled around the clubhouse, wondering if the game would be played.

The A's broke a scoreless tie with three runs in the fifth off Joel Pineiro.

After David DeJesus was hit in the thigh with a pitch to lead off the inning, Ellis followed with a grounder to third. Alberto Callaspo thought about throwing to second, then uncorked a wild throw that got past first baseman Mark Trumbo.

DeJesus motored all the way home, making a nifty headfirst slide to avoid the tag of catcher Bobby Wilson.

Ellis wound up on third, and he came home on Cliff Pennington's single to center. Josh Willingham's sacrifice fly eventually made it 3-0.

But the Angels battled back against A's left-hander Brett Anderson.

They scored twice in the sixth to cut Oakland's lead to 3-2. Anderson limited the damage somewhat considering he loaded the bases with no outs. Callaspo's grounder to short could have been a double play, but Pennington made a bad flip to second and the A's got just the force out.

A terrific running catch in left-center by center fielder Crisp on Trumbo's deep drive went for a sacrifice fly but prevented a bigger inning.

Los Angeles took a 4-3 lead with two runs in the seventh on Kendrick's two-run, bases-loaded single to left off reliever Micahel Wuertz.

A's update: Michael Wuertz giving club bullpen lift with Andrew Bailey out

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/17/2011

As the A's bullpen awaits the return of injured closer Andrew Bailey, Michael Wuertz's resurgence has provided a boost.

After coming off the disabled list April 25 for a hamstring injury, the right-handed reliever gave up just one hit in his first eight appearances (81/3 innings). He hadn't allowed a run in nine appearances overall before yielding one in the seventh inning Monday.

Wuertz struck out the side in the ninth inning of Sunday's loss to the Chicago White Sox, using his bread-and-butter slider to finish off each hitter. He's showing form similar to 2009, when he led American League relievers with 102 strikeouts in 782/3 innings.

Last year, Wuertz was hampered by an early-season shoulder injury and posted a 4.31 ERA in 48 games.

"Things didn't fall into place. It was an uphill battle the whole way," Wuertz said before Monday's game against the Los Angeles Angels. "I got back to the right mindset this year. I'm not trying to be more than I am. Last year it was a matter of trying too hard."

It helps that his injury this season wasn't arm-related. Even after Wuertz returned from his shoulder injury last year, he said his arm didn't bounce back some days.

His performance so far this season has A's manager Bob Geren using him as a right-handed setup option along with Grant Balfour.

"His slider is back to where it was before, against righties and lefties," Geren said. "The ones that can do that against righties and get the same ugly swings against lefties are rare."

Bailey (strained forearm) is throwing in a second extended spring training game Tuesday in Phoenix rather than head out on a minor league rehab assignment.

"That's what he felt he'd like to do," Geren said. "Ronny (pitching coach Ron Romanick) talked with him on where he's at and what he felt comfortable doing."

Extended spring games are different from regular minor league games. It's a controlled environment, where the A's can manipulate innings, extending them to four outs, for example, if that helps Bailey get his work in.

Presumably, Bailey will report to Single-A Stockton or Triple-A Sacramento as a next step.

Left-hander Dallas Braden's rescheduled shoulder surgery was set to take place at 10:30 a.m. (ET) Tuesday in New York. It was originally scheduled for Monday, but Braden had a flight canceled.

Chin Music: Third (and hopefully last) adjustment on A's-Angels first pitch

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/16/2011 8:00pm

It's getting comical, I realize, but we're now looking at an 8:30 p.m. start time tonight at the Coliseum. The tarp is off the field and the rain has stopped. But until I see Brett Anderson emerge from the clubhouse and begin his warm-ups, I won't be convinced ...

Chin Music: Make that an 8:05 p.m. start time

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/16/2011 7:34pm

We've got another change at the Coliseum. The A's and Angels are now looking at an 8:05 p.m. start time, it was just announced in the press box. The rain is finally letting up, so it's looking like we'll have baseball tonight ...

Chin Music: 7:35 tentative start time for A's-Angels

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/16/2011 7:03pm

Update from the Coliseum ...

There's a tentative 7:35 p.m. start time for the A's-Angels series opener. But the rain is still falling hard, so we'll see if that's realistic. FYI, in these situations, it's the home team's decision on whether a game gets played or postponed. Once a game begins, however, the umpires take over.

Chin Music: Rain continues to fall at the Coliseum, but A's-Angels game is still on

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/16/2011 6:24pm

Here's the situation at the Coliseum ... The rain is falling steadily, batting practice has been canceled on the field, but the A's have no plans to postpone tonight's game against the Angels. That's what we're hearing. The forecast calls for a 30 percent chance of rain by 7 p.m., dropping to 15 percent by 8 p.m. If the A's haven't canceled this thing by now, they're willing to wait it out to see if they can squeeze it in, even if it means delaying the 7:05 first pitch.

Remember what it was like during rainy day recess in elementary school, when everyone was stuck in the classroom and all activity was indoors? That's the scene right now in the A's clubhouse. Everyone is milling around, grabbing a bite to eat and wondering if this game is going to be played. The busiest guy in the building right now? Head groundskeeper Clay Wood, who was walking the field earlier – in shorts, with rain pouring down – surveying what kind of condition the field was in. There are puddles on the warning track, and groundskeepers are sweeping water off the infield tarp. It's not going to be ideal playing conditions even if the rain stops.

It's bizarre to even consider a rainout for an A's home game. The last home rainout was May 5, 1998 against the Detroit Tigers. How many will show up for this one? Monday night games usually draw poorly anyway, and you can take it to the bank that tonight's crowd is below the season-low of 9,193 that showed up for a May 2 game against the Rangers.

The update from Bob Geren's pregame media chat:

–Andrew Bailey is heading to Phoenix to throw in another extended spring training game Tuesday. “That's what he felt he'd like to do. Ronny (pitching coach Ron Romanick) talked with him on where he's at, what he's comfortable doing,” Geren said. The other option was for Bailey to just go out on a rehab assignment with Single-A Stockton or Triple-A Sacramento. The advantage for the A's in an extended spring game is it's a “controlled” environment. The A's can stop the action, manipulate innings to keep Bailey out there for four outs if they choose – the situation can be tailored to what he needs. But pitching in minor league games will be a better test for Bailey because it's regular game conditions. That's the next step after Tuesday. There's still no indication of how many minor league games Bailey will need to pitch in before returning.

–Dallas Braden's shoulder surgery has been rescheduled for Tuesday at 10:30 a.m. He was originally supposed to have the operation today, but his flight to New York was canceled Sunday.

–Rich Harden, on the 60-day DL with a side muscle injury, is doing strengthening exercises but still not throwing. He's nowhere close to returning yet.

–Geren talked about Michael Wuertz's dominant form lately out of the bullpen. The guy has given up just one hit in eight appearances since coming off the DL for a hamstring injury. You'll notice he's starting to be used more in late-inning situations, and Geren considers him another right-handed setup option, filling the same role as Grant Balfour when Balfour isn't available. Until Bailey returns, Wuertz's effectiveness is even more important for the 'pen. I'll have more on Wuertz in tomorrow's paper. ...

Tonight's lineups (assuming there's baseball)

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

Angels – Aybar SS, Abreu DH, Izturis 2B, Hunter RF, Kendrick LF, Callaspo 3B, Trumbo 1B, Wilson C, Bourjos CF; Pineiro RHP.

A's top Angels in a wet blanket of a game

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

Monday night's game introduced a new question to the American League West: If the A's and Angels play late into the night - in a near-empty, rain-drenched ballpark - did it happen?

It did, much to the A's satisfaction. They scored once in the ninth inning to tie the game, then once more in the 10th to win 5-4 before a cozy gathering at the Coliseum.

A's officials announced the crowd at 11,061, but in reality, it was closer to 2,000. By the time the game ended, at 11:37 p.m., there were no more than a few hundred spectators left.

Kurt Suzuki and then Conor Jackson drew one-out walks off Angels reliever Fernando Rodney in the 10th. They advanced when Rodney uncorked a wild pitch with Mark Ellis up.

That prompted Angels manager Mike Scioscia to bring in his infield - and turn left fielder Howie Kendrick into the team's fifth infielder. Ellis hit a bouncing ball toward Kendrick (playing between first and second), who threw high to home plate. Suzuki slid in safely for the win.

"I was just trying to put the ball in play," Ellis said of his decisive grounder. "As an infielder, I know that's a tough play (for Kendrick), especially in wet conditions."

"It was just dead," Ellis said of the atmosphere. "Not a fun game to play - but to come out and get a victory is huge."

The A's earlier squandered a 3-0 lead and stood on the brink of a disheartening 4-3 loss. They rallied with two outs and nobody on base in the ninth, when Coco Crisp dropped a single into left field and stole second on Jordan Walden's second pitch to Daric Barton.

Barton, down to his last strike, singled to right-center on Walden's 2-2 pitch - a howling, 98-mph fastball - to score Crisp and tie the game at 4-4.

A's starter Brett Anderson handed reliever Michael Wuertz a 3-2 lead in the seventh, with two outs and a runner at first. That's also when the rain returned, making conditions wet and chilly and altogether unpleasant.

Wuertz had not allowed a run this season in nine appearances, but that ended Monday night. He allowed Maicer Izturis' infield single and walked Torii Hunter, loading the bases for Howie Kendrick - who lined a two-run single to left field, giving the Angels a 4-3 lead.

The game started at 8:30 p.m., after a one-hour, 25-minute rain delay (the first rain delay in Oakland since 2006).

The infield grass seemed dry and pristine, but the rain left its soggy mark in the outfield, along the foul lines. That became clear in the bottom of the first inning, when Josh Willingham hit a sharp grounder between Angels third baseman Alberto Callaspo and the bag.

As soon as the ball rolled through the dirt and onto the outfield grass, it abruptly skidded to a splashy stop. Angels shortstop Erick Aybar dashed over, took a long slide to reach the ball and probably felt as if he had gone for a swim. Willingham settled for a single.

Tyson Ross subbing capably for Dallas Braden

Ron Kroichick, Chronicle Staff Writer

As the A's move into the second quarter of their season - they played Game No. 41 on Monday night - their starting rotation carries a different twist than it did on Opening Night, with **Dallas Braden** headed for shoulder surgery and **Tyson Ross** filling his spot.

Ross looks like he's here to stay, too. He's 2-0 with a 1.69 ERA in his past four starts, after pitching into the eighth inning to earn the win Saturday against the Chicago White Sox.

"I'm finding a little bit of a groove," Ross said Monday. "It's still a work in progress - it's kind of like starting from scratch every fifth day. Every start is a clean slate. They don't care if you threw a perfect game in your last start, or gave up 10 runs."

Ross knows better than to become comfortable in the major leagues, especially at age 24. But he's also back in his familiar domain as a starter - his role at Bishop O'Dowd High in Oakland and at Cal - after making only two starts in 26 appearances for the A's last season.

Ross likes the structure of being a starter - for instance, coming to the ballpark Monday knowing his routine in advance (long toss and lower-body work in the weight room). He will make his next start Thursday against Minnesota.

Braden could miss the rest of the season, so Ross would appear to be more than a temporary place-holder.

"I have to go out there and earn my innings every time out," he said. "I know there are plenty of guys in the minors who are hungry to get up here."

Briefly: Closer **Andrew Bailey** (strained right forearm) will pitch in another extended spring training game today in Arizona. ... Infielder **Adam Rosales** will have another CT scan Wednesday on his broken right foot.

A's leading off

Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle

Braden's surgery today: Pitcher Dallas Braden finally found his way to New York on Monday, one day after his flight was canceled. The surgery on Braden's left shoulder was rescheduled for this morning.

Drumbeat: A's pregame: Playing in the rain?

Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/16/2011 5:57pm

The A's apparently will try to play tonight's game against the Angels, despite steady rain and a sure-to-be-meager crowd.

It's a curious decision, especially because both teams have a scheduled day off on Thursday, July 14 (coming out of the All-Star break) -- and open a series in Oakland on July 15. Safe to say, A's-Angels in July weather would draw more fans than tonight's game.

At any rate, the forecast calls for the rain to subside in the next couple of hours, so the A's will wait at least until game time (7:05) before making any decision. Brett Anderson is scheduled to face Joel Pineiro of the Angels.

If the game gets washed away, it would be the first rainout in Oakland since May 5, 1998 against Detroit.

Here are a couple of nuggets to come out of manager Bob Geren's pregame session with reporters:

**Geren didn't try to mask his team's offensive shortcomings 40 games into the season. The A's have scored only 141 runs, third-fewest in the American League (ahead of only Seattle and Minnesota).

"Our offense is still not anywhere close to where it could be, or where it needs to be," Geren said. "But I see light at the end of the tunnel."

Geren finds hope in the recent signs of life from first baseman Daric Barton and outfielder David DeJesus.

Tonight's lineup if the game does happen: Crisp, CF; Barton, 1B; Willingham, LF; Matsui, DH; Suzuki, C; DeJesus, RF; Ellis, 2B; Kouzmanoff, 3B; Pennington, SS.

**Dallas Braden traveled to New York today and is now scheduled for surgery on his left shoulder Tuesday morning. Braden's original flight, on Sunday, was cancelled.

**Andrew Bailey will return to Arizona and pitch in another extended spring-training game Tuesday.

On night of obstacles, Ellis clears last hurdle

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Mark Ellis rewarded the small contingent of fans who stuck around on a strange Monday evening that saw an 85-minute rain delay, extra innings, a peculiar defensive alignment and two plays at the plate.

A day removed from a 3-for-4 performance against the White Sox, Ellis knocked in the game-winning run in the bottom of the 10th and the A's defeated the Angels, 5-4, on a cold and rainy night at the Coliseum.

The A's forced the extra inning on Daric Barton's two-out, two-strike RBI single in the bottom of the ninth.

"It was not a fun game to play, but to come out and get a victory in a game like that is huge," Ellis said. "If you're going to be out there, you might as well win the game."

Ellis came to the plate after Kurt Suzuki and Conor Jackson each reached on walks from Angels reliever Fernando Rodney. After falling behind 0-1 to the righty, Ellis watched a pitch in the dirt that allowed Suzuki and Jackson to advance to third and second, respectively.

One pitch later, Ellis was down to his final strike -- one he would not give up easily. After battling with Rodney (2-2, 4.67 ERA), fouling off pitch after pitch, the Angels decided to employ a five-man infield, bringing in left fielder Howard Kendrick, primarily a second baseman, to play between first and second.

That's when Ellis became Monday's hero.

The nine-year veteran hit a soft grounder to Kendrick, who had to run to his left to field it, and Suzuki got a good jump from third to beat the throw home and slide in for the walk-off win.

"I just wasn't going to strike out," Ellis said. "I know as an infielder that's a tough play to catch that ball, especially in these conditions. So I just tried to put the ball in play somewhere."

"We're going to run on contact no matter what," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We've got to try to win a game right there. We're fortunate that, even with five guys, it wasn't at somebody."

But Ellis would have never had the opportunity to put the game away if not for a two-out ninth-inning rally thanks to Coco Crisp and Barton.

Crisp singled with two out, and then the speedy center fielder promptly swiped second for his 13th stolen base of the year. Barton then ripped an RBI single off Jordan Walden.

"They got a couple of balls to fall," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Jordan ran a [fastball] to Barton down and in, and he managed to find the right-center gap."

The late-game magic from Ellis and Barton helped bail out another odd scene from Monday: a shaky performance from A's reliever Michael Wuertz. After starting the season with an impeccable 0.00 ERA, surrendering only one hit in 9 1/3 innings of work through nine appearances, the righty gave up the go-ahead run that the A's eventually clawed back from.

Wuertz entered the game in the seventh, relieving starter Brett Anderson, who pitched 6 2/3 innings. With a runner already aboard, Wuertz quickly fell behind the first two batters he faced.

He allowed a single to Maicer Izturis before walking Torii Hunter to load the bases. While he trailed in the count against the first two hitters, he didn't have a chance to fall behind against Kendrick.

Kendrick swung at the first pitch and connected on a line-drive single to left that plated two runs for a 4-3 lead. Wuertz finally recorded an out one batter later. He lasted only one-third of an inning and saw his ERA jump to 0.93.

While Wuertz's outing resulted in a no decision for Anderson, it also nearly nullified a fifth inning in which the A's tagged Angels starter Joel Pineiro for three runs and sent eight batters to the plate.

After David DeJesus was hit by a pitch near his right knee to lead off the frame, Ellis found himself involved in another peculiar sequence that resulted in a play at the plate.

Ellis hit a grounder to third and hustled down the line, forcing an errant throw from Alberto Callaspo. The ball missed first baseman Mark Trumbo's glove and rolled to the wall between the Angels' dugout and bullpen.

DeJesus rounded third and headed toward home, beating the throw and sliding in headfirst to narrowly avoid the tag from catcher Bobby Wilson for the game's first run. Ellis wound up at third on the play and Cliff Pennington singled him in two batters later. Josh Willingham capped off the inning with a sacrifice fly to center.

But that's all the A's would be able to muster until the timely late-inning hitting from Ellis and Barton.

"What a great finish to a tough game," Geren said. "The conditions were tough. We got a lead, then blew the lead, and to fall behind and come back the way we did, that was a big win for the team."

Gonzalez, confounding Angels offense to clash

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

Call it a big league do-over.

When Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez takes the mound against the Angels on Tuesday, he will look to rebound from his last outing, a start against the Rangers. That day, Gonzalez lasted just 2 2/3 innings and gave up seven runs in the third inning but was rescued when the contest was called because of rain before it became an official game.

In other words, it didn't count.

"Obviously, it was a blessing in disguise that would happen. Now you just move forward," Gonzalez said. "It happens to any pitcher: You give up a couple of runs, but it's how they bounce back. This is a situation where I have to bounce back, especially against the Angels. It's not an easy task against a division rival. They're not going to be easy, but as long as I keep my team in the game, that's all that matters."

The Angels are among the AL leaders in batting average but are in the middle of the pack in runs scored, primarily because of their inability to hit with runners in scoring position. Their .236 average with runners in scoring position after their first 41 games ranked eighth in the AL.

"In '09, we scored the second most runs in baseball and were ninth or 10th in home runs," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "The offense contributed in many ways. It's great to balance power with speed and situational hitting, everything. The bottom line is scoring one more run than the other team. More distressing with us is our hitting with runners in scoring position more than any perception of not hitting home runs. That's what we need to be more productive with, hitting with guys in scoring position."

Gonzalez will pose a challenge to the Angels' hitters. The Oakland starter is holding hitters to a .133 average with runners in scoring position. Moreover, hitters are 0-for-15 against him with two outs and runners in scoring position.

That said, the Angels still beat Gonzalez, 5-0, on April 25 in Anaheim. He went five innings, giving up five runs, four earned, on eight hits and one walk with five strikeouts.

"You have to take the same swing you normally do, not try to do too much," Angels infielder Maicer Izturis said. "When you try to do too much, that's when you get behind in counts and pop up pitches. Just relax and take your normal swing."

On the mound, Tyler Chatwood, 21, will make his eighth start as the fifth starter for the Angels. He won a decision over the A's in Anaheim on April 26, going 5 1/3 innings and giving up three earned runs on five hits and four walks with one strikeout.

Angels: Chatwood nothing to show for strong outings

- Chatwood has given up just two earned runs in his past two starts, covering 14 1/3 innings, but did not get a decision in either game. He has a 3.19 ERA in his past six starts. He has impressed teammates with his ability to pitch out of jams.
- If the Angels' rotation holds up as anticipated, Chatwood would pitch the finale of the first series of Interleague Play against Atlanta on Sunday at Angel Stadium. One of the rookie's best friends, Tommy Hanson, pitches for the Braves and preceded Chatwood at East Valley High School in Redlands, Calif.

Athletics: Braden surgery costs more than quality arm

- Oakland starter Dallas Braden will undergo shoulder surgery Tuesday and will be missed in the clubhouse, especially by Gonzalez.

"It's tough. Dallas has always been our pitching leader," Gonzalez said. "He's the one that motivates us all, but being now that [Brandon] McCarthy and myself are the oldest guys in the rotation, it's not easy. The other guys do a great job, so to keep up with them is not going to be an easy task. They're leading the pack right now."

Braden's advice to Gonzalez after the start in Texas was simple: move forward.

"That's the stuff you want to hear, not more of the jokes," Gonzalez said. "The jokes are obvious. We know it. You don't constantly have to remind me. That's one thing Dallas does, he cuts it and moves forward. That's definitely what you need, as a leader."

Braden is likely out for the season.

Worth noting

- Rich Harden's time on the disabled list with a shoulder injury doesn't appear to be nearing an end any time soon. The A's hurler has been limited to strengthening exercises.
- A's right-hander Andrew Bailey will hold off on a Minor League rehab stint and instead pitch in another extended spring training game in Arizona on Tuesday.
- Angels shortstop Erick Aybar went 0-for-4 Monday to snap a 13-game hitting streak.

Lights-out Wuertz emerges as key bullpen cog

By Jane Lee and Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Since returning from the disabled list, A's reliever Michael Wuertz has quietly put up numbers reminiscent of a remarkable 2009 campaign, when he stood among the top American League setup men.

Those numbers -- no runs, one hit and 13 strikeouts in 9 1/3 innings -- are not just the result of the return of his menacing slider, he said Monday, but a fastball that has allowed the slider to be even better.

"I think I'm getting ahead of counts with my fastball, and any time you can do that really helps me to be able to use my slider to put away guys," he said. "Obviously, it's somewhat back to where I want it to be, but there's still room for improvement, which is a good thing based on how it's looking now."

It's hard to imagine visions of an upgrade from a nonexistent ERA and a 0.43 WHIP, but Wuertz is not one for complacency, especially following a handful of absences from the game, most recently in the form of a left hamstring injury.

The right-hander missed the first month of the 2010 season because of a bout of shoulder tendinitis. He struggled upon his return, but bounced back midseason, posting a 3.16 ERA and a 1.21 WHIP from the start of July through the end of the year. Overall, he was 2-3 with six saves and a 4.31 ERA after posting a 6-1 record and 2.63 ERA with a career-high 102 strikeouts in 2009.

"I think last year was a matter of trying to be somebody I wasn't, in a way," Wuertz said. "I was trying to be too good, coming off the year I had. I think I was trying too hard instead of just taking a step back and saying, 'Hey, this is who I am.' With my slider, I was trying to make it too good. I'm back in the right frame of mind and just being me."

"This year, more than anything, I've really been paying more attention to how I've pitched to certain hitters in the past. I'm trying to study a little bit more and find different ways to be successful."

So far, so good. Wuertz has a sky-high swing-and-miss percentage of 42.4. In his most recent outing against the White Sox on Sunday, he fanned all three batters he faced. Even more, he did it in the ninth inning of a one-run ballgame, signaling manager Bob Geren's regained confidence in placing the reliever in key late-inning situations.

"He's a guy a couple years ago was one of the best setup guys in baseball," Geren said. "He had a decent year last year and was obviously sidelined a bit before coming back, but he looks as good as he has, and that's a huge plus for us late in the game."

"He's throwing really well. With his slider, he can throw it to righties and lefties, and that's what's really impressive. Some guys in the league have a devastating slider they can throw against right-handers, but once you can do the same against lefties, those guys are good. And he's one of those when he's on."

Said Wuertz: "When you're a reliever, you want the ball in those late innings. With the guys we have here, you don't want to be that missing link in the bullpen. You want to go out each and every time and, when you get your name called and get the ball, you want to throw up a zero."

Three-hit day could signal turnaround for Ellis

OAKLAND -- Mark Ellis is used to slow starts, so it's no wonder the A's second baseman isn't concerned about his .194 batting average at the quarter mark of the season. Neither is A's manager Bob Geren.

"You don't like it -- you never want to get off to a slow start," Ellis said. "I've never been a real fast starter, but you just want to feel like you're helping the team and contributing to winning ballgames. ... It's something you have to battle through and pretend like you're 0-for-0 going into every game."

"He's a veteran guy, a leadership guy," Geren said. "He doesn't show any signs of panic when he struggles."

Before Sunday's 4-3 loss to the White Sox, the nine-year veteran was mired in an 8-for-73 slump over his previous 20 games. But Sunday, Ellis enjoyed a 3-for-4 afternoon with three singles -- a couple of which just eked through the infield.

It was just the kind of performance Ellis thinks he needed to get things going offensively.

"A lot of the times you hit the ball hard, you hit it right at them, so sometimes it's good to get the bleeders through the infield," he said. "It's something that hopefully can break you out of your little funk and get you going."

If Sunday's showing wasn't enough to get Ellis out of his hitting slump, Monday's matchup with Angels righty Joel Pineiro could be an added confidence booster for him. Ellis was batting .400 in 40 career at-bats against Pineiro and had drawn six walks.

Although Ellis has struggled in the batter's box, Geren lauded his middle infielder for not letting it affect his defense, pointing specifically to a handful of web gems Ellis made against the White Sox on Sunday.

"The one thing he brings consistently is his defense," Geren said. "Had we pulled that game out yesterday and won, you could very easily say he won the game with his glove. ... With an average second baseman, they may have scored five, six, seven runs. He literally took a minimum of one run away from that team."

Bailey opts for another extended spring game

OAKLAND -- A's right-hander Andrew Bailey will hold off on a Minor League rehab stint and instead pitch in another extended spring training game in Arizona on Tuesday.

"That's what he felt he'd like to do," manager Bob Geren said. "We talked it over, and it seems like a good situation, a good spot. It's perfect for him. Hopefully he can move up from there."

Bailey, close to returning from a strained right forearm, is coming off an encouraging session on Saturday, when he threw 1 1/3 innings in Arizona, giving up two hits and one run in an 18-pitch outing while flashing 92 and 94 mph on the radar gun.

It represented his first live game action since the onset of his injury in mid-March, and if all goes well Tuesday, it's believed Bailey will need a handful of appearances under his belt in the Minors before the team activates him.

That time could come before month's end, though.

"Any time you add a guy like Andrew Bailey to a bullpen," Geren said, "it's going to make the team better."

Harden still limited to strengthening exercises

OAKLAND -- Righty Rich Harden's time on the disabled list with a shoulder injury doesn't appear to be nearing an end any time soon.

The A's hurler, who has yet to pitch in a game this season after signing a one-year deal worth \$1.5 million as a free agent in the offseason, has been limited to strengthening exercises, manager Bob Geren said Monday.

"He's working through it and feeling really good," said the A's skipper.

There is no timetable on when Harden will be cleared to throw again, though Geren said that time should come "relatively soon."

The 29-year-old Harden, who was transferred to the 60-day DL on April 18, is attempting to work back from an injury to the teres major muscle in his shoulder. This marks his 10th career DL stint and seventh with the A's.

Worth noting

Geren confirmed that lefty Dallas Braden will undergo surgery to repair a torn capsule in his pitching shoulder on Tuesday morning in New York. Braden was initially supposed to have the procedure done Monday, but his scheduled Sunday flight was canceled.

Braden's recovery time will be determined following the operation, to be performed by Mets medical director David Altchek. However, it's likely that the southpaw will miss the remainder of the season.

A's win 5-4 in 10 innings

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Kurt Suzuki scored from third base in the 10th inning on a fielder's choice grounder to an outfielder playing in the infield, lifting the Oakland Athletics to a 5-4 win over the Los Angeles Angels on Monday night.

Suzuki drew a one-out walk off Los Angeles reliever Fernando Rodney (2-2), moved to second on another walk then took third on a wild pitch.

After Angels manager Mike Scioscia called in left fielder Howie Kendrick to play in the infield, Mark Ellis hit a sharp grounder to Kendrick near second base. Kendrick tried to throw home but the ball sailed high as Suzuki slid across the plate.

Grant Balfour (3-1) pitched one inning with three strikeouts for the win.

Gutierrez: A's Ellis getting it done with glove, if not bat

[Paul Gutierrez](#), CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND -- Mark Ellis entered Monday night's rain-delayed series opener against the Los Angeles Angels hitting 74 points below his career batting average.

Thankfully for him, and the A's, the second baseman does not take his woes at the plate out to second base with him.

"Oh no, I can't do that," he said Monday afternoon, hours before the A's 5-4 rain-delayed, 10-inning defeat of the Angels at Overstock.com Coliseum.

"I wouldn't be here if I took it out there with me. It's frustrating to not hit and not contribute offensively. My defense is there, though."

Indeed, Ellis is playing like a Gold Glover, while his bat looks like it's made of lead. Even as he had the game-winning RBI with a fielder's choice grounder to left-fielder Howie Kendrick, who was playing second base in a five-man infield.

While Ellis had his first three-hit game of the season on Sunday, he is just 11 for his last 78 (.141) with no walks, one double and two RBI in his last 22 games after going 0-for-5 against the Angels.

Overall, he is batting .187 with no home runs and seven RBI.

All of this, mind you, is in the wake of him batting a career-high .291 in 2010.

Confused? Imagine how Ellis feels.

"(Sunday) I got three hits, cheap hits," he said. "Well, not cheap, but I wasn't squaring the ball up and I got three hits."

Baseball is a cyclical thing, so Ellis' hitting troubles have to reverse themselves soon, right?

"He's a veteran guy, a leadership guy," said A's manager Bob Geren. "The thing that's consistent is his defense. He doesn't show any signs of panic (at the plate).

"Had we pulled it out (Sunday) and won, you could have said he won that game for us with his defense. He's so valuable with his glove."

He had numerous clutch plays on defense Sunday, including a sweet bare-handed grab and throwout on a high chopper. Monday night, on the slick grass, he had a few more highlight-worthy snags.

But if his bat stays silent -- yes, the A's had a Mark Ellis bat giveaway day on Saturday -- those drum beats from Sacramento pounding away for Jemile Weeks will only grow louder.

Weeks, the A's first-round pick out of Miami in 2008, was batting .327 with 19 runs scored, 19 walks, a .427 on-base percentage and a .909 OPS in 27 games for the triple-A River Cats through the weekend.

Ellis has been with the A's organization since the Jan. 8, 2001 trade that also landed Oakland Johnny Damon and has been a mainstay in the big leagues since 2002.

"When I first came up, Dave Justice was here and he told me, 'You'll look up one day and you'll notice you've got 12 years in the big leagues,'" Ellis said. "I'm not there yet, but it's getting close."

So Ellis has been around long enough to hear the whispers...and the haters. Not that he listens.

"I could care less," Ellis said. "If there's somebody better, then put them out there. That's fine be me. I'm here to do my job, and that's to help this team win."

Even if it's just with his glove. Or on a fielder's choice to the left-fielder playing second base to score Kurt Suzuki for the victory.

Ellis walk-off gives A's the win

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, May 16, 2011

Oakland, CA – The rain delayed the game for about ninety minutes and left many wondering if there would be a game today. After what seemed like an eternity the first pitch was thrown and both teams quickly adjusted to a wet field.

No one expected a dramatic ending that led to extra innings and a walk-off run from Mark Ellis to win the game in overtime defeating the Angels 5-4. An unbelievable effort from a team that lost their lead early but never gave up in tough weather conditions.

"It wasn't much fun or good to pitch in," Ellis said. "It means a lot to win a game like this against a division rival, it's a good win for us."

Coco Crisp tied the game bottom of the ninth frame that led to extra innings. With the rain still coming down only a few remained from the questionable crowd of 11,061. For those who stayed it was definitely worth it.

Fernando Rodney's struck out one and walked two before Mark came to bat. With one out and the pressure mounting, Rodney threw a wild pitch that allowed both runners to advance to second and third. Ellis knew it was his time to shine, waiting for the right opportunity, he grounded the game winning run and the celebration began.

"I knew I wasn't going to strike out," he explained. "I saw the huge gap in the middle and wanted to get the ball there." "I know as an infielder that would be a tough play to catch especially in these conditions."

The A's aren't playing their best baseball but it's still early. Good teams don't quit and Oakland showed that tonight. Due to the rain there was no batting practice for either team so it seemed fitting that the offense was unavailable until players warmed up and by the fifth inning, the A's started bringing in the hits.

Joel Pineiro allowed seven hits, three runs (all earned), two walks and three strike outs in seven innings. An error at third led to Oakland's first run when Alberto Callaspo over threw first and David DeJesus scored with no outs. Cliff Pennington then singled center and Mark Ellis scored. Pineiro intentionally walked Daric Barton and loaded the bases.

Josh Willingham popped out to center field and brought in another run giving the A's a 3-0 lead. The Angels returned the favor and brought in two runs after Brett Anderson gave up a single and two walks to load the bases top of the sixth. Callaspo grounded into force out and Maicer Izturis scored. Mark Trumbo was out on a sacrifice fly and Torii Hunter scored.

After a pitching change for Oakland, Michael Wuertz walked two and gave up a single to again load the bases. Howie Kendrick singled center bringing in two more runs to take the lead 4-3 in the seventh frame. At this point the rain got worse and all assumed the umpires would call the game, no such luck. Both teams battled and the A's bullpen did what was needed in keeping the Angels off the score board.

"Anderson threw the ball well except for one inning," manager Bob Geren said. "Majority of his outing was good, I think we had a great finish to a tough game." "The conditions were tough, we blew the lead and came back for the win.

Thanks to a two-out ninth inning rally both Crisp and Barton set up Ellis' game winning RBI. Crisp singled, swiped second for his thirteenth stolen base of the year. Daric then ripped an RBI single off Jordan Walden. The two walks issued to both Kurt Suzuki and Conor Jackson was a perfect ending to a long night. The walk-off grounder sent Suzuki dashing to home plate and he was ruled safe.

Younger MLB players embrace Twitter, 140 characters at a time

By Mike Dodd, USA TODAY

Walk through a major league clubhouse a few hours before first pitch, and you'll likely see players huddled in their lockers over their mobile devices, thumbs a-blazing.

U got emails & texts, 4ever. New 2 the game: Twitter.

"It's becoming as prevalent as texting now," says Garrett Olson, who has spent time with the Pittsburgh Pirates and their Class AAA team this year.

More than 200 big-league players are chatting directly with fans on the popular social media platform this season, and the number is growing steadily. Players say they love the exchanges with their followers — and like the fact that it's limited to 140 characters at a time.

"It's a lot of fun, just interacting with your fans," says Cincinnati Reds second baseman Brandon Phillips, whose online persona @DatDudeBP entertains more than 31,000 followers. "I'm just keeping it real and being myself. I'm a very outgoing person, and I don't bite my tongue."

To some, Twitter is the 2011 equivalent of television in the early 1960s: "A vast wasteland," in the words of then-Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton Minow 50 years ago this week. The majority of tweets could support the argument.

But to others, the gems in the online playground are worth the effort — a chance to engage players, see an unvarnished side of their personalities and peek behind the scenes.

"We all have a good sense of humor in here," Olson says. "People can see that and they realize we're people and have quirks, and we're very relatable."

Twitter was launched in 2006, but it was a couple of years before athletes began embracing it. MLB trails several other sports in the number of athletes tweeting; it is, after all, the country's most traditional pastime and harbors a clubhouse culture that frowns on overt self-promotion.

According to tweeting-athletes.com (@Pro_Athletes), 207 big-leaguers have public Twitter accounts, ranking fifth behind athletes in the NFL (1,013), soccer (447), the NBA (331) and mixed martial arts (229).

The website's baseball roster includes more than 30 retired players and four active managers. No baseball player is among the top 10 of athletes, a domain ruled by Boston Celtics center Shaquille O'Neal with nearly 3.75 million followers since opening his account in November 2008.

Nick Swisher of the New York Yankees is baseball's MVT. He has accumulated 1.32 million followers, nearly 10 times more than the next-highest active player, the San Francisco Giants' Brian Wilson with almost 142,000. Retired slugger-steroids outer Jose Canseco has about 396,000.

"My (personal) team and I have done a great job of really building it up," says Swisher, whose celebrity appeal is amplified by his wife, actress Joanna Garcia. "Somebody said we had the 200th-biggest Twitter following in the world."

Swisher, who was traded to the Yankees from the Chicago White Sox in November 2008, says he started tweeting early, and the number of followers "didn't really blow up until we got here to New York."

MLB prohibits uniformed personnel from tweeting during games (starting 30 minutes before first pitch), but otherwise has no formal policy for players, leaving it up to individual clubs to suggest guidelines and warn about the pitfalls. White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen, loquacious in any forum, was suspended for two games and fined \$20,000 two weeks ago for tweeting negative comments after being ejected from a game. He said he agreed with the sanction and vowed to continue using Twitter.

Easier than blogging

According to tweeting-athletes.com, the Los Angeles Angels lead the majors in tweeters with 11, including two players who made the opening-day roster but have since been sent to the minors. The Florida Marlins, with 10 tweeters, including one recently shipped out, are among the most active.

Marlins outfielder Logan Morrison, on the disabled list with a sprained foot, has sent out more than 7,200 tweets to his 22,000 loyal — and amused — followers. One Sunday last month, he posted about 65 times in seven hours. If Morrison has a filter, it went on the disabled list long before he did. His tweets range from self-deprecating and clever to crass; from playfully teasing his followers to posts on public restroom etiquette.

"I throw some jokes in for fun," Morrison says. "Some fans think you're serious, and you get some strange comments. ... It's like, 'Dude, we're joking here.' "

The limits of Twitter are a major part of the appeal for big-leaguers, who need to be wary about security and invasion of privacy.

"I was getting tired of the Facebook stuff because it was too personal for me," says Reds pitcher Sam LeCure, with about 7,400 followers. "I didn't want to totally open up the window into my life that much. ... (Twitter) just seemed a little more casual."

And, as Atlanta Braves pitcher Peter Moylan put it when asked by a fan why he stopped blogging: "Tweeting is easier, to be honest."

As with any unfiltered communication with the public, Twitter has its risks.

It was a decidedly unsocial network around the White Sox last year, as Guillen's son Oney criticized the club and general manager Ken Williams on Twitter. It fractured the relationship between the GM and the manager, who say they have repaired it.

"I don't particularly understand the whole social media thing," Williams told news reporters after Guillen's suspension last month. "I understand how it can work for you at times, but I certainly see more of the pitfalls. I don't get why people want to tell all of their business and whereabouts all the time."

Wilson, the quirky Giants closer, shut down his account in April 2009 after one of his playful tweets led to a blog item suggesting he was out partying the night before he blew a save. Wilson is back at it this year, off-the-wall but a little more careful.

Oakland Athletics reliever Brad Ziegler last year created an unexpected ruckus when he chimed in on the debate about boycotting the 2011 All-Star Game in Arizona after the state passed a tough immigration law.

"In the end, you don't want to hurt anybody's feelings or say something that will be embarrassing," White Sox utility man Brent Lillibridge says.

Younger players have embraced the phenomenon more than established stars.

"A lot of the older guys make fun of me for tweeting," says Arizona Diamondbacks pitcher Barry Enright, 25, who was optioned to Class AAA last week. "They call me 'Tweeter.' "

So is the MLB tweet boom a fad? "It's a big wave," Enright says. "It's kind of like the new generation."

To tweet or not to Tweet

Mike Dodd and Seth Livingstone, USA Today

The informality and spontaneity of Twitter is one of the main appeals of the social media phenomenon. And to a professional organization wishing to control its image, it is also a concern.

Exhibit A: Ozzie Guillen, who was suspended for two games and fined \$20,000 for posting negative comments after being ejected from a game at Yankee Stadium on April 27.

"There is the obvious benefit of having players who are connecting with their fans in a new way and in a way that's obviously very popular," says Matt Bourne, a spokesman for MLB. "But some of the clubs are sensitive to the kinds of mistakes that have happened in the past with athletes in a variety of sports."

Despite a very discouraging word from manager John Farrell this spring, eight Toronto Blue Jays players have Twitter accounts, including ace Ricky Romero, top prospect Brett Lawrie and pitcher Brett Cecil, who was recently demoted to Class AAA.

"I don't Tweet, and I don't plan to," Farrell, 48, said during spring training. "My opinion: For a player to be involved in that, they set themselves up for another distraction.

"(We) can't mandate anything to them but probably would advise them to just let it be.

"We make them aware of some of the pitfalls that could possibly exist there," he added. "We're not going to say that they can't do it, but they've got to be careful."

Other teams are embracing the opportunities.

"Once I started with it, the Diamondbacks kind of asked me to keep going with it," says Barry Enright, a starting pitcher for Arizona this season before a minor league demotion.

Bourne says teams briefed players on the potential hazards during their normal spring training meeting on media issues. The basic message: Don't tweet anything you wouldn't say in front of a news reporter.

Cincinnati Reds second baseman Brandon Phillips says outspoken Bengals wide receiver Chad Ochocinco helped persuade him to join Twitter. But he says the front office hasn't discouraged him.

"Nobody's said nothing to me about Twitter. But the thing is, a lot of people do worry about what I'm going to say. And I feel like they should," Phillips says with a smile. "I'm not going to say nothing (harmful to the team). I respect my team too much. It's all in fun."

Statistical revelations about Giants, A's

Lowell Cohn, Press Democrat, 5/16/2011

This is about a particular baseball statistic as it relates to the Giants and A's. I won't tell you what it's called until a little later because I don't want to scare you off.

I almost never write about stats. They bewilder me. I am a storyteller, a character describer and an opinion giver. But today is about this one particular stat. It all started on Sunday. I was innocently watching the A's and Sharks games on television with my son Grant — you may know him from his writing on my blog, the Cohn Zohn.

"Have you heard about OPS+?" Grant said.

Say what?

He went on to explain it's the greatest thing in baseball stats, more precise than old-style stuff like batting average and RBIs. I said I like batting average and RBIs. I understand them.

"Be open-minded," he said.

He said OPS+ is the bee's knees because it combines on-base percentage and slugging percentage and is even weighted for the relative difficulty of ballparks.

"People actually sit around thinking of this stuff?" I asked.

He shrugged. He said an OPS+ of 100 represents league average. Above that, you're good. Below that, you stink. I could comprehend the good/stink duality.

He gave me a for-instance. Barry Bonds had the three highest OPS+ seasons of all time. His best was in 2002 when he topped the chart at a whopping 268. Babe Ruth is the all-time leader in career OPS+ at 206. Ted Williams is second. Bonds is third. Mickey Mantle is sixth. Willie Mays does not make the top 10, although his career number is 157, very good.

So, how do the Giants and A's rank on the OPS+ scale, based on performance before Monday's games?

Of their significant hitters, only three Giants come in over 100. Pat Burrell is 112. That's interesting because you think of Burrell striking out, but he actually is productive for the Giants. His OPS+ says so.

Nate Schierholtz — yes Nate Schierholtz — is 107. And Pablo Sandoval was a monstrous 145 before he broke his wrist. He was 95 last season, another indication he wasn't so hot in 2010.

I'll give you a few others just so you know the deal. Aubrey Huff's OPS+ is 78, a real stinkeroo, especially compared to his 138 in 2010. Miguel Tejada is 34, which makes him 66 percentage points south of average, which makes him the worst in the National League by 15 points, which makes him the worst in the major leagues. FYI, Tejada also is one of the worst fielding shortstops, so even his batting stats don't show how bad he is.

These numbers tell us pitching is saving the Giants' bacon because the hitting sure isn't. Same goes for the A's.

Quickie A's stat: Reggie Jackson's lifetime OPS+ was 139.

Back to the present. Only two A's are hitting above 100, the number that indicates average, as in mediocre. They are Conor Jackson at 112 and Ryan Sweeney at 135, although Sweeney hasn't had many at-bats.

Here's proof the A's aren't hitting. Hideo Matsui: 89; Kevin Kouzmanoff: 70; David DeJesus: 86, and Mark Ellis a pitiful 38, second-worst in the majors. Lucky for the A's they have pitchers Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Tyson Ross.

The A's rank third from last in the American League with an OPS+ of 85. The Giants rank third from the bottom of the NL at 82. No surprises there.

I got up early Monday morning and dutifully did my OPS+ research and was proud of it and started writing my column. After a while, Grant filtered into my office.

"Dad," he said, "they came up with a brand-new stat that's even better than OPS+. OPS+ already is outdated."

He told me the newer stat is called wOBA or "weighted on-base average." I sprinted upstairs to my bedroom and buried my head under a pillow.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Outman dominant in victory over Nashville

By Mike Morris / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento left-hander Josh Outman sat out much of 2009 and all of 2010 recovering from Tommy John surgery. However, Outman spent most of Monday night sitting down the Nashville Sounds batters en route to a road 3-2 win, his fourth straight victory.

The 26-year-old was 4-1 with a 3.48 ERA in Oakland his rookie season, and thought to be in line for a spot in the A's rotation. After one-and-a-half years out of baseball, Outman began 2011 in Sacramento. He was 0-1 through four starts with a 8.59 ERA, but has recently reminded us of his outstanding 2009 form.

Outman allowed two hits, one a two-run home run in the seventh inning. He is now 4-1 with a 4.78 ERA, allowing only six runs in his last four starts.

Sacramento pitching has been spectacular of late, as the River Cats have won 12 of 15 games, recording three shutouts in that span. River Cats pitching leads the Pacific Coast League with a 3.63 ERA. They also lead the league with 330 strikeouts.

Catcher Anthony Recker hit a lead-off double in the fourth to get things started and left fielder Adrian Cardenas brought him in to put the first run on the board. Josh Donaldson followed the Cardenas single with a double of his own, bringing in Cardenas to give the River Cats the 2-0 lead.

Newest River Cat Michael Taylor, called up earlier in the road trip, drove in his third run of the season on a single to right that scored Donaldson in the sixth. Taylor had three hits on the night, and has five in his last two games.

The Sounds made noise late in the game, scoring two in seventh. It wouldn't be enough as the River Cats pitching shut them out the rest of the way.

Sacramento has its best franchise record through 39 games (26-13). After starting the season 2-5, Sacramento has posted a 23-9 record over the last 31 games. They are now 14-5 on the road and 7-2 in games decided by one run on the road.

The River Cats plays at 9:05 a.m. on Tuesday as right-hander Guillermo Moscoso (3-2 3.13) faces Nashville Sounds right-hander Josh Butler (2-2 3.90).

Hounds Come Up Short Against Cruz And Frisco

05/17/2011 9:35 AM ET

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Dr Pepper Ballpark ... Frisco, TX - - - -

Nelson Cruz is an All-Star outfielder for the Texas Rangers. He is also a former RockHound ("class" of 2004). Monday night, Nelson had been quiet in the first game of a rehabilitation assignment with the Double-A Frisco RoughRiders, going 0-for-2 plus a walk.

He then came to bat in the eighth inning, after the RockHounds had broken a scoreless tie in the top of the inning to take a 2-0 lead. With one on and one out, Cruz ripped an RBI double into the gap in left-center, putting the RoughRiders on the board. Moments later, Tommy Mendonca took an 0-2 pitch out to right, and Frisco had a 3-2 lead, which would stand up as the final score.

The Frisco line-up, which now includes much talked-about outfielder and Cuban defector Leonys Martin, was backed by the Texas Rangers' # 1 prospect, Martin Perez. The 20-year-old left-hander got a great play from Martin in center in the second inning on a 400-foot blast off the bat of Jeremy Barfield, and would go on to take a shutout into the eighth.

RockHounds left-hander Carlos Hernandez matched Perez' brilliant outing, departing after seven shutout innings.

Adam Heether walked to open the eighth against Perez, and Kent Walton dropped down a perfect sacrifice bunt. With two out, Jermaine Mitchell tripled to the gap to deep right-center, breaking the scoreless tie. The three-bagger was Jermaine's Texas League leading 10th of the season. Tyler Ladendorf then greeted reliever Ben Snyder with an RBI single, and the RockHounds led, 2-0, setting the stage for "Benedict Cruz" & Company.

- Mitchell went 1-for-4 with the RBI triple, and has now hit in 23-of-his-last-25 games (40-96, .417). He is second in the league in batting (.350) and on-base percentage (.471) and leads the Texas League in hits (49), runs (41), walks (32) and triples (10). His 10 triples rank second in all of Minor League Baseball.

- The Oakland A's have made two personnel moves affecting the RockHounds: Pitcher Justin Murray has been released ... and pitcher Polin Trinidad has been signed as a free agent.

Polin, who was originally with the Houston Astros organization, joined the RockHounds Monday in Frisco. The lefty pitched for the Astros' Double-A club in Corpus Christi in parts of three seasons (2008-10) and spent time at the Triple-A level for the Astros in Round Rock in each of the last two seasons. He was a member of the Astros' 40-man roster as recently as 2010, before signing as a minor league free agent with the Chicago Cubs in December. He opened the year with the (AAA) Iowa Cubs, but was released May 5.

- After snapping a nine-game losing streak Sunday, Corpus Christi beat San Antonio, 5-1, so Frisco is now within five games of the Missions, with the RockHounds trailing by seven and Corpus 10 back.

- Monday night's game at Frisco was the opener of an eight-game road trip. The 'Hounds play the RoughRiders Tuesday morning (11:00) and again Wednesday and Thursday evenings (7:00), then travel to Corpus Christi for a four-game set with the Hooks.

Ports Fall To Giants In Epic 18-Inning Contest

05/17/2011 1:45 AM ET

SAN JOSE, Calif. - Part of the draw of going to the ballpark each day is that you never know what you'll see. On Monday night at Municipal Stadium, the Stockton Ports and San Jose Giants gave all who witnessed it a game they won't soon forget. In 18 innings and over five-and-a-half hours, the Ports and Giants dueled into Tuesday morning. After four ties, three lead changes, and three blown leads in extra innings, the Giants, after falling behind 9-6 in the top of the 18th, scored four runs in the bottom of the inning to beat the Ports by a final of 10-9.

San Jose scored four runs in the bottom of the 1st inning and after that, didn't score another run until they were down to their final out in the 11th. In the 1st, the Giants got a two-run double from Hector Sanchez and a two-run homer from Chris Dominguez to take a 4-0 lead. After allowing the four runs, Ports starter Rob Gilliam settled in and retired the next 17 batters in a row to take him one out into the 7th inning. Gilliam retired 19 of his final 20 batters to finish his outing. He received a no-decision after going seven innings and allowing four runs on five hits while striking out five.

The Ports didn't score a run off Giants starter Santiago Casilla, who pitched the first two innings on a Major League rehab assignment. Stockton's first runs came in the 4th off Craig Westcott. After Michael Choice drew a leadoff walk, Mitch LeVier hit a two-run homer to right to cut the Ports deficit to 4-2. After the LeVier homer, Westcott retired 13 of his next 15 batters to take him into the 8th inning.

With one out in the 8th, Dusty Coleman doubled to right and went to third on a wild pitch. After Choice reached on an infield single to put runners at the corners, LeVier doubled to right to score Coleman and make it a 4-3 game. With runners at second and third and one out, the Giants called upon Hector Correa out of the bullpen. Correa got Anthony Aliotti to fly to left, but it was deep enough for a sac-fly that scored Choice and tied the game.

Stockton's first four runs were allowed by Westcott, who received a no-decision after 5.1 innings, allowing five hits while striking out two.

Tied at 4-4, the game went into extra innings where the Ports broke through in the top of the 11th. LeVier singled to start the inning off Correa. After a sac-bunt by Aliotti, Max Stassi put the Ports in front with his first hit of the night—a single up the first-base line to give Stockton a 5-4 advantage.

It was the only run allowed by Correa who went 3.1 innings in relief for San Jose.

The Ports turned to Scott Deal to shut the door in the bottom of the inning following two scoreless frames from Jose Guzman and a scoreless 10th from Connor Hoehn. Deal, after getting two quick outs, allowed a solo home run on his first pitch to Ryan Cavan that tied the game at 5-5.

Stockton took the lead back in the 13th. After a leadoff walk drawn by Aliotti, Myrio Richard, who entered the game to pinch-run for Stassi in the 11th, laid down a sac-bunt to the first base side. The ball was fielded by Giants pitcher Ari Ronick who threw wide of first, putting runners at second and third. Leonardo Gil, who entered the game in the 11th after Michael Gilmartin was ejected for arguing a called third strike, drove in Aliotti with a sac-fly to center to give the Ports a 6-5 edge.

The Giants took advantage of a Gil error to tie the game in the 13th. Gary Brown reached on a Gil throwing error to start the inning, at which point Deal was replaced by A.J. Huttenlocker. After a sac-bunt from Brandon Crawford, Jarrett Parker tied the game at 6-6 with a double to left. The run was charged to Deal and was unearned. Deal pitched 2.1 innings in relief for Stockton.

Huttenlocker tossed three scoreless innings for the Ports to take the game into the 16th.

After the 16th inning was completed, play was delayed so California League President Charley Blaney could be contacted regarding the league's midnight curfew. Blaney lifted the curfew and determined that play would resume for as long as was necessary to complete the game.

After each team came up empty in the 17th, the Ports broke through in a big way in the top of the 18th. With Andy Reichard (2-0) on the hill, the Ports got a leadoff single from Gil, followed by an RBI double from Rashun Dixon to give the Ports a 7-6 lead. After a sac-bunt from Ryan Lipkin moved Dixon to third, Conner Crumbliss delivered his first knock of the night-a single to left to make it 8-6. Crumbliss would steal second and score two batters later on a two-out double from Choice that gave the Ports a 9-6 advantage.

San Jose, however, would stage an improbable rally in the bottom of the 18th. With Scott Hodsdon (0-1) on the mound, Sanchez drew a leadoff walk followed by a double from Cavan to put runners at second and third with nobody out. Dominguez drove both home with a single up the middle to cut the Ports lead to 9-8. After Tommy Joseph laid down a sac-bunt to advance Dominguez to second, Dominguez advanced to third on a wild pitch and scored the tying run on a sac-fly from Nick Liles to knot the score at 9-9. With two outs and the bases empty, the Giants started the game-winning rally on a bad-hop single from Wendell Fairley-a ball that bounced up and over Coleman at shortstop. Brown came up next and singled to left-center. After Crawford walked to load the bases, the count ran full to Parker. After Hodsdon's first 3-2 pitch was fouled off, his second payoff pitch was tapped to Coleman at short. The last hop bounced up into Coleman's midsection. Despite Coleman staying with the ball, his throw to first was ultimately late and the Giants won the game on what was ruled an error, completing a thrilling 10-9 ballgame at close to 1 a.m.

Reichard earned the win for San Jose while Hodsdon took the loss for Stockton. The Giants used six pitchers while the Ports used seven in a game that lasted five hours and thirty-eight minutes. The extra-innings victory was the first of the season for the Giants who had been 0-2, while it was the first loss in extra frames for the Ports who had been 4-0. It was also the first series loss of the season for Stockton, and the loss sets the Ports back two games out of first place behind the Giants. Stockton's road trip continues on Tuesday as the Ports begin a four-game set with the Bakersfield Blaze in their first visit of the year to Sam Lynn Ballpark.