

A's News Clips, Sunday, May 22, 2011

A's bats continue their slumber

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Remember way back when the A's scored 14 runs against the division rival Los Angeles Angels?

OK, so that blowout victory happened just five days ago.

It sure seems like ancient history.

The A's are generating the wrong kind of momentum right now. They made hardly a whimper Saturday in a 3-0 loss to the Giants before a sold-out crowd at AT&T Park.

Granted, two-time Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum can create headaches for any lineup. He limited the A's to three hits in tossing his eighth career complete game and third against Oakland.

But Saturday's defeat merely continued an A's trend: They just can't build on a good thing.

Since taking two from the Angels, capped by Tuesday's 14-0 blowout, they have lost a season-high four straight, scoring a total of five runs in the process.

"Nobody has a magic formula," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "Either you score runs or you don't. Right now, we're not doing it. It's frustrating because it's keeping us from winning ballgames."

The A's dropped their eighth consecutive game at AT&T Park, their longest losing streak ever in San Francisco.

Looking at the bigger picture, they are missing a chance to make a move in the American League West because no team has played with any consistency yet.

The Texas Rangers, who began the day with a half-game lead over the Angels, lost their third straight Saturday. Two of the Rangers' best hitters, Josh Hamilton and Nelson Cruz, are on the disabled list.

When Texas gets healthier, they figure to get better.

The A's? They need to find the route to home plate more.

They have scored just two runs in their past 30 innings, and Saturday was their season-high sixth consecutive game without a home run.

"It's hard, we don't have any momentum," third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff said. "I think hitting is a contagious thing."

A's pitchers are operating with a thin margin of error. Just as Trevor Cahill did a night earlier, Oakland starter Brett Anderson walked Giants leadoff man Andres Torres in the first, and Torres came around to score, putting the A's in an early hole.

Anderson (2-4), who went to his breaking stuff more after struggling with his fastball in the first, gave up just one run in five innings.

A's manager Bob Geren pulled Anderson for pinch hitter Hideki Matsui with one out in the sixth, with Anderson at 91 pitches.

It seemed early to call on Matsui, especially with the bases empty, but Geren said he had no intention of sending Anderson back out.

"He was done," Geren said. "If that was an American League game (where a pitcher wouldn't hit), he'd have been done."

"Chances to score against Lincecum were at a premium," Anderson said. "You want to keep going, but you understand the situation, so you kind of have to deal with it."

Geren started Ryan Sweeney and Conor Jackson at the corner outfield spots over David DeJesus and Josh Willingham. Jackson was 7 for 22 lifetime against Lincecum (4-4).

But the A's managed little solid contact. Daric Barton drove a ball deep to right-center, but Torres made a terrific diving catch.

Kouzmanoff left the game with a right-groin strain he suffered while running out a grounder in the eighth. He is day-to-day and didn't consider it to be serious.

A's update: Joey Devine returns to the mound for Oakland

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Reliever Joey Devine completed his long journey back to the major leagues with a scoreless sixth inning Saturday.

Now the A's must decide how best to use Devine, a right-hander who posted a 0.59 ERA in 2008 before missing the next two seasons after elbow ligament replacement surgery.

If Devine's stuff is anywhere near that 2008 form, he would seem to be an excellent late-inning candidate for A's manager Bob Geren. And the A's can't have too many of those until closer Andrew Bailey returns from the disabled list.

Devine, recalled from the minors Friday, allowed one hit in his inning of work. Aubrey Huff reached when third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff bobbled his grounder and threw wildly for an error. But Devine's defense then helped him, as Huff was thrown out at home on a 9-4-2 play while trying to score from first on Mike Fontenot's double.

"I thought he looked like the Joey I remember from '08," A's catcher Landon Powell said. "Good fastball, tight slider."

Devine's fastball was in the 92 mph range -- he hovered around 95-96 mph before the surgery and said before the game he's confident the extra zip will come back in time.

Considering A's interim closer Brian Fuentes has been charged with five losses, tied for most among AL relievers, more bullpen depth -- especially for the back end -- would be welcome.

"You could see his face," A's manager Bob Geren said of Devine. "When he got done he was pretty happy with himself to get back out there. He's going to be a big part of the team the rest of the way, I really feel that way."

Bailey said he felt good physically after Friday's rehab appearance with Sacramento, but the A's hadn't decided when he would throw next.

Geren said the reports were excellent on Bailey's scoreless inning Friday, but Bailey said there still is work to be done.

"It was equivalent to the first outing of spring training," he said. "The stuff's not there."

The A's injury woes extend to the farm system.

Single-A Stockton catcher Max Stassi, ranked the team's No. 6 prospect by Baseball America, is having shoulder surgery. He had been limited to designated hitter duty all season with the ailment.

Pooler: Oakland's lineup is the source of its greatest despair

By Monte Pooler, Bay Area News Group

If only the A's had one man, just one, whose presence in the lineup carried with it the element of danger, someone whose stance in the batter's box would push fans to the edge of their seats and put pitchers on high alert.

One man who could break the monotony of what all too often is an endless loop of similarly nondescript batters coming up, taking swings and going back to the dugout.

That's how close the A's are to presenting an offense that might modestly be described as "interesting."

For now, though, Oakland's lineup is the source of its greatest despair, a mismatch against quality pitchers and practically invisible against someone who brings it like Tim Lincecum

The boyish right-hander rocked the A's to sleep without a whimper of protest in a 3-0 Giants win Saturday afternoon before 42,152 at AT&T Park. Lincecum went the full nine, limiting the A's to three singles, no runs and not the slightest rumor of a rally.

The Giants didn't mount much offense, either, but they didn't have to. Three runs against Oakland these days pretty much assures victory.

Three runs in support of Lincecum, against an A's lineup in which batters two through five -- Daric Barton, Ryan Sweeney, Conor Jackson, Mark Ellis -- had one home run in a cumulative 458 at-bats, is downright sadistic.

"These guys have hit before," A's manager Bob Geren said earnestly. "They're going to get it going."

Geren is right insofar as there are some quality bats on the roster. There will be games when they don't face the likes of Lincecum, when they will outscore the opposition.

But the manager is wrong, too. These A's, as currently constituted, are not likely to "get it going" to the degree required to contend into September. The roster lacks an impact bat, an intimidator opposing managers' fear and pitchers like to avoid.

Meanwhile, despite having the best pitching in the American League, the A's are huffing and puffing simply to stay within range of mediocrity -- mostly because the offense can't be counted on to provide support.

"It's one thing if we're out there losing games 7-nothing," Ellis said. "But our pitchers usually keep us in it. We could be winning a lot of these games."

Indeed, the A's are 15-3 when they score more than 3 runs, 7-21 when they don't. Put more graphically, Oakland (22-24) fails to break the three-run barrier in roughly two of every three games.

It's almost impossible to win with such a consistently paltry output, especially in the American League.

More to the point, the A's in Oakland never have won with that formula. Whether it was Charlie Finley's championship A's with Reggie Jackson and Sal Bando or the Haas-owned champions with Jose Canseco, Mark McGwire and Rickey Henderson, there always were offensive forces opponents sought to avoid.

Even when the A's made four consecutive postseason appearances (2000-03) under the ownership of Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann, the lineup featured such imposing hitters as Jason Giambi, Miguel Tejada, Jermaine Dye and Eric Chavez.

It's a steep drop from such explosive lineups to one unable to shake nagging slumber, currently batting .234 and on pace to be shut out 18 times and hit a franchise-low 85 home runs.

Center fielder Coco Crisp, batting .268, has been the most consistent offensive presence. Only one man in Saturday's lineup, Sweeney at .313, left the ballpark with a higher average.

"You have days where you tell yourself it's going to get better," said Ellis, batting .210, "but you also have some days where it just gets old."

"It's not just one or two of us. And I'm not looking at anybody else; I'm right at the top of the list."

The Giants, you may recall, staggered through much of the 2010 season with superb pitching and similar offensive shortcomings. They helped themselves with the late-May addition of rookie Buster Posey, whose presence put just enough pressure on pitchers, making it harder for them to navigate the lineup.

One bat made an impact, made all the others better. All ended well.

Insofar as the A's don't have a Posey in the minors, they'll have to get creative. As the calendar turns to June and July, general manager Billy Beane will have to make an aggressive trade or risk watching the unwatchable.

As it was Saturday, when Lincecum mastered the A's.

"It's difficult to win with two hits," Geren said.

Actually, the A's had three hits. Forgive the manager, who has gotten familiar with this act, for not recognizing the difference.

Chin Music: A's-Giants lineups and an Andrew Bailey update

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/21/2011 4:26pm

Game 2 of A's-Giants on a sunny and breezy day at AT&T Park. Here's your lineups:

A's — Crisp CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Jackson LF, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Powell C, Pennington SS, Anderson LHP.

Giants — Torres CF, Sanchez 2B, Posey C, Burrell LF, Ross RF, Huff 1B, Tejada 3B, Fontenot SS, Lincecum RHP.

—Bob Geren swapped out corner outfielders, plugging in Conor Jackson and Ryan Sweeney for Josh Willingham and David DeJesus. Jackson is 7 for 22 lifetime against Tim Lincecum. As for others in the lineup, Kevin Kouzmanoff has fared the best against the two-time Cy Young winner, going 13 for 34 (.382) for his career.

—Closer Andrew Bailey said he came out of Friday's rehab appearance feeling good physically, but that his stuff needs to get sharper. The A's haven't decided when he'll pitch next, but it will be with Triple-A Sacramento again. Bailey suggested Monday as a possible date.

Joey Devine's return is small victory in A's loss

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

You could understand why Joey Devine would take some personal satisfaction from the A's 3-0 loss to the Giants on Saturday.

After all, the last time Devine set foot on the mound in a major-league game, George W. Bush was president.

That was Sept. 28, 2008, at Seattle. Tommy John surgery sidelined the right-hander for the 2009 and 2010 seasons.

So, his scoreless sixth inning at China Basin on Saturday merited more than your typical reaction when he got back to the dugout.

"His teammates were genuinely happy for him," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It almost appeared like somebody in (his) first game."

Devine was not available to the media after the game. The A's recalled Devine from Triple-A Sacramento on Friday. In 11 appearances with the River Cats, he went 3-0 with three saves. He struck out 17 in 12 1/3 innings.

He struggled in spring training to the tune of eight walks in 4 1/3 innings.

"He looked so much better than he did in spring training," Geren said.

Catcher Landon Powell added, "I thought he looked like the Joey I remember from '08. He had a lot of good (velocity) on his fastball and a tight slider. He could be a welcome addition."

The A's committed two errors in Devine's inning. Powell dropped Cody Ross' foul popup, but Ross wound up lining out. Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's error on Aubrey Huff's slow roller could have cost Devine and Oakland.

That's because with two outs, Mike Fontenot drilled a Devine pitch into the right-field corner for a double, but an excellent relay from Ryan Sweeney to Mark Ellis to Powell cut down Huff at the plate.

"You could see (Devine's) face when he got done, he was pretty happy with himself, just to get back out there," Geren said.

Second baseman Mark Ellis said, "That's two long years for Joey. He's worked really hard, had a lot of setbacks and it was fun to see him back on the mound."

When Devine was on the mound for Oakland in 2008, he was brilliant. His numbers: 6-1 with an 0.59 ERA.

He ended the '08 season with a streak of 26 1/3 innings without allowing an earned run.

Devine's also pretty good at keeping the ball in the ballpark. He owns a 61-inning streak of not giving up a home run. The last long ball he allowed came at AT&T Park.

And we can go from presidential to managerial references on that one. When Devine was pitching for the Braves on April 7, 2006, the Giants' Moises Alou took him deep. The Giants' manager that day was Alou's father, Felipe.

Kevin Kouzmanoff sustains minor groin injury

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

One day after putting pitchers **Brandon McCarthy** (right scapula) and **Tyson Ross** (left oblique) on the disabled list, the A's got another injury scare Saturday, but this one doesn't appear to be too serious.

Third baseman **Kevin Kouzmanoff** left the game in the eighth inning with a groin strain he incurred while running out a grounder to shortstop. He's listed as day to day.

"It's a little sore," Kouzmanoff said. "It's not any worse than when I came off the field, which is a good sign."

Kouzmanoff said he missed a couple of games this season with a similar injury.

"I'm able to move around fine, so I don't think it's anything serious," he said.

Coming into Saturday's game, Kouzmanoff was 13-for-34 (.382) lifetime against **Tim Lincecum**. After an 0-for-3 day, Kouzmanoff's 2011 average fell to .198. He's in a 6-for-39 funk.

Bailey update: Closer **Andrew Bailey**, who has been on the disabled list with a strained forearm since the start of the season, made his first rehab appearance with Triple-A Sacramento on Friday night.

Bailey worked a scoreless, hitless inning with one strikeout in the River Cats' 3-1 loss to Oklahoma City.

"The good news was he felt good," manager **Bob Geren** said, "and his pitches looked like what you'd expect if he felt as good as he said he did."

Briefly: One day after collecting his 1,000th career hit, second baseman **Mark Ellis** went 0-for-3. ... Shortstop **Cliff Pennington** made an excellent diving grab of Lincecum's foul popup in the seventh inning. ... The A's have not said who will be their replacement starters for McCarthy and Ross on Monday and Tuesday nights, respectively, in Anaheim. ... **Max Stassi** of Class A Stockton will have shoulder surgery. Stassi, a Yuba City High grad, was the A's fourth-round pick in 2009. He's a catcher, but had been limited to a designated-hitter role this season, batting .231.

A'S LEADING OFF

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle

None in a Blue Moon: Since interleague play began in 1997, no A's pitcher has hit a triple or a homer. John "Blue Moon" Odom was the last to do either in a regular-season game - he homered Sept. 4, 1972, against the Angels and tripled Aug. 22, 1971, against the Red Sox.

Drumbeat: Lineup vs. Lincecum

This is Steve Kroner, covering the A's today on the shores of McCovey Cove ... 5/21/2011 3:12pm

Bob Geren's lineup against Tim Lincecum: Crisp, CF; Barton, 1B; Sweeney, RF; Jackson, LF; Ellis, 2B; Kouzmanoff, 3B; Powell, C; Pennington, SS; Anderson, P

In his pregame newsconference, Geren discussed Lincecum: "He's got good stuff, good fastball, good changeup. He's one of the elite pitchers in baseball, for sure -- and so is ours today. Brett Anderson's an excellent young pitcher also."

Two men in the Oakland lineup have good career numbers against Lincecum: Kouzmanoff, 13-for-34, and Jackson, 7-for-22.

THE BULL PEN

By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Just a hunch, but maybe the Mets will hasten the **Jose Reyes** trade talk after **David Wright**, also trade bait as a free agent in waiting, went on the disabled list with a stress fracture in his back, virtually stalling any attempt to deal the third baseman.

The Giants had a scout at last week's Mets-Marlins series. It was **Steve Balboni**, who technically was doing advance work on the Marlins, who begin a series in San Francisco on Tuesday, but certainly had an eye on Reyes.

Jose Reyes, a pending free agent, might be on the move; do the Giants have interest?

SHEA HEY

Interleague quirks part of the game

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

A's ace **Trevor Cahill** was surprised when told he was being removed from Friday's game. Normally, he doesn't exit after throwing 83 pitches and surrendering one run and one hit in six innings.

But this was interleague play.

"I was confused at first," said Cahill, removed for a pinch-hitter, "and then realized it was a National League game and we had a guy at third."

Conor Jackson grounded out to end the inning, and the A's lost 2-1.

More interleague irregularities confront the A's. They play six games against their natural rivals, the defending champion Giants, while division foe Texas gets six games against the hapless Astros.

Plus, the A's face the Phillies and Marlins.

Every year, in all divisions, there's inconsistency — it's the nature of an unbalanced schedule — but let's not blame the schedule for a team's woes. You could catch the Red Sox when they're scuffling or the Twins when they're soaring, and nothing's unjust about that.

More discrepancy comes with geographic rivals being forced to square off. Problem is, teams outside the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York don't have the same built-in rivalries. Does Reds-Indians really generate extra interest?

Tigers manager **Jim Leyland**, with designated hitter

Victor Martinez benched in NL parks, called for interleague play to go away because it has "run its course," and other

managers and many players aren't big fans. It might not be perfect, but it's part of the game.

And isn't that what sets baseball apart, its imperfections?

Walker an early Killebrew admirer

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

At an American Legion game in a minor-league park, **Harmon Killebrew** hit a line drive so hard over the third baseman's head that the ball continued to soar over the left fielder until it hit high off the outfield fence.

"We held him to a single," said **Wayne Walker**, the left fielder.

That was in the early '50s, when two kids from Idaho were beginning a friendship that would last a lifetime.

Walker was a city boy from Boise, Killebrew a country boy from Payette, about 60 miles northwest of Boise and near the Oregon border.

Their first love was baseball, and they competed against and with each other throughout high school. Killebrew was to become known for tape-measure home runs during a Hall of Fame career, and Walker became an All-Pro linebacker for the Detroit Lions and later a popular San Francisco sports anchor for KPIX.

"Harmon and I go way, way back, playing Legion ball as 14-year olds," Walker said from his Idaho home in a phone interview Friday. "He was King Kong then. He was 5-11, 185 when he was 14 and could hit it a mile. I played left field, and we didn't always have fences. I played him so damn deep, he told me he could see only the upper half of my body because of the Earth's curvature."

Killebrew died Tuesday of esophageal cancer. He was 74, three months older than Walker. Walker and Killebrew exchanged letters in recent years, and the last time they chatted was shortly after Killebrew's diagnosis. Walker said he shared thoughts about his own diagnosis of throat cancer. He has been in remission for two years.

"What they're all saying about him is true," Walker said. "He was the kindest, gentlest, best guy you ever knew. Nothing phony or nasty about him. They just don't come any better."

Walker was at KPIX for 20 years through 1994 and a fixture on 49ers broadcasts.

He also called A's games in the late '70s and early '80s. In '79 and '82, Killebrew was in the booth as a color man, having come highly recommended by Walker. Killebrew also suited up in spring training and was an A's minor-league hitting instructor in 1981.

"I enjoyed the heck out of it," Walker said of broadcasting the A's with his childhood buddy. "Harmon knew so much. The split-second a ball was hit, he'd know if it was an out or not. He wasn't too much for telling stories. In fact, I don't think I remember him telling a story about himself on or off the air. It meant he was probably really comfortable with who he was."

The two hung out when Killebrew's Washington Senators (who later became the Minnesota Twins) played in Detroit, where Walker remembers Killebrew and **Frank Howard** as the only players to hit balls out of Tiger Stadium.

Killebrew hit 573 homers and attributed his power to work he did growing up in Idaho. Walker recalls Killebrew helping his dad paint houses as a youth, strengthening his wrists.

He's 11th all time in homers, surpassed by four players linked to steroid use, and was quoted in recent years as saying old-timers are "saddened" by steroids' effect on the game. Walker said Killebrew was at peace with his own numbers.

"Those guys from that time all knew what they did and how they did it," Walker said.

"They did it the right way, and they know it, and that's the most important thing by far."

Efficient offense makes few runs go a long way

Gwen Knapp, San Francisco Chronicle

The Giants let some opportunity get away Saturday.

The players and the sellout crowd at China Basin didn't seem to mind, or even notice.

A 3-0 win over the A's more than satisfied the customers in orange and black, who thoroughly enjoyed two insurance runs in the eighth inning. The place really rocked when Cody Ross slid home on a shallow sacrifice fly for the last run, finishing with

a typical Ross flourish, both arms dramatically extended as if he were a landing aircraft.

But in its own way, a 1-0 win would have been more impressive, improving this homestand's chances to surpass the oddity and beauty of the last one. The Giants swept those six games while scoring only 18 runs. After two games in this homestand, they have two wins on five runs, so they're on pace to score just 15 times.

Saturday could have been so much more helpful, though.

Facing Oakland pitchers, owners of the best team ERA in the majors, in the changing light and shadows of a late afternoon game? With Tim Lincecum on the mound? That should have been the Giants' sweet spot.

But they don't dare to dream small enough.

Winning six games with fewer than 15 runs isn't their idea of greedy ambition. Saturday's win was. In fact, for a team that had earned 10 of its previous 11 home wins by one run, this 3-0 rout of the A's constituted absolute gluttony.

The Giants' primary source of intimidation isn't just their remarkable pitching staff. It's their confounding ratio of runs to wins. They rank last in scoring in the National League, yet hold first place in their division by 2½ games.

They are 26-19 after 45 games despite having scored just 158 times — or 3.51 runs per game.

A year ago at the same point, they had scored 182 runs and rung up only a 23-22 record. The Padres had smoked them in six straight games, thwarting even a Jonathan Sanchez one-hitter.

The "Torture" moniker had already been coined — for a team that had scored 24 more runs than the current model.

When those Giants reached autumn, they had become known as a team with a viciously opportunistic offense. It was the Murderers' Row of September. It swatted away Atlanta's pretensions. It overcame a Chase Utley-inspired meltdown by Sanchez in Philadelphia and a World Series Game 1 "brain fart" by Lincecum. It unearthed deeply buried vulnerabilities in Roy Halladay and Cliff Lee.

On paper, it was a bantamweight. On the field, it was lethal.

The current low output will have to be addressed at some point, through some combination of trades, a call to Fresno for Brandon Belt and Pablo Sandoval's return from the disabled list. But there is no need for panic or exasperation these days — unless you're in the opposing dugout.

The Giants were the team no one wanted to face in last year's postseason, strictly because of their pitching. The threat is worse now.

Friday's 2-1 win over the A's in extra innings amounted to a statement game.

The final score said enough. Anyone who checked the highlights would have seen Freddy Sanchez in maestro form at second base and Nate Schierholtz channeling Dave Parker in right field. Offensively, they didn't need a hit to get their first run, and they scraped together the game-winner.

In truth, their offense isn't the least potent in the National League. The Giants have scored the fewest runs overall, but the Dodgers have played two more games and scored just five more runs, averaging 3.47 runs per game to the Giants' 3.51. The Dodgers, however, are five games below .500 and six behind the Giants in the National League West.

The Giants can easily drop lower in scoring and still rise in the standings over their next four home games. When they pulled off the six wins on 18 runs, they faced Colorado and Arizona, with pitching staffs ranked in the majors' bottom dozen then.

This weekend, they're playing the A's, with their leading ERA, and then come the Marlins, No. 9 in the rankings.

The potential for more greatness on an offensive budget is there. The burden on the pitchers may be heavy, but they are well-conditioned to carrying the load. The hometown audience is accustomed to the anguish. The rest of baseball, if it's smart, will be very afraid.

A's have no answer for Lincecum

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- Never mind the combined .311 average against Giants hurler Tim Lincecum with which Oakland's starting nine entered Saturday's mid-afternoon affair.

Lincecum's numbers against the A's were even better.

San Francisco's two-time Cy Young Award winner came into the contest 4-0 in five career starts against the A's, whose scuffling offense has faced intermittent struggles this season and saw those very woes shine under a magnifying glass in a 3-0 loss.

Amidst a cast of shadows, the A's managed just three hits off Lincecum, who retired 21 straight at one point while tossing 133 pitches in his third career complete game against the green and gold and improving to 5-0 against them -- numbers that haven't fazed the pitcher.

"Maybe it's that I don't see them that much throughout the year," Lincecum said. "I have no idea."

"He was very tough," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It looked like he was pretty much at the top of the game. He threw the ball about as good as I've seen him."

As a result, the A's were left staring down a season-high fourth straight defeat and have lost seven of their last 10 while dropping to 22-24 on the year -- all just four days after a 14-0 victory over the division-rival Angels for a share of first place in the American League West.

That standing has since been lost. It's early in the season, but the A's realize now may be the time to gain ground on Angels and Rangers ballclubs that are currently without a handful of key lineup members.

That's hard to do, though, even with a starting pitching staff that owns an AL-best 2.83 ERA, when the club's hitters ranks near the bottom of every offensive category in the league.

"We need to string some hits together and make something happen," said Kevin Kouzmanoff, who left in the eighth inning with a right groin strain. "It's hard when you don't have any momentum. I think hitting is a contagious thing. Sometimes when things aren't going well, you try to do too much. I think that's a natural thing, and sometimes you have to take a step back. The biggest thing is to not try to get a hit but to get a good pitch to hit, and whatever happens after that happens."

Not much was going Saturday, as Lincecum's impressive showing made A's hurler Brett Anderson's solid work go for naught, the lefty picking up a loss after allowing just one run through five frames.

The lone damage against Anderson came early, as the Giants' Andres Torres drew a consequential leadoff walk from Oakland's starter for a second straight day. Torres advanced to third on Freddy Sanchez's line-drive double and scored on Buster Posey's groundout.

"You don't want to ever give up a run in the first inning," Anderson said. "You walk the leadoff guy and he comes around to score, and it's kind of unfortunate, but you have to put that behind you."

He did, tossing four scoreless frames thereafter. But he gave up one hit in each of those innings, making for what seemed like a lengthy 91-pitch outing. Anderson was removed in the top of the sixth in favor of pinch-hitter Hideki Matsui, who softly grounded out against Lincecum with one out and no runners on.

"My mechanics were off a bit in the first inning, and I was able to make some adjustments," Anderson said. "I didn't have a clean inning one through five and, giving up one run through five, most of the time it's not bad, but against a guy like Lincecum, it kind of puts you behind the eight ball. I'm kind of half-pleased, half-not pleased with my outing."

Geren said his decision to bring in Matsui would have been the same in an American League park, noting Anderson was "done" at that point.

"He wasn't quite as sharp as he had been," the A's skipper said. "His strike ratio was a little down at times, but he used his fastball pretty well, and I thought when he needed to go to his breaking ball, he did."

The Giants were held at bay until Brad Ziegler was charged with two runs in the eighth. Meanwhile San Francisco's starter breezed through a lackluster A's lineup, creating a rather glum day aside from Joey Devine's sixth-inning relief stint.

Devine, making his first Major League appearance since Sept. 28, 2008, following two-plus years of Tommy John surgery rehab, proceeded to allow just one hit in one inning, giving his teammates something to cheer about in an otherwise frustrating day.

"Not too many positives today with the outcome, but that was one good thing that came out today," Geren said. "It's a big step for him, and I really feel like he's going to be a big part of our team the rest of the way."

Geren's club steps into Sunday's series finale hoping to avoid its ninth straight loss at AT&T Park, where the hits have been few and far between this weekend, evidenced by an 8-for-64 showing over the past two days.

"Obviously it's difficult to win with three hits like we had today, but you battle the best you can," he said. "We didn't have a whole lot of opportunities, that's for sure."

A's look to tighten things up vs. Giants

By Steven Miller / MLB.com

For as close as the Bay Bridge Series has been through two games, Oakland keeps hurting its own cause with its defense.

The A's committed three errors in a pair of losses to San Francisco this weekend, and although starter Gio Gonzalez is more than capable of getting a strikeout, the defense will have to improve in Sunday's series finale.

"I think we've played pretty good defense over the last couple of years as an organization, and I think we're going to come around and play good defense this year," said catcher Landon Powell, who made an error along with third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff in Saturday's 3-0 loss. "That's why we have good pitchers, because we have great defense behind them. Everyone's going to make an error every once in a while."

While the A's have lost four straight, the Giants ride a four-game winning streak into Sunday's game at AT&T Park, where they are 12-5 this season.

San Francisco turns to Jonathan Sanchez, who struggled in his past three starts with a 5.50 ERA. But with Sunday's rivalry game already sold out -- the Giants had a sellout for each of the first 17 home games -- the defending World Series champions believe they can again feed off the crowd.

"It helps the adrenaline. The players are self-motivated, but when you have the kind of crowds that we do, the support that we have, there's some extra incentive to go out there and play well and help try to win the ballgame for your fans," said manager Bruce Bochy. "It's something we don't see very often when we're on the road. What we have here is special. These guys know it. They talk about it. To have a packed house every day pulling for you is added incentive to do well."

A's: Bailey begins rehab with a positive

Closer Andrew Bailey met with the media Saturday in San Francisco, where he was scheduled to throw after a successful rehab outing Friday for Triple-A Sacramento.

The right-hander pitched a scoreless inning and struck out one, throwing 11 of his 16 pitches for strikes. He will likely make at least three more rehab appearances before returning to Oakland, but the first result was encouraging.

- Fellow reliever Joey Devine, who underwent Tommy John surgery in May 2009, returned to action Saturday and pitched a scoreless sixth inning.

Devine allowed one hit as manager Bob Geren attempts to ease the right-hander back through low-pressure situations.

Giants: Schierholtz rests shoulder

Outfielder Nate Schierholtz was out of the starting lineup Saturday with a sore right shoulder, but entered in the ninth as a defensive substitute for Pat Burrell.

Schierholtz injured the shoulder making a diving catch Thursday and played Friday, but is receiving treatment and said he is not concerned.

Bochy might want Schierholtz in the lineup Sunday against Gonzalez, whom Schierholtz is 2-for-2 with a home run and two RBIs against in his career.

Worth noting

- Oakland outfielder Conor Jackson, who started for the first time in the past six games Saturday, could be a candidate to remain in the lineup Sunday against Sanchez.

The right-hander is 9-for-18 in his career against the left-handed pitcher with two home runs and five RBIs.

- The Giants cut into Oakland's advantage in the all-time series with their second straight win Saturday. The A's lead the Bay Area rivals' all-time series, 42-40.

Bailey has successful first rehab outing

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SAN FRANCISCO -- Right-hander Andrew Bailey took yet another step closer to rejoining the A's bullpen Friday by throwing a perfect inning for Triple-A Sacramento.

It marked Bailey's first Minor League rehab appearance, and the two-time All-Star is expected to make at least three more outings before being considered ready to return to Oakland's active roster.

Nursing a strained right forearm back to health, the A's closer relayed nothing but positive reports Saturday, when he was slated to throw in San Francisco and determine when he'll head back to Sacramento for another outing.

Bailey threw 11 of his 16 pitches for strikes Friday, fanning one along the way, while utilizing all of his pitches and reaching 94 mph on the radar gun.

"I felt good," he said. "The ball was coming out well. I'm just trying to get my stuff to where it needs to be. It's the equivalent of the first Spring Training outing, I would say, so not where it needs to be, but I was able to throw strikes and get outs and keep progressing."

Barring any setbacks, Bailey could potentially be back by month's end.

"Everything was positive about his outing -- his velocity, strike percentage, performance," manager Bob Geren said. "It's very encouraging, very good news, because his performance matched how he felt."

Kouzmanoff day to day with right groin strain

SAN FRANCISCO -- A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff exited Saturday's contest against the Giants with a right groin strain and has been deemed day to day.

Kouzmanoff incurred the injury while running to first base on a ground ball with one out in the eighth inning and was replaced by Andy LaRoche at third in the bottom half of the frame.

Following the team's 3-0 loss to the Giants, Kouzmanoff noted he dealt with the same pain nearly a month ago and missed a few games because of it. However, that was not known to the public at the time.

"It's a little sore now," Kouzmanoff said. "It's not any worse than when I came out, which is a good sign. It was sore coming off the field but it's gotten a lot better since."

The 29-year-old infielder, who entered the day with a .382 average against San Francisco's Tim Lincecum, went 0-for-3 against the right-hander before departing the contest. Overall, he is 6-for-39 over his last 15 games and batting just .198 on the season.

LaRoche, who has started 12 games at the hot corner this season, will likely fill Kouzmanoff's place while he's out. There's no timetable on his return.

"I'm not exactly sure, but I think we'll know more in the morning," Kouzmanoff said. "I'm able to move around fine."

Devine eases back into big leagues

SAN FRANCISCO -- Joey Devine's seemingly perfect season continued at the big league level Saturday, when the A's reliever made his first Major League appearance in nearly three years.

Devine, who was brought into the sixth inning against the Giants following Brett Anderson's departure in an eventual 3-0 A's loss, allowed just one hit in one inning, throwing nine of 14 pitches for strikes.

The A's right-hander, who last pitched in the Majors on Sept. 28, 2008, before undergoing Tommy John surgery the following May, has not given up a run this year between his time in Triple-A Sacramento and Oakland.

Devine recorded a 3-0 record in 12 1/3 innings, striking out 17 and walking just one for the River Cats. But Saturday's experience proved far more rewarding, as it came at a level where Devine had previously been denied of pitching since his injury.

"It's fun for everybody to see, and hopefully he can do it again," Anderson said. "It's exciting for all of us to see him back on the mound."

Upon his departure from the game, Devine was greeted by a cheering group of teammates, who knew all too well the road he's traveled.

"They were genuinely happy for him," manager Bob Geren said. "It almost appeared like he had played in his first game."

The A's skipper liked what he saw from Devine, who in 2008 reeled off a 6-1 record and 0.59 ERA in 42 relief appearances. Since the earned run became an official stat, that ERA marked the lowest in Major League history among pitchers with at least 25 innings.

"He had good velocity," Geren said. "He looked so much better than Spring Training, and that's what the reports had been showing us, that he was getting it going. I'm happy to see that, even in a losing cause. He was happy about it, getting back up to the big leagues, and you could see it in his face."

Worth noting

- Adam Rosales (right foot) played third base and went 1-for-3 at the plate in his first extended spring training game Friday, manager Bob Geren said. Rosales, who is expected to stay in Arizona for a couple of weeks before beginning a Minor League rehab assignment, served as designated hitter Saturday and will have a day off Sunday.
- Geren said he would likely wait until the conclusion of Sunday's series finale against the Giants to announce his starters for Monday and Tuesday's contests in Anaheim.

Lincecum blanks A's on 3 hits

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — Tim Lincecum pitched a three-hitter, and the San Francisco Giants beat the cross-bay rival Oakland Athletics 3-0 on Saturday for their fourth straight victory.

The two-time NL Cy Young Award winner allowed Ryan Sweeney's two-out single in the first before retiring 21 straight batters, leading the Giants past the A's for the second day in a row.

Lincecum (4-4) struck out five and walked none for his eighth career complete game, handing Oakland its fourth straight loss.

Buster Posey had two hits and drove in the only run against starter Brett Anderson (2-4), who left after giving up five hits in five innings to the defending World Series champions. Cody Ross added an RBI single and Miguel Tejada had a sacrifice fly in the eighth.

San Francisco's ace was back to his dominant form. After allowing seven runs and walking six in a 7-4 loss at Colorado in his last start, Lincecum labored through a 24-pitch first inning before finding his groove. Sweeney sent a grounder on the ninth pitch just out of reach of diving second baseman Freddy Sanchez, the only Oakland baserunner until Landon Powell's two-out single in the eighth.

Lincecum sparkled with his best performance of the season, shattering bats, baffling hitters and popping catcher Buster Posey's glove with a wicked curve and a fastball that touched 94 mph. He threw a season-high 133 pitches, striking out Daric Barton and Sweeney to end the game.

San Francisco needed every last bit of from its ace, too.

Andres Torres got things started for the Giants with a leadoff walk in the first. Sanchez followed with a double, and Posey's groundout to second was hit slow enough to score Torres and give San Francisco a 1-0 lead.

A night after a trio of solid defensive plays, the Giants were sharp again in the field. Torres made a diving catch in center in the fourth to rob Barton of extra bases, moving to his left on a ball slicing away from him in a strong gust.

Even the smallest of plays would prove big with runs so scarce.

Aubrey Huff tried to score from first on Mike Fontenot's double in the sixth, getting thrown out at the plate on second baseman Mark Ellis' relay throw from short right field.

They finally gave Lincecum some extra cushion in the eighth, when Ross had an RBI single off reliever Brad Ziegler. Two batters later, Tejada added a sacrifice fly to center field off Jerry Blevins to score Ross.

Lincecum also allowed a single to pinch-hitter David DeJesus leading off the ninth. He has never thrown a no-hitter, but twice took a no-hit bid into the sixth inning this season.

Notes: Oakland 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff has a right groin strain, and is day to day. ... Giants 3B Pablo Sandoval fielded ground balls and did some light tossing, the latest progression in his return from right wrist surgery. He will hit off a tee sometime in the next few days and is still on schedule to return in about two or three weeks. ... Oakland's two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey (strained right forearm) had a light throwing session before the game and will make his first rehab assignment in Triple-A Sacramento either Monday or Tuesday, Geren said. Bailey is scheduled to throw one inning.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

River Cats win longest game in team history

By Cassie Kolas / Sacramento River Cats

Eric Sogard ended the longest game in River Cats history with a 16th-inning RBI single as Sacramento beat Oklahoma City 3-2 on Saturday night at Raley Field.

The 5-hour, 4-minute game broke the team record for longest game by one minute - Sacramento played a 5-hour, 3-minute game last year in Albuquerque.

Catcher Anthony Recker opened the scoring in the second inning with his fifth homer of the season, a solo blast on the at-bat's first pitch.

Sacramento starter Yadel Marti didn't allow a hit in his first 4.0 innings, and allowed three hits in 8.0 innings total. He struck out three and allowed one walk in front of 13,039 fans, Raley Field's largest crowd of the season.

"He did great; he was awesome," said Recker, who caught all 16 innings. "He hit his spots all night."

Oklahoma tied the game in the seventh inning. Outfielder Brandon Barnes was hit-by-pitch to start the inning, and Jeff Keppinger hit a sacrifice bunt to move Barnes to second. Catcher Robinson Cancel doubled on a fly ball to left field to bring Barnes home and leave the score 1-1.

"It felt really good," Recker said of the win. "It felt really good to do it against them like that, to tie it up in the 13th and win it in the 16th was awesome."

Sacramento loaded the bases on three walks in the bottom of the eighth inning, but did not produce.

River Cats reliever Vinnie Chulk walked home a run in the top of the 13th to give Oklahoma City a 2-1 lead. In the bottom of the inning, Sacramento designated hitter Josh Donaldson hit a two-out solo home run to extend the game.

"It was a changeup right down the middle," Donaldson said. "Lucky for me I saw it and was able to hit it out of the park."

Sacramento opened the bottom of the 16th with a Shane Peterson walk and a Wes Timmons sacrifice bunt. Sogard then singled on a line drive to right field to score Peterson.

The River Cats close the series against Oklahoma City on Sunday at 1:05 p.m. at Raley Field. The River Cats improved to 27-16, and remain two games ahead of Las Vegas in the Pacific Coast League South Division.

"We have a really good team this year," Donaldson said. "We're going to win more than we lose."

Hooks send RockHounds to 7th straight loss

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

CORPUS CHRISTI -- The Corpus Christi Hooks had a big seventh inning to come from behind and hand the Midland RockHounds their seventh consecutive loss, 6-3, Saturday night at Whataburger Field.

The Hooks scored five runs in the seventh that was highlighted by a three-run double by T. J. Steele to erase a 3-1 deficit.

Jimmy Paredes also had an RBI double off Neil Wagner (0-2) and Jacob Goebbert added an RBI single off RockHounds reliever Trey Barham in that big frame.

The RockHounds had a good start to the game thanks to a two-run home run by Tyler Ladendorf in the top of the first inning.

After the Hooks answered with a run in the bottom of the first, the RockHounds extended the lead to 3-1 in the sixth with an Adam Heether home run.

But other than two big homers, there wasn't much offense for the RockHounds, who were held to four hits, all given up by Hooks starter Jonnathan Aristil. The Corpus bullpen of David Berner (1-1) and Pat Urckfitz -- who earned his first save of the year -- combined to pitch 3 1/3 scoreless innings to give the Hooks a chance at the comeback.

The teams meet at 2:05 p.m. today in the third game of a four-game series at Whataburger Field.

Giants' One Run Enough

Stockton Ports

The Giants only scored one run in the series opener Saturday night, but that was enough to pull out the win, as the Ports fell 4.0 games back of G-men in the standings.

Ports starter AJ Griffin, who had been called up from Low-A Burlington that morning, threw 7.0 scoreless innings in his Ports debut. Griffin threw a staggering 10 strikeouts on the evening and gave up just two hits and a walk to complete his first night with the Boys of Banner Island.

Josh Lansford relieved Griffin in the eighth, and gave up the only run of the game, taking the loss. With two outs already recorded in the ninth, Lansford gave up back-to-back doubles to second baseman Ryan Cavan and designated hitter Hector Sanchez to drive in the winning run.

San Jose pitching was equally impressive all evening. Starter Chris Heston went 8.0 scoreless innings, giving up just three hits and three walks on the evening, and recorded four strikeouts of his own, which was enough to earn him the W in the contest. Heath Hembree was brought in in the ninth to close the game, and struck out the side to end the game in a snappy two hours and fifteen minutes in front of the first sell-out crowd of the season.

The Ports look to regain some ground against the Giants tomorrow as Rob Gilliam takes the mound for Stockton.

Bees Split "Double Dip"

By Jon Versteeg, burlingtonbees.com

GRAND CHUTE, WI- The Burlington Bees (30-12) forced a doubleheader split against the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (23-19) to a doubleheader split. The Bees lost game one 4-3 before winning 10-4 in the nightcap before 3,838 fans at Time Warner Cable Field on Saturday night. The Bees scored a season-high seven runs in the fourth inning of game two to earn the split.

Wisconsin scored a run in the second inning of game one against Burlington RHP Josh Bowman (4-1). DH Chris Dennis (2-3) tripled and scored on a single by 1B Mike Walker (1-3) for a 1-0 lead.

Burlington scored three runs in the third inning. CF Tyreace House (1-3), C John Nester (1-3) and RF Royce Consigli (1-4) singled to load the bases. 2B Nino Leyja(1-3) hit an RBI single to score House. LF Douglas Landaeta (1-1) and SS Yordy Cabrera (0-2) added RBI sacrifice flies to make it 3-1 Burlington.

Wisconsin scored three runs in the third inning to take the lead for good. CF Reggie Keen (1-2) walked and went to third base on a double by 2B Nick Shaw (2-3). Both runners scored on a double by LF T.J. Mittelstaedt (1-2). A single by DH Chris Dennis (2-3) scored Mittelstaedt for a 4-3 lead.

The Timber Rattlers opened the scoring in game two of the doubleheader with an unearned run. 2B Nick Shaw (1-2) doubled and scored when 1B Chris Dennis (0-2) reached on an error.

3B Ryan Pineda (2-3) hit a two-out solo home run in the second inning. It was his first professional home run and tied the game at 1-1.

Wisconsin scored two runs in the third inning to knock Bees RHP Nate Long out of the game. Burlington responded with a seven-run fourth inning. The Bees sent 13 men to the plate. C Daniel Petitti (1-4) hit a two-run triple in the inning to give Burlington a 4-3 lead.

Burlington scored two more insurance runs in the sixth inning on a two-run single by Pineda for a 10-4 lead.

The Bees and Timber Rattlers play game three of their series on Sunday afternoon at 1:05 p.m. The Bees have yet to announce a starter while RHP Jimmy Nelson (1-3, 5.40) starts for Wisconsin.