

Oakland A's rookie Graham Godfrey outpitches San Francisco Giants' Tim Lincecum

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Graham Godfrey surely was an unknown quantity to much of the sellout crowd watching him Friday night.

The A's right-hander wound up playing the lead role in Oakland's 5-2 win over the visiting Giants, notching his first major league victory in the opener of the three-game Bay Bridge Series.

In his second big league start, Godfrey limited the Giants to two runs, one earned, over seven innings, walking none and striking out three.

Few A's pitchers get to make their first home start before a packed house, but the announced crowd of 36,067 left quite an impression.

"The thing I'll remember most, a couple times on the mound I could hear A's fans cheering and then Giants fans, and they're just going back and forth," Godfrey said. "Hearing that, it was pretty neat."

It was just the A's third sellout in 33 home games, and Godfrey (1-0) wasn't the only one soaking up the atmosphere.

"I kind of got caught up in watching the fans go back and forth," said A's manager Bob Melvin, who grew up in the Bay Area, played for the Giants and Friday was managing his first game in the rivalry.

The A's snapped their six-game losing streak to the Giants -- longest in Oakland history -- and ran their own winning streak to three games.

The A's were the aggressors. They dictated action on the basepaths and perhaps set a new tone in a cross-bay series that the Giants have recently dominated.

Beating two-time Cy Young winner Tim Lincecum (5-6), who came in 5-0 with a 1.17 ERA against Oakland, also was big.

"That's one of the best, if not the best pitcher in the game right there," A's first baseman Conor Jackson said.

Godfrey had lasted just 41/3 innings against the Chicago White Sox in his big league debut June 10. He was more settled from the get-go Friday, saying he used his change-up and other secondary pitches more effectively.

He allowed Cody Ross' homer in the second but otherwise kept the Giants at bay.

The only other run he allowed came in the sixth, when shortstop Cliff Pennington misplayed Aubrey Huff's grounder that scored Bill Hall and cut Oakland's lead to 3-2.

The A's took the lead in the first when Coco Crisp singled and eventually scored on Jackson's two-out single to right.

After Ross' homer evened the score, the A's added two in the third.

Hideki Matsui drew a one-out walk and scored on Josh Willingham's double down the left-field line. Oakland was helped when the ball got pinned against a chair sitting along the railing.

Willingham then broke for third on a steal attempt. When Giants catcher Chris Stewart sailed his throw into left field, Willingham scored to make it 3-1.

Willingham aggravated his sore left Achilles tendon on the play, and he left in the seventh. He said he might require a couple of days off to recuperate.

In Melvin's aggressive style, anyone might be called upon to steal a base.

"We don't have six guys that can hit the ball out of the ballpark," Willingham said.

Lincecum walked five in six innings.

The A's added two runs in the eighth off Guillermo Mota on run-scoring doubles from Scott Sizemore and Jemile Weeks.

Jackson went 3 for 4, and with Daric Barton hitting just .211, Jackson might be in store for more time at first. It's not inconceivable Barton could go to the minors when Mark Ellis comes off the disabled list.

Oakland A's unofficial minor league instructor Rickey Henderson fast becoming fan of speedy Jemile Weeks

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Rickey Henderson is in town for his periodic visit with the team, but he is already familiar with one of the newer A's players.

Henderson, an unofficial minor league baserunning instructor, worked with rookie second baseman Jemile Weeks during the past few years.

"I think he's exciting," Henderson said Friday. "Usually when you get a guy like that just coming up to the big leagues, he's got a little fire in him. He's a little hyper out there. It seems like the team picks something up."

Henderson wants to continue working with Weeks to best utilize the youngster's speed.

New A's manager Bob Melvin is emphasizing a small-ball approach, looking for opportunities to bunt runners over and steal bases.

"Now that we want to run a little more, I'll come up and see what I can do for them," Henderson said.

Melvin would like to see more former A's visit the current team.

"There's something to be said for having winners around your guys," Melvin said. "There's been a ton of winning in this organization, and the more of those guys that can come around, the better off we'll be."

Adam Rosales started at third base in Melvin's first game as manager on June 9, but Scott Sizemore has seen all the action at the position since then.

And though Melvin said he plans to play Rosales at third Saturday against Giants left-hander Jonathan Sanchez, Rosales is trying to acclimate himself to being a part-time utility player.

"(Melvin) said I'd be filling in for guys who need days off," Rosales said. "When I get the chance to play, I want to perform."

Sizemore entered Friday hitting .417 with five RBIs in eight games since being called up from Triple-A Sacramento.

"(Sizemore) has been doing some good things, so I want to make sure he gets consistent at-bats," Melvin said. "The guy that has to pay for that at this point in time is Rosie, unfortunately. I haven't forgotten about him, and I need to get him involved."

Second baseman Mark Ellis (strained right hamstring) will begin a three-game rehab assignment Saturday with Sacramento.

Right-hander Rich Harden (side muscle injury) will make his first rehab start Monday for the River Cats.

Chin Music: Rickey Henderson's take on Jemile Weeks, and A's injury updates

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/17/2011 6:31pm

There's a good turnout for batting practice before tonight's Bay Bridge Series opener, so I'd expect to see a packed house by first pitch. ...

—Rickey Henderson is in town to work with some of the A's top base runners. "I think now that we really wanna run a little more, I'll come up and see what I can do for them," said Henderson, who has worked extensively with the A's minor league teams since the start of last season. Henderson worked with Jemile Weeks plenty at the Double-A level and thinks a young player with Weeks' ability provides a spark for an entire team. "I think he's exciting," Henderson said. "Usually you get a

guy like that just coming up to the big leagues, he's got a little fire in him. He's a little hyper out there. It seems like the team picks something up."

Manager Bob Melvin likes the idea of former A's greats coming around the team more often. I'm not surprised to hear that, knowing Melvin is a big Bay Area sports fan going back to his childhood. It's interesting to hear Melvin sound off on that topic. He also has a strong position on the Oakland Coliseum itself, saying he wants his players to embrace the venue and think of it as a true home field advantage. It certainly runs counter to the prevailing thought (inside and outside the organization) that the Coliseum is a severe handicap for the franchise.

—Updates on some wounded Athletics: Second baseman Mark Ellis is scheduled to play three rehab games for Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. He's eligible to come off the DL on Wednesday, though Melvin still is not tipping his hand on how he'll handle second base once that happens. One direction the A's could go is to option struggling first baseman Daric Barton to the minors, allowing the team to keep Weeks and Ellis on the big league roster. Conor Jackson and Adam Rosales could split first base, Rosales could still serve as a utility infielder and perhaps even Ellis could back up at different infield spots, assuming the A's wanted to keep Weeks playing every day.

Rich Harden will pitch for Sacramento on Monday in his first rehab outing. Brandon McCarthy will face hitters for the first time in batting practice Saturday. Tyson Ross threw off the mound Friday.

Here's your lineups:

A's: Crisp CF, Pennington SS, Matsui DH, Willingham LF, Jackson 1B, DeJesus RF, Suzuki C, Sizemore 3B, Weeks 2B; Godfrey RHP.

Giants: Torres CF, Hall 2B, Sandoval 1B, Huff DH, Ross LF, Schierholtz RF, Tejada 3B, Crawford SS, Stewart C; Lincecum RHP.

A's Graham Godfrey gets 1st win, 5-2 over Giants

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- Almost any major-league "first" rates as memorable for the player involved. Graham Godfrey's first major-league win rates as especially memorable.

In his second big-league start, the A's right-hander limited the Giants to two runs (one earned) in seven innings as Oakland knocked off San Francisco 5-2 at the Coliseum on Friday night.

Godfrey, 26, held the Giants hitless in six at-bats with runners in scoring position. He did so in front of 36,067 fans, the A's third sellout crowd of the season. And the man who took the loss, Tim Lincecum, is merely a two-time Cy Young Award winner who hadn't lost to the A's in his five previous career decisions.

Yeah, fairly memorable.

"The thing I'll remember the most," Godfrey said, "would be there were a couple of times when I'm on the mound and I can hear the A's fans cheering and the Giants' fans - and they're just going back and forth.

"Hearing that, it was pretty neat."

Godfrey's line was pretty neat: six hits, three strikeouts and no walks. In his first start, the previous Friday against the White Sox in Chicago, Godfrey gave up nine hits - including a two-run homer to Paul Konerko - and five runs in 4 1/3 innings.

The only earned run Godfrey allowed to the Giants came on Cody Ross' homer to lead off the second. Godfrey set down the next six hitters in order.

"For him to come right back after the homer and get right back on it," A's manager Bob Melvin said, "that really impressed me more than anything he did tonight."

Said Godfrey: "I just kind of regrouped and went back to business."

The A's took the lead for good on Josh Willingham's RBI double down the left-field line that broke a 1-1 tie in the third. Willingham proceeded to steal third and scored when catcher Chris Stewart's high throw went into left field.

Willingham had to leave the game after six innings because he aggravated his Achilles tendon injury on that play in the third.

In the fourth, the Giants put runners at the corners with one out but did not score. First, Pablo Sandoval opted not to go from third on Nate Schierholtz's flyball to medium right; David DeJesus's throw wound up well off line.

Then with Miguel Tejada at the plate, a Godfrey pitch squirted away from Suzuki and toward the A's on-deck circle. As Sandoval broke for the plate, Suzuki hustled after the ball and made a quick throw to Godfrey, who dropped the tag on Sandoval.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy didn't second-guess Sandoval for the attempt; instead, Bochy praised the A's battery.

"Actually, that was a very good play on their part," Bochy said. "Suzuki really jumped on it real quick, and the pitcher was right there at home plate."

The A's would pick up their third straight win. Leading them on offense were Conor Jackson (three hits and an RBI) and Jemile Weeks (two hits and an RBI).

Melvin - who grew up in Menlo Park, went to Cal and played for the Giants - thoroughly enjoyed his first Giants-A's interleague matchup.

"It was a lot of fun," he said. "... I kind of got caught up in watching the fans go back and forth."

A Giants win would have evened the all-time interleague series at 42-42. Instead, the A's lead 43-41.

Rickey Henderson teaching today's A's how to steal

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- Considering the A's came into Friday with the fewest homers (38) in the majors, it would behoove them to make the most of their opportunities on the basepaths.

And who better to teach the finer points of base stealing than the man who owns the major-league record with 1,406 steals?

Yes, **Rickey Henderson** was in uniform at the Coliseum on Friday. The four players with whom he planned to work: **Coco Crisp, David DeJesus, Cliff Pennington** and **Jemile Weeks**.

Henderson wants to make sure players aren't "afraid to get thrown out." A key to stealing bases is getting a good jump, and Henderson believes that comes from studying the man on the mound.

Said Henderson: "That's the first thing I try to tell them: Pick out something that you want to read off the pitcher."

A's manager **Bob Melvin** views Henderson as an invaluable resource.

"I told Weeks not to go too far when this guy's around," Melvin said. "Make sure you talk to him some, that there's a wealth of information."

Henderson is a Hall of Famer, someone generally believed to be the greatest leadoff man of all time. Those credentials give him instant credibility, but also can intimidate some players.

He tries to overcome the intimidation factor by telling players, "It's basically about being yourself ... not worrying about what I have done in the game, but can I give you something to help you have success in what you're doing?"

Melvin hopes more A's of the glory days return to the Coliseum.

"There's something to be said about having winners around your guys," Melvin said. "There's been a ton of winning in this organization, and the more those guys can come around, the better off we'll be."

Ellis update: Second baseman **Mark Ellis** (hamstring strain) will begin a three-game rehab stint with Triple-A Sacramento today against the Giants' Fresno affiliate. Ellis is eligible to come off the disabled list Wednesday, when the A's are playing the Mets in New York.

Leading off

Bay ties: Bob Melvin is the second Oakland manager to have played for the San Francisco Giants. He spent three seasons (1986 to '88) as a catcher in orange and black. The other Oakland manager was Jim Marshall, who led the A's in 1979 and played for the Giants in 1960 and '61.

Drumbeat: Midway through game vs. Giants

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle 6/17/2011 8:27pm

Sorry for not getting this done before the game.

In any event, the A's lead 3-1 going to the bottom of the fifth.

A couple of good signs for Oakland: The A's have drawn four walks (two by Hideki Matsui and two by David DeJesus) in four innings against Tim Lincecum, and Graham Godfrey has not allowed a hit in four at-bats with runners in scoring position.

One other note: Mark Ellis is set to begin a three-game rehab stint tomorrow with Triple-A Sacramento.

A's top Lincecum in Godfrey's first win

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 6/18/2011 2:33 AM ET

31 wins

OAKLAND -- Excuse A's manager Bob Melvin for his lack of focus during his club's 5-2 victory over the Giants on Friday night.

"I got caught up in watching the fans go back and forth, chanting and such," Melvin said. "Being from the Bay Area, I had to work at times to keep my mind on the game because it was so much fun watching them."

Amidst the marvel of a packed Oakland Coliseum, Melvin found just as much pride on the field as he did off, as the A's claimed victory for the first time against Giants ace Tim Lincecum.

But the win wasn't simply decided by besting Lincecum. Rather, the Interleague matchup between the Bay Bridge rivals was ultimately aided by A's starter Graham Godfrey and a handful of costly errors -- and one folding chair.

The chair, stationed against the left-field wall, guided a two-run third for the A's. Hideki Matsui led off the frame with a walk, and Josh Willingham proceeded to ground a ball down the left-field line that appeared foul.

Except it wasn't.

And once deemed a fair ball, despite no sign of life from the line chalk, Willingham scooted on into second while the ball found itself trapped between the wall and the chair -- creating what was likely a ground-rule double that would keep Matsui at third base.

Except it wasn't.

No call was made, allowing Matsui to score easily to break a 1-1 tie.

"It looked like a double and a run scored to me," a smiling Melvin said. "The ruling in this ballpark is you have to dig it out of there, and it was in plain view."

"We got a bad break," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "The ball bounced their way down the line, just went over the bag and went for a double then hit the chair down there that the security guard uses."

As if the chair hadn't provided enough drama already, even more ensued when Willingham stole third as Giants catcher Chris Stewart's throw sailed high into left field, paving the way for Willingham's arrival at home to extend Oakland's lead by two.

Willingham aggravated his left Achilles tendon on the play and will now likely miss a handful of days. But it also marked yet another example of an amped-up style of baserunning by the A's, who enjoyed the presence of Rickey Henderson -- baseball's all-time great speedster -- on Friday.

"That's the way this team needs to play," Willingham said. "We need to play aggressive, and we need to manufacture runs."

"We're not going to be the '27 Yankees and sit around and wait for home runs all day," Melvin said.

Sandwiched on the outer parts of the strange frame was a first-inning RBI single off the bat of Conor Jackson and back-to-back run-scoring doubles from Scott Sizemore and Jemile Weeks in the eighth. All of the above, against Giants ace Lincecum no less, aided a solid seven-inning showing from rookie Godfrey, who allowed one earned run in just his second Major League start for his first career victory.

"The thing I'll remember the most will be a couple times on the mound when I could hear the A's fans going, cheering, and then the Giants fans, and they're just going back and forth," Godfrey said. "Just hearing that was pretty neat. But definitely the first win means even more when it's against a team like that."

The righty's lone blemish was a solo shot to Cody Ross in the second, but he sailed through his final five innings with help from an effective changeup, all the while surrendering just six hits and no walks total. San Francisco's only other run came courtesy of a Cliff Pennington fielding error in the sixth.

"He was focused the whole game," Melvin said. "You really watch for a young player like that, how he responds. We get a lead and then Ross hits the homer, and now how is he going to respond? We saw him in Chicago get a little bit out of sorts, but this time you could see him compose himself. He came in after the inning and was shaking his head, but for him to get right back on it impressed me more than anything he did tonight."

On the other side, Lincecum walked five in another shaky outing and dropped to 0-2 with a 7.59 ERA over his last four starts. The right-hander's success against the A's had been well-documented, though, evidenced by a 5-0 career record and 1.17 ERA against them before Friday.

"That's one of the best, if not the best pitcher in the game right there," Jackson said. "For us to pull out a 'W' right there is pretty uplifting. It's definitely a momentum-builder."

Much of the ongoing momentum in the A's last three wins following losses in 13 of their previous 14 contests stems from the success growing out of the bottom of the order, namely Sizemore and Weeks. The fresh-faced A's hitters, respectively batting eighth and ninth Friday, have combined for 24 hits in 64 at-bats.

"I'll tell you what, Sizemore and Weeks have definitely thrown a spark in this lineup," Jackson said. "Weeks has added some swagger that I think we've been missing a little bit and he's definitely thrown some energy, and so has Scotty."

"You get production from the bottom of the order, that's something we need," Melvin said. "We do have a little bit of a lack of power, so one through nine, whether it's walks or deep counts, we're always trying to put some pressure on the pitcher, and to come up with big hits from the bottom like that, especially in the eighth, the breathing room was terrific."

A's outfielders look to make mark vs. Sanchez

By Quinn Roberts / MLB.com | 6/18/2011 3:10 AM ET

While the A's have dealt with more than their fair share of injuries to their starting rotation this season, new manager Bob Melvin has the luxury of penciling in proven outfielders any given night.

He'll have that advantage once again when the A's take on the Giants in the second game of the Bay Bridge Series on Saturday at the Oakland Coliseum.

With Josh Willingham usually in left and Coco Crisp in center, Ryan Sweeney, Conor Jackson and David DeJesus are all vying for time in right field as everyday players.

"I must admit, I've had that conversation, that if someone wants to take that position, I'm all for it," said Melvin, whose decision-making will be a little easier with Willingham sidelined a few days by a strained Achilles tendon. "It is difficult, because a lot of times you need consistent at-bats to do that, and I understand that. It's tough not playing a Ryan Sweeney or a Conor Jackson when you have a DeJesus out there. It's a difficult proposition, and the one I have the toughest time with.

"I feel for all those guys because I've been in that role before, but usually, at some point in time, somebody usually takes the ball and gets three games in a row and starts to run with it. We'll see if that happens."

Such depth in the outfield will be a great benefit to A's starter Guillermo Moscoso, who took the loss Sunday against the White Sox after giving up five runs on six hits. With a record of 2-3 and a 3.91 ERA, Moscoso has lost his last three decisions.

On the mound for San Francisco will be lefty Jonathan Sanchez, who in 14 starts this season leads the National League in walks with 50.

Yet the Giants have won eight of those outings partly because they average 4.37 runs per game in support of Sanchez, which is the most of any starter.

Sunday against Cincinnati, Sanchez went six innings, giving up two runs on five hits, while walking five and striking out five in a no-decision. Staying at 4-4 on the season, the left-hander dropped his ERA down to 3.47.

Giants: Zito to make final rehab start

Barry Zito will make one more rehab start before the Giants figure out what step to take with the left-hander.

Working his way back from a right mid-foot sprain, Zito said he felt good after Thursday's start for Triple-A Fresno. Giants manager Bruce Bochy said it is a fair assumption that Zito will rejoin the club in time for a June 28 doubleheader against the Cubs in Chicago.

"He's stretched out. He's been in our rotation, so that would make all the sense in the world for him to be in the mix there," Bochy said. "It's something [general manager] Brian [Sabean] and I will talk about after his next start."

"As far as the foot goes, everything felt good on that front," said Zito, who is 3-0 with a 3.20 ERA in three rehab starts. "The ball felt good coming out of my hand. Offspeed was there for the most part. It was a good outing."

A's: Harden slated for first rehab start

Sidelined all season with a strained latissimus dorsi muscle, Rich Harden will make his first rehab start Monday with Triple-A Sacramento.

It will be the first time Harden has seen action since signing a one-year, \$1.5 million contract with the A's in the offseason.

- Mark Ellis, nursing a strained right hamstring, is slated to begin a three-game rehab assignment with Sacramento on Saturday.

Barring any setbacks, he should be activated from the 15-day disabled list Wednesday.

Worth noting

- Fifty-eight of the Giants' first 70 games this season have been decided by three runs or fewer, the most such games by any team in the Majors this season.
- San Francisco closer Brian Wilson is currently riding the third-longest scoreless streak in the National League with 14 1/3 scoreless frames. He hasn't allowed a run since May 18 at Los Angeles.
- The A's are 9-15 in one-run games, which is the second-worst record in the American League.

Willingham aggravates Achilles tendon strain

By Jane Lee and Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Left fielder Josh Willingham left Friday night's 5-2 A's win over the Giants in the seventh inning with a strained left Achilles tendon.

Willingham aggravated it while pushing off third base to score in a two-run third inning for the A's. Earlier in the frame, Willingham hit an RBI double and then swiped third base.

The slugger has dealt with the injury before in his career but said it has never felt this bad. The injury flared up in a game against the Red Sox during the team's recent 10-game road trip and Willingham was given a day off in Chicago to rest it.

This time around, Willingham will likely miss multiple games, meaning he'll be out for the remainder of the series against San Francisco, a team he is hitting .309 against for his career.

"I don't know how long, hopefully just a couple games," Willingham said. "It's hard to say. That's what I'm hoping, just rest it a couple days."

With Willingham sidelined, the A's have multiple options to fill the void in left field, including Conor Jackson -- who took over the position in the seventh inning Friday -- and Ryan Sweeney. It is also possible that designated hitter Hideki Matsui could see time at the position, though A's manager Bob Melvin said he would be more likely to use Matsui in right field during Interleague Play.

Harden slated for first rehab start

OAKLAND -- Rich Harden is finally going to see his first game action since signing a one-year, \$1.5 million contract with the A's in the offseason.

Sidelined all season with a strained latissimus dorsi muscle, Harden will make his first rehab start Monday with Triple-A Sacramento, A's manager Bob Melvin said.

Given the A's current situation with their rotation, Harden will be stretched out as a starter, a role he is accustomed to. Aside from Harden, four starters -- Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden, Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross -- are on the disabled list for various injuries to their throwing arm.

While Harden will take the mound Monday in Sacramento, two of the other injured A's starters are working their way back from the disabled list.

Ross, who has been sidelined with a strained right oblique, threw another bullpen session before Friday's game. The righty tossed two simulated innings and, including warmups, threw roughly 70 pitches.

"It's coming along," Ross said. "My arm got out of shape for a minute there, but it's been feeling pretty strong. I got my command back the last two outings in the 'pen. I'm feeling pretty good."

Ross will next throw in four days when he will pitch a simulated game and face hitters for the first time since his injury on May 19. After that, it is unclear what the next step in his recovery will be, saying the team will take it one step at a time as long as his arm is feeling well.

Meanwhile, McCarthy, who has a stress reaction in his right shoulder, will throw against live hitters Saturday. The righty said his shoulder is feeling well so far and that he is scheduled to throw between 60 and 65 pitches from the mound.

Ellis to get back to work in rehab outing

OAKLAND -- A's second baseman Mark Ellis, nursing a strained right hamstring, is slated to begin a three-game rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento beginning Saturday.

Barring any setbacks, Ellis is fully expected to be activated from the 15-day disabled list when eligible Wednesday, when the A's are scheduled to take on the host Mets at Citi Field for the second of a three-game set.

Where that leaves red-hot rookie Jemile Weeks is unknown at the moment. Neither manager Bob Melvin nor general manager Billy Beane is tipping his hand about the second-base situation. It's a tricky one, considering Ellis' veteran status as the club's longest-tenured player and Weeks' immediate production at the plate, where he entered Friday hitting .344 with three triples and five runs in nine games.

"That will work itself out," Ellis said. "That's all I can say. It's never a problem to have too many good players. That'll all take care of itself."

A possible scenario that doesn't involve the moving of Ellis or the demotion of Weeks is optioning the struggling Daric Barton to Triple-A Sacramento. Barton, who did not start Friday, is hitting just .212 with a Major League-worst .264 slugging percentage. He's also homerless in his first 63 contests as a first baseman, marking the longest such streak since Sean Casey also matched that total at the start of the 2007 campaign.

"Nothing's been going right all season," Barton said. "It's a grind, and it's one of those things you have to go through and just figure out a way to get out of."

Still, a Barton transaction wouldn't guarantee everyday playing time for both Ellis and Weeks at second base, something the organization would likely prefer to see.

Henderson teaching A's about baserunning

OAKLAND -- Rickey Henderson spent 25 seasons tormenting opposing teams on the basepaths, 14 of them with the A's. Now the Hall of Famer is mentoring some current A's players in the art of swiping bags.

At the behest of A's manager Bob Melvin, Henderson, the all-time Major League leader in stolen bases (1,406), spent time Friday with his former ballclub in the clubhouse and on the field during batting practice before the resumption of the Bay Bridge Series.

"There's a wealth of information that he has," Melvin said. "That's something I'd like to see more of, to get the former A's and the championship A's here. There's something to be said about having winners around your guys."

Henderson was a member of two World Series champions, the 1989 A's and the 1993 Blue Jays, and Melvin hopes Henderson passes on his wisdom to players like Coco Crisp, Cliff Pennington, David DeJesus and rookie Jemile Weeks.

"He stole a lot of bases -- that's the end result of it -- but he did more than that because he took the focus off the hitter," Melvin said. "A lot of times your focus is on the runner, you hang a pitch and it's a two-run homer."

"More than just the basestealing part of it, he took, completely like no other, took your mind off the pitcher-catcher relationship and trying to get the hitter out because you were so worried about him at first base or second base."

Baserunners like Henderson come few and far in between, but the Hall of Famer believes the A's have the talent to be a good stealing team with the quartet of speedsters on the roster. Entering Friday, Crisp was fourth in the Majors with 20 stolen bases while Weeks swiped his first one Wednesday.

"Them guys can run," Henderson said. "The kids aren't running as much now because they're so afraid to get thrown out. They need to get away from being afraid of getting thrown out."

Although fearlessness is something that can't be taught, Henderson also wants to teach the players something tangible to help them become more successful. Specifically, he wants to work with them on getting a good jump when attempting to steal.

"The kids now concentrate on hitting, concentrate on trying to do our fielding and we forget about what baserunning means to the ballclub and what it means to you as an individual," he said. "I think they need to pay a little more attention to working on getting a good jump."

Matsui downplays approach to 500 homers

OAKLAND -- Hideki Matsui's surging presence at the plate has culminated in three home runs during a seven-game stretch, putting him on the verge of career home run No. 500 between the U.S. and Japan.

Entering Friday's series opener against the visiting Giants, Matsui stood just one homer shy of reaching the rare plateau, one he insists he's not overly concerned about.

"Really, I'm not thinking about it," Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon. "In my mind, even if it's No. 500, the majority of them were hit in Japan, so I separate the two. Honestly speaking, it's really something that's not in my mind."

Of Matsui's 499 career long balls, 167 have come on the Major League stage during a nine-year playing career. A total of 25 big leaguers have hit 500 home runs and eight players have done it in the Japanese Leagues, but Matsui would be the first one to combine the two.

The 36-year-old veteran has tallied six homers as a member of the A's, and he's also 7-for-23 with five walks and seven RBIs over his previous seven contests following a disappointing 4-for-40 stretch. Much of that success potentially stems from newly named manager Bob Melvin's decision to make him the club's everyday designated hitter, no matter the opposing hurler.

"Over the past week, I've been feeling pretty good at the plate," Matsui said. "I think being able to get consistent at-bats and play every day, that has helped mentally."

One of Matsui's biggest fans showed up at the Oakland Coliseum on Friday and marveled at his looming 500th home run.

"That's a great feat," A's great Rickey Henderson said. "Achieving that goal, that's just the ultimate."

A's down Giants, 5-2

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Josh Willingham hit an RBI double and also scored on a throwing error, and the A's ended their winless streak against Tim Lincecum with a 5-2 victory over the Giants on Friday night.

Conor Jackson had three hits and an RBI, and Graham Godfrey pitched seven innings to win in just his second major league start for Oakland.

The A's ended a six-game losing streak against the Giants and have won three straight under interim manager Bob Melvin.

Cody Ross homered for San Francisco but the Giants couldn't overcome Lincecum's fourth straight shaky outing and a sputtering offense that continues to misfire with runners in scoring position.

The A's hadn't defeated Lincecum (5-6) in six previous interleague games between the two teams and were shut out by the two-time NL Cy Young Award winner on May 21.

Oakland jumped on Lincecum for one run in the first and two more in the third. The three runs equaled the total Lincecum gave up to Oakland in his previous five starts combined.

Godfrey (1-0) and two relievers did the rest, combining on the six-hitter.

Godfrey, roughed up for five runs and nine hits in his major league debut against the White Sox on June 10, allowed six hits and gave up both San Francisco runs. He had three strikeouts.

That marked the third straight win by an Oakland starting pitcher following a 14-game stretch when the staff went 0-11.

Rookie Jemile Weeks continued his impressive showing since getting called up from the minors 10 days ago to fill in for injured second baseman Mark Ellis. Weeks had two hits to raise his average to .361, including an RBI double in the eighth when the A's scored a pair of insurance runs off Giants reliever Guillermo Mota.

It was a tough day all around for San Francisco's pitchers and came less than 24 hours after reliever Santiago Casilla gave up a walkoff home run to Arizona's Justin Upton in the 10th inning.

Lincecum didn't make it out of the fifth inning in either of his previous two starts and ran into trouble early again. He gave up a two-out RBI single to Jackson in the first inning, then later loaded the bases before getting Kurt Suzuki to ground out.

After Lincecum breezed through the second on 11 pitches, the A's got to him for two more runs in third.

Hideki Matsui walked and scored on Willingham's double when the ball hit a folded chair leaning against the wall near Oakland's bullpen. Willingham then stole third but catcher Chris Stewart's throw sailed into left field, allowing Willingham to score easily and make it 3-1.

The three runs are the most the A's have scored off Lincecum since June 8, 2007 — his second month in the majors. Lincecum, who left after walking Coco Crisp leading off the seventh, finished with seven strikeouts and five walks.

Lincecum, who has a 7.59 ERA over four starts in June, has walked 12 batters over his past three outings and has won just once since pitching a complete game against the A's on May 21.

Ross homered off Godfrey in the second, and San Francisco added an unearned run in the sixth when Aubrey Huff's slow grounder rolled through the legs of shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Godfrey, called up from the minors last week after Brett Anderson went on the disabled list with elbow soreness, looked more relaxed making his first start at the Coliseum. The Oakland right-hander pitched out of a jam in the first then later made an inning-ending play in the fourth to tag out Pablo Sandoval trying to score the tying run from third on a wild pitch.

That was key because San Francisco didn't get many other chances.

Godfrey retired nine of the final 10 batters he faced after Bill Hall scored on Pennington's error. Grant Balfour pitched the eighth and Andrew Bailey worked the ninth for his third save in four chances.

Notes: Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson wore an A's uniform during pre-game warmups and talked with several Oakland players. ... Giants LHP Barry Zito allowed four runs in six innings during his latest rehab start. Zito (sprained right foot) is likely to make one more outing in the minors, according to manager Bruce Bochy, before the club decides what to do next. Bochy has already said that Ryan Vogelsong, who was called up when Zito went to the minors, will remain in the rotation when Zito is ready to return to the big league club. ... Oakland 2B Mark Ellis (hamstring) will begin a three-game rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento beginning Saturday. ... RHP Tyson Ross (strained left oblique) threw off a mound, an important step in his rehab. ... RHP Brandon McCarthy (stress reaction in right scapula) is scheduled to throw to hitters Saturday for the first time since early May. ... The game was sold out, just Oakland's third of the season.

Gutierrez: Ellis, Barton could meet at career crossroads

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - In one corner of the A's clubhouse, the consummate professional. A 10th-year veteran who's not looking forward to his three-game rehab stint beginning Saturday at Triple-A Sacramento but, rather, at the end of it so he can rejoin the major league club. Even if his replacement has been a revelation.

Across the way, is the one-time "phenom," so dubbed by none other than Frank Thomas. A former hitting machine whose once oh-so-pretty swing now is now so out of whack - physically and mentally - he might actually be looking forward to being sent down to work on his hitting. Might being the key word.

Mark Ellis and Daric Barton could be meeting at individual career crossroads come Wednesday, when Ellis and his strained right hamstring is eligible to come off the disabled list. Barton, who told me he has two options remaining, being sent down to the River Cats, just might be the corresponding roster move to make room.

And it might be the best of both worlds for both men.

Because while many A's fans are wondering if Jemile Weeks' inspiring play at second base has pushed Ellis to the brink of becoming trade bait or, in some fantasy G.M.'s minds, to another position, Ellis plans on returning to second base.

"That stuff will work itself out," Ellis told me before the A's 5-2 series-opening win over the Giants Friday night at the Coliseum. "You never have enough good players."

So I asked him if I should be surprised if I saw him playing third base or first base for the River Cats.

"Yeah," he said. "I'd be surprised."

The plan, then, should be to continue to let Weeks play as the spark he's been in not only hitting .361 with three triples and six RBI in 10 games, but also, as Conor Jackson said, bringing a certain "swagger" to the A's.

Ellis has played Gold Glove-caliber defense in his career and when Weeks tires or cools off, Ellis' glove will come in handy, so long as he does not sulk, which he's too much of a pro to do.

Then do the A's move Ellis before the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline?

"I don't have any control over it," he said. "I understand the situation. When something happens, *if* something happens, I'll deal with it then."

Barton, meanwhile, is having a tough time dealing with his shortcomings at the plate.

He is three for his last 27 and has not homered this season, the lone regular first baseman in the big leagues without a home run.

"I could say no, but I'd be lying," Barton said when I asked him if his home run drought bothered him. "Of course I feel like (crud) not hitting home runs. I don't feel right in the box.

"I feel like I'm losing strength. Something's keeping me from my game."

It's been like this all season, and he's become the fans' favorite whipping boy. Well, now that Bob Geren is no longer the A's skipper.

Barton's 64-game homer-less streak as a first baseman is the longest such skid since Sean Casey went 63 games in 2007 for Detroit. The Oakland record for such a power outage is 75, by Mike Hegan from July 6, 1971 to Aug. 16, 1973.

"I'm grinding it out right now," he said. "I don't know what else to say. I'm trying to find it.

"I'm going through my normal routine, just trying to keep it simple. Is it pitch selection? Is it my approach? I just can't miss my pitch when I get it ... I'm putting pressure on my self to make things happen.

"Being my arbitration year, it (stinks), but it is what it is."

A's interim manager Bob Melvin had some sage advice for Barton - don't focus on the funk; focus on getting out of the funk.

Which is why Barton did not say he'd welcome a demotion to get his swing, and his head, straight.

"Obviously, it's not something I want to do," he said. "But when I went back in '09, I put a lot less pressure on myself and it let me get back to finding myself."

Hmmmm, sounds like it might be a welcome respite, right? Besides, first base could be handled by Conor Jackson and Adam Rosales in the interim.

"I look at baseball in a simple way - if somebody's playing better than me, then put them out there. My job is to produce, and I'm not doing that right now.

"They've given me every opportunity in the world and I'm thankful for it."

A return on the A's investment from Barton, much like a bonus from a returning Ellis, would please all.

A's Ellis to start rehab Saturday in Sacramento

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND -- A's second baseman Mark Ellis, on the 15-day DL with a left hamstring strain, will begin his rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday.

A's interim manager Bob Melvin said Friday afternoon that Ellis will play three games for the Rivercats. Ellis is eligible to come off the disabled list on Wednesday, though Melvin was noncommittal about a specific timetable for the veteran infielder's return.

Ellis' replacement, Jemile Weeks, is batting .344. Ellis was injured on June 6, in a 4-2 loss to Baltimore. He left the game in the fifth inning.

Ratto: A's Melvin lonely at the top of the bottom

Ray Ratto, CSNBayArea.com

Bob Melvin sat back and looked at his phone to count the texts.

"One . . . two . . . there'll be more," he said, as though he were describing messages from MI-5. They weren't, though.

"Diamondbacks," he said with that wry smile he likes to use. "I still have some guys over there."

His Oakland A's had trimmed the Giants' lead in the NL West to a prosciutto-esque half-game with a 5-2 win at whatever the hell they're calling the Oakland Coliseum this month. He had gotten a better (and in some ways fortune-laden) performance from rookie Graham Godfrey than the Giants got from Tim Lincecum, and the offense revved up a series' worth of runs.

So he got thank-yous from people who could use the win almost as much as him.

He'll need moments like this, though, while he learns what it is he's volunteered for here. I mean, he's working in a ballpark where signs roasting the general manager and the two principal owners are allowed to hang for nine full innings without interference, so while it may be a First Amendment haven, it's not exactly DisneyWorld, mood-wise.

"You'll have to give me a bit more time before I can tell what we have here," he said as he gnawed on an unsuspecting former shrimp. "I mean, I'll have something for you, but we need to see what we're going to be like when we get (Brandon) McCarthy back, maybe (Rich) Harden and (Brett) Anderson. This isn't a lot like any other team I've had, but I can't say why that is yet."

Melvin's finest moment was in 2007 with Arizona, and while that was a team that started poorly and found its pace in August and September, it was also a team of young power hitters, a three-man bullpen and two starters (Randy Johnson and Brandon Webb). That team won 90 games while being outscored. It also hasn't been as good since, for you karma fans out there.

But the A's haven't been that good either, so Melvin goes from day to day, trying to pick up hints here and there, taking the occasional Billy Beane phone call for the A's version of the Giants' postgame rap (only after wins so far). He is working with Bob Geren's staff, a roster that is fraying at the edges, and is six games back with who gives a damn how many games left.

"I've told them not to get involved in that," he said. "I want them to reduce the season to the day bin front of them and not worry about down the road. How's that for a nice cliché?"

Excellent. Says a lot without saying anything.

"I try not to do that," he said. "I try to say things that will mean something to them, but I'm not at that point yet where I can say specific things to everyone. I can tell them to fight, and so far they have. But we have a ways to go yet."

Friday's game was a modest little pas de deux as June interleague games go. Second baseman Jemile Weeks had two more hits and was thrown out twice on the bases, signs of talent and impetuosity that the A's have been running low on for some time now. Hideki Matsui walked three times, twice against Lincecum, and scored the A's second run. Conor Jackson had three hits and drove in a run.

And Godfrey, who wasn't fooling anyone, was still clever enough to get through the Giants despite letting the leadoff hitter get into scoring position four times. Melvin had to get three pitchers up in the seventh for different matchups while gritting his teeth that he could get Godfrey through the seventh, but in the end the A's resembled a team that shouldn't be nine games under .500.

What they should be is another matter entirely, but Melvin is still trying to figure that out. He'd like time. He's got three weeks, tops. Beane is on Line 1, and the Diamondbacks won't be texting him much after this weekend. It's lonely at the top of the bottom.

A's finally beat Lincecum as Oakland wins third straight with 5-2 victory

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- Tim Lincecum has owned the Oakland Athletics in his career, even though the rest of the American League has owned the San Francisco Giants' two-time, National League Cy Young Award winner.

But the A's finally pinned a loss on the San Francisco ace.

Oakland scored three runs off Lincecum in his six innings on their way to a 5-2 win over the Giants tonight at the Overstock.com Coliseum, while A's rookie Graham Godfrey earned his first major-league win with seven strong innings against the defending World Series champions.

Lincecum had surrendered only six earned runs total in his prior 46 1/3 innings against the A's, while going 6-0 with a 1.17 ERA.

But the A's strung together a single, a walk and another single in the first inning to take an early lead, and later in the third inning, Oakland pinned two more runs on Lincecum to take a 3-1 lead. Overall, the Giants ace threw 113 pitches, only 63 of them for strikes as he walked five batters and gave up five hits in six innings of work.

This victory is somewhat of a stolen gift as they sent a rookie to the mound to face Lincecum, and no one would have expected the kid to outpitch the Giants' best pitcher.

Lincecum has struggled in his career in interleague play, posting a 1-3 record and a 6.89 ERA against teams not from Oakland. So while the A's didn't light up Lincecum tonight, they certainly put a dent in the aura he's carried to the mound against them in the past few seasons.

Godfrey himself entered the game with an ERA of 10.38, but in seven innings against the second-worst offense in the NL, he gave up only one earned run on six hits -- and no walks. He threw 96 pitches, including a whopping 70 for strikes.

A's relievers Grant Balfour and Andrew Bailey threw perfect eighth and ninth innings, respectively, to keep any thoughts of a San Francisco comeback at bay.

Meanwhile, Conor Jackson had three hits for Oakland, and Jemile Weeks added two hits for the A's. Four different players drove in a run for Oakland, including both Jackson and Weeks.

It's a nice win for the A's, as they have now won three straight games -- and they stayed six games out of first place in the American League West.

On the downside, Oakland made an error for the eighth straight game which cost them another unearned run.

Oakland faces tough series against San Francisco, needing wins to stay in race

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- It seems like every time the 2011 Oakland Athletics open a series, it's a crucial one for their playoff hopes.

And tonight, against the San Francisco Giants, is no different.

The A's have 22 more games before the All-Star break, and they currently stand six games out first place with a 30-40 record. While it would be great to get back to .500 before the midsummer days off, that's probably not going to happen. Oakland would have to go 16-6 over the next few weeks to see even-level win-loss totals.

Sure, anything's possible, but the A's might be happiest if they can just cut their American League West deficit in half by July 10.

But they have to start winning the close games, and this weekend, they face one of the best teams in baseball when it comes to playing tight ones.

The A's are just 9-15 in one-run contests this year, while the Giants are 19-10 in those kinds of games.

That 7.5-game difference in close battles is one reason why San Francisco is in first place in the National League West despite not being able to outscore their opponents overall on the season -- and Oakland is in last place in the AL West.

If the A's could learn to win the close ones like the Giants can and do, Oakland might find themselves in a similar position to the defending World Series champions.

But it's a big if.

Both Oakland and San Francisco have great pitching staffs: the A's lead the AL with a 3.38 ERA, while the Giants are fourth in the NL with a 3.25 mark.

Both the A's and the Giants have mediocre (at best) offenses: Oakland is 12th in the 14-team AL in runs scored, while San Francisco is 15th in the 16-team NL in that same category.

The Giants have a mildly better defense (.984 overall fielding percentage, compared to the A's .980 mark), but the primary difference between the two teams is that San Francisco ability to win the close ones more often than they lose them.

And it's not about "clutch" hitting, either (which is a myth in itself, of course): the A's hit .245 with runners in scoring position, while the Giants are hitting just .229 in such situations.

What's strangely different and random about San Francisco's hitters is they hit their best when they're in close games -- even though they're still hitting below league average in those situations. Oakland, too, hits worse than the league average in those situations, but they also hit worse than they normally do.

If the A's want to learn a lesson this weekend, that's the one to be learned -- be your best with the game on the line, and good things can happen.

Call it fate, call it luck, call it karma -- Oakland needs to learn how to make it happen like the Giants do.

Soon.

Godfrey gets first win against Giants

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post

Oakland, CA – The last time these two teams met was back in May when the San Francisco Giants sweep the Oakland A's in a three-game series. Tonight a different team faced the World Champs, with the addition of a new manager and a few new players the A's were excited about the rematch. But what no one expected was the rookie defeating the veteran at the mound.

Graham Godfrey recorded his first win over the Giants and Tim Lincecum 5-2. Graham was selected from Triple-A Sacramento a week ago today and made his Major League debut that night in Chicago. In his second appearance he out pitched and outlasted the "Freak" in tonight's match-up.

"The thing I'll remember the most will be the A's and Giants fans cheering," said Godfrey. "While at the mound I could hear them a couple of times going back and forth which was neat but the first win definitely means more against a team like that."

Graham pitched seven innings allowing six hits, two runs (one earned), no walks, three strikeouts and one home run. After giving up the home run to Cody Ross he returned and calmed himself down to pitch a great game. His counterpart lasted six innings, gave up five hits (three earned), five walks and seven strikeouts.

Lincecum lost to Oakland for the first time in his career. The 2-time National League Cy Young winner and 3-time NL All-Star continues to struggle at the mound. In his fourth consecutive start without a victory he entered the game with a 5-0 record and a 1.17 ERA against the A's. Although Tim looked better than in his past three outings he's lost his past two starts and hasn't won since May 27.

"You have to go out there and battle, give your team a chance to win, once again, I failed to do so," explained Lincecum.

Oakland got off to a good start in the first with a leadoff single from Coco Crisp and a RBI single from Conor Jackson. After Ross tied the game with a solo home run in the second, the A's responded quickly to regain the lead. Josh Willingham hit a RBI double to right field down the third-base line that got lost behind a folding chair against the wall which prevented left-fielder Cody from grabbing it quickly.

"We got a bad break," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "The ball bounced their way down the line, just went over the bag and went for a double then hit the chair down there that the security guard uses."

Willingham then swiped third before scoring on a throwing error by catcher Chris Stewart to give the A's a 3-1 lead bottom of the third frame. The defense was also a factor as well, Jemile Weeks dove for Andres Torres ground ball to center field and got him out at first. A huge play considering seconds later would've resulted in a single up the middle.

"That's the way this team needs to play," explained Josh. "We need to play aggressive and we need to manufacture runs."

San Francisco's offense was out of synch, Pablo Sandoval led off in the fourth with a single to center, Aubrey Huff's pop up moved him to second. Ross' single advanced Sandoval to third but Nate Schierholtz's fly out to right field, led to David DeJesus throwing home for the out but Pablo remained at third. Then while Miguel Tejada was at bat, Godfrey over threw a

pitch that Kurt Suzuki chased and Sandoval broke for home. But Suzuki recovered it and got the out in time to prevent the run.

The Giants cut the lead to 3-2 when Bill Hall doubled and scored on Huff's fielding error to shortstop Cliff Pennington. And that was it for the San Francisco's rally, Oakland's bullpen and defense did not allow any more runs. Yet instead they continued with the hits, Sizemore's RBI double bottom of the eighth gave the A's a 4-2. Weeks followed with another RBI double for the insurance run but was out at third to end the inning.

"You get production from the bottom of the order, that's something we need," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Sizemore struggled a bit but both he and Weeks came up with big hits in the eighth that gave us some breathing room which was terrific." "We do have a little bit lack of power, so one through nine, whether it's walks or deep counts, we're always trying to put some pressure on the pitcher."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Carter's homer, game-winning hit tops Fresno

By Max Lush / Sacramento River Cats

The River Cats were down and out entering the bottom of the eighth inning Friday night at Raley Field.

Losing 5-1 to the rival Fresno Grizzlies, Sacramento was seemingly running on fumes, having left their Salt Lake hotel at 4 a.m. Friday morning to take a flight home that landed at 11:45 a.m.

The River Cats chose rest over batting practice, and it paid off. Sacramento tied the game with four runs in the eighth inning and Chris Carter's game-winning infield single in the ninth gave Sacramento a 6-5 victory.

"The travel is always tough like today but you have to get over it," said Carter, playing his first home game since returning from a thumb injury. "The dribbler felt great, that's the game-winning hit right there."

Sacramento mustered five hits, though one was a home run from center fielder Jai Miller in the first inning, through seven innings.

Then Sacramento woke up. Eric Sogard opened the bottom of the eighth with a seeing-eye grounder up the middle that went off the shortstop's glove and into right field. Sogard advanced to second on a wild pitch. Andy LaRoche then clanked a single off the third baseman's glove, and the ball rolled far enough into left field to score Sogard.

Carter then delivered the big hit, a two-run bomb that landed on top of the clubhouse in left field.

Matt Carson joined the rally with a Texas leaguer that stayed in the air long enough for him to reach second. It was his team-leading 21st double of the season. Anthony Recker brought in Carson, lacing a double on a 3-1 pitch down the left field line to tie the game, 5-5.

In the ninth, Sogard lined a one-out single to left, stole second and advanced to third on a wild pitch. LaRoche walked to make it first and third for Carter. The first baseman worked the count full before hitting a bouncer in front of the plate that spun away from the catcher. Carter beat out the throw and Sogard scored for a bizarre walk-off win.

For only the fourth time - first at home - the River Cats came back from trailing after seven innings. The comeback takes away from Fresno starter Matt Yourkin's terrific outing, limiting Sacramento's offense to one run on four hits, a walk and six strikeouts in 6.0 innings of work.

The Sacramento bullpen knew it would need to be stellar; one of their own made the start and was limited to a pitch count of 60. Closer-turned-starter Willie Eyre made his first start since July 5, 2009, when he pitched for the Oklahoma City RedHawks.

Eyre has done it all for the River Cats this season, working as a set-up man, long reliever (throwing 3.0 innings of relief five times), and closer (six-for-eight in save opportunities).

"I can't say enough how much he (Eyre) has been valuable to this team," pitching Coach Scott Emerson said. "He's been around long enough to take the ball and just pitch."

As a starter Friday night, Eyre looked sharp through three innings, giving up only one earned run on four hits. However, in the fourth Eyre gave up a lead-off walk and single before being removed. Both runs would score. Eyre threw 57 pitches, scattering five hits and a walk in 3-plus innings of work, giving up three earned runs.

The bullpen kept the River Cats in the game. Relievers Fautino De Los Santos, Joe Bateman, Justin Souza and Vinnie Chulk combined to give up two earned runs, five hits and two walks while striking out eight Grizzlies to keep the River Cats in the game. Vinnie Chulk earned his third win of the season.

In comparison, the Grizzlies' bullpen gave up five runs and eight hits in 2.2 innings.

Bateman had arguably his best outing of the season, pitching 2.0 perfect innings and striking out four Grizzlies. Emerson described Bateman's outing as "just awesome." On Saturday, Sacramento left-hander Carlos Hernandez (3-1, 5.74) will pitch against Fresno right-hander Andrew Kown (7-5, 3.89) at Raley Field at 7:05 p.m.

Missions hit late homer to sink RockHounds

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

SAN ANTONIO -- The combination of Midland RockHounds pitchers Gary Daley, Trey Barham and Neil Wagner held a dangerous San Antonio Missions lineup to a mere four hits at Wolff Stadium on Friday.

But the Missions proved exactly how dynamic they can be at the plate with two of their four hits going for home runs and lifting them to a 3-2 victory.

The deciding swing came from James Darnell, who played both third base and left field for the Missions on Friday. Darnell hit a solo home run to left in the eighth inning, breaking a 2-2 tie with his blast turning out to be the game-winner.

It was first baseman Vincent Belnome who struck first, taking a Daley pitch over the left field wall in the first inning for a two-run homer that put the Missions up 2-0.

But Daley only allowed one more hit in his 5 2/3 innings of work after giving up two in the opening frame, giving the RockHounds bats a chance to catch up.

A Matt Sulentic RBI-single in the fourth pulled the 'Hounds within a run and left fielder Adam Heether pulled them even with San Antonio with a RBI-double to left, scoring shortstop Grant Green.

The loss marks a fifth straight loss and 10th in the last 12 games for Midland (25-41). Meanwhile, it's a seventh consecutive win for the Missions who are also winners of 15 of their last 17 games and boast a Texas League-best record of 47-19.

The RockHounds and Missions play Game 3 of a four-game series at 7:05 p.m. today at Wolff Stadium.

Big Bats Keep Streak Alive

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports took their second straight win of a series at home against the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes with a score of 10-4. The Ports have had the necessary offensive backing for their solid pitching and are now on a six game winning streak.

Rancho Cucamonga wasted no time getting the ball rolling this evening. Center fielder Nick Buss opened the game with a lead-off double. Shortstop Jake Lemmerman laid down a sacrifice bunt to move Buss over to third. Left fielder Angelo Songco grounded out to third, and Buss was able to score the game's first run. Ports starter A.J. Griffin ended the inning by striking out right fielder Blake Smith.

The Quakes followed up with a quick defensive inning, starting pitcher Jon Michael Redding retiring the Ports in order. They couldn't make anything big happen in the top half of the second, bringing up the Ports, and this time, Stockton would score some runs. Catcher Ryan Ortiz opened up the bottom half with a single to center field, followed by a double to left field for first baseman Anthony Aliotti. Right fielder Rashun Dixon would draw a walk to load the bases. Redding would strike out designated hitter Mitch LeVier, but then he would walk shortstop Dusty Coleman to bring in Stockton's first run of the night.

Out number two came on a grounder by second baseman Conner Crumbliss, but it also brought in run number two for the Ports, giving Stockton a two-run lead going into the third.

Rancho Cucamonga would reclaim the lead in the third, second baseman Rafael Ynoa doubling to start the inning. A wild pitch would move Ynoa to third, but Griffin would strike out two in a row before bringing up left fielder Angelo Songco and right fielder Blake Smith, who each had an RBI double, bringing the score to 3-2 in favor of the Quakes.

In the fourth, the Ports would take the lead again. With one out, LeVier singled and Coleman doubled, both to center field. They would both be brought in on a shot to left field by left fielder Myrio Richard, putting the Ports up 4-3.

Stockton extended that lead in the fifth, beginning with a double by Ortiz and a single by Aliotti. It was then that Luis Vasquez replaced Redding on the mound for the Quakes, inheriting the two base runners. Dixon kept things going with a single that brought in Ortiz. Vasquez struck out LeVier, bringing up Coleman who singled to center. Crumbliss reached on an infield single, and Aliotti came in to score. Richard would ground into a force at home, but with two outs, Gilmartin would reach on a fielding error by Lemmerman, allowing two more runs to score.

The Quakes would get just one run back in the sixth. Third baseman Travis Denker drew a one-out walk. Griffin got catcher Gorman Erickson to pop out, but a double by first baseman J.T. Wise would bring Denker in for the fourth Quakes run.

Josh Lansford would come in to pitch in the seventh, Griffin having gone six innings, allowing four runs on seven hits. Lansford would continue to maintain his team's comfortable lead in his two innings of work.

Robert Romero came in to replace Vasquez on the mound for the Quakes in the seventh. The Ports continued to pad their lead, Crumbliss hitting a one-out single and stealing second. Later with two outs, Gilmartin hit a two-run blast, making it a 10-4 game.

The final pitcher for Rancho Cucamonga in the eighth would be Ethan Martin. Martin would not allow anymore runs, but neither would Chris Mederos, who came in to close for the Ports in the ninth and took the Quakes down in order.

The Ports look to protect their win streak tomorrow with Ports righty Rob Gilliam on the mound against the Quakes. Rob Gilliam is coming off a spectacular start against the High Desert Mavericks in which he struck out a career-high 12 batters. First pitch is scheduled for 7:05 p.m.

Thompson Walk-Off Gives Burlington the Win

By Matthew Wheaton, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA - 3B Tony Thompson (2-5) scored the tying run on a passed ball and hit a walk-off home run to left field to lead the Burlington Bees (45-23) over the Beloit Snappers (36-32) by a score of 5-4 in 11 innings at Community Field Friday night.

Beloit started the scoring in the top of the second inning after 3B Jairo Perez (2-4) hit a lead-off single, stole second base and scored on a RBI double from C Kyle Knudson (2-4). An RBI single from CF Wang-Wei Lin (2-5) brought Knudson home and the Snappers held a 2-0 lead.

Burlington 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (2-4) hit a solo home run in the bottom of the second inning to make the score 2-1.

Perez led off the top of the fourth inning with a single to center field and later stole second base. RF Lance Ray (1-4) hit a broken bat single to move Perez over to third base. An RBI single from Knudson knocked in Perez and Ray advanced to second base. A bunt single from 2B Adam Bryant (1-4) moved Ray to third base and Knudson to second. Ray scored on a ground out from Lin to give the Snappers a 4-1 lead.

After a single by Burlington LF Douglas Landaeta (1-4) to lead off the bottom of the fifth inning, CF Jose Crisotomo (1-3) hit a single to center field to move Landaeta to third base. An RBI single from RF Royce Consigli (1-5) brought Landaeta in from third to make the score 4-2.

Bees SS Yordy Cabrera (1-4) hit a triple to lead off the bottom of the seventh inning and later scored on a sacrifice fly by Crisotomo to get Burlington within one run at 4-3.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Thompson hit a two-out single to left field. A double by DH Josh Whitaker (1-4) moved Thompson to third base. With Kirby-Jones at the plate, Thompson scored on a passed ball by Knudson, and the game was tied at 4-4.

Bees RHP Josh Bowman pitched seven innings, allowed four runs on eight hits and struck out three. RHP Jonathan Joseph pitched four innings, allowed two hits, struck out four and earned the win.

The Bees and Beloit Snappers continue their series on Saturday at 2 p.m. It's "Friends and Family Day" at Community Field. Bring your family and friends, and get exciting baseball plus everyone gets to run the bases after the game sponsored by KCPS AM 1150. RHP A.J. Achter (1-1, 3.12) gets the start for the Snappers against RHP Sean Murphy (0-0, 0.00) for the Bees.

Lake Monsters 9-3 Win Friday in Opener

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

TROY, NY --- Vermont used timely hitting along with wildness from Tri-City ValleyCat pitchers for a 9-3 victory in the season opener Friday night at Bruno Stadium and the Lake Monsters first game as an Oakland Athletics affiliate in the organization's 18th year in the New York-Penn League.

Two walks and a run-scoring wild pitch gave Vermont a 1-0 lead in the third. After Tri-City tied the game in the fourth on a run-scoring wild pitch of its own, the Lake Monsters scored four times in the fifth for a 5-1 lead. A walk, hit batter and a throwing error by starting pitcher Juri Perez on a sacrifice bunt scored Aaron Shipman to put the Lake Monsters on top for good at 2-1. Chih-Fang Pan followed with a two-run single and later scored in the inning on a Chris Affinito RBI double.

The Lake Monsters used a throwing error and two more walks to score a run in the sixth for a 6-2 lead, then put the game away in the eighth with three more runs as they scored two runs on throwing errors and another on a wild pitch.

Pan, who is in his second season in the A's organization out of Taiwan, went 1-for-4 with a pair of runs scored and three RBI, while Chad Oberacker (25th round 2011 pick out of Tennessee Tech) was 1-for-2 with two walks, two steals and three runs scored to lead Vermont. Four Lake Monster relievers combined to allow just one run on three hits over 4 2/3 innings of relief, including Drew Tyson (1-0) who picked up the win in relief of starter Seth Frankoff.

Matt Duffy, who played the final two seasons of baseball at the University of Vermont in 2008 and 2009, went 2-for-4 in his first professional game for Tri-City after being selected in the 20th round of the 2011 draft by the Houston Astros out of the University of Tennessee. Perez (0-1) allowed five runs (four earned) on three hits with four walks to take the loss for the ValleyCats, who won the NY-Penn League championship in 2010.

The victory improved the Lake Monsters to 7-11 all-time in season openers, including wins in four of their last five lidlifters. It was also the first time that Vermont has opened the season with a win on the road since 3-2 at Oneonta in 2004.

The Lake Monsters and ValleyCats continue their three-game series at Tri-City on Saturday at 7:00 pm as Argenis Paez is the scheduled starter for Vermont. After the series concludes on Sunday, the Lake Monsters will open their 2011 home season on Monday as they begin a six-game homestand against Lowell and Connecticut.