

Oakland A's keep rolling, win their sixth in a row

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

NEW YORK -- Everyone is pitching in during the A's winning streak, even equipment manager Steve Vucinich.

After winning five consecutive games in their throwback gold jerseys to finish their previous homestand, players walked in from batting practice Tuesday afternoon at Citi Field and were surprised to find those same jerseys hanging in their lockers.

Credit the stealthy work of Vucinich, who sneaked the jerseys on the team charter Monday and hid them in the clubhouse before the A's game against the New York Mets on Tuesday.

The A's notched a 7-3 victory in the opener of their six-game trip. And while their winning ways run deeper than whatever color they are wearing, the feeling is that whatever dynamic is at work should not be disturbed.

"They don't necessarily look the greatest with our gray pants," winning pitcher Josh Outman said. "But when you've got something going, you stick with it. Whether they look good or not, we've won six in a row."

The A's typically only wear the gold jerseys as alternate home tops, replacing the black ones of years past.

When Vucinich heard players discussing the possibility of bringing the gold jerseys on the road, he initially frowned on the idea.

But while Major League Baseball mandates that teams wear gray pants and designated hats on the road, there are no regulations on jerseys as long as they don't duplicate what the home team wears.

After consulting with the A's "powers that be," in Vucinich's words, he and his staff got the jerseys ready.

"(A's reliever) Brian Fuentes volunteered to have a private jet fly them in," Vucinich said. "He didn't know I had them here already."

The six-game winning streak is Oakland's longest since a seven-gamer Sept. 14-20, 2009.

Mets starter Dillon Gee, who came in 7-0 with a 2.86 ERA, walked six in four innings, including four in the third inning when the A's scored twice to take a 4-0 lead.

Jemile Weeks and Cliff Pennington led off both the first and third innings with walks, and they came around to score each time.

Weeks, hitting leadoff for the third straight game, stole two bases and scored three runs.

"He looks like he's been leading off for 15 years, the way he's taking pitches," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

Weeks missed a catchable pop fly in shallow center, and another blooper fell when he didn't hear right fielder Ryan Sweeney call him off.

But Outman (3-1) made sure those mistakes didn't magnify. He allowed two runs (one earned) over six innings and continued to be a steadying force for a rotation that has been ravaged by injuries.

Sweeney went 4 for 5 with an RBI.

With Josh Willingham still out with a sore left Achilles tendon, Hideki Matsui played left field in his first defensive start of the season and looked strong.

He hauled in Jose Reyes' drive to the left-center gap in the third and added a running catch near the foul line in the fifth.

Matsui will start in left again Wednesday, but Melvin hopes Willingham will return Thursday.

As for the gold jerseys, Melvin said it was solely Vucinich's call to bring them across the country.

But he's a big-time subscriber to the "ain't broke, don't fix it" theory.

"I have a couple superstitions," Melvin said, knocking on his wood desk as he spoke. "Based on the fact we've won I-don't-know-how-many games in a row, there's a good chance they could be broken out tomorrow."

Barton heading to Triple-A with Ellis due to return

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

NEW YORK — With second baseman Mark Ellis set to come off the disabled list Wednesday, A's manager Bob Melvin said first baseman Daric Barton will be optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to make roster room.

The move doesn't come as a shock considering Barton is hitting .212 and has lost playing time since Melvin took over as manager June 9.

"I've talked to him. He's changed his attitude, he's been positive," Melvin said after a 7-3 victory over the New York Mets. "It's a chance to go down and clear his head. I think he's going to be a big piece for us down the road — this season."

Barton hadn't homered in 65 games as a first baseman, the longest season-opening homerless streak by a major league first baseman since Al Oliver went 101 games for the Giants and Phillies in 1984.

"It is what it is," Barton said. "I didn't produce."

Conor Jackson will see most of the time at first, Melvin said.

Ellis is ready to return from a hamstring strain, but it appears rookie Jemile Weeks will remain the starting second baseman.

"If Jemile is here, he's going to play some," Melvin said. "He's played well to this point."

A common school of thought is that starters don't lose their jobs due to injury. But it's hard to imagine Weeks coming out of the lineup. He is hitting .362 in 13 games since his call-up, providing an energy that's been key in the A's six-game winning streak.

What is Ellis' role if he's not the everyday second baseman?

"We'll sit down and talk about that," Melvin said. "We do have some moving parts, guys that can play different positions and so forth."

Ellis' name also is surfacing in trade talk. A published report Tuesday said the Giants inquired about Ellis over the weekend.

A's assistant general manager David Forst had no comment on whether the A's have held discussions on Ellis, who is making \$6 million this season.

"You've read the same things I have," Forst said with a smile.

Right-hander Tyson Ross (strained oblique) went to Phoenix and was scheduled to face hitters from the A's rookie league team Tuesday.

Chin Music: Gold jerseys make the trip east as A's open series with Mets

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/21/2011 4:29pm

Checking in from Citi Field, where the A's provided a surprise by taking the field in their gold jerseys. They won five in a row in them at home, but because the golds are considered "alternate home" jerseys, no one expected to see them on the road. They weren't hanging in the lockers before the game, and a team official told me they could be shipped in but had yet to arrive. Perhaps they arrived last-minute, like a player flying in from Triple-A Sacramento. Green hats, gold jerseys, gray pants ... interesting to say the least. ...

–Manager Bob Melvin wouldn't say what role Mark Ellis would play when he's activated from the disabled list Wednesday. But he was asked if he considers Jemile Weeks his starting second baseman even after Ellis returns. "Sure. If Jemile is here, he's going to play some. He's played well to this point." So that's the most definitive statement we've gotten on the future of the second base position.

Unless Josh Willingham is put on the DL with his Achilles' tendon injury – and considering Melvin hopes to have him back Thursday, that seems unlikely – someone has to go to the minors to make room for Ellis. Adam Rosales? Daric Barton? Those are the two most likely candidates in my mind. Melvin pointed out that Rosales can play every infield position, but that other players on the roster can also fill the backup infielder role, including Scott Sizemore. Does that point to Rosales going down? Tough to say. Barton is not starting today, and he's obviously fallen down the totem pole in terms of playing time. And the A's have other potential first basemen in Conor Jackson and Rosales. Lots of intrigue surrounding this decision ...

The lineups:

A's – Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Crisp CF, Matsui LF, Jackson 1B, Sweeney RF, Suzuki C, Sizemore 3B, Outman LHP.

Mets – Reyes SS, Turner 3B, Beltran RF, Murphy 1B, Pagan CF, Bay LF, Paulino C, Tejada 2B, Gee RHP.

Monte Poole: Time for A's and Giants to make a deal

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

It's almost unfathomable that two baseball general managers, both restless and daring, can share a region for almost 14 years without once conducting a mutual trade of players.

A's GM Billy Beane and Giants GM Brian Sabean have been the chief architects of roughly 200 swaps, dating back to 1996, and none was with each other.

Insofar as there is occasional polite dialogue, the barrier between Billy and Brian isn't exactly a cold war. But these gamblers have carefully avoided working the same table.

It's natural they do so now.

Mark Ellis, the longest-tenured member of the A's and a team leader, is expected to come off the disabled list Wednesday. But there is nothing for him. His heir apparent at second base, Jemile Weeks, summoned June 7 when Ellis sustained a hamstring injury, needed about a week to become the team's most alluring player.

After all Ellis has done for the A's, the organization can't ask him to earn his \$6 mil by sitting and watching his replacement. Nor can it rationally consider demoting Weeks, 24, to the bench or back to the minor leagues.

Fortunately for the A's, there is a convenient alternative. They can give Ellis, 34, a ride across the bay, where the Giants are seeking a second baseman with a reliable glove.

The Giants also are shopping for a catcher with some pop. Oakland has one in burly backup Landon Powell, last seen rounding the bases after a home run that beat the Giants.

Suddenly, Oakland has something San Francisco needs — which brings us back to Billy and Brian. If they continue to ignore each other now, it looks personal.

Sabeian, who was promoted after the 1996 season, has made at least one deal with every major league team except Oakland and Cincinnati. Beane, promoted a year later, has made at least one deal with every team except San Francisco.

The local inactivity can't be attributed to fear of failure — or projected fan reaction — because neither GM gives a whit about that. Both have made trades fantastic and awful. Both have sparkled and gotten played. They've been praised and criticized with enough volume and regularity to grow scar tissue.

Yet, between them, not one player deal. Only that memorable 2004 transaction in which the A's gave the Giants a few dollars for a pitcher named Adam Pettyjohn.

The last swap between the local teams was on Dec. 4, 1990, when the Giants sent veteran infielder Ernest Riles to the A's for young outfielder Darren Lewis and a player to be named later, who became minor leaguer Pedro Pena. The Giants won

the deal by a wide margin, as D-Lew became a Gold Glove outfielder of such personal integrity he was the inspiration for then-manager Dusty Baker naming his son.

That deal, though, was consummated by former Giants GM Al Rosen and former A's GM Sandy Alderson. Their successors have since closed off the border. The Bay Bridge, for Sabeen and Beane, may as well be 4,000 miles long.

Supply and demand, though, are conspiring to remind both GMs the span is actually 4[1/2] miles.

Moving Ellis and/or Powell would not suggest the A's are in sell mode but, rather, that they are in a numbers game that works to their advantage. Ellis is a veteran who has become gratuitous and Powell is a reserve 19 months older than starter Kurt Suzuki.

Indeed, it's an opportunity for Beane to shed salary while adding a young player or two to a core that certainly would seem to include Suzuki and Weeks. And remember, in every minor league system, there is someone Billy likes.

For the Giants, it would address the losses of catcher Buster Posey, who is out for the season, and second baseman Freddy Sanchez, whose 2011 return is uncertain.

Acquiring Ellis would instantly patch their infield defense, buttressing their strong pitching. Second baseman Bill Hall, an emergency pickup who was released by Houston, has power but comes with a low on-base percentage and a mediocre glove.

As for Powell, it's not likely the Giants are going to get much more on the market. Quality catchers are an exceedingly valuable commodity and almost never get traded. The Nationals would part with Pudge Rodriguez, but the Giants reportedly have only moderate interest in adding a 39-year-old wheezing toward retirement.

Giants fans can look down their noses at Ellis and/or Powell. They can cling to fantasies about Mets shortstop Jose Reyes, who might be unattainable. They can dream about Johnny Bench, who is 63.

But Sabeen is in no position to dismiss a reasonable option.

The phones are warm, a deal table-ready. All the GMs have to do is dust off the seats, look each other in the eye and play.

A's win 6th in a row, beat Mets 7-3

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The A's brought their alternate yellow jerseys on the road for the first time, and the bold gold tops worked their magic again.

Oakland extended its winning streak to a season-high six games by exerting constant pressure on the Mets in a 7-3 victory Tuesday night at Citi Field. The A's scored in four different innings, and they had men in scoring position in every inning but two.

Equipment manager Steve Vucinich had told A's players that the team wasn't bringing the gold jerseys on the road, but after several requests to do so - reliever Brian Fuentes even volunteered to have them sent by private jet if necessary - Vucinich checked and found the alternate jerseys are OK to wear away from home.

So he packed them and saved them as a surprise, hiding them in the laundry room until after batting practice.

"I didn't know anything about it," left fielder Hideki Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon. "Perhaps our streak in a way is because of the gold jerseys. So hopefully we can continue to win in them."

Vucinich checked with Josh Outman to make sure that he wanted to wear the jerseys - the color is selected by the starting pitcher - and after the game, Outman said, "I don't think they look the greatest with the gray pants, but when something is going for you, you stick with it, whether it looks good or not."

The A's are 10-3 overall wearing the yellow jerseys.

On Tuesday, Outman allowed four hits and two runs, one earned, in six innings. He walked two, struck out four, and he lowered his ERA to 2.86. Though an error by Jemile Weeks led to the one unearned run, he played a big role, with a hit, two walks, two steals and three runs.

Cliff Pennington walked twice and had two hits, a double and an RBI single. Mets starter Dillon Gee, 7-0 entering the game, walked six and lasted four innings.

Ryan Sweeney had four hits and made a nice diving catch in right-center in the eighth. Jason Bay hit a drive to center that Coco Crisp almost caught at the wall with a leaping try. The ball struck the heel of his glove and Bay wound up with an RBI triple, after a quick instant-replay check by the umpires.

Josh Willingham remained out with a sore left Achilles tendon and he will not start tonight, but he hopes to do so Thursday.

Matsui played in left, his first start in the outfield this year. He caught five flyballs, including a drive by Carlos Beltran into the corner and a foul ball near the wall by Josh Thole. Matsui played all nine innings in the field.

"He picked back up in left field like he never left," Outman said.

A's option Daric Barton to Triple-A

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Daric Barton was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento after Tuesday night's game in order to make room for second baseman **Mark Ellis**, who will come off the disabled list today, possibly in a backup role.

Barton knew before Tuesday's game there was a good chance he was going to be demoted. The first baseman said, "I decided my own fate. I haven't done anything this year. I haven't produced."

Perhaps some time working on his stroke and regaining his confidence at Triple-A Sacramento might benefit Barton, who is hitting .212. He said he hasn't felt comfortable at the plate all year.

The one thing he wasn't trying to do was to hit the ball out of the park, a tendency that can send young hitters into a funk. Barton was trying merely to get hits of any kind, he said.

"Having some kind of record for going without a home run is kind of depressing," Barton said. "But I've hit a few balls well that might have gone out in another park or on a different night."

Barton has not hit a homer in his first 65 games as a first baseman, the longest season-opening streak since **Al Oliver** went homerless in all 101 games he played there for the Giants and Phillies in 1984.

Manager **Bob Melvin** would not divulge the plan at second base, saying he'd like to address it first with Ellis and rookie **Jemile Weeks**. Weeks is hitting .362; Ellis was at .211 when he went on the DL with a slight hamstring strain.

When asked whether Weeks will continue to play second base, Melvin responded, "If Jemile is here, he's going to play some. He's played well."

Powell picks it: Catcher **Landon Powell** played first base during the team's early hitting session Tuesday but, he said, he had not been asked to, he was simply doing it on his own. Powell has played seven games at first in his big-league career.

Powell said that he was getting in work there because the A's are at National League parks this week, so many players might be playing in unusual spots.

With Barton heading to Triple-A, **Conor Jackson** will play first, with utilityman **Adam Rosales** backing up Jackson. Powell also could be in the mix.

Ross update: **Tyson Ross** (oblique) was scheduled to throw 40 pitches of live batting practice to the A's Arizona League hitters Tuesday evening.

Leading off

Secret weapon: Guillermo Moscoso ... switch hitter? Moscoso, who starts Friday at Philadelphia, went deep at spacious Citi Field from both the right and left sides of the plate ("Upper deck!" he said) during batting practice, but he said he'll stick to hitting righty in games.

Drumbeat: A's gold jerseys go on road; Josh Willingham won't start until (maybe) Thursday

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Citi Field, 6/21/2011 4:35pm

There was some misdirection about the A's gold jerseys - strong suggestions were made that they didn't make the trip, then it changed to they might arrive "via private jet." As it turns out, the A's had them with them. I'm not sure if it was a surprise for the players, or strictly a surprise for the media and for the fans, but Oakland came out wearing the gold jerseys in the game.

And why not? The team has won five in a row with them and they are 9-3 overall with the tops. Alternate jerseys are just that - they may be used at home or on the road as alternates. It doesn't happen a lot on the road, but a few teams have done it. It requires no authorization, at least that's my understanding.

Josh Willingham told me he's unavailable to start tonight and tomorrow night, but he "might" be OK for Thursday's day game with that sore Achilles tendon. Willingham said if a few more days are needed to get rid of the problem, though, they'll take the extra time.

Hideki Matsui will start in left field tonight and tomorrow night and he will get Thursday off, according to manager Bob Melvin.

Here's the lineup: Weeks 2b, Pennington ss, Crisp cf, Matsui lf, Jackson 1b, Sweeney rf, Suzuki c, Sizemore 3b, Outman p

Melvin confirmed that Mark Ellis will rejoin the team tomorrow, but he said he'd prefer to discuss with Ellis and Jemile Weeks what the plan is at second before he tells the media. Seems only fair.

I'm having a hard time envisioning Weeks coming out of the lineup, but when I asked if Weeks will be at second base upon Ellis' return, Melvin said, "If Jemile is here, he's going to play some. He's played well."

I'd imagine the team would like Weeks, a young player, a top prospect, to be playing every day wherever he is. "Some" isn't a word I'd associate with that, but I'd again be surprised if he's sent out. It seems clear that Daric Barton will be the players

optioned out tomorrow, something that certainly was discussed by the team last week. Barton is out of the starting lineup again, with Conor Jackson at first.

Ellis played only second base while on a rehab assignment at Triple-A Sacramento, and he told me firmly when I asked about the possibility of other positions, "I'm a second baseman." Weeks is also pretty much strictly a second baseman.

Does Weeks stay in the lineup until he cools off? That could be a reasonable plan, I suppose. So then does Ellis move back into the fulltime role at some point? Could he even be there tomorrow? Do the A's try to explore a trade for Ellis? There is definite interest, but then what happens if Weeks has a really rough patch or gets hurt? Ellis is popular in the clubhouse, a team leader, and he is an excellent defensive second baseman.

This is one of the most interesting decisions the A's have been faced with in some time. They've made some bold calls in recent weeks - now what happens with a much loved player who has spent his entire 10-year big-league career in Oakland vs. a young sparkplug who clearly is the team's future?

In other news, Tyson Ross (oblique) will throw 40 pitches of batting practice at Phoenix Municipal Stadium this evening, to the team's Arizona-League players.

Melvin visits winter home in summer

Gwen Knapp, San Francisco Chronicle

The A's road trip has taken Bob Melvin to an unconventional place for a baseball manager.

He and wife Kelley make their home in New York — in Greenwich Village, to be exact.

They became Manhattan residents about five years ago, when Melvin worked as the Diamondbacks' manager. The decision turned a common baseball living arrangement — work in a bad-winter urban area, live in Arizona or Florida — upside down.

But the star of the Melvin family has nothing to do with baseball. Daughter Alexi decided to become an actress at about age 3, when her mother took her to see "The Phantom of the Opera" on Broadway. At 17, she went to the renowned Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, with her mom in tow.

"She's our only child," Kelley Melvin said, "and I wasn't just going to let her loose in New York City."

The protective instinct was enhanced by a diagnosis of juvenile diabetes near Alexi's 15th birthday. While Alexi spent three days in the hospital restoring her health, the family spent hours in classes, learning about diets and treatments.

"It was really overwhelming," Kelley Melvin said. "People don't realize how complicated it can be."

So she joined Alexi in New York, sharing a small apartment while Bob managed the Diamondbacks. As the offseason approached, Kelley wasn't sure her Menlo Park-reared, mountain-biking husband would enjoy the ultimate urban lifestyle. He found it exhilarating, and they got their own place in Greenwich Village. Soon, they plan to buy a home in Soho.

Alexi, now 22, has graduated from the institute and begun work, appearing as an extra in TV's "The Good Wife" and the film "Duplicity." This summer, she will volunteer as a counselor at a camp for young diabetes patients at the Columbia University Medical Center. She also co-administers a Facebook page called "Cure Diabetes," which has attracted more than 1 million supporters and more than \$64,000 in donations.

Within days of becoming the A's manager, Bob Melvin had taped a public-service announcement for Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Apparently, he makes an excellent co-star.

A's golden once again in win over Mets

Clad in yellow, Outman solid while offense draws nine walks

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 6/22/2011 12:36 AM ET

NEW YORK -- The Melvin effect has turned into the gold jersey effect -- or at least some combination of both, it seems.

The success the A's have endured since the arrival of manager Bob Melvin has been well documented, no doubt. But, now, so have the winning ways attached to a not-so-flattering look that the A's are going to stick with so long as the wins keep coming.

Oakland notched its sixth straight victory on Tuesday, all while wearing gold jerseys, in a 7-3 decision over the host Mets. In doing so, they introduced the increasingly popular gold jerseys to the road life, as they had before been confined to the Oakland Coliseum.

It was the A's first win in Queens since they defeated the Mets in the 1973 World Series, winning Game 3 at Shea Stadium.

"They don't necessarily look the greatest with our road gray pants," starter Josh Outman said, "but when you've got something going, you try to stick with it. It's just how the game goes."

The A's weren't even aware the gold jerseys made the trip, as they were under the impression they were only allowed to wear them at home. Thus, not much fuss was made when their regular road greens hung in their lockers upon their arrival Tuesday afternoon.

"When they asked if we could take them on the road, I immediately said no because we had kinda in-house designated it as our home alternative," A's clubhouse manager Steve Vucinich said. "But in talking to our powers that be in Oakland, and then checking the Major League style guide, we found out the gold jerseys are not designated for home. We did that ourselves."

"So yesterday morning, I gathered them up, packed them in bags, didn't tell anybody, and brought them here and hung them up and hid them in the laundry room."

Meanwhile, reliever Brian Fuentes volunteered to have a private jet fly them out to New York if need be, not knowing they were already in the vicinity. And Vucinich, ever so sly, sported a yellow shirt with gray pants, just to see if he would draw any comments on the look.

He didn't, but he got just the response he was looking for when players filtered into the clubhouse after the conclusion of batting practice only to see the green replaced by the gold.

"The guys were pumped," Vucinich said.

"I had a feeling they might sneak out," Melvin said, "but it wasn't my doing."

The A's skipper, admittedly superstitious and a fan of the gold jersey phenomenon, wasn't so much a proponent of Monday's scheduled off-day. Worried it would mess with the momentum gained from a five-game winning streak, it ultimately made merely for a 24-hour interruption.

The A's scored twice in three of the first five innings. They not only walked eight times in that span, but watched five of those six runs score after having walked.

In the first, Mets hurler Dillon Gee offered up two of his six free passes to Jemile Weeks and Cliff Pennington. Both of them scored courtesy of a sacrifice fly by Hideki Matsui -- who added some nice defensive plays in his first game in the field this year -- and an RBI groundout by Conor Jackson, respectively.

"I've got to come out and set a better tone for the game," said Gee, who entered the contest boasting a 7-0 record. "To state the obvious, I just couldn't find it tonight. I just couldn't make the adjustment."

It showed. Four more walks ensued in the third, as Weeks and Pennington again drew free passes from Gee. A bases-loaded walk by Jackson brought in Oakland's third run, and Ryan Sweeney's RBI base hit -- the first of his three singles on the night -- made it 4-0.

"We knew we had to have a good approach against a guy like that, and that's how we started the game," Weeks said. "That allowed us to get in hitter's counts and then get walks."

A fielding error by Weeks led to New York's first run against lefty Josh Outman in the fourth, but Oakland proceeded to expand its lead in the next frame when another member of the Mets' pitching staff, this time D.J. Carrasco, walked in run No. 5.

The A's tacked on two more runs while Outman quietly breezed through the Mets lineup minus one major mistake in six innings -- a solo shot by Jason Bay -- and allowed just four hits total. The A's southpaw, who also allowed a sacrifice fly by Ruben Tejada, walked two, struck out four and has surrendered just four earned runs over his past 19 innings.

The A's starting staff, despite missing Brett Anderson, Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross, is now 5-0 with a 1.17 ERA during the club's six-game winning streak following a stretch that saw the same group go 0-11 with a 7.30 mark.

Just another result of the golden era?

"Whether they look good or not, we've won six in a row, so we'll likely be seeing them again tomorrow night," Outman said.

It's a sensation Vucnich has never seen before in his 35-plus seasons with the club.

"We'll keep it until it wears out," Weeks said.

Melvin agreed, "Just in case, right?"

Ellis to return Wednesday, but role undefined

While veteran was on shelf, rookie Weeks stated his case

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

NEW YORK -- Mark Ellis will be reinstated from the disabled list on Wednesday as expected, but the veteran's role upon his return is less of a known commodity considering rookie Jemile Weeks has proven his case to be an everyday big league second baseman.

A's manager Bob Melvin again stayed mum on the topic when approached about Ellis' potentially changing role on Tuesday, but he did say, "If Jemile is here, he's going to play some."

"It's a great problem to have because we have two really good players," Melvin said. "One's an up-and-coming, high-profile prospect, and then there's a guy that's meant as much to this organization as anybody in the last 10 years. It will be nice to have them both on the team, but it will be a difficult proposition either way."

Ellis, on the mend from a right hamstring strain, collected his only two hits of his three-day rehab stint with Triple-A Sacramento on Monday. He was batting just .211 with a .533 on-base plus slugging percentage when his injury occurred, while Weeks has put together a .361 mark with five multi-hit games in 13 contests.

However, Ellis' veteran status as the organization's longest-tenured player, combined with his strong defensive skills and seemingly unmatched clubhouse presence, are of significance to the A's. What that means for his role will likely be unveiled Wednesday.

"We'll sit down and talk about that," Melvin said. "We do have some moving parts here, with guys that can play different positions and so forth, but that's something we'll have a conversation about before I have a conversation with you guys about that."

With the A's deciding to keep both Ellis and Weeks on the active roster, first baseman Daric Barton was optioned to Triple-A following Tuesday's 7-3 win in New York, leaving Conor Jackson as the club's primary first baseman.

Adam Rosales can also play first. Ellis doesn't have experience at the position, but he does offer versatility, having appeared in 15 career games at shortstop and seven at third base, all of which came in 2002.

Power shortage sends Barton to Minors

NEW YORK -- Just four months after entering camp with a new physique that brought about hope for an increased dosage of power, A's first baseman Daric Barton is headed back to the Minors following a sluggish start to the season.

Manager Bob Melvin announced after Tuesday's win against the Mets that Barton has been optioned to Triple-A Sacramento to make room on the roster for Mark Ellis, who will be reinstated from the disabled list on Wednesday when the moves are made official.

Barton, who came into Spring Training having added about 15 pounds of muscle while losing 10 pounds of fat, ended up not just lacking power -- he had no home runs in 66 games -- but any sense of comfort at the plate.

The 25-year-old first baseman hit just .212 with a .268 slugging percentage, which is the second-lowest mark in the Majors behind Seattle infielder Chone Figgins' .258. And the home run drought represented the longest season-opening streak by a first baseman since Al Oliver went homerless in his 101 games for San Francisco and Philadelphia in 1984.

"It is what it is," Barton said Tuesday night. "I didn't produce."

His demotion comes two weeks after third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's move to Triple-A. Barton and Kouzmanoff were once deemed the organization's long-term answers at the infield corners, and Melvin insists Barton is still viewed that way at first base, so long as he can prove himself again -- starting in Sacramento.

"He hasn't struggled like this before, so this is really hard on him," the A's skipper said. "I've talked to him several times since I've been here, and he's done everything I asked him to do. For a guy that's dug himself into a little bit of a hole, he's changed his attitude, he's been positive, he's worked hard -- all the stuff that's very difficult to do when you're struggling like that.

"For me, he needs to go down and clear his head, and do the things he's done successfully at the big league level. I think he's going to be a very important piece for us, regardless, down the road this season. We do need him. I believe that."

In the meantime, Conor Jackson will see the majority of time at first base, with Adam Rosales acting as another option.

Matsui makes first outfield start of 2011

NEW YORK -- Hideki Matsui received his first outfield start of the season on Tuesday, drawing time in left field for the A's Interleague opener against the Mets while Josh Willingham (Achilles) was rested.

The rare scene wasn't always such, as Matsui has 582 games under his belt as a left fielder, including 18 in 2010. His last season as an everyday outfielder came with the Yankees in 2007, when he made 112 appearances in left.

"He's played out there," manager Bob Melvin said. "He knows what to expect. Because he hasn't in a while doesn't mean he's not prepared to play. I don't expect any problems, and whether or not we need to do something later in the game, I don't think I'd have to take him out just to take him out. I certainly think he's capable of playing nine innings."

Matsui, one homer shy of 500 for his career between the United States and Japan, entered the contest with a .300 average over his last 10 games at designated hitter, with eight walks, three home runs and nine RBIs over that span.

The 37-year-old veteran is expected to again start in left field on Wednesday and will receive a day off for Thursday's matinee, Melvin said.

Willingham still out; Thursday a possibility

NEW YORK -- A's outfielder Josh Willingham remained sidelined with a sore left Achilles tendon for a third straight game on Tuesday, missing the first of a three-game road set against the Mets.

Willingham described his injury as "a little better" on Tuesday and noted he could potentially return to the lineup as early as Thursday, though he wouldn't be surprised if he was allowed the entire series to rest.

The disabled list is not seriously being considered at this time.

With Willingham out of the mix, manager Bob Melvin utilized Hideki Matsui in left field and plans to do so again on Wednesday. However, he didn't rule out Willingham as a pinch-hitter for any of the contests in New York.

Worth noting

- Rehabbing right-hander Rich Harden, who tossed three no-hit innings for Triple-A Sacramento on Monday, is expected to make his second rehab start on Saturday and will likely be "in the neighborhood of 80 pitches," manager Bob Melvin said.

Barring any setbacks, Harden could potentially join the A's rotation for the first time all season sometime during the next homestand, which begins Tuesday.

- Righty Tyson Ross, nursing a strained left oblique back to health, was scheduled to throw 40 pitches in a session of live batting practice in Arizona on Tuesday.

Chasing elusive winning record. Mets face A's

By Jon Star / MLB.com | 6/21/2011 11:31 PM ET

Heading into Interleague Play, the Mets were riding a wave. They had won or split their previous five series before welcoming American League West opponents to Citi Field. Since then, they have dropped three out of four, falling three games under .500 and remaining in search of the elusive over-.500 mark since reaching 34-34 on June 15.

Manager Terry Collins acknowledged that getting over .500 is a short-term goal for this team. The Mets are 26-8 when leading after six innings, but a number of late-inning disappointments has Collins recognizing that his club can do better when it comes to limiting opponents down the stretch.

"I go back and talk about the 15 or so games that we've had the lead in the seventh inning and we've lost them," Collins said. "I certainly think we can close the gap. We've just got to find a way to shut the game down in the end or add on runs to make the leads bigger. I do believe we can close the gap."

First, the Mets will look to find a way to end their homestand on a high note. With Tuesday's loss, the Mets are now 2-5 against the AL this season. Their lack of success against the Junior Circuit comes one year after the Mets went a franchise-best 13-5 against the AL.

While Collins attempts to push his team over the break-even mark, A's manager Bob Melvin looks to strike a balance with returning second baseman Mark Ellis and his replacement, Jemile Weeks. Ellis, who has not played since June 6 due to a right hamstring strain, faces a potentially uncertain role given Weeks' emergence.

Melvin hinted at a possible change given Weeks' .361 average (17-for-47), six RBIs and 10 runs scored in 13 games.

"If Jemile is here, he's going to play some," Melvin said. "He's played well to this point, and Mark Ellis is a good player. It's good to have decisions like this, tough decisions, because you want as many good players as you can have."

While Melvin feels positive about the situation, it is a somewhat sticky scenario given Ellis' veteran status and his presence as the longest-tenured player on the roster. That position means a great amount to a team that feeds off his on-field and clubhouse participation.

"We'll sit down and talk about that," Melvin said. "We do have some moving parts here, with guys that can play different positions and so forth, but that's something we'll have a conversation about before I have a conversation with you guys about that."

Athletics: Gonzalez looks to build on previous effort

Melvin will hand the ball to Gio Gonzalez, who is looking to back up his two-run, six-inning effort on Thursday in which he registered a season-high 10 strikeouts. The left-hander picked up the victory after losing his previous three starts. Gonzalez (6-5, 2.69 ERA) heads into his eighth Interleague start with a 1-3 record and 3.46 ERA.

Mets: Time for Turner turnaround?

Justin Turner burst onto the New York scene when he was promoted from Triple-A Buffalo in late April. The second baseman hit .322 through his first 29 games, notching 20 RBIs in May, but June has not been so kind. He is hitting just .206 (13-for-63) so far this month, though he does have nine RBIs in 15 games. Turner missed two games on June 14 and 15 with a thumb injury, and Collins noted that the injury could be a reason for his recent downswing.

"Obviously the [scouting reports on Turner] are being ... people are seeing them," Collins said. "I think the hand's an issue, I think he's playing through some things. He's gotten a couple big hits though. He's driven in some runs with a couple big hits. I do believe the hand is bothering him a little bit. He keeps telling me he's fine."

Worth noting

A's reliever Joey Devine is riding a 76-game homerless streak, dating back to 2006. The right-hander, who missed all of 2009 and '10 while recovering from Tommy John surgery, has tallied 74 2/3 innings and faced 302 batters since last surrendering a home run.

Time running short to support A's in voting

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

The A's are without any top vote-getters in the latest All-Star ballot update, but that doesn't mean it's too late to send a Coco Crisp, Josh Willingham or any other player to the Midsummer Classic.

They can't get there on their own, though. And time is running out to send them there.

Several A's players, who put together a five-game winning streak entering Tuesday, need help to take part in baseball's glorified summer tradition by way of votes to be included in the top picks among their positions.

Fans can cast their votes for starters up to 25 times at MLB.com and all 30 club sites -- online or via a mobile device -- using the **2011 All-Star Game MLB.com Ballot Sponsored by Sprint** until June 30 at 8:59 p.m. PT.

Voting at the Oakland Coliseum ended Thursday.

Rosters will be announced during the 2011 All-Star Game Selection Show on TBS on July 3. Baseball fans around the world will then be able to select the final player on each team via the 2011 All-Star Game Final Vote Sponsored by Sprint.

And the voting doesn't end there. Fans will have the opportunity to participate in the official voting for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet at the Midsummer Classic via the 2011 All-Star Game MVP Vote Sponsored by Sprint.

The All-Star Game, to be played in Phoenix on July 12, will be televised nationally by FOX and around the world by Major League Baseball International. ESPN Radio will provide exclusive national radio play-by-play, while MLB.com will offer extensive online coverage.

It must be the uniforms: A's win again

Oakland, decked out again in gold alternate jersey, stretch win streak to six

By MIKE FITZPATRICK, ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Josh Outman, Jemile Weeks and the Oakland Athletics have been good as gold in their garish alternate jerseys.

Outman threw another impressive game, Weeks scored three times and the streaking A's walked their way to a 7-3 victory over the New York Mets on Tuesday night, handing rookie Dillon Gee his first loss of the season.

Riding their longest winning streak of the year, the A's had a gift waiting for them when they came back into the clubhouse after batting practice. Equipment manager Steve Vucinich secretly brought those gold alternate jerseys from Oakland to New York so players could keep wearing them — even on the road.

He hid them away all afternoon, then sprang the surprise.

In baseball, you don't mess with a winning streak. It's all about superstition.

"A bunch of guys were pumped," Vucinich said. "Brian Fuentes said he would fly them in on a private jet. He didn't know I already had them here."

It all started when, with his team in a tailspin, Outman opted for the gold jerseys when he started last week at home in a win over Kansas City. He said he was looking to "mix it up, see if we can get something going."

The A's kept wearing gold and haven't lost since, so Vucinich checked to make sure it wasn't a violation of Major League Baseball rules to don those alternate jerseys on the road.

No problem at all. It just meant pairing them with gray pants and the team's traditional white spikes.

"Not our best look," Weeks said. "But like I said, it's part of our winning right now, so we're just going to I guess keep it until it wears itself out, I guess you could say."

Ryan Sweeney had four hits, including an RBI single, and the resurgent A's won their sixth straight game after dropping 13 of 14. It's their longest winning streak since a seven-game run in September 2009.

Cliff Pennington reached base four times and scored twice, forming a pesky tandem with Weeks at the top of a Punch and Judy lineup. The speedy Weeks walked twice and stole two bases, the latest spark he's provided since getting called up from the minors June 7.

"He's like the little Energizer bunny. That guy just keeps going and going and he battles and he takes good at-bats," Oakland reliever Grant Balfour said. "You can just see that he's got a lot of energy and a lot of confidence, and he's a great little player."

Outman (3-1), who wears No. 88, lived up to his pitcher-perfect name, allowing two runs — one earned — and four hits in six innings while wearing old-school, dark green stirrups stretched high over his yellow socks.

Balfour retired Josh Thole on a bases-loaded grounder to end the eighth, then finished for his second save as the last-place Athletics took the series opener, an interleague rematch of the 1973 World Series.

Reggie Jackson and the A's won that one in seven games for the second of their three straight titles.

The lone bright spot for the Mets was Jason Bay, who finally showed his old pop at the plate. Bay hit a long homer in the sixth to make it 7-2, his first extra-base hit in 25 games and 89 at-bats — the longest drought of his career.

It was Bay's first home run since May 13 at Houston, and the former slugger wasn't done. He added an RBI triple in the eighth that might have cleared the center-field fence if not for a leaping Coco Crisp, who knocked the ball back into play.

Umpires took a look at the replay but upheld the original call.

"It's been a battle," Bay said. "I feel like the last week has been a lot better, and it was nice to get the results and put some wood on some balls and get that confidence and hopefully build off that."

Normally so poised and polished on the mound, Gee (7-1) was all over the place in a matchup of promising young pitchers. He walked his first two batters, and a single by Crisp loaded the bases.

Hideki Matsui hit a sacrifice fly and Conor Jackson drove in a run with a groundout.

"I couldn't locate the fastball, and that's what it all comes off of. If you can't locate the fastball, you're probably not going to do very well," Gee said. "I don't really care about the wins and losses. They come and go. But the frustrating part is I really didn't give us a chance tonight."

Gee walked Weeks and Pennington again in the third, and two more free passes soon followed. Sweeney's infield single made it 4-0.

Trying to become the first Mets rookie to win eight straight decisions, Gee walked six in the first three innings. His previous career high for a game was four.

"That's certainly not the guy we know," Mets manager Terry Collins said. "I don't think he made any adjustments tonight."

Oakland, which was coming off a three-game sweep at home of the Bay Area-rival Giants, improved to 7-4 under interim manager Bob Melvin, who took over when Bob Geren was fired June 9.

In the offseason, Melvin interviewed for the Mets' managerial job that went to Collins.

NOTES

Matsui started in the outfield for the first time this season. He made a nice catch in left to end the fifth.

After the game, the A's optioned slumping 1B Daric Barton to Triple-A Sacramento to make room for 2B Mark Ellis, who will come off the disabled list Wednesday after being sidelined by a strained right hamstring.

Bay also made a pair of nice plays in left field.

Injured Mets 1B Ike Davis (ankle) is scheduled to be re-evaluated Wednesday and 3B David Wright (back) gets checked out on Thursday.

Blackwell: A's Melvin, Weeks inject life into dead team

Amanda Blackwell, CSNCalifornia.com

Is this season moving fast or what? Spring Training felt like it was five minutes ago and now, just like that, we're a little over a month away from the trade deadline. That magical time of year when every baseball fan is slightly on edge; where every move, or non-move, could be the difference between "this could be the year" and "there's always next year."

For the next month, each and every fan will be hypothesizing on what his or her team needs to get over that hump and into the postseason. It's a telling time of year. If your GM makes a move that brings in talent, you know the front office is serious about going all the way this year. If they ship out talent for prospects, you're in the dreaded "rebuilding" phase.

A's fans have become far too familiar with this phase over the last five years. In fact, the rebuilding phase has seemed to be connected to the building of something else. Well, I've got news for you (which should come as a shock to absolutely no one), that "something else" A's fans have been hoping for and Bud Selig has been refusing to seriously address isn't coming any time soon. They've got to start looking for other ways to bring fans out to the ballpark and creating an exciting team would certainly help.

Billy Beane made leaps and bounds in the right direction by shipping out one Bob and bringing in another, proving to A's fans that the team will not accept mediocrity. Already, the team appears more energized and everything they've said in postgame interviews (along with their beaming smiles) points to faith in and happiness with their new manager. In about two weeks, Bob Melvin has turned a clubhouse and fan base that seemed to have all but given up, and effectively performed

CPR, bringing it back to life. But, if we're sticking with this metaphor, his hands weren't the only ones on the chest of the near-corpse that was the Oakland A's.

You'll be hard pressed to find someone who likes Mark Ellis more than I do. The fact that he's been in the top five among AL second basemen in fielding percentage for the last six years speaks for itself to just about everyone except the people who vote for Gold Gloves. His stellar defense has always been more than enough to make up for his career .265 batting average and it'd be difficult to find a nicer guy in all of baseball than the South Dakota native.

But now there's this guy on the team that is bringing an infectious energy. He's hitting, he's playing defense, he's all-around exciting to watch and brings an "anything could happen" air to a game. He gets on base and the pitcher can't think of anything other than him. The A's can't afford to favor Ellis over Jemile Weeks. It'd be sending a similar message that keeping Geren would have sent. Beane would be saying, "I like this guy as a person and what he's meant in the past, so we're going to keep him here, whether he's the right guy for the job or not."

I know that Ellis is a million times more liked by fans than Geren ever was, but keeping him around as a starter wouldn't be the right thing for the team and keeping him on the bench wouldn't be the right thing for Ellis. We just have to accept, the Ellis era is coming to a close in Oakland. If only they could figure out a way to convince him to retire and stay on as an infield coach. We all know they need it.

I'm not a huge fan of the term, "Chicks dig the long ball." I don't happen to dig it all that much. Sure, home runs are exciting, but I dig the underrated guys who play defense and get on base, the guys who play hard and make things happen. But the fact is, the long ball sells tickets and that's something the A's have been missing. The team hasn't had a 30 home run guy since Jack Cust hit 33 in 2008 (he also struck out 197 times that year, but hey, who's counting). Last year, Kevin Kouzmanoff's 16 homers led the team.

Hardcore fans find other stats that excite them and look at multiple factors and qualities in players and in games, but for the A's to bring in more fans without the new ballpark, they need to appeal to the average fan too; and if there's one thing the average fan likes, it's the long ball. Who could blame them? It's exciting knowing that at any moment your team could go from down two to up one. It's hard to cheer for a team that gets down a couple runs and all hope is lost, and that's what it's felt like as an A's fan for the last few years.

The team is headed in the right direction. I honestly believe that Melvin is going to bring out the best in these guys, Jemile Weeks is going to add a burst of personality and energy that this team has been thirsting for and if Beane could add another bat to supplement the power that Josh Willingham is capable of, the team will keep winning and fans will show up.

If you can't build it, smash a few out of the park, steal a few bases, strike them out, and they will come.

Ratto: Don't expect changes in A's situation

Ray Ratto, CSNBayArea.com

Not ever having been too geeked up by the Lew-Wolff-to-the-Dodgers conspiracy theories, we find the new news from Divorce McCourt fascinating, though slightly baffling.

With Bud Selig's energies about to be turned full-force onto what will be a parade of nuisance lawsuits from McCourt now that his plan to have Fox pay for his divorce has been foiled, the A's go even further onto a back burner. In fact, the A's are now behind the stove entirely.

It is a view the franchise should be used to, but one of its own making. The San Jose gambit seems essentially undone, not because of inaction from Major League Baseball but from the California side, and slowly but surely it is dawning on people that the ownership's next step is in fact an exit strategy.

It doesn't have to happen right away, not while the revenue-sharing pixie waves her fortune-dispensing wand each year. But unless Wolff and John Fisher have a change of heart about Oakland, or would rather have a team in an old park than none at all, they're pretty well boxed.

San Jose can't save them. MLB can't save them. They don't seem amenable to the "Screw it we'll do it ourselves" plan, and whatever back-channeling Wolff could do with Selig to whip territorial rights votes his way has either failed or not been done at all.

Now that the Dodgers are the game, the A's are just not an issue. And with labor discord scheduled just up the road, the problem of Oakland will remain, well behind the stove.

In other words, the status is way quo, and is going to stay quo for the foreseeable future. Unless, the conspiracy freaks and tinfoil-hatters are correct in their supposition that Wolff's road out of town is Highway 5, to the 110.

That may be true in the end; one always guesses as to just how close Selig and Wolff actually are, and whether Wolff wants a piece of the Dodgers in their current distressed state.

But for the moment, McCourt seems ready to blizzard MLB with court dates protecting his prerogatives as well as he can given that he may have take his lawyering out in trade. That hardly seems like the barrel of monkey owning the Dodgers used to be. Wolff may, in fact, want to wait until the shrapnel clears if L.A. is in fact his goal.

That leaves the A's where they have always been -- in the Eat At Joe's Coliseum, without discernible options for relocation, no chance for contraction, and unless they can find the next Walter Haas, always available for strangulation.

Indeed, what the A's need most isn't a ballpark at all, but a sense of greater purpose that starts in the big leather chair and works its way down. They need an owner who wants to make his stand in Oakland, whether it be on the present site, Victory Court, or in the Piedmont hills. They need an owner who wants to engage the Giants despite the disadvantages inherent in their position. The franchise needs an owner who frankly is willing to forgo the unicorn of San Jose and get people believing that this team has its own intrinsic value.

Maybe that requires a building. Maybe not. But in an ever-shifting landscape -- anyone want to take bets that the Raiders will still be in Oakland in a decade, or that the Warriors won't flee for South'O'Market? -- what we believe as immutable truth with the A's rarely is. All things are cyclical, including the Giants' hegemony, and all it takes to change the equation again is someone who knows not the grass isn't greener, but that there is no other patch of grass. No other city to move to, no new stadium awaiting them down the 880, nothing but the right here.

And other than the fact that it's damned difficult to find such a person or persons, that has always been the fact.

In sum, the A's don't have a Portland plan, or a Sacramento plan, or a Memphis plan, or a San Antonio plan. The San Jose plan is withering if not completely dead. And contraction isn't an option because whatever it takes to buy out the A's, it will take six times that when the other owners who want an easy way out of their situations petition MLB for the same deal the A's got.

This is what they have, and this is who they are. And as long as Frankie Empty Pockets can make trouble in L.A., and as long as a new CBA remains undone, that will not change in the slightest.

Killion: Weekend wrap -- A's are on a roll

[Ann Killion](#), CSNBayArea.com

First the good news. The A's are on a roll.

And it's not a coincidence.

"Coincidence" is what ex-A's manager Bob Geren termed the team's struggles against the Yankees under his guidance. In truth, there aren't many coincidences in sports.

And the new bounce in the A's step under Bob Melvin is no coincidence. The A's have won five straight, won back-to-back series, swept the reigning World Series champions, and head onto the road for interleague play with confidence.

Their manager will know how to function in a National League park, the complexities of which mystified and often embarrassed Geren.

"If you've been in the National League, it's a little bit more instinctive," Melvin said.

What a difference 10 days make. Yes, the A's swept the Giants last year at the Oakland Coliseum with Geren at the helm so the accomplishment is no guarantee of season-long success. But the vibe around the A's is good right now. They've got a future star blossoming in Jemile Weeks. They brought in their former star, Rickey Henderson, over the weekend to remind everyone that Oakland was once the center of the baseball universe. The A's players are positively glowing about their new manager.

"He's a phenomenal communicator," [Conor Jackson](#) said. "He puts life into a clubhouse."

The only people who might be happier than the players about Melvin's arrival are the Japanese media. The throng of reporters that has descended on Oakland this season is there to cover one guy, and one guy only. And under Geren, Hideki Matsui had become an afterthought.

But in 10 games under Melvin, Matsui is batting .300, has scored five runs and has three home runs and nine RBIs. Melvin said he will play Matsui quite a bit in left field on the upcoming road trip to New York and Philadelphia. Matsui is on the brink of 500 career home runs (including his statistics in Japan).

"I think Bob Melvin is infusing a lot of positive beliefs and attitude with the players," Matsui said through a translator, which is as close to ripping the previous guy as the gracious player can get.

All in all, it means news, every day in Japan. Which makes a one-player beat a lot more satisfying.

Now the bad news.

The Giants magic ran out in Oakland and there were no scrappy wins to disguise the team's complete lack of offense. No need to rehash the misery here: see Ratto's column for all the shortcomings. Once again, the Giants offense is forcing their pitchers to be perfect: an impossibility.

The Giants are still clinging to a half-game lead over the Diamondbacks but host red-hot Minnesota, winners of seven in a row.

Interleague play is rarely kind to the Giants and the team's inability to function with a designated hitter is always exposed: Aaron Rowand? Really? Shinjo wasn't available?

Let's see where the Giants are by the time interleague play is over, on July 3. That will be closer to the trade deadline and real deals— not pretend talk-radio trades — will be more viable. The Giants first priority has to be a catcher, hopefully one that can hit. Obviously, that's easier said than done, as Bruce Bochy pointed out on Sunday.

"It's not quite that easy," Bochy said. "A lot of teams are looking for hitters."

Welcome to the post-steroids era. When every team is struggling for runs, there are going to be a lot more buyers than sellers.

A's Harden sharp in first rehab start in Sacramento

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

Rich Harden was dominant in his first rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento on Monday afternoon. The right-hander struck out six Fresno batters and walked one in three innings of no-hit ball at Raley Field.

Harden, who has a history of injury issues and has been on the A's disabled list since spring training with a strained pitching shoulder, threw 42 pitches, 30 of which were strikes against the Giants' top minor league affiliate. He struck out the side in the first and third innings, including the rehabbing Darren Ford twice.

On Sunday, Harden said his plan was to "get my work in, get my pitch count up and get the feel ... see how sharp my pitches are. Get sharp with my off-speed (pitches) and my fastball."

Harden, who signed a one-year, \$1.5-million free-agent contract on Dec. 15, 2010, also said he planned on another rehab start for the River Cats on Saturday, against Reno.

Also, second baseman Mark Ellis, eligible to come off the D.L. on Wednesday, got the first base hit of his three-game rehab stint with a single to left field. He was a combined 0-for-6 in his first two games with Sacramento.

Also, second baseman Mark Ellis, eligible to come off the D.L. on Wednesday, got the first base hit of his three-game rehab stint with a single to left field in the third inning. He also had a run-scoring, game-tying double to left-center in the eighth to go 2-for-4 on the day. He had been a combined 0-for-6 in his first two games with Sacramento.

Homecoming weekend for the Athletics

by Bob Bloss, Philadelphia Daily News

In a few days, some well-traveled relatives will return to Philadelphia for a weekend visit - only their second "homecoming" since packing bags for the Midwest more than a half-century ago.

Family surname's still the same as during its long Pennsylvania residency. Athletics.

The Philadelphia Athletics, born 1901. Later, they were the Kansas City Athletics (1955-67). You know the current "younger" relatives as the Oakland Athletics.

During the 54 baseball seasons (1901-54) shared here by the American League A's and their National League neighbors, the Phillies, the two clubs never met in a game that counted. The Athletics played in eight World Series during that stretch; the Phillies in two. But never in the same seasons, except spring training and "city series" exhibitions.

Major League Baseball would not institute regular-season interleague competition until 1997. Before this coming three-game Oakland vs. Philadelphia booking at Citizens Bank Park, the two former North Philadelphia neighbors previously faced each other here just once, in 2003. Two Phillies-A's interleague series transpired in California in the meantime. Oakland won both, two games to one, in 2005 and '08.

In 2003 - Veterans Stadium's final season - Oakland posted a 7-4 series-opening victory. Rain forced the Saturday match to be rescheduled as part of a Sunday doubleheader. The Phillies won both games. Oakland now leads the overall interleague series, 5-4.

Many combatants from that Vet series have retired or are with other teams. But two Phillies starters in that June 8, 2003 doubleheader are expected to play again - Jimmy Rollins and Placido Polanco. Second baseman Mark Ellis is the lone returning Oakland starter.

That June 6, 2003, game was the Athletics franchise's first victory in Philadelphia since Sept. 4, 1954. The '54 Philadelphia Athletics lost their final five home games before leaving Connie Mack Stadium for the last time.

The A's final Philadelphia season had 37-year-old Eddie Joost in the manager's post, following the tenures of Jimmy Dykes (1951-53) and Connie Mack (1901-50). Joost, who passed away in April at age 94, was among several Californians who were All-Star caliber producers for Philadelphia. Longtime centerfielder Sam Chapman also was from the Bay Area. Some Philadelphia region natives who have starred for Oakland in the meantime are Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson (Cheltenham High) and current relief pitching standout Andrew Bailey (Paul VI High School). Bailey, who was the 2009 AL Rookie of the Year, resides in Cherry Hill.

Because 57 seasons have elapsed since the A's represented Philadelphia, not many of the few who attended home games can report details. Total A's 1954 home attendance: 304,666, a 4,995 average per the 61 gate openings (16 home doubleheaders were played). The final Philadelphia series, three games - all won by the New York Yankees - drew just 6,596 spectators.

On Sunday, Sept. 19, 1954, only 1,715 fans attended the 2-hour, 30-minute ultimate home finale. A's pitchers Art Ditmar and reliever Charlie Bishop took a 2-0 lead into the eighth. Second baseman Pete Suder, then in his 14th Philadelphia season, had driven in the A's two fifth-inning runs, both unearned, on a single with two out.

But New York's Gil McDougald launched a three-run homer in the eighth inning off reliever Moe Burtch. The Yankees scored again and won, 4-2. Interestingly, the New York pitcher credited with the game's "save" was a Philadelphia baseball hero who's still revered by Phillies faithful: Jim Konstanty. The National League's 1950 MVP, Konstanty left the Whiz Kids for the Yanks in mid-1954.

Ironically, on the weekend following their home finale, the A's won two of three at Yankee Stadium to officially conclude their Philadelphia history that included three glorious eras of earlier championships, but also numerous lackluster second-division summers, with only four winning records in their last 21 years in Philadelphia.

Final score for that last Philadelphia American League game ever - Sunday, Sept. 26, 1954 - A's 8, Yankees 6. Ditmar posted his first of 72 big-league career pitching triumphs. Player-manager Joost's three hits led the team that day. Among them was the Philadelphia A's very last double. (Incidentally, the Yankees, who already had lost the AL race to Cleveland despite 103 wins, played Mickey Mantle at shortstop and Moose Skowron at second base.)

Philadelphians had long been aware that their once-mighty franchise would likely move. But the club's departure for Kansas City would not be official for several weeks.

Reflecting television's mass appeal as a home-entertainment staple following World War II, and widespread family movements to the nation's West and South, baseball's landscape was dramatically changing by the early 1950s. It was generally accepted that any two-team major league city might see one franchise move away.

Inevitable transferring began when the Braves left Boston for Milwaukee in 1953. The St. Louis Browns went to Baltimore a year later. Then - no surprise - the Athletics to Kansas City for 1955. The Phillies, vastly more popular here since Whiz Kid successes, were now the only game in town.

Even though the Athletics generally fared poorly as a team during their final half-dozen years here, there were many outstanding individual performances. Ferris Fain won AL batting titles in 1951 and '52; Bobby Shantz went 24-7 en route to the 1952 AL MVP award. Gus Zernial won the RBI and home-run titles in 1951; pitcher Harry Byrd was the 1952 Rookie of the Year. And 1954 featured the promising rookie seasons of third baseman Jim Finigan, second baseman Spook Jacobs, outfielder Vic Power and pitchers Arnie Portocarrero and Ditmar.

After the season ended, the Athletics were sold by the Mack family to businessman Arnold M. Johnson, who predicted that Kansas City would continue as the Midwest baseball hotbed it had been during many minor league and Negro League successes. However, what Johnson introduced to KC in 1955 was sadly similar to Philadelphia's 1954 performance, when it finished 51-103, 60 games out of first.

Johnson and his controversial successor Charles O. Finley failed to build a solid Kansas City fan base. After 13 drab seasons with five cellar finishes, Finley took his ragtag club to California in 1968.

With Reggie Jackson on board, the again-transplanted A's suddenly met with significant improvement.

The 1968 Athletics posted an 82-80 record, the franchise's first winning mark since the 1952 fourth-place finish in Philadelphia.

But owner Finley's penchant for hiring-firing-hiring managers and players stirred controversy. Despite that, the on-field section of the organization rapidly materialized into a championship caliber combine.

By only their second year in Oakland, 1969, the Athletics finished second in the AL West. Same result in 1970. Then, in 1971, the division-winning A's logged the franchise's first 100-win season since its 1931 pennant-winning Philadelphia forefathers.

Similarities with their Philadelphia ancestors continued to abound. Among them:

American League championships: Philadelphia, nine (in 54 years); Oakland, six (43 years).

World Series titles: Philadelphia five (1910, '11, '13, '29, '30); Oakland four (1972, '73, '74, '89)

The Athletics Family can be justifiably proud of this special accomplishment relating to championships:

Over the 1901-54 seasons, the Yankees won 20 AL pennants, far surpassing all competitors. But the Philadelphia A's eight titles ranked second.

Through the most recent 43 seasons, as the Yankees won 11 American League crowns, it was the Athletics again - this time in Oakland - ranking next best, with six.

A sense of 21st-century realism will surely pervade South Philadelphia this weekend. Most local fans have only a passing, long-distance acquaintance with the visiting team. Quite naturally, they'll be soundly behind their first-place Phillies.

One of the still-spunky Philadelphia A's is Shantz, who is 85. The agile southpaw will deliver the ceremonial first ball before the series finale on Sunday. That's one of several sidelight attractions choreographed by Kurt Funk, Phillies director of marketing programs and events, and by Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society leaders Ernie Montella, Dick Rosen, David Jordan and Bob Warrington. Examples of A's memorabilia and historical material will be displayed near Mitchell & Ness in Ashburn Alley.

Aside from toasting the A's historic franchise, the weekend's major highlight for players and fans alike remains simply . . . three big-league baseball games.

When the umpire shouts "Play ball" Friday evening, the 2011 Athletics Family Reunion, hosted by their old friends the Phillies, officially begins.

1954 ATHLETICS

(Philadelphia Athletics rostered personnel during 1954 season):

Position Players

Catchers: Joe Astroth, Jim Robertson, Billy Shantz

First Base: Don Bollweg, Lou Limmer

Third Base: Jim Finigan

Shortstop, Second Base: Joe DeMaestri, Forrest (Spook) Jacobs, Eddie Joost (player/manager), Jack Littrell, Pete Suder

Outfield: Ed McGhee, Vic Power (OF, 1B), Bill Renna, Joe Taylor, Elmer Valo, Bill Wilson, Gus Zernial

Pitchers: Charlie Bishop, Moe Burtshy, Art Ditmar, Sonny Dixon, Marion Fricano, John Gray, Alex Kellner, Morrie Martin, Bill Oster, Arnold Portocarrero, Hal Raether, Dutch Romberger, Dick Rozek, Carl Scheib, Bobby Shantz, Al Sima, Bob Trice, Bill Upton, Ozzie Van Brabant

Manager: Eddie Joost

Coaches: Augie Galan, Rollie Hemsley, Les McCrabb, Wally Moses

Oldest players at season's start: Pete Suder 38; Eddie Joost 37

Youngest players at season's start: Bill Oster 21; Arnie Portocarrero 23

Oakland A's: Should the A's Deal Josh Willingham? Should They Do It Early?

By Gean May, Fowler News, 6/22/2011

Buyers or sellers? That is the question.

It wasn't long ago that the Oakland Athletics were knee-deep in a June swoon losing 13 out of 14 games. The climate in Oakland was lukewarm at best, and that's being nice.

There was still hope due to the A's pitching staff, but losing starting pitcher Brett Anderson for an extended period of time lowered the temperature a bit in A's land. Dallas Braden (out for the season), Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross have already been sidelined by injuries, but Graham Guthrie and Guillermo Moscoso have filled in and done a formidable job keeping fans off the ledge.

The firing of manager Bob Geren and hiring of Bob Melvin seemed to sit well with A's fans.

Even with that terrible 14 game stretch, the A's remain within striking distance of first place. The school of thought in Oakland seems to be as long as we pitch well we can stay afloat. With all the injuries, though, the boat has started to take on a little more water.

Bob Melvin has had time to settle, and the A's have won five in a row, so the question is this: Do the A's have enough bats to contend, and even with the recent success, are the A's going to be buyers or sellers before the July 31 trade deadline?

If the A's choose the latter, the name that keeps popping up is outfielder Josh Willingham.

I was asked to give 10 reasons why the A's should sell early on Willingham. A few things have transpired since I was asked to write this column, such as Willingham's Achilles tendon injury, the A's starting to play better under new manager Bob Melvin and the emergence of rookie second baseman Jemile Weeks.

Bats are needed in Oakland, this is no secret, and Willingham definitely has not lived up to expectations so far. Or has he? The left fielder is batting .231 with 10 home runs. The .231 average is a disappointment, but 10 home runs is about right considering he averages just over 14 a year, and 20 home runs are not out of the question. Willingham also leads the team with 42 RBI.

The thought of getting rid of a possible 20 home run and 90-plus RBI guy might not make sense.

Although, let's not forget that we are talking about the A's, and dealing Willingham early shouldn't be a shock.

The first thing to consider is his salary, which is \$6 million. Couple that with the fact that the [Philadelphia Phillies](#) and the [Atlanta Braves](#) have shown interest. Depending on what is offered, the club could consider a deal with one of these teams, especially if they can get another bat at cheaper price.

First basemen Daric Barton seems to be all but gone, and with the emergence of Jemile Weeks, this might put veteran second basemen Mark Ellis on the hot seat.

The surprising Weeks has added a much-needed bat to the lineup and he's a switch hitter, as well. Now you have Willingham and Ellis and their \$12 million combined salaries.

Maybe you package Willingham and Ellis and get some value. I know it's early when talking about Weeks, but there is still plenty of time to evaluate him further before the trade deadline.

The conundrum is this: the A's can get rid of Willingham and use Sweeney in left field, but Sweeney hits for average and doesn't possess the RBI and home run potential that Willingham brings, but his salary is only \$1.4 million. Like I said, we are talking about the A's.

Whether or not the A's make any of these moves will depend on the health of Ellis and Willingham, along with the development of Weeks. Oh, and lets not forget that their record come mid-July will play a huge role in all of this.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Taylor's single gives Cats extra-inning victory

By Cassie Kolas / Sacramento River Cats

Michael Taylor's two-out single in the tenth inning put Sacramento over the Tucson Padres 4-3 on Tuesday night at Kino Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Sacramento remains undefeated (4-0) in extra innings this season and has a season-high seven-game lead over second-place Las Vegas in the Pacific Coast League's Southern Division.

Josh Donaldson didn't waste time getting Sacramento on the board in the first inning. The catcher doubled, Matt Carson singled and Chris Carter hit a sacrifice fly to score Donaldson.

Sacramento was back at it again in the second inning. With Taylor on third and Wes Timmons at first, the two executed a flawless double steal for a 2-0 lead. Tucson catcher Rocky Gale attempted to throw out Timmons at second, allowing Taylor to trot home.

This was the first time the River Cats have played in Tucson since 2008, and the Padres lineup featured a familiar faces.

Three of the nine players in Tucson's starting lineup were former River Cats. In the Padres' outfield were Aaron Cunningham and Eric Patterson (No. 21 on www.rivercats.com's Top-25 All-Time River Cats list), and infielder Steve Tolleson who was traded to Tucson earlier this season.

The Padres had their answer in the second inning as left fielder Kyle Blanks had a lead off triple, and Cunningham grounded out to score Blanks and make the score 2-1 Cats.

Doug Mathis made his Sacramento River Cat debut Tuesday night. He pitched 6.0 innings and received a no-decision. He allowed eight hits and three runs (all earned), while allowing one walk and dealing two strikeouts.

Mathis, who was recently released by the Fresno Grizzlies, was ranked fourth in the Pacific Coast League with a 3.60 ERA. This is Mathis' sixth professional season and his third professional organization. Mathis had a 3-3 record with a 4.84 ERA and 44 strikeouts with the Texas Rangers from 2008-2011.

The Padres took a 3-2 lead in the fourth inning. Cunningham singled, Jarrett Hoffpauir singled, and Patterson was hit by a Mathis pitch to load the bases. Gale singled on a ground ball to left field to bring home two runs. Mathis ended the inning by picking off Patterson as he attempted to steal third.

The lead didn't last long for Tucson as Sacramento came back in the fifth inning. Donaldson knocked his second double of the game, Carson answered with a double of his own, and Carter singled home Donaldson to tie the game.

Carter got the 10th inning going with a leadoff double. Taylor smacked a two-out RBI single to score Carter and bring the River Cats over the Padres.

Sacramento's bullpen only allowed a combined one hit over 4.0 innings, with Tucson facing Fautino De Los Santos, Trystan Magnunson (3-2) and Vinnie Chulk (third save).

The River Cats improve to 47-26, and are 23-9 on the road this season.

The series will continue in Tucson on Wednesday at 7 p.m. with Sacramento righty Yadel Marti (5-1, 4.58) taking on righty Matt Buschmann (3-3, 7.34).

Hounds Hold On To Finish Off The First Half

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Dr Pepper Ballpark in Frisco, TX - - -

The first half of the Texas League season has been a struggle, but the RockHounds took it "out in style," winning one of the league's wildest games to date in 2011.

The RockHounds took a 9-0 lead into the last of the sixth but, by top of the eighth, the game was tied at 9-9. The 19th, and final, run of the game came off the bat of Stephen Parker, who ripped a solo home run just over the wall in right field in the top of the eighth.

Neil Wagner made the 10-9 lead stand up with a 2-inning save (*). Wagner, again touching at 99 and higher on the (unofficial) stadium radar gun, recorded his second impressive save of the road trip.

The RockHounds built their 9-0 lead with eight batters scoring and/or driving in a run. Adam Heether hit a solo home run in the fourth, his ninth homer in "half of a half" (Adam played in 35 of the first 70 games).

Starter Polin Trinidad was outstanding until running to trouble in the sixth. He allowed two singles in the first inning, but only a walk from that point through the end of the fifth. With two on and two out in the sixth, and the RockHounds leading, 9-1, Elio Sarmiento hit a 3-run home run, slicing the lead to 9-4. The RoughRiders then got to relievers Ben Hornbeck and Paul Smyth for five runs in the seventh, capped by Sarmiento's game-tying, 2-run double (he drove in five of Frisco's nine runs).

Wagner was dominant, but Frisco did threaten. In the eighth, Heether made a diving catch on a flair to shallow right field off the bat Davis Stoneburner. In the ninth, Wagner struck out the league's hottest hitter, whiffing Tommy Mendonca, but Mike Bianucci reached on a dribbler to third and Jonathan Greene singled to shallow right, fighting off a 1-2 pitch, before Wagner struck Engel Beltre out on three pitches to end the game.

- The RockHounds finished the first half 27-43, while Frisco compiled the league's second-best mark at 40-30. The 'Hounds' win was their first in six tries at Dr Pepper Ballpark in 2011.

- Jermaine Mitchell busted out of a 3-for-29 slump, going 3-for-5 with two runs and an RBI, finishing the half with a .348 average.

- Parker and Matt Sulentic each had three hits, with Sulentic hitting in 10-of-his-last-11 games, raising his average nearly 40 points in that time (from .250 to .289).

- Heather is second on the club with nine home runs, trailing Mitchell and Michael Spina (10 each), but has played in just 35 games (compared to 68 for Mitchell and Spina). Spina (47), Mitchell (44), Parker (44) and Jeremy Barfield (38) led the RockHounds in RBI in the first half. Heather was the "per game" leader, driving in 29 runs in his 35 games.

- All eight Texas League teams return to 0-0 to open the second half on Wednesday. The RockHounds are midway through their 12-game road trip (2-4) and now open the second half with the final two games of the 4-game set at Frisco. The 'Hounds then conclude the road trip with a return visit to San Antonio for four games (Friday-Monday).

Gyorko Leads Cal. League to 6-1 Win

MODESTO - Lake Elsinore's Jedd Gyorko had two hits and drove in two runs for the California League in its 6-1 victory versus the Carolina League in the 2011 All-Star Smash in front of 5,082 on Tuesday night at John Thurman Field in Modesto. Gyorko hit RBI singles in the third and fifth and was named the California League's MiLB Top Star for his performance in the game. Rey Navarro had a run batted in single in the fifth for the Carolina League and was also awarded the MiLB Top Star award.

San Jose's Gary Brown sparked a four run third with a RBI single to center off the Carolina League's Bobby Bundy. Bundy (0-1) allowed four runs (two earned) and three hits in the third. He walked Gorman Erickson to start the inning and then saw Jake Lemmerman reach on a error at second.

Navarro missed Lemmerman's double play ball in the third and the California League quickly took advantage. Brown drove in the game's first run immediately after the error and Adam Eaton followed with a walk. A RBI single from Gyorko plated Lemmerman and a RBI single from Modesto's Mike Zuanich scored Eaton. Angelo Songco drove in the final run of the inning with a sacrifice fly to score Gyorko.

Jake Buchanan (1-0) pitched a perfect third inning for the Cal. League and earned the win. He followed Tyler Skaggs and Craig Westcott who combined for three strikeouts and one hit allowed over the first two innings. Skaggs started the game and struck out two. Westcott pitched the second and allowed one hit and struck out one.

Joe Wieland started for the Carolina League and would strike out one in the scoreless first. Drew Pomeranz followed with a scoreless second, but Bundy allowed four in the third.

Jake Odorizzi followed the third with a perfect fourth and struck out one in his appearance.

Modesto's Dan Houston was the only Cal. League pitcher to allow a run in the game. He struck out Dan Butler to start the fifth, but then gave up an infield hit to Joey Tedslovich. Jose Martinez also reached on an infield hit, and a botched double play ball hit by John Whittleman allowed the inning to continue. Lemmerman missed the ground ball hit right to him by Whittleman and the resulting error put two on with one out for Navarro. Houston gave up the RBI single to Navarro, but left the inning by getting Whit Merrifield to hit into a double play.

Michael Mariot pitched the fifth and gave up a lead off triple to Eaton and a RBI single to Gyorko. He got out of the inning by striking out Vinnie Catricala and by getting Zuanich to hit into a double play.

Lemmerman atoned for his fifth inning error when he drove in Rossmel Perez with a two-out double to left in the sixth. Salem's Will Latimer walked Perez with two outs in the sixth and then gave up the long double to Lemmerman.

The Cal. League owned a 6-1 lead after the sixth and the remaining All-Star pitchers kept the lead for the win. Zack Wheeler allowed one hit and struck out one in the sixth. Pedro Hernandez pitched a perfect seventh and Chris Heston allowed two hits in a scoreless eighth.

Robbie Ross struck out two in the scoreless seventh for the Carolina League. Preston Guilmet and Andre Rienzo split the ninth and would combine to allow just one hit.

Modesto pitchers Chad Bettis and Coty Woods combined to close down the ninth. Bettis struck out Ian Gac to start the ninth and would lead after getting Zach Zaneski to ground to second. Woods finished the game by getting Andy Wilkins to ground out to second on one pitch.

Lowell Beats Vermont 13-1 On Tuesday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- The Lowell Spinners scored seven runs over the first three innings and 10 runs in the first four frames in handing Vermont its second loss of the season with a 13-1 victory over the Lake Monsters Tuesday night in New York-Penn League action at historic Centennial Field.

Vermont starter Kurt Wunderlich (0-1) retired the first two Spinners he faced in the first inning, but then gave up three hits and three walks to the next six batters for a four-run Lowell first-inning. Seth Schwindenhammer had an RBI single and Drew Turocy a two-run single in the inning to put the Spinners out on top early.

The Spinners added three more runs in the second off Lake Monster reliever Drew Bailey on a Travis Shaw RBI single and a two-run homer from Boss Moanaroo for a 7-0 advantage. Lowell then greeted reliever Brent Powers with three straight doubles to leadoff the fourth inning as the Spinners had nine runs on 11 hits with no outs in the fourth inning.

Powers settled down to allow just one more hits while striking out five over three innings of relief, while Jeff Urlaub was charged with a run on two hits with four strikeouts in two innings. Vermont scored its only run of the game in the fifth as Beau Taylor reached on a throwing error and scored on a Aaron Shipman RBI double to centerfield.

Taylor had two of Vermont's four hits on the night as the Lake Monsters have now been outscored 23-1 in their two losses this season. Vermont (3-2) is also outscoring its opponents 23-14 in the Lake Monsters three wins on the young season.

Moanaroo was 2-for-4 with three runs, a double, homer and three RBI to lead a 14-hit Lowell attack, while Schwindenhammer and Kuery De La Cruz each had two hits, two runs and two RBI for the Spinners (2-3). Starter Jason Garcia allowed the unearned run on three hits over four innings, while reliever Swen Huijjer (1-0) tossed four hitless innings with one walk and three strikeouts over the win.

The two teams will play the finale of the three-game series at Centennial on Wednesday night with opening night starter Seth Frankoff scheduled to start for the Lake Monsters. It is Ramunto's Brick Oven Pizza Night at the ballpark with the game's first pitch scheduled for 7:05 pm.