

A's News Clips, Friday, June 24, 2011

Oakland A's drop second straight game to New York Mets

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

NEW YORK -- Chris Carter was called up from the minor leagues Thursday for what is likely a short-term stay with the A's.

Will he ever become the power hitter that team officials envision?

It remains to be seen.

But Carter's mere presence provided an important reminder about the 2011 A's.

For all the hustle and fire they have shown under new manager Bob Melvin, they are a team in need of more bona fide run producers. That was illustrated in a 4-1 loss to the New York Mets, a game that was delayed 2 hours, 15 minutes at the start because of rain.

With Josh Willingham and Hideki Matsui both absent from the lineup, the A's mustered just five hits and made Mets left-hander Chris Capuano look better than his pregame 5-7 record and 4.29 ERA suggested.

"When Willingham is out of the game, that's big for us," Melvin said. "We have to string hits together. We have to battle deep into counts. We're not the kind of team that is going to strike quick."

Willingham was placed on the 15-day disabled list before the game with a strained left Achilles tendon. The transaction is backdated to June 18, making Willingham eligible to return July 3, and he said he believes he'll be ready then.

Willingham, who leads the team with 10 homers and 42 RBIs, tried running Wednesday but was still hampered by the injury.

"It didn't go as well as I thought it was going to," he said. "We had to make a decision whether I was going to try to play on it. But it wasn't going to get any better if I played."

Carter, 24, was called up from Triple-A Sacramento to take his roster spot.

"Baseball America" ranks Carter as Oakland's No. 2 prospect behind shortstop Grant Green. But the jury remains out -- will Carter's raw power translate to the major leagues or will his penchant for strikeouts and his defensive deficiencies prove too much to overcome?

He hit .186 with three homers and seven RBIs in 24 games with Oakland last season and looked uncomfortable in left field.

Carter entered Thursday afternoon's game at first base -- his most natural position -- as part of a double switch, replacing Mark Ellis during the bottom of the sixth inning.

Carter dropped Jose Reyes' foul pop-up on his first defensive opportunity of the inning. It was ruled an error, and Reyes wound up delivering an RBI single that gave the Mets a 4-0 lead.

"It's not a good feeling to drop a pop-up and (Reyes) gets a hit with two outs," said Carter, whose red-eye flight from Phoenix arrived in New York around 8:30 a.m. Thursday.

Melvin hinted Carter will go back down when Willingham returns. But Carter could get D.H. at-bats on the next homestand, as Melvin said he's considering playing Matsui more in left field.

Matsui received a day off Thursday.

The Mets scored two runs off A's starter Graham Godfrey (1-1) in the second, and that proved enough for Capuano (6-7), who delivered six shutout innings before leaving with discomfort in his abdomen.

Willingham's injury could affect the A's off the field, as well. Whether he recovers fully will impact how much interest he receives from other teams as the July 31 nonwaiver trade deadline approaches.

Willingham, 32, is expected to be one of the more attractive hitters on the market if the A's fall out of contention and decide they don't want to sign him to a multiyear extension.

He can become a free agent at season's end.

Oakland A's update: Mark Ellis finds himself in unfamiliar territory at first base

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

NEW YORK -- Mark Ellis typically feels right at home when he's playing defense.

But Thursday afternoon, he had butterflies as he took the field. He sometimes wandered around as if he wasn't sure where to go.

Ellis is one of the sharpest second basemen in the game, but the nine-year veteran made his first major league start at first base in the A's 4-1 loss to the New York Mets at Citi Field.

"It was different," Ellis said. "I was nervous before the game. It took me a little while to get used to it."

Ellis, the A's starting second baseman since midway through the 2002 season, came off the 15-day disabled list Wednesday. But with rookie second baseman Jemile Weeks playing well, the A's are using Ellis in a utility role.

Conor Jackson played left field and manager Bob Melvin penciled in Ellis at first base Thursday.

Ellis, who had made just two career appearances at first as a substitute, handled all the routine plays, but he said it was a learning experience.

He absorbed one lesson in the fifth, when he broke to the right on Jose Reyes' grounder that was headed right for Weeks. Pitcher Graham Godfrey had to cover first but got there late, and Weeks' off-target throw went for an error.

Ellis said that's the most difficult kind of play he has to get used to, and that he should have been covering the bag.

"Instincts took over," Ellis said. "After one step, I knew I made a mistake."

Melvin didn't take issue with the hit-by-pitch that cost his team in Wednesday's 13-inning game. Reliever Brad Ziegler grazed Justin Turner with a slider to force in the winning run, and

Ziegler suggested Turner leaned into the pitch. "Even if he did, it's not like they're going to call it in that situation," Melvin said. "And if I had a player do that, I wouldn't be that upset with him either. There's supposed to be an attempt, but it's difficult to attempt to get out of the way of a pitch. It's a slider that starts at him."

The A's have hit one home run or fewer in 27 straight games, the second-longest streak in Oakland history.

Shortstop Grant Green, currently with Double-A Midland, will represent the A's in the Futures Game for the second straight season. That game in Phoenix is two days before the All-Star Game.

Chin Music: A's-Mets tentatively set for 12:20 p.m. (PT) start

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/23/2011 12:01pm

Rain is delaying the A's-Mets game again today, and the reason I haven't been updating here is because the start time has changed three different times. They just announced we would start at 3:20 pm local time (12:20 PT). We'll see if that actually happens ...

Chin Music: Josh Willingham placed on DL; Chris Carter called up, but for how long?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/23/2011 9:54am

Chris Carter showed up in the A's clubhouse this morning, bleary-eyed from a redeye flight from Phoenix but back for a surprise stint with the big club. The A's placed Josh Willingham on the DL, retroactive to June 18, and called up Carter to take his roster spot. Don't get too used to seeing him in green and gold. Manager Bob Melvin didn't say much specifically about Carter, but he hinted that Carter may just be up for the short-term until Willingham returns. Willingham is eligible to come off the DL on July 3, and he said he's confident he'll be ready by then.

How much playing time will there be for Carter, the A's No. 2 prospect according to Baseball America? He's played strictly first base for Triple-A Sacramento since coming off the DL on June 13 for a thumb injury, and Carter said he definitely feels more comfortable there than left field. "There's nothing to press about" when playing first, he said this morning. But Conor Jackson has been swinging the bat well, and Melvin has him tapped as the regular first baseman for now (Mark Ellis is starting at first today with Jackson playing left field). I'm not sure the A's would start Carter in the outfield right now considering how shaky he looked there last year during his big-league stint.

One interesting point Melvin made is that he's considering giving Hideki Matsui time in left field after the A's return to American League play after this road trip, and that could provide an opportunity for Carter to get DH at-bats. It's sort of an awkward time for Carter to get called up. We always think of this guy in the context of him being an up-and-coming power bat that can help revive a sluggish offense. But the A's have been playing good baseball lately – still not hitting a ton, but looking better – and it's tough to identify an obvious role for Carter.

As for Willingham, he said his running didn't go well Wednesday, which is why he became the A's 11th DL transaction of the season. Willingham doesn't consider the injury serious, but it's also the latest in a string of injuries that have hampered him in recent seasons. You have to wonder how his health history will influence teams that view him as a trade target. And from the A's perspective, I wonder how much they're taking that into account as they weigh whether to offer Willingham a long-term extension.

–How would you like to be David DeJesus right now? The guy is obviously lost in the shuffle among outfielders (granted, his performance hasn't demanded he be in there). And now that

he's finally playing today, he gets to face Mets lefty Chris Capuano. DeJesus is 7 for 56 (.125) against lefties this season, the lowest average in the American League against lefties.

–Injury updates: Brandon McCarthy is pitching today for Single-A Stockton in his first rehab start. Rich Harden will make a second start Saturday for Triple-A Sacramento, and Tyson Ross will throw a simulated game Saturday in Phoenix.

Today's lineups:

A's – Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Crisp CF, Jackson LF, Sizemore 3B, Ellis 1B, DeJesus RF, Powell C, Godfrey RHP.

Mets – Reyes SS, Turner 2B, Beltran RF, Murphy 3B, Pagan CF, Bay LF, Duda 1B, Thole C, Capuano LHP.

Chris Carter called up; A's lose to Mets 4-1

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Every day with the A's seems to bring big news, and on Thursday, it was the arrival of Chris Carter, a top power-hitting prospect.

Carter took the red-eye, didn't arrive until 8:45 a.m. and was not in the lineup. The A's offense was quiet again in a 4-1 loss to the Mets at Citi Field.

Oakland didn't push across a run until the eighth; the team has scored three runs, total, in the past two games, covering 22 innings.

"Just one of those games we didn't get the job done," infielder Mark Ellis said.

The A's hit .214 with runners in scoring position in the series. They haven't hit more than one homer in any of the past 27 games, the second longest such streak in Oakland history, after a 31-gamer in 1978. Carter has two minor-league seasons in which he has hit 30-plus homers.

It does not sound, however, as if Carter's promotion is viewed as permanent. Manager Bob Melvin said that the bench was short because of Josh Willingham's Achilles tendon injury - the team needed a full complement of players while in National League parks, where pinch hitters and double-switches are frequently used.

Melvin also said that it's unfair, one way or another, to say if a young player's call-up is to be a lengthy one; ideally, teams would like their prospects to think they have a shot to stay. But Melvin emphasized that when Willingham returns July 3, the A's cleanup man will be back in the lineup for good. "So," Melvin said, "you can forecast for yourself."

On the other hand, Oakland has no obvious everyday answer at first base with Daric Barton optioned to Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday. Conor Jackson, Adam Rosales and Ellis are options there, but even though Carter is not a good defensive player at first base, he is adequate. Should he provide some much-needed pop while with the big-league club, perhaps he could force his way into the lineup, a la Jemile Weeks.

Melvin said that when the team returns to Oakland, he might continue to use Hideki Matsui in the outfield, where he has played well. That could point to some starts at designated hitter for Carter.

Carter entered Thursday's game as part of a double-switch in the sixth inning, and he made an error on the first ball hit to him, dropping a two-out foul pop by Jose Reyes. Reyes then singled in a run. Carter said that Weeks ran into him and hit his glove, causing him to drop it, but on replays, Carter didn't appear to have good control of the ball in the first place. Carter flied out in his only at-bat.

Willingham said his running session to test his Achilles did not go well, but he believes he will be ready to come off the disabled list when eligible in nine days.

Willingham is a potential trade-deadline target for contenders (especially Philadelphia, which tried to acquire him last year), but his injury might scare clubs, according to one scout who has been following Willingham this week.

Mark Ellis makes 1st start at 1st for A's

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

New York -- Mark Ellis borrowed **Landon Powell's** glove, and for the first time in his big-league career, he started at first base Thursday.

"**Keith Hernandez** out there," he joked as he walked by reporters.

Ellis, who has been among the best defensive second basemen in baseball since he came to the big leagues in 2002, said that he was nervous at the beginning of the game.

"It took me a while to get used to it," he said, "but my instincts took over."

Manager **Bob Melvin** said, "I thought he was fine for his first time there. ... As the game went on, he was more and more comfortable."

Ellis said the most difficult play for him at first is the ball hit to his right, trying to determine whether to go for it or to head to the bag. He nearly cut off a grounder heading straight for second baseman **Jemile Weeks** in the fifth, and the play fell apart from there, with Weeks throwing slightly out of range of pitcher **Graham Godfrey**, who was covering first. The runner, **Jose Reyes**, wound up scoring that inning.

Pal plunked: Justin Turner, who was hit with the bases loaded in the 13th inning Wednesday to end the game, is one of catcher **Kurt Suzuki**'s best friends from their days at Cal State Fullerton. Suzuki caught the ball that nicked Turner's thigh, and even if Turner didn't make any effort to move, Suzuki didn't disapprove - although he did give him some grief.

"We're really close," Suzuki said. "I texted him after the game to say, 'Way to lean into the pitch.' He said, 'I just tried to stay there.'"

"I would have done the same thing. After 13 innings, you want to do anything you can to get the run. And he's a guy who plays the game right."

Turner was hit on the left thigh again Thursday in his first plate appearance against Godfrey.

"I was a little quick with my delivery," Godfrey said. "That was definitely unintentional."

Briefly: Thursday's game's start was delayed by rain for 2 hours, 15 minutes. ... Double-A shortstop **Grant Green** will play in his second All-Star Futures Game on July 10 in Phoenix. ... **Brandon McCarthy**, rehabbing from a stress reaction in his right shoulder, gave up one unearned run in four innings for Class A Stockton at San Jose on Thursday night. He struck out four and did not issue a walk.

Leading off

Changing colors: After losing for the first time in seven games Wednesday while wearing their gold alternate jerseys, the A's wore green tops Thursday. Starting pitcher Graham Godfrey said he asked a few players, and the consensus was to go back to green.

A's have a chance, must take chances

Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle

The calendar reaches July one week from today, which is a nice way of saying it's about time the A's scored a few runs. Their recent six-game winning streak offered some encouragement but did not mask Oakland's lingering meekness.

Thursday's 4-1 loss to the Mets provided a more telling snapshot of why the A's remain stuck

in last place in the American League West.

Forget about working with the baserunners. Maybe it's time to ask Rickey Henderson to resume his career (hey, he's only 52).

Here's the thing: The A's can win the oh-so-ordinary West. It's the only division with four teams, and none of those four teams is especially good. Texas, at 40-36, owns the worst record of any firstplace club in the majors.

The A's must approach July with a giant sense of urgency.

They have been mediocre for too long (four-plus seasons and counting). General manager Billy Beane needs to be bold and creative in trying to upgrade the offense, because it's long past time for the A's to become relevant again.

The hiring of manager Bob Melvin, the play of second baseman Jemile Weeks and Thursday's promotion of first baseman/outfielder Chris Carter are steps in the right direction. Beane seems to realize he cannot afford to simply wait for Hideki Matsui, David DeJesus and Mark Ellis (among others) to start hitting.

That would be a disservice to Oakland's fans — and its pitchers.

The A's stand third in the majors in team ERA (3.22), a sparkling number offset by their total runs (275, thirdfewest in the AL) and homers (40, fewest in the majors).

Forty homers on the brink of July? That's embarrassing.

It's also why Weeks should play second base every day — even if it means trading Ellis, a classy and enduring presence — and why Carter needs at-bats. The A's have to find out if they can spark the offense. Even a small spark would help.

Remember, the A's are only six games back with three teams to pass and 86 games left. It's not too late — but Rickey isn't getting any younger.

Drumbeat: Chris Carter called up; sounds like a fill-in role for A's for now

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Citi Field 6/23/2011 9:07am

Chris Carter is here, a development I know many A's fans have wanted to see for some time, but it doesn't sound as if it's a permanent thing - at least right now. Carter is here because Josh Willingham was placed on the DL. Willingham's Achilles tendon problem had left the team short on the bench two nights in a row at an NL park, and that's not ideal with the number of pinch hitters needed - especially in a game like last night's.

I asked manager Bob Melvin directly if this is a temporary fill-in spot for Carter or if it's envisioned to be a more permanent situation, and Melvin said that it's not fair to a young player to say that a situation is temporary - you'd like them to think they have a shot to stay.

But, he added, "Certainly when Josh Willingham is back, he'll be back in there. So you can forecast for yourself."

That sounds fairly temporary - although that was also the case when Jemile Weeks came up to fill in for Mark Ellis. It was under a different manager, sure, but the idea then was that Ellis would return to second base when he came off the DL. So perhaps if Carter hits some homers, gets on base, contributes, maybe he has more of a shot than Melvin is suggesting right now. First base is certainly up for grabs if Carter goes off at the plate, because with Daric Barton's demotion, the A's first base options are Conor Jackson, Adam Rosales and Mark Ellis.

Melvin said that with Willingham out, he's considering playing Hideki Matsui in left field when the team returns home; Matsui has been quite good out there. That presumably leaves the DH spot as an option for Carter, who is not a great outfielder and adequate at best at first base. Carter certainly appears to be the A's fulltime DH of the future, probably next year, or maybe sooner if Matsui were to get hurt or were to go back into the sort of tailspin he was in the first two months of the season.

Willingham said his running session yesterday didn't go as well as he'd hoped, but he's convinced he'll be ready to come off the DL when eligible in 10 days.

This injury could affect interest in Willingham were the A's tempted to move him in the next five weeks - one scout for a contender asked me about the Achilles injury last night, wondering why it has been such a nagging issues, and he said that it might scare his club off or reduce any offer they might make. He's a free agent after the season, so if the A's fall out of it in the next month, he might be a player the team would look to deal.

Ellis is making his first-ever big-league start at first base today. He walked by me earlier and joked, "Keith Hernandez out there." He's such a good defensive player, I'm sure he'll be fine, though I'd imagine there will be a few plays that are trickier than others, particularly making throws to pitchers - or just knowing when to let the pitcher field a tapper or bunt toward first and when to field it himself. I wouldn't be surprised to see the Mets test Ellis with a bunt or two, especially with a guy on the mound, Graham Godfrey, making his third big-league start.

Here's the lineup: Weeks 2b, Pennington ss, Crisp cf, Jackson lf, Sizemore 3b, Ellis 1b, DeJesus rf, Powell c, Godfrey p.

Carter didn't arrive on the red-eye until 8:45 a.m., he said. I'd guess he'd get a pinch-hit opportunity today.

Melvin said there are probably a couple of relievers unavailable today (Brad Ziegler is likely one of them).

Ziegler thought that Justin Turner leaned into the pitch that hit him last night with the bases loaded and two outs in the 13th, but Melvin said when I asked about it that he wouldn't be upset if his own batter did that in that situation. It was a slider heading toward Turner, Melvin said, and he wasn't going to get called for not trying to get out of the way - not in that situation. "Any way you can get on in that situation," Melvin said.

A's slugger Dave Kingman should show more regret

A few days ago I saw a nice little story about Dave Kingman, former slugger for several major-league baseball teams, lastly the Oakland A's in 1986. Kingman hit 35 home runs that year but could not get a job the next. Later he and other free agents won a collusion suit against baseball, and in the nice little story, Kingman, 62, blames owners for the end of his career.

But I know why Dave Kingman was not re-signed by the Oakland A's, even though their new manager, Tony La Russa, wanted him back. It was because of an act he himself committed 25 years ago Thursday and for which he has never publicly apologized or expressed any regret.

Though I do not begrudge fans their fond memories of his monstrous home runs, I still cannot share rosy views of the man or the player.

I covered the A's for the Sacramento Bee beginning in 1985, and Kingman - who never managed to stick with a team for long despite his power shows - let me know that I was not welcome. We didn't have any personal or professional run-in, he just did not think women should be covering baseball - as he put it, "A lady should be a lady." So he regularly belittled me with vicious comments, and refused to answer questions if I were near.

On June 23, 1986, the press box guard in Kansas City brought me a corsage box. I opened it slowly in front of my fellow scribes, asking them jokingly what they were up to. Inside, the tissue paper rustled. Something in the box was alive.

At this point I closed the box and let security investigate. There was a rat inside tagged "My name is Sue." We all knew immediately who had sent the "gift," and because the A's were on a horrible losing streak with a well-liked manager on the ropes, Kingman's disruptive prank and very public display of sexual harassment became a big story. Three days later, the manager was fired.

Walter Haas owned those A's, and Roy Eisenhardt was team president. They were better businessmen than to put up with this sort of behavior from an employee - except, this employee hit home runs. So they fined Kingman and warned him that if he did anything like it again, he would be dismissed.

When Kingman's contract expired that offseason, it was quietly ignored, despite the coaching staff's pleadings. Other owners may have colluded against Kingman and free agents, but the A's had reasons all their own for dropping him and signing Reggie Jackson in his place for 1987.

I and other women kept covering baseball long after Kingman left, and Susan Slusser, an intern at the Bee back in those days, covers the A's today for The Chronicle. In the long run, I think that corsage box helped raise awareness and reduce tolerance of harassment. I like to think it could never happen today.

But I don't want to hear about any campaigns to put Kingman in Cooperstown. In addition to stats, election requires "integrity, sportsmanship, character." That kind of guy would have regrets 25 years later, and the nice little story I read Monday offered none.

Susan Fornoff, author of "Lady in the Locker Room," is the founder of GottaGoGolf, a new online magazine for women.

Godfrey rebounds, but suffers first loss

Righty pitches through rough second inning, hurt by tepid offense

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 6/23/2011 7:44 PM ET

NEW YORK -- The A's reentered Citi Field less than 10 hours after dropping a 13-inning affair, only to face a rain delay of more than two hours at the start of Thursday's rubber match with the Mets.

The less-than-ideal circumstances were met with a rather forgettable 4-1 defeat, marking the club's second consecutive loss following a season-high six-game winning streak.

"Today, we were at a little bit of an energy low," manager Bob Melvin said, "but that's no excuse."

Two errors made by rookies, and an absent offense that posted five hits, were at the crux of this one, the latter problem magnifying the loss of Josh Willingham to the disabled list earlier in the day.

Willingham, owner of a team-high 10 home runs and 42 RBIs, leaves the team without a true power hitter. And on a day when Hideki Matsui needed rest, the A's were essentially left staring at a hole in the middle of their lineup.

During the remainder of Willingham's DL stay, the A's hope to get a power surge from Chris Carter, who was called up from Triple-A before the game to take Willingham's roster spot. But Carter was given just one at-bat off the bench on Thursday and drew unwanted attention to himself on the first ball hit his way -- a popup he dropped in foul territory, allowing Jose Reyes to prolong his at-bat and collect an RBI single.

"That's not a good feeling with two outs, when the batter gets another pitch and gets a hit," Carter said.

"It was another opportunity, so I just tried to do something good because you don't have too many opportunities like that in the big leagues," Reyes said. "I was able to put a good swing on that ball."

The sixth-inning miscue followed a fifth-inning throwing error by Jemile Weeks, who was delayed to Reyes' ground ball while Mark Ellis, making his first career start and fourth

appearance at first base, made a run for it to his right. Meanwhile, hurler Graham Godfrey ran to first but couldn't grab hold of Weeks' throw.

"After a step, I knew I made a mistake," Ellis said. "I figured it would be better to just keep going and get out of the way. Just one of those things that the more you're out there the better you're going to be."

"This is a second baseman with a terrific amount of range," Melvin said of Ellis. "You want him to err on the side of aggressiveness, rather than be passive."

Ellis noted that was exactly the type of play that's going to be difficult while he is adjusting to a new infield position.

"That's the one where, in the middle of the field, you're going out there to get everything," he said. "It's a tough one because it wasn't hit hard, but off the bat, it looked like it was."

Godfrey, meanwhile, was coming off his first Major League victory against the Giants, not to mention a weather-related setback he wasn't about to use as an excuse while tossing a career-high 115 pitches.

"You have to be ready physically and mentally, no matter what the situation is," he said.

The young right-hander allowed the Mets to take a two-run lead in the second. He loaded the bases and retired two batters on a double-play ball from Mets starter Chris Capuano, which scored a run. Another scored on a single off the bat of Reyes.

"My stuff was good enough, but it doesn't meet my expectations," Godfrey said. "I was working deep counts and leaving some balls up."

His counterpart compiled six shutout innings of five-hit ball, with seven strikeouts, before exiting the game prematurely with discomfort in the right side of his abdomen. Capuano's departure was met with an impressive performance by the Mets' bullpen, which limited Oakland to one run in the final three frames.

The A's lone run didn't come until the eighth inning, when a sacrifice fly from Coco Crisp snapped the club's 11-inning scoreless streak and brought home the team's the third run in its past 24 innings, dating back to Tuesday's series opener.

"We've had some offensive deficiencies," Melvin said. "We have to string hits together. We have to battle, we have to work deep counts, we have to get on base, because we're not the type of team that's going to strike quick."

"We didn't get a lot of hits," Ellis said. "We had chances, had guys out there and just didn't get them in."

Coupled with Texas' off-day, the A's moved six games back in the American League West with the loss and dropped to eight games below .500.

They'll now head to Philadelphia to continue Interleague Play with a three-game set against the Phillies.

Willingham's injury opens door for Carter

Top prospect recalled as left fielder goes on DL with Achilles strain

NEW YORK -- The A's lost their most productive hitter on Thursday, placing outfielder Josh Willingham on the 15-day disabled list with a strained left Achilles.

In an effort to regain the power it will lose in Willingham's absence, the club recalled Chris Carter from Triple-A Sacramento prior to a 4-1 loss to the Mets.

The transaction is retroactive to Saturday, and Willingham believes he'll be ready to return once eligible July 3. He tested the nagging Achilles injury during a set of running drills on Wednesday, but the results weren't encouraging enough to avoid his fifth-career DL stint.

"It didn't go as well as I thought it was going to," Willingham said. "I ran on it, maybe 60 to 70 percent, and still felt it. It was one of those things where we had to make a decision on whether or not we were going to play on it, and we didn't think it was going to get any better if I played on it, so we'll just let it heal."

The A's upcoming schedule also played a factor, because after leaving New York, the club will spend the weekend playing in a Philadelphia under National League rules and preferred to have a full bench.

"We were hoping not to do this," manager Bob Melvin said. "Certainly, he's a guy that's very important to us, a guy that hits fourth for us, so we gotta get him right. Taking a chance in trying to run him out here in the next few days was probably not the thing to do."

In the meantime, the A's will get a peek at Carter, who has long been considered the organization's top prospect. During his first Major League callup last season, he endured an 0-for-33 stretch but batted .342 over his final 13 games.

Carter sat on Sacramento's DL from April 22 to June 4 with a sprained left wrist and was 11-for-33 with three home runs and eight RBIs in just nine games upon his return.

The 24-year-old's progress to the big league level has somewhat been delayed by the presence of Daric Barton at first base, Carter's natural position. But Barton's demotion to Triple-A this week following struggles of his own at the plate means that Carter is in line to see time there during his stay.

Willingham's absence could draw Carter a few outfield starts as well, though the A's have several options in Ryan Sweeney, David DeJesus, Conor Jackson and Hideki Matsui. Melvin was admittedly unsure of Carter's role going forward, but Carter appeared at first base as a late-inning substitution Thursday, making an error in a key moment that allowed Jose Reyes to rap an RBI single.

"One of the things we lack a little bit is some power, and he does have some power," Melvin said. "I know, talking to him, first base is probably his most comfortable position, but we'll see what we figure out going home with the [designated hitter] and the outfield."

Though Carter's promotion signals an exciting time for A's fans, who have been awaiting his return, the move is likely not a permanent one, as Melvin ensured that "certainly when Josh Willingham is back, he's going to be back."

Still, that was seemingly the case when Jemile Weeks was called up to fill in for the injured Mark Ellis, who on Wednesday assumed a utility role upon his return because of Weeks' consistent production. So should Carter offer a similar performance, the A's could consider handing him an extended stay at first base.

Carter, who arrived in New York at 8:45 ET on Thursday morning following a delayed red-eye flight out of Phoenix, did not play the outfield after coming off the DL in Sacramento but is still open to playing the position. At the same time, he said first base "is a natural thing" and helps his focus at the plate.

"There's nothing to press about," he said. "I'm feeling pretty good, seeing the ball well."

Green named to second straight Futures Game

Shortstop will appear for US on All-Star Sunday at Chase Field

NEW YORK -- A's shortstop Grant Green received his second consecutive selection to the XM All-Star Futures Game on Thursday as part of the U.S. team.

The event, which features several of the game's premier Minor Leaguers, is scheduled for July 10 at Arizona's Chase Field.

Green, Oakland's 2009 first-round Draft pick, entered Thursday batting .293 with four home runs, 16 doubles and 35 RBIs in 63 games with Double-A Midland. A shortstop out of the University of Southern California, the 23-year-old Green is still developing his defensive skills, evidenced by the 18 errors attached to his name this season.

The 13th annual Futures Game can be seen live on MLB.TV, ESPN2 and ESPN2 HD and followed live on MLB.com's Gameday on Taco Bell All-Star Sunday, July 10, at 3 p.m. PT. In addition, XM Radio will broadcast play-by-play coverage of the event live on XM 175. MLB.com will provide complete coverage before, during and after the game, and you can keep up to date by following [@MLBFutures](#) on Twitter. Fans can join the Futures Game conversation by tagging tweets with #mlbfutures.

Major League Baseball, along with with the Major League Baseball Scouting Bureau, MLB.com, Baseball America, USA Baseball and the 30 Major League Baseball clubs, selected the 25-man rosters for each club. Each organization is represented, and the World Team features players from 12 countries and territories. Players from all full-season Minor Leagues were eligible to participate.

Ellis gets first career start at first base

NEW YORK -- Mark Ellis, relegated to an infield utility role upon his return from the disabled list this week, received his first career start at first base on Thursday for the A's series finale with the Mets.

Ellis has little experience at the position, having made just three appearances there through nine big league seasons. But the 34-year-old veteran views it just as he would any other infield slot. The only difference is that he has to remember to cover first.

Along with Ellis, Conor Jackson and callup Chris Carter are expected to see time at first base in the coming weeks while the demoted Daric Barton regains his comfort level at the plate with Triple-A Sacramento.

To the right of Ellis at second base is successor Jemile Weeks, who entered the day batting .321 in 14 games since his promotion.

Weeks gets chance to meet hero Reyes

NEW YORK -- Jemile Weeks was never so much a fan of one particular Major League team. The A's second baseman was more drawn to certain players, among them three or four whom he tried to model himself after.

The Mets' Jose Reyes was included in that bunch. The nine-year veteran shortstop offers the speed, spark, and even the same long hair Weeks hopes come to define him as a big leaguer.

"That was probably one of my more favorite players in the league to watch before I got to this level," Weeks said. "I watched him a lot, and that's always been somebody who I watched and was like, 'Man, that's the type of guy who -- he brings that type of energy to a team, the way he plays. I like that.

"I would like to take pieces from his game and try to do that, too. And anything that I can bring along in my own style and my own way of playing, it'll add to it."

Weeks came face to face with Reyes for the first time on Tuesday night at Citi Field when he reached second base during the A's series-opening victory over the Mets and noted that Reyes had a few "encouraging words" for him.

Reyes currently leads the Majors with 13 triples. That's 10 more than Weeks, but the A's youngster has been in the bigs for all of 14 games, making Reyes' mark something of an attainable feat -- sort of.

"We'll see," Weeks said, smiling.

Worth noting

- A's right-hander Tyson Ross (oblique) is scheduled to throw 55 pitches in a simulated game in Arizona on Saturday. That same day, righty Rich Harden (lat muscle) will make his second rehab start with Triple-A Sacramento.
- Given Josh Willingham's absence from the lineup, manager Bob Melvin said he would consider playing regular designated hitter Hideki Matsui in the outfield once the club returns to American League play on Tuesday.

"I'd probably have to sit down and talk to him about that," Melvin said. "Based on what I'm seeing in the outfield, as long as health is not an issue, he's done a nice job."

Melvin has thriving A's on same page

Players responding as new skipper communicates, defines roles

NEW YORK -- The Athletics' winning streak came to a halt at Citi Field on Wednesday night, and with it went those lucky gold jerseys that were thrust in the middle of it.

The belief? As strong as ever.

"It's just sad to see the gold jerseys die like that," A's starter Gio Gonzalez said after getting a no-decision in a 3-2, 13-inning loss in which his team tied it up with one out remaining in the ninth.

"It's just one of those unfortunate losses, but it shows that we have life."

Not too long ago, the A's were on life support.

A team many thought would compete for a playoff spot looked finished by early June after dropping 13 of 14 and 10 in a row. But the six-game winning streak they immediately went on -- and was snapped by Wednesday's nail-biting defeat -- has them only 5 1/2 games back of what still looks like a wide-open American League West.

The superstitious type would credit those gold tops they've worn ever since Josh Outman began the streak by taking the mound on June 15 and winning with seven shutout innings.

Others would credit rookie Jemile Weeks, the wiry second baseman who has brought speed, production and a new kind of energy since coming up on June 7.

But mostly, the credit goes to a change in Bobs -- from Geren to Melvin.

"I think Bob [Melvin] came in at a time when we kind of needed a change," reliever Craig Breslow said about the managerial switch that took place on June 9. "We needed kind of a fresh attitude and a new perspective, and he brought that."

Melvin may not be one of the more well-known managers in baseball, but players will say he's among the most well-liked.

Conor Jackson will tell you that.

Jackson, who has essentially become Oakland's starting first baseman now that the struggling Daric Barton is down in the Minor Leagues, was the only one on the A's who had ever directly dealt with Melvin, having played under him with the Diamondbacks from 2005-09.

"Listen, it's hard to get 25 guys to like one guy," Jackson said. "But when I was in Arizona, everybody loved him."

It's not hard to tell that there wasn't as much harmony with Geren.

Reliever Brian Fuentes said as much last month, when he criticized Geren's "unorthodox managing" and said "there's just no communication." Others will give you that impression in more subtle ways, mostly by lauding what they have now -- more clarity about their roles, more communication and thus more confidence.

In terms of managing styles, Geren and Melvin simply lie on opposite ends of the spectrum. And it's clear to see that this team needed the side Melvin is on.

"Us being a young team, I think we kind of needed that leadership," A's closer Andrew Bailey said, though he also praised his former skipper.

"Geren just kind of put the lineup out there and expected the guys to go out there and play. But some guys here, you need a little kick in the butt or a little kiss on the cheek, it depends who you are. I think [Melvin is] good at doing that."

Melvin -- one of many who interviewed for the Mets' managerial vacancy last offseason -- had an introductory meeting with the players on day one, telling them he'd take the final four days of their current road trip to get acquainted with personnel before assigning roles.

By the time they got back to Oakland, relievers knew exactly which situations they'd be placed in.

Position players -- especially Hideki Matsui, who's playing more regularly and thriving -- knew when they'd be in the lineup.

And the club, after dropping four of the first five under their new skipper, couldn't stop winning.

"I find that you have to be yourself," said Melvin, who was serving as a special assistant for Arizona. "You have to be honest and go from there. That's how you get people's attention."

A good example occurred on Wednesday afternoon, when Mark Ellis -- a clubhouse favorite and the team's longest-tenured player -- returned from the disabled list, only to find that the second-base job he had held for so long now belongs to the hot-hitting Weeks. Melvin sat Ellis down and told him the team was better with him serving as more of a hybrid utility man.

And though Ellis still believes he can be an everyday second baseman, he understood.

"He was great about it," Ellis said of Melvin. "He brought me in there, told me the deal, and it was fine. All you want to know as a player is where you stand."

The A's currently stand as a team to beat, because their greatest strength is the game's most critical component: pitching.

Their bullpen is arguably the deepest in baseball, and despite having five of their starters on the shelf -- though Rich Harden, Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross could be back shortly -- their rotation has been among the best in baseball.

No, they don't possess much thump in their lineup, but Weeks has been a spark plug as a midseason callup -- in much of the same way Buster Posey was for the pitching-heavy Giants last year.

For that needed middle-of-the-order bat, there's always the July 31 non-waiver Trade Deadline.

And thanks to a new-found belief, the A's may be buyers by that point.

"Confidence is everything in this game," Jackson said. "If you don't believe you're going to win, then you're going to lose. We believe we're going to win now, every time we step on that field."

First try for Oakland's new 1B not so smooth

The first try for the new first baseman of the Oakland Athletics went a little awry.

The first try for the new first baseman of the Oakland Athletics went a little awry.

Mark Ellis and Chris Carter each had trouble with balls hit by Jose Reyes, and the mistakes helped the New York Mets beat the A's 4-1 on a dreary Thursday.

A day after full-time first baseman Daric Barton was demoted to the minors because of a slump, Ellis started at the spot for the first time in his nine-season career.

"A little nervous before the game and it took me a little while to get used to it," the longtime second baseman admitted.

The Mets led 2-0 when the speedy Reyes opened the fifth with a grounder and Ellis ranged much too far to his right, missing the ball and leaving the bag uncovered. Second baseman Jemile Weeks made a clean pickup, but zipped a throw past scrambling pitcher Graham Godfrey (1-1) for an error. A sacrifice set up Daniel Murphy's RBI single with two outs.

"Obviously, one ball just took over. After a stab, I knew I made a mistake," Ellis said. "Just one of those things where the more you're out there, the better you're going to be."

The last time Ellis played first base was in 2006, for only one game. A's manager Bob Melvin appreciated Ellis' effort.

"Well, here's a second baseman with a terrific amount of range. You want him to err on the side of aggressiveness," Melvin said. "I thought he was fine. The first time you have to do that on a major league field, I don't know how long it's been for him."

In the sixth, the A's made a double-switch and inserted Chris Carter at first base - a highly touted minor leaguer, he was promoted from Triple-A Sacramento and arrived at the ballpark in midmorning after an all-night flight from the West.

Carter's first play was a foul popup by Reyes with two outs that he dropped near the stands for an error as Weeks brushed against him. Reyes, the NL's top hitter, slapped the next pitch from Craig Breslow for an RBI single.

"Yeah, he jostled me. It hit off my glove," Carter said.

Said Reyes: "You don't have too many opportunities like that in the big leagues."

After the start of the game was delayed by rain for 2 hours, 15 minutes, the Mets won their second in a row. They beat the A's on Wednesday night in a rain-interrupted game that took 13 innings and ended after midnight.

Chris Capuano (6-7) shut out the A's on five hits for six innings, walking none and striking out seven. He left with discomfort in his abdomen and Pedro Beato relieved to begin the seventh. Francisco Rodriguez closed for his 20th save in 23 chances, a day after blowing a ninth-inning lead.

Reyes hit a pair of RBI singles and also scored a run.

Coco Crisp had a sacrifice fly in the Oakland eighth.

The Mets took a 2-0 lead in the second. Capuano grounded into a double play with the bases loaded and Reyes hit an RBI single.

NOTES: Justin Turner was hit in the left thigh by Godfrey in the first inning. Turner was plunked in nearly the same spot with two outs and the bases loaded in the 13th inning

Wednesday night, ending the game. ... Hideki Matsui sat out for the A's. Normally a DH, he played the outfield for the first time this season and did quite well in the opening two games of the series. He's likely to start twice in the outfield this weekend at Philadelphia. ... The A's put OF Josh Willingham, who leads the team in homers and RBIs, on the DL because of a strained left Achilles'. Carter was summoned - he caught a ride from Tucson to Phoenix on Wednesday night, then took a redeye flight that was delayed. He got to New York around 8:45 a.m.

Oakland's Willingham tries to ignore trade talk

Sam Donnellon, Philadelphia Inquirer

NEW YORK - It's a safe guess that online, in print, or both, Josh Willingham's name has been mentioned at least once a day in the last 3 weeks.

As in righthanded power, manageable salary, yada yada yada.

"Three weeks?" he said in front of his locker the other day. "How about the last 3 years?"

Fair point. Willingham's hustle, team-first attitude and relative low cost has made him seem like a perfect Phillie for a long time. Even amid a season in which his average has dipped and injuries cropped up - he's currently on the disabled list with a cranky left Achilles' tendon - the leftfielder leads the Oakland Athletics with 10 home runs.

That's one reason he might be unavailable. The starless A's have the major leagues' third-best earned run average, but their offense is stagnant. Oakland is on pace to shatter the club low for home runs, yet a recent six-game winning streak put them within striking distance of first place in the American League West. Even in last place, they are only 5 1/2 back.

That's one reason Willingham laughed about the latest conjecture. Another is that he's been with three teams - Florida, Washington and Oakland - over the last 3 years.

"You can't worry about it," he said. "The minute you start worrying about that, it will affect you on the field. So I try not to."

That said, he had hoped to play in this weekend's series between the A's and Phillies. But when he tested his foot on Wednesday in New York, where the A's played the Mets, there was enough pain for the team to disable him, retroactive to June 18.

So, for now, his only appearance in Philly will be in papers and online.

"I'm not going to say that, 3 weeks ago, I wanted to be traded," he said. "Or that I want to now. I love the guys on this team. Whatever happens, happens. If I get traded, it's out of my control. I try not to worry about that." *

Fifty-seven years later, A's are in same predicament as their Philadelphia

On Sept. 19, the Philadelphia Athletics, a onetime baseball dynasty whose popularity had been so great that spectators often filled adjacent rooftops, concluded their 1954 home schedule in front of 1,715 fans at wet and dreary Connie Mack Stadium.

The 4-2 loss to the Yankees was the A's 99th of the season. They were 59 games behind league-leading Cleveland, with six meaningless road contests left. Their final home attendance totaled 305,362, an embarrassing number that nonetheless surpassed their payroll.

As the beaten A's trudged off the muddy field that afternoon, they didn't yet know that after 54 seasons, nine pennants, and five world championships, they had played their final game in Philadelphia.

Now, nearly 57 years later, when the A's return to the city of their birth for the first time for an interleague series with the Phillies, they will find themselves in the same troubled state as their flannel-uniformed ancestors.

Like the '54 A's, the 2011 Athletics are dogged by a lack of financial resources, an outmoded stadium, an apathetic fan base, the rise of the National League team that shares their market, and persistent speculation that they could move or even fold.

"The Athletics' current difficulties are in some respects eerily reminiscent of those that affected the club during its last years in Philadelphia," said Bob Warrington, vice president of the Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society.

These Oakland A's are in last place and near the bottom in attendance (27th of 30). They play in obsolete Oakland-Alameda County Stadium, where their lease will expire in 2013. An apathetic city government won't get involved. And they can't move to nearby San Jose, a boomtown that wants them badly, because baseball considers that Giants territory.

"What is the alternative for this franchise if baseball does not allow us to move to San Jose?" A's president Mike Crowley said recently. "I don't know. I don't know that we have any options. I don't think it can work here in Alameda County."

Desperate as the trading deadline approaches, the A's, at \$66 million already in the bottom third of payrolls, are widely expected to jettison salary, action that would link them even more closely to the '54 Athletics.

"If Oakland moves Josh Willingham, as has been suggested, to dump his salary and pick up lower-cost prospects in return," Warrington said, "it will be the same strategy Connie Mack pursued in the 1950s to keep his A's on life-support financially."

By 1954, Mack was, by most accounts, slipping into senility. His feuding children couldn't agree on what to do with a ball club that was just as sick.

Twenty-three years removed from their last pennant, the original American League members had been eclipsed here by the Phillies, whose new owner, DuPont heir Bob Carpenter, was spending money.

As Mack's role diminished, the sons from his first marriage, Earle and Roy, squared off with Connie Jr., his son from a second wife. Simply put, Connie Jr. wanted to spend money, and Earle and Roy did not. Eventually, the frustrated younger son sold his share of the team.

As attendance dipped and the A's options shrank, payroll was cut, minor-league teams were sold, and their North Philadelphia stadium was neglected. As Roy and Earle also grew apart, a crisis loomed.

Smelling blood, Arnold Johnson, a Chicago businessman who had the backing of the all-powerful Yankees, bid to buy the club and move it to Kansas City.

Stories of the A's troubles became sports-page fixtures in the city's newspapers. The resulting negativity, coupled with the popularity of the young, promising Phillies, smothered interest in the Athletics.

Nine times on their final two homestands, the A's drew fewer than 2,200 fans. Players were sold, traded, released. To reduce travel costs, Philadelphia sent nine players home before the final road trip.

On the day of that final home game, nearly twice as many fans turned out to see a Roman Catholic-West Catholic high school football game than paid to watch the Yankees and A's eight blocks away.

At a New York meeting Oct. 12, 10 days after the underdog Giants' World Series sweep of the Indians, AL owners unanimously approved Johnson's \$3.5 million purchase and, by a 6-2 vote, allowed the move to Kansas City. The Philadelphia A's were dead. Less than three years later, at age 93, Mack was, too.

On another rainy day, Philadelphians flocked to Oliver Bair's Chestnut Street funeral home to say goodbye. When the doors finally closed, it was noted that 3,400 people had paid their respects.

"If Mr. Mack could have gotten that many people to come see his team," one policeman noted, "the A's might still be in Philadelphia."

When the Phillies were our other team

The visiting A's once rose and fell in Philadelphia.

By Rich Westcott, Philadelphia Inquirer

The Philadelphia Athletics are long gone and mostly forgotten. But thanks to interleague play, the Oakland Athletics are in town for a three-game series against the Phillies starting tonight. The unusual visit serves as a nostalgic reminder of a team that once held a special place among the city's professional sports franchises.

In the distant past, Philadelphia had two major-league baseball teams. One, of course, was the Phillies, now a fixture in the city for 128 years. And the other was the Athletics.

The A's, as they were sometimes called, played in Philadelphia from 1901, when the American League was formed, through 1954, when they fled to Kansas City. It could be argued that they were Philadelphia's most successful sports team. Playing at Shibe Park in all but the first eight years, they captured more titles than any other pro team in the city's history, winning nine pennants and five World Series.

Throughout most of the first half of the 20th century, the Athletics stood as Philadelphia's premier baseball team. Although they drew more than 700,000 fans in only eight seasons during that period, they were significantly more successful than the Phillies, who won just one pennant in their first 67 years.

The Athletics' hitters won 14 home run crowns and six batting championships. Their pitchers led the league in wins 11 times. And team players won MVP awards three times.

Some of the greatest players in baseball history wore the uniform of the Philadelphia Athletics. They included Jimmie Foxx, Mickey Cochrane, Eddie Collins, Frank Baker, Al Simmons, Lefty

Grove, and Eddie Plank. All are members of the Hall of Fame, as are 11 others who at some point played for the A's.

Through 50 of their 54 years in Philadelphia, the Athletics were managed by the legendary Connie Mack, both the winningest and losingest skipper in big-league history. Eventually the team's owner, Mack didn't only pilot good teams. He also was in charge when the team finished in the basement 18 times, or a third of their total seasons, for a greater last-place percentage than any other team in baseball.

Mack traded away his best teams, and, after blossoming for the last time in 1931, the Athletics went steadily downhill. By the late 1940s, the Phillies were on their way to becoming the favorite of Philadelphia baseball fans and, ultimately, winning the pennant in 1950 with the wildly popular Whiz Kids.

Thereafter, Philadelphia was a Phillies town. Although players such as Ferris Fain, Gus Zernial, and Bobby Shantz had glittering seasons for the Athletics, interest in the team had virtually disappeared. And so, after playing their final home game before a crowd of just 1,715, the A's were sold by the Mack family to a group that moved them to Kansas City.

The Athletics stayed in Kansas City for 13 lackluster seasons. In 1968, they moved to Oakland, where they would win six pennants and four World Championships. Ironically, their biggest star during much of their success in California was the Philadelphia-area native Reggie Jackson.

In Philadelphia today, the old Athletics are little more than a glint in the eyes of a handful of elderly fans and a few scholars of the city's illustrious baseball past. Many modern fans have never heard of the Philadelphia A's and don't realize the city once had two major-league teams.

The Philadelphia Phillies and Athletics once met regularly in the enormously popular City Series, which pitted them against each other before the season, and sometimes during or after it, every year starting in 1903. But since Oakland's forerunners left town 57 years ago, the team has made only one previous trip to Philadelphia. (That was in 2003, when the Phillies won two out of three. The Phillies have visited Oakland twice, in 2005 and 2008, and they never met the Kansas City A's during the season.)

This weekend's rare meeting of the Phillies and Athletics marks a good time to celebrate a team that was a major part of Philadelphia's storied baseball history.

Willingham to DL with Achilles problem, so A's call up Chris Carter

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

The Oakland Athletics always seem to be hurt, and the hits just keep on coming.

A's team leader in home runs (10) and RBI (42), outfielder Josh Willingham, hit the disabled list this morning with an Achilles problem, so Oakland recalled first baseman/outfielder Chris Carter to take his place on the roster.

Willingham had struggled this month with the tendon strain, hitting only .204 in June. It's also his fifth career trip to the DL -- so once again, the A's took a risk on a player with an injury history that ends up hurting them a bit when it matters most.

Meanwhile, Carter has been up and down himself the past two seasons after leading the minor leagues in total bases in both 2008 and 2009. He was batting only .235 with five HRs and 21 RBI in Sacramento this year, although he did hit .333 with three HR and seven RBI in Stockton on a rehab assignment from his own injury earlier this year.

He has been hitting very well since recovering from that injury, though: three HRs and eight RBI in his last nine games with the River Cats.

Carter also hit .342 over his final 13 games last year in Oakland, after suffering an 0-for-33 start to his career.

He will join the mixture of outfielders and first basemen the A's have available to them right now, but new manager Bob Melvin would be wise to give Carter the lion's share of at-bats somewhere since he represents the future of the franchise. At age 24, Carter has a world of upside and talent others on the current roster do not have.

What Carter lacks, of course, is experience -- so Melvin needs to make sure he gets it.

After all, he can't perform too much worse than other A's hitters have for most of the year, unless he goes 0-for-33 again. And that's not likely.

With Carter joining Jemile Weeks in Oakland, the team now has two of its best three high-minor leaguers with the big club. Only outfielder Michael Taylor remains in Sacramento, and he won't likely see Oakland this year unless the team loses some more outfielders to injury (or trade, if the team falls out of playoff contention soon).

Taylor is hitting .280 with six HRs and 22 RBI in Sacramento right now, and at age 25, time is running out for him to justify his reputation that led the A's to flip Matt Holliday for him two years ago (via the Brett Wallace transactions).

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento can't hold off Tucson

By Mike Morris / Sacramento River Cats

Willie Eyre can be found under "relief pitcher" on this year's Triple-A All-Star ballot, but the right-hander has started in his last two appearances for Sacramento. Thursday night in Tucson was a short one as he allowed six runs on eight hits through just three innings of work in the 9-7 loss.

While Eyre has started just two games for the River Cats, Tucson starter Pedro Hernandez won his first game in Triple-A.

Although Sacramento was first on the board, the River Cats found themselves down 9-4 early. A double by Josh Donaldson in the first inning brought in Eric Sogard to give them the early one-run lead. The Tucson Padres followed that run with nine of their own by the end of the fourth inning.

The River Cats threatened Tucson late with Andy Laroche and Michael Taylor singling to start the eighth inning. With a man on first and second, Sacramento had no outs with Jai Miller at the plate, forcing a pitching change by Tucson. Miller struck out before Wes Timmons and Eric Sogard singled, inching the River Cats closer to the Tucson lead.

The late effort would not be enough as the River Cats grounded out and flew out with two runners in scoring position.

Five Tucson batters had two-hit games, including former River Cat Steve Tolleson, who left his mark on the game getting two hits, scoring twice while driving in one run.

The River Cats can't blame their offense for the loss as they called and raised Tucson's 14 hit total with 15 of their own. Matt Carson and Andy LaRoche stood out for Sacramento, combining for seven of those 15 hits while scoring three and driving in four. It was only Sacramento's third Thursday loss of the season, moving them to 4-1 on the road Thursday's and 25-10 on the road this season thus far. Before the game, the River Cats had the best road record in all of baseball (Major Leagues to Single-A), but are now tied with the San Jose Giants (San Francisco Giants Single-A affiliate) who also have a 25-10 record on the road. The River Cats look to take that lead back as they play Tucson on Friday night with lefty Carlos Hernandez (3-2, 5.19 ERA) facing right-hander Jeremy Hefner (4-4, 4.40).

With the all-star voting coming to a close Friday, the River Cats look to add on to their Pacific Coast League leading 48-27 record before the All-Star break (July 10-13).

'Hounds lose to RoughRiders 9-5

From staff reports, Midland Reporter Telegram

FRISCO — After opening the second half of the Texas League season with a 3-1 loss to the Midland RockHounds, the Frisco RoughRiders rebounded in a big way, scoring six runs in the first three innings en route to a 9-5 win Thursday at Dr Pepper Ballpark.

The poor starts that plagued the RockHound pitching staff at the end of the first half of the season resurfaced Thursday as Frisco jumped on starter Anthony Capra from the first at-bat, a line-drive double to left by Davis Stoneburner.

Stoneburner later crossed the plate on a sacrifice fly by Renny Osuna, and the RoughRiders tacked on two more runs in the inning on a two-run single to right by Jose Ruiz that made it 3-0.

Elio Sarmiento, who finished a single short of the cycle, launched a solo shot to left in the bottom of the second to push the lead to 4-0, then the lead ballooned to 6-0 in the third on a two-run blast to center by Ruiz.

Capra gave up six runs on six hits, including the two homers, in just three innings of work.

The RockHounds made a push in the top of the sixth, starting with RBI singles by Adam Heether and Jeremy Barfield that made the score 6-3. Three batters later, two runs scored on a ground ball single by Jermaine Mitchell and suddenly the RockHounds were within a run, trailing 6-5.

But Frisco responded in the bottom of the inning, as Sarmiento led off with a triple and then scored on a two-run shot to left by Osuna that made it 8-5.

The RoughRiders coasted to the win after that as the RockHounds failed to put anymore runs on the board.

Ports Make It 9 Straight With 2-1 Win Over Giants

SAN JOSE, Calif. - In order to extend their season-long winning streak to nine games, the Stockton Ports were going to have to snap an 11-game losing streak to the San Jose Giants. On Thursday night at Municipal Stadium, the Boys of Banner Island started the season's second half by expelling some demons. Using clutch hitting and outstanding pitching, the Ports clung to a one-run lead over the final five innings and defeated the Giants by a final of 2-1.

Stockton opened the scoring with a two-out rally in the 1st. With two down and the bases empty, Michael Choice singled to right. Ryan Ortiz followed with a double high off the center-field batter's eye that scored Choice from first and gave the Ports a 1-0 lead.

Brandon McCarthy started the game for Stockton on Major League rehab and McCarthy would allow an unearned run in the bottom of the 1st. Gary Brown singled to open the frame and then stole second. With one out, Brown went to third on a passed ball charged to Ortiz, then scored on a sac-fly from Ryan Cavan to tie the game at 1-1.

McCarthy would complete a very strong rehab outing, going four innings and allowing just the unearned run on three hits while striking out four. Unofficially, McCarthy threw 49 pitches, 34 for strikes.

In the top of the 5th, the Ports found themselves in danger of wasting a golden opportunity to grab the lead. After back-to-back singles and a stolen base put runners at the corners with nobody out, Giants starter David Mixon (4-1) struck out Conner Crumbliss and got Myrio Richard to pop to the catcher. In need of a clutch two-out single, Stockton's All Star delivered. Michael Gilmartin drove in the go-ahead run with a base hit to right to put the Ports in front 2-1.

Mixon would take the loss despite five strong innings, allowing two runs on six hits while matching a season-high with seven strikeouts.

After the four inning rehab start from McCarthy, Dan Straily (5-5) took over in the 5th and was sensational. In his first inning of work, Straily pitched around an error made by shortstop Dusty Coleman that would've resulted in an inning-ending double-play. Straily would record back-to-back strikeouts of Brown and Jose Flores to end the inning.

Straily would retire seven batters in a row to take him two outs deep into the 9th inning. With two down, Wendell Fairley singled to left-center, prompting manager Webster Garrison to go to the bullpen and get closer Jose Guzman (SV, 11). Guzman would strike out Bobby Haney to end the game and preserve Straily's second straight win and the team's ninth straight.

The Ports and Giants will play the second game of their four-game set on Friday night at Municipal Stadium. In a battle of right-handers, Murphy Smith (2-6, 4.52 ERA) will head to the mound for Stockton, opposed by Andy Reichard (4-0, 2.90 ERA) for San Jose. First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

Vermont Beats Tigers 6-1 On Thursday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- Seth Frankoff tossed seven strong innings and the Vermont Lake Monsters used a four-run fourth inning to defeat the Connecticut Tigers 4-1 in New York-Penn League action Thursday night at historic Centennial Field.

Frankoff (1-0) allowed one run on five hits with one walk and six strikeouts for his first win of the season with Vermont. A 27th-round selection in the 2010 draft out of the University of North Carolina-Wilmington who pitched earlier this season for the Burlington Bees (Single-A Midwest League), Frankoff threw just 80 pitches (56 strikes) over his seven innings. The seven-inning outing marked the first time that a Vermont starter has pitched seven innings in an outing since Brad Peacock did it three times for the Lake Monsters in 2008.

Vermont has hitless over the first three innings off Connecticut starter Luis Sanz, but Chris Affinito led off the fourth with a double and scored two batters later on a Chad Oberracker RBI double to left to tie the game at one. Dan Petitti followed with a line drive single to left scoring Chad Lewis, then two batter later Michael Fabiaschi grounded a two-out, two-run single to center scoring Oberacker and Petitti to give the Lake Monsters a 4-1 lead.

The Lake Monsters added single runs in the fifth and sixth innings, including back-to-back one-out doubles from Jordan Tripp and Affinito to plate a run in the fifth and got an unearned run in the sixth as Fabiaschi walked, moved to second on a single before scoring on a wild pitch and passed ball.

Vermont reliever T.J. Walz struckout the side in the eighth and Logan Chitwood worked a hitless ninth inning for the Lake Monsters, while Sanz (0-1) was charged with five runs on seven hits with one walk and six strikeouts over 4 1/3 innings for the loss.

Affinito went 2-for-4 with one run, two doubles and an RBI for Vermont (4-2), while Oberacker and Chih Fang-Pan each had two hits in the Lake Monsters 11-hit attack. Wright went 2-for-2 with the only run for Connecticut (3-3).

Vermont and Connecticut continue the three-game series at Centennial on Friday night with Argenis Paez scheduled to start on the mound for the Lake Monsters beginning at 7:05 pm.