

**Oakland A's still hapless at hitting at halfway point**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

If there was any mystery about the challenge facing the A's over the season's second half, Wednesday night summed things up quite effectively.

Playing their 81st game, the A's marked the halfway point of the schedule with a thud, losing 3-0 to the Florida Marlins in front of 17,006 fans at the Q.co Coliseum.

It was a microcosm of Oakland's season to this point -- pitching good enough to win but with hitting that was nowhere to be found.

"We have some guys that are struggling, but they're not going to continue to struggle like that," A's manager Bob Melvin said before the game. "Every day I feel like we're going to break out and score multiple runs.

"It'll happen. You just have to stay with it and understand, too, that your pitching is going to keep you in games."

The A's (36-45) generated just five hits against Florida right-hander Ricky Nolasco (5-4), who pitched his second career shutout. Over the past seven games, they're averaging 1.3 runs.

Extend the numbers out over the first three-plus months of the 2011 campaign, and the picture isn't pretty either.

The A's entered Wednesday on pace to hit 83 homers, which would be the fewest in Oakland history. They are now hitting .234 as a team -- the lowest mark by an Oakland squad over an entire season came in 1982, when the club hit .236.

The A's are seven games behind the first-place Texas Rangers in the American League West. But given the injuries that have plagued the pitching staff and the offensive inconsistency, closer Andrew Bailey doesn't view that as a negative.

"Right now, no one is really running away with the A.L. West," Bailey said. "We've battled through a lot of injuries. I think we're fortunate to be where we are."

Melvin said highly touted prospect Chris Carter will serve as the designated hitter Thursday, with Hideki Matsui to play left field. It will be Carter's first start in seven games since being called up from the minors.

All indications are that Carter will return to Triple-A Sacramento when Josh Willingham comes off the disabled list, which is expected Sunday. But that could change if Carter, the organization's best power-hitting prospect, provides a spark.

"I don't know if we consider that a mad scientist move," Melvin said. "But we have to try to do something, get some production in the middle."

Right-hander Guillermo Moscoso (2-4) was solid Wednesday, allowing three runs (one earned) over six innings and striking out a career-high eight with no walks.

But Hanley Ramirez drove a 2-1 pitch over the center-field wall in the first for a two-run homer.

Logan Morrison added a solo shot in the fourth.

It's well-documented that the A's haven't gotten enough from offseason additions such as Matsui and outfielder David DeJesus.

But the A's also aren't getting enough from the complementary pieces.'

Melvin installed shortstop Cliff Pennington into the No. 2 spot in the batting order upon replacing Bob Geren as manager on June 9.

Pennington initially provided a spark but has struggled mightily since, conjuring up memories of last season, when he also struggled after being elevated from the bottom to the top of the order.

Pennington has batted second in each of his past 17 starts and is hitting .179 (12 for 67) over that span.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki is hitting just .217. He and Pennington were each robbed on deep drives Wednesday by Marlins right fielder Mike Stanton.

### **Oakland A's update: Manager Bob Melvin feels pitcher Gio Gonzalez is American League All-Star team worthy**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Left-hander Gio Gonzalez is making a strong bid for an All-Star berth in the eyes of A's manager Bob Melvin.

Melvin said he believes several of his players are worthy of consideration for the July 12 game -- he mentioned relievers Grant Balfour and Andrew Bailey as well as starting pitcher Trevor Cahill -- but that Gonzalez probably headlines the group.

"He certainly has the numbers to be an All-Star," Melvin said before Wednesday night's game against the Florida Marlins. "Just talking about my guys, I think there are several that could merit some consideration. But certainly Gio would probably be close to the top of that list."

All-Star game rosters will be announced Sunday, with fans voting in the starters and the pitchers and reserves being decided by players' balloting and selections by American League manager Ron Washington and National League manager Bruce Bochy.

Gonzalez's 7-5 record isn't eye-catching, but his 2.38 ERA is tied for fourth among A.L. starters. He also ranks among the top 10 in strikeouts (99) and opponents' batting average (.216).

With Balfour currently on the 15-day disabled list with a strained right oblique, that might open the door a little wider for Gonzalez, 25, to make his first Midsummer Classic.

As Oakland's rotation currently projects, Gonzalez would make his final start before the All-Star break on July 8 against the Texas Rangers, which could allow him to pitch in the All-Star game in Phoenix on three days' rest.

Tyson Ross (strained left oblique) will make a rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday and another one five days after that. The right-hander is encouraged by the progress he's making. "I'm feeling strong, and I have no limitations," Ross said. "I'm just trying to find a feel for my different pitches."

Outfielder Josh Willingham is recovering well from his strained left Achilles, and Melvin said he's very confident his cleanup hitter will come off the D.L. on Sunday, when he's first eligible.

The Cal baseball team, which made a surprise run to the College World Series, was honored before the game. Bears coach David Esquer, a Stanford alum, threw out the first pitch to Cal alum Conor Jackson. Jackson posed for a picture with the Bears team as did Ross and Melvin, who also attended Cal.

### **Mark Purdy: Baseball owes weary fans, cities and A's owner an answer on a ballpark in San Jose**

By Mark Purdy, Mercury News Columnist

Last month, San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed sent a letter to Bud Selig.

The letter was friendly. Reed simply asked the commissioner of baseball for a general timetable of when he might finally decide whether the A's and owner Lew Wolff can pursue a new ballpark in the South Bay.

"We have to contemplate the timing of a future election," Reed explained to Selig.

The letter was dated May 10. Reed still has received no answer. So the mayor, a deceptively crafty prankster beneath his all-business exterior, has formulated an alternate plan.

"I'm thinking of going to Milwaukee for a photo op," Reed told me the other day at his city hall office.

A photo op? Yes, a photo op. It would be staged outside the Brewers' ballpark, which features a statue of Selig outside one gate. Reed wants to put an A's jersey on the statue, then pose for a picture holding an imaginary conversation.

"I think that's the only way I can talk to him," Reed said. "Unless maybe I could contact him through a medium."

A sense of humor is always better than a livid attack. But it is clear Reed is frustrated and irritated. The feeling here is, he should become even more irritated. The situation regarding the A's uncertain Bay Area future is ludicrous. In fact, it is several freeway exits past ludicrous.

More than two years ago, Selig formed and authorized a "blue ribbon" committee to investigate the A's ballpark situation in the Bay Area. Committee members subsequently visited Oakland, San Jose and Fremont. They examined proposals, pored over data, authorized marketing studies. Over 26 months, surely every piece of information to be assembled has been assembled. Selig has it all on his desk. Yet, no decision. Reed has a theory.

"I think they did all their work in six months," Reed said of the committee members. "And since then, it's been a dodge."

And not just a dodge for San Jose, remember. It also has been a dodge for fans of the A's, wherever they live. Oakland deserves to know if it should keep pursuing a ballpark proposal, even if the current scheme basically amounts to a Happy Meal with no meat. So far, lines have been drawn around a downtown site. That's about all. An environmental impact study has not been completed. There is no whiff of how Oakland would begin to pay for the property.

By comparison, San Jose's plan and site are pretty much shovel-ready, pending a successful election. But regardless, both cities are owed an answer on how to proceed before either municipality invests more time and money. That's why my next suggestion is by no means a joke:

It is time to up the ante. It is time to make noise about challenging Major League Baseball's antitrust exemption.

That, after all, is what has allowed Major League Baseball to hold the Bay Area hostage on this issue. No other sport possesses such an exemption, which dates to 1922. It has allowed MLB to act as a monopoly, restricting movement of its teams. The exemption's last legal challenge was in 1972. The U.S. Supreme Court allowed it to stand and ruled that only Congress could overturn the exemption. Maybe we need to think about that.

The process would start with congressional hearings. Reed has never broached that topic with either Rep. Zoe Lofgren or Rep. Mike Honda, the South Bay's congressional delegation.

"We haven't gone down that path," Reed said. "Not that we won't. But if Lew hasn't wanted to do it, we don't want to do it. I think Lew should be steaming angry."

When contacted by phone, Wolff was neither angry nor steaming. Mostly, he sounded weary. At this point, Wolff knows that a new A's ballpark -- anywhere -- realistically could be completed no sooner than 2015, when he would be approaching his 80th birthday. So unless there's a decision soon, the project will essentially belong to his son, Keith, and business partner John Fisher.

Wolff continues to take the high road, however. As is widely known, he and Selig were fraternity brothers at the University of Wisconsin. They remain close. That probably has hurt more than helped the A's ballpark quest.

How so? Selig knows he can keep delaying because Wolff won't rant or rave about it. Wolff knows that Selig has his crisis plate full, what with the ongoing ownership meltdowns regarding the New York Mets and Los Angeles Dodgers. It's why Wolff doesn't want to hear about any antitrust challenge that would create more problems for his friend and the sport.

"I want to be an owner that puts baseball first and my own team second," Wolff said.

(He might want to discuss that philosophy with his Giants counterpart.)

For the record, Wolff did dispel a couple of rumors floating around the baseball universe, one of them being that he and Fisher are fed up and want to unload the A's.

"We're not for sale," Wolff said.

And what about the scuttlebutt that Selig is manipulating a deal to find buyers of the A's to keep the team in Oakland -- so that in turn, Wolff and Fisher can buy the troubled Dodgers at a discount?

"There's nothing to it," Wolff said. "Nothing. I deny it. I've got enough things to worry about without the aggravation of anything involving the Dodgers."

So where does that leave the A's and San Jose?

"The mayor and the City Council have done everything I've asked them to do," said Wolff.

"As long as he's optimistic, I am," Reed said. "I'm still excited about the prospects for a downtown ballpark in San Jose. But I am frustrated."

Can't wait for that photo op.

### **Chin Music: A's reach the halfway point — what's in store from here?**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 6/29/2011 6:55pm

The A's hit the halfway point of the season tonight with game # 81. So right off the bat, I'll throw the question out to you: Do you have optimism that this team can make a second-half run to be a factor in the American League West race? Or is it time to once again start looking down the road to next year? This goes hand in hand with the decision the A's face with the trade deadline approaching. Do they keep this core veteran group together and play for this season, perhaps even add a piece through a trade? Or do they sell off the marketable players they have (think outfielders and/or relievers) and try to get some prospects?

There's a bit of pregame news ...

—Tyson Ross will make a rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday, with another one after that five days later.

—Josh Willingham is doing very well in his recovery from an Achilles injury. In fact, A's manager Bob Melvin said he thought Willingham might be able to be activated tomorrow from the DL were he eligible. As it stands, Sunday is the first day he can return.

—Melvin said he believes he has several players worthy of All-Star consideration (Gio Gonzalez, Grant Balfour, Trevor Cahill, Andrew Bailey), but he said Gonzalez would have to top that list right now. Tough to argue w/him there. All-Star pitchers and reserves will be announced Sunday.

Tonight's lineups:

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

Marlins — Bonifacio 3B, Infante 2B, Sanchez 1B, Ramirez SS, Morrison LF, Stanton RF, Dobbs DH, Buck C, Wise CF; Nolasco RHP.

### **A's shut out by Florida Marlins, 3-0**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's offense is stuck in awful and not showing signs of moving.

The team has scored nine runs over the past seven games, including Wednesday night's 3-0 loss to Florida at the Coliseum. The A's managed all of five hits off the Marlins' Ricky Nolasco, who threw 112 pitches in his first shutout of the year, the second of his career.

It was the ninth time Oakland has been shut out this season, tied for the league lead.

In an effort to reboot the A's offense today, manager Bob Melvin will insert rookie Chris Carter into the lineup at designated hitter, and he'll use Hideki Matsui in left field.

"The anticipation has been building for a start," said Carter, who has had only one at-bat since being recalled last week when Josh Willingham went on the disabled list.

The A's established an Oakland record Wednesday by extending their streak of games with one homer or none to 32, one more than the previous mark set in 1978. Carter, 24, has two minor-league seasons in which he has hit 30-plus homers.

Melvin said after Wednesday's game that it's a tough tightrope to walk between wanting to shake up things when an offense is flat, but also wanting to show the regulars that he has confidence in them.

"The guys we have are the guys we have," he said.

The A's most stirring moments at the plate were long flyballs by Matsui in the first, Kurt Suzuki in the fourth and Cliff Pennington in the sixth. That one required a lunging catch by Mike Stanton in right; Stanton slammed into the wall and rolled into the warning track but held onto the ball.

Based on track records, the A's expect many of their hitters to pick up the pace, but instead, a few are going the opposite way. Suzuki is becoming a real concern after going 0-for-3 to lower his average to .217, including .136 in June; Suzuki will start today, Melvin said.

Suzuki said he feels great in batting practice, "but getting no results, it's frustrating. It can wear on you. But I have two jobs to do and I can't get caught up in results. You have to stay positive."

Suzuki is working on being more relaxed at the plate. "I've been a little too tense," he said. "That comes with not getting the results you want."

Melvin is giving outfielder David DeJesus four games in a row to try to get him going. DeJesus is 0 for his past 13, 1 for his past 25 and is batting .118 in June.

Pennington snapped an 0-for-23 skid with a base hit in the first. The A's loaded the bases against Nolasco that inning but Ryan Sweeney flied out to end the threat. Melvin noted that Pennington and Suzuki both hit the ball hard Wednesday and he believes they're both starting to come out of their funks.

At the midpoint of the season, the A's have the lowest slugging percentage (.338) in the league, the second-lowest batting average (.234) and the third-lowest on-base percentage (.302).

Guillermo Moscoso, pitching to try to stay in the rotation when some injured starters come off the DL in the next two weeks, gave up four hits and three runs in six innings. Only one run was earned because of an error by Pennington at shortstop in the first inning.

Moscoso allowed a two-run homer by Hanley Ramirez in the first and a solo homer by Logan Morrison in the fourth.

Moscoso's ERA stands at 2.51, second best among Oakland starters behind Gio Gonzalez's 2.38 mark. Moscoso struck out a career-high eight.

### **Tyson Ross, Brandon McCarthy close to returning**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Tyson Ross** will make a rehab start at Triple-A Sacramento tonight and **Brandon McCarthy** made what probably was his final rehab start at Class A Stockton on Wednesday evening.

That follows the A's announcement that **Rich Harden** will come off the disabled list Friday, as Oakland - down five starting pitchers - suddenly regains some of its rotation depth.

Ross, who has missed more than five weeks with a left oblique strain, isn't sure how many innings he'll go tonight, but he knows he's expected to make at least one more rehab appearance after this.

That means he could pitch for Oakland the final day before the All-Star break if the A's elect to put Ross back into the rotation right away, a decision that might depend on **Guillermo Moscoso's** performance in the next week-plus and the health of the rest of the rotation.

McCarthy, who could start for Oakland as soon as Monday, gave up one unearned run in six innings against Bakersfield on Wednesday. He allowed four hits, struck out four and did not issue a walk.

McCarthy has been out since May 19 with a stress reaction in his right shoulder.

**Willingham on track:** Manager **Bob Melvin** said that outfielder **Josh Willingham**, the A's cleanup hitter, will return from the DL when eligible Sunday. "I don't have any doubts," Melvin said.

Willingham, who is out with an Achilles tendon strain, did some running Wednesday and it went well, according to Melvin.

**Briefly:** At the midpoint of the season, Oakland is 36-45, and in last place in the AL West, seven games behind division-leading Texas. ... The A's, who made two errors Wednesday, have allowed a major-league-high 44 unearned runs.

### **Leading off**

**Good cause:** Among the celebrity ice-cream scoopers in the Eastside Club from 10:35 a.m. to 12:35 p.m. for today's Root Beer Float Day: Bob Melvin, Andrew Bailey, Gio Gonzalez, Jemile Weeks, Dave Stewart and Vida Blue. The event benefits the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

### **Drumbeat: Tyson Ross nearing return; Willingham on track to come back Sunday**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 6/29/2011 5:50pm

Tyson Ross, out for more than five weeks with an oblique strain, could be back early in July - he's making a rehab start tomorrow at Triple-A Sacramento and then he'll make at least one more rehab start after that.

The question then will be: Does Ross return to Oakland's rotation? Or has Guillermo Moscoso - who is pitching tonight - done enough to stick here? Josh Outman, another fill-in starter, acknowledged the other day that he's likely to get sent out (probably when Brandon McCarthy comes back early next week), and, Outman said, he was only here in the first place because of injuries and he knows the deal.

Moscoso has been mostly very good, though - he has a 2.68 ERA after seven scoreless against Philadelphia last week. Ross is only slightly higher: 2.75. Do the A's stick with Moscoso? Or do they go back to one of their top prospects? Does Moscoso deserve to stay with his performance, or should Ross not lose his spot while injured?

These things have a way of figuring themselves out, as everyone kept saying during the Jemile Weeks/Mark Ellis discussion. Usually when it comes to Oakland's starters, there's another opening in the rotation shortly after the rotation has been filled back up.

Manager Bob Melvin says that outfielder Josh Willingham (Achilles tendon strain) will be ready when eligible to come off the DL on Sunday. And yes, that's when Chris Carter would head back to Sacramento to play every day. Carter might get a start at DH on Saturday against lefty Joe Saunders, though.

Many people believe that Carter should be getting more playing time while here, but there never was any indication he'd get much time. And he is getting a lot from this callup, even without playing - he's watching opposing pitchers and how they approach the A's hitters. He's watching how the A's hitters adjust. He's watching DH Hideki Matsui, a consummate-professional type, and how he goes about his business. He told me he talks to Mark Ellis a lot on the bench, Kurt Suzuki sometimes, too. That might be more valuable than any 10-day stretch at Sacramento. We all know he can hit at the Triple-A level and his fielding is shaky everywhere. What's 10-12 days more there?

*UPDATE, AFTER THIRD INNING: OK, I'm starting to see the appeal of the "well, the rest of the offense isn't doing anything" argument when it comes to Carter. It's not as if this lineup is producing. Could Carter fare worse? Let's see.*

Here's the lineup: Weeks 2B, Penn. SS, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Jackson 1B, Sweeney LF, Suzuki C, DeJesus RF, Sizemore 3B

### **Rooting for A's Ellis, always a class act**

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Mark Ellis' career with the A's seems to be approaching the finish line, and we're guessing it'll end honorably.

Nobody has been on the team longer — Bob Melvin is Ellis' fourth manager — and nobody has demonstrated more professionalism and leadership and all things accompanying a respected veteran who has remained upbeat without complaining or ridiculing even in the lousiest of times.

Ellis could have piled on against Bob Geren, but didn't. Put up a stink over losing his job when injured, but didn't. Whined about not winning a Gold Glove, but didn't. Followed everyone else out of town long ago, but didn't. Instead, he spoke of retiring in an A's uniform even if turnover is an organizational theme. Ellis, 34, has been around long enough to have appeared in three postseasons, beginning in 2002, and now he's relegated to utility status with rookie Jemile Weeks, 10 years younger, the everyday second baseman. Ellis started two of seven games since coming off the disabled list, both at first base, and Melvin is talking about putting him at third for the first time since his rookie year.

Of course, Ellis is open to it, though not his preference, especially heading into free agency.

"No, not at all," he said.

"But it's the situation I'm in.

Jemile is probably the future at second base. If I were hitting .300 with 10 homers and 40 RBIs, it would be tough taking me out of the lineup, playing the defense that I play."

Instead, it's .217 with one homer and 16 RBIs.

"I put myself in this position a little bit," said Ellis, a .265 career hitter. "At the same time, I feel I'm an everyday second baseman. I can help a team, whether it's this team or another team. I still feel I'm able to do that somewhere."

Ellis probably would be OK with being dealt by the July 31 trade deadline, considering his desire to play second base more regularly. If the A's move him, it would be admirable to put him in an environment right for him. Ellis has earned that much.

### **A's come up empty against Marlins' Nolasco**

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Melvin had a feeling his team, which scored just nine runs over its last six games entering Wednesday, would break out offensively in its second matchup against the Marlins.

But Melvin's intuition proved to be wrong, and it was more of the same from Oakland's bats as the A's anemic offense continued to struggle in a 3-0 loss to the Marlins.

"We didn't have much to show for some pretty good at-bats, and we did hit some balls hard, which will add to the frustration," Melvin said. "But you just work through it, you have no choice."

The A's were flustered by Florida's Ricky Nolasco, who pitched a shutout and held the A's to five hits while getting help from some stout defense, including two catches at the wall from right fielder Mike Stanton.

Nolasco's counterpart, Guillermo Moscoso, fresh off a tough-luck no-decision against the Phillies, again ran into some unfortunate luck. Moscoso tossed six innings and gave up just one earned run while striking out a career-high eight and surrendering no walks. But the Marlins managed to score three runs, all of which came on home runs, as he dropped his fourth straight decision.

"The numbers look a little skewed when, one, we don't do anything offensively and, two, when two of the hits he gives up are home runs," Melvin said. "Once again, he battled and pitched well enough to keep you in a ballgame."

Shortstop Hanley Ramirez took Moscoso deep in a first inning that saw the righty throw 25 pitches. After Emilio Bonifacio led off by reaching on a Cliff Pennington error, Ramirez crushed his fifth home run of the year to center field to put the Marlins on top, 2-0.

"It was a mistake," Moscoso said. "I was making the right pitches tonight and was commanding my zone pretty well. The first homer, it was a curveball I left back door. It was a homer. I don't really care, I tried to be focused on the game and go deep into the game."

The A's threatened to cut into the lead in the bottom of the frame when Nolasco loaded the bases by giving up two hits and walking Conor Jackson. But Oakland came away empty-handed after Ryan Sweeney flied out to center field.

The Marlins struck again off Moscoso (2-4) in the fourth when Logan Morrison hit a shot to right field to extend the lead to 3-0.

After the blown opportunity in the first, the A's got only four more runners on base against Nolasco over the next eight innings -- a David DeJesus walk in the second, a seventh-inning single from Sweeney that was washed away by a double play one batter later and hits in each of the final two frames.

Nolasco (5-4) retired 24 of the last 28 batters he faced to help the Marlins improve their dismal June record to 4-23 and snap the A's six-game home winning streak. The righty, who played with injured A's left fielder Josh Willingham when the slugger was still with the Marlins, said he switched up his usual soft-tossing tendencies because he expected Willingham to give the A's a detailed scouting report.

"I threw a lot of fastballs," Nolasco said. "I just tried to stay hard and was able to locate fastballs in and out. Just tried to challenge them and stay aggressive. They swang early, and I was just trying to use that to my advantage and keep getting ground balls. We made some really good defensive plays out there to help us out. I'll take it."

"We just couldn't muster up anything," A's catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "Nolasco, he threw a great game. He kept us off balance, kept the ball off the middle of the plate. Some games you got to tip your hat. But at the plate, as a team, as a whole, we're battling up there. We're having good at-bats, it's just a matter of time before we start clicking."

While Melvin was optimistic entering Wednesday's game, the lack of production didn't do much to break it after the game. However, it did prompt the A's skipper to announce a lineup change heading into Thursday's rubber match. Melvin said rookie Chris Carter will make his first start of the season in the series finale.

The slugger, who was called up from Triple-A Sacramento during the team's recent six-game road trip, will start at designated hitter and Hideki Matsui will shift to left field, a move Melvin hopes will prove to be a catalyst to one of the Majors' worst offenses.



"I don't know if that's a mad-scientist move," Melvin said, "but we have to try to do something to get some production in the middle."

### **Gio leads list of Melvin's potential A's All-Stars**

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Melvin has been at the helm for only 17 games entering Wednesday's contest against the Marlins. But in that time, he has been impressed with what he has seen from some of his players and believes there are a few who are deserving of being named an All-Star come Sunday.

At the top of Melvin's list of potential candidates for the Midsummer Classic is lefty Gio Gonzalez, who one-hit the Marlins over eight innings on Tuesday while striking out nine.

"He certainly has the numbers to be an All-Star," Melvin said. "Certainly his numbers he's put up to this point, especially the ERA, would suggest that he would fit right in."

Gonzalez's 2.38 ERA was tied with Detroit's Justin Verlander for the fourth-best mark in the Majors entering Wednesday. Although Gonzalez had a rough three-game stretch to start June, he has rebounded nicely in his last three outings, giving up a combined three earned runs over 21 innings. Over that span the southpaw has fanned 27 and walked six.

Opponents are hitting just .216 against him, which is the 14th-lowest average in the Majors. Despite the numbers, and the support of his manager, Gonzalez was quick to deflect the praise and possibility of earning his first All-Star nod.

"I just put my head down and do my job, the rest is up to the fans and everyone else," Gonzalez said. "We have plenty of guys on this team that are definitely All-Stars in my opinion."

Among the other contenders in Gonzalez's mind, and on Melvin's list, are setup man Grant Balfour and starter Trevor Cahill.

Balfour was tied for second among American League relievers with four wins before being placed on the disabled list Tuesday with a strained right oblique. In 33 appearances, opponents are hitting just .198 against him, including .136 with runners in scoring position. He has also not allowed a run in nine of his last 10 outings.

Cahill sprinted out to a great start to the season but underwent a seven-game stretch in which he went 0-5 with a 5.67 ERA. He has bounced back with two stellar outings that Melvin said made the former All-Star look "like a guy who has pitched in an All-Star Game."

Although Melvin believes a handful of A's should be considered, it's likely only one will be named an All-Star. And while he won't be making any calls to campaign for them, Melvin said if AL manager Ron Washington calls, he would certainly give a recommendation.

"I'm probably a little biased ... I'm just talking about my guys," Melvin said. "But I think there are several guys who could certainly merit consideration."

### **A's Ross set to start rehab stint on Thursday**

OAKLAND -- A's righty Tyson Ross is set to see his first game action since injuring his left oblique on May 19 against the Twins.

Ross will make his first of at least two rehab starts Thursday for Triple-A Sacramento. The righty said he will likely pitch four or five innings but wasn't completely sure about how long he will be stretched out, something manager Bob Melvin said he would address after Wednesday's game against the Marlins.

Before suffering the injury, Ross was a pleasant surprise for the A's while filling the void in the starting rotation left by the injured Dallas Braden. Ross, who exited eight pitches into his last start, is 3-3 with a 2.75 ERA. Now that his oblique is feeling better, the righty is just ready to get back on the mound.

"There are no more limitations," he said. "I don't feel it anymore and I'm just kind of ready to get back to the normal schedule of things."

After Thursday's start, Ross will make another rehab outing for the River Cats, currently scheduled for Tuesday. Melvin said Ross is tentatively scheduled to make three rehab outings before being activated from the disabled list, but that can change with the All-Star break approaching.

"It's going to be pretty close right there, so I don't know exactly what we're going to do with the third one," Ross said. "We'll see what happens when that comes around."

Ross' progress means the A's are close to seeing three starters return. Right-hander Rich Harden is set to make his debut for the A's on Friday after being sidelined all season with a strained right lat muscle, and righty Brandon McCarthy was scheduled for a rehab start with the Class A Stockton Ports on Wednesday night and could rejoin the rotation next week.

### **A's honor Cal for run to College World Series**

OAKLAND -- The University of California baseball team entered its season with the program facing cancellation as the school's athletic department faced budget cuts.

But thanks to numerous donations, the team survived and staved off a potential final season.

"It was never a slam dunk that they were gone," said A's manager Bob Melvin, who spent time at Cal. "This is the University of California. For me, that's like USC losing their program. We all were embarrassed. Everybody that was part of the program in the past was embarrassed for the situation even to come up."

Through it all, though, the team persevered and made the College World Series for the first time since 1992, becoming the only Pac-10 school to make it to Omaha, Neb., this season.

The A's, who have five members of the club affiliated with Cal, honored the baseball team before Wednesday's game against the Marlins, who have a former Cal player of their own.

Making its first public appearance since being eliminated from the CWS, the team gathered around the pitcher's mound of Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum on Wednesday evening and head coach Dave Esquer threw out the ceremonial first pitch to A's first baseman and former Cal player Conor Jackson.

"They had a great season and they deserve this tribute today," said A's righty Tyson Ross, who also attended Cal. "It was unbelievable. It was a tough year for them, and they really came together as a team and put something special together."

Along with Melvin, Jackson and Ross, assistant athletic trainer Brian Schulman and scouting director Eric Kubota each have ties to the program.

"They showed the baseball world that Cal baseball is here to stay," Melvin said.

### **Worth noting**

- Manager Bob Melvin said left fielder Josh Willingham, who is on the 15-day disabled list with a strained Achilles tendon, ran well on Wednesday and should be ready to go when he is eligible to come off the disabled list on Sunday.

"If we were at Day 15 today, I think potentially he could come off tomorrow," Melvin said. "I don't have any doubts he'll be ready to come off on Sunday."

### **A's duo use social media to promote charities**

#### **Relievers Ziegler, Breslow spread word via Twitter, Facebook**

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Since the advent of social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter, the barrier between athletes and fans has become far easier to break through. Access into players' lives and everyday doings has become the norm.

The A's clubhouse is no exception, with several players active on social networking sites.

Some use the websites to give fans a peek into their everyday lives, like starting pitchers Brett Anderson (@BrettAnderson49 on Twitter) and Brandon McCarthy (@b\_\_mccarthy), who combined have nearly 17,000 online followers. The two are often found sending late-night tweets after games and while on road trips, interacting with fans and also exchanging friendly jabs with each other.

But other players, like relievers Brad Ziegler and Craig Breslow, have found another way to utilize social media: as a marketing tool.

"Obviously I understand that fans are looking to figure out what we do day-to-day and get inside our heads as much as possible," Breslow said. "It's something that started primarily as a way to reach potential charity supporters and I try not to blur those two lines."

While the pair does, to an extent, let fans into their lives, Breslow (@CraigBreslow) and Ziegler (@BradZiegler) each use their Twitter pages mainly to promote their foundations, the Strike 3 Foundation and Pastime for Patriots, respectively.

"Social media and social networking is kind of the next wave of marketing and advertising, so it just made sense," Breslow said.

Ziegler, who has been on Twitter since Jan. 31 of last year, said he decided to use it as a means of promoting his charity because he simply got tired of using social media for personal reasons. He scrubbed his Facebook page of a lot of his personal information and photos and then linked the two pages to make it easier to update both.

"I've made it to where most of what I tweet about is baseball and my foundation," Ziegler said.

According to Ziegler, the move has paid dividends for his foundation, which helps the families of troops serving overseas. The right-handed reliever also hopes social media will help when his foundation launches its new website in a week or two.

As for Breslow, his use of Twitter came after his foundation -- which raises funding for childhood cancer -- already had a website set up. The Yale-educated reliever said some of the people who handle his foundation's web design recommended Twitter to him as a means of raising awareness for the charity.

"We're still gauging the returns," Breslow said. "It's a hard thing to quantify. Unless people are following me on Twitter and writing donations, it's kind of hard. I've definitely increased my network and made some connections.

"Like I said, while it's something that's hard to quantify, it's going to prove to be resourceful for the next couple of years."

### **Marlins can end tough month with series win**

By Jon Star / MLB.com | 6/30/2011 1:24 AM ET

It has been a brutal June for the Marlins, but they enter Thursday's finale against the A's looking to do something they haven't done all month -- win a series. However, if there is anything to expect, it is that this series has proven unpredictable.

The series opened with a 1-0 A's victory followed by a 3-0 Marlins win. It has been a battle of a generally struggling Marlins team against an offensively challenged A's order. Looking to capitalize on the latter will be the Marlins' Chris Volstad, who will attempt to continue his recent, positive run following two strong outings.

Volstad (3-7, 5.42 ERA) has endured a rough season but has allowed just three earned runs over his last 13 2/3 innings, including two earned runs in 6 2/3 innings against Seattle on Saturday. Those results have manager Jack McKeon feeling more confident about his right-hander and his staff in general.

"He had a great game in Seattle," McKeon said. "Our pitchers are pitching great. Since I've been here, 2-1, 2-1, losers. We've got to do something. The pitchers are doing their share. But Volstad, he's pitched two pretty good games his last two times out. I think he's back on track, at least I hope so."

Marlins infielder Greg Dobbs echoed his skipper's sentiment in regards to the lineup needing to pick up the slack to help out the pitching staff.

"We're competing. We're working hard at it," Dobbs said. "I see these guys every day working at it, watching video, talking about pitchers. ... And as long as you have that and don't have guys giving up or cashing in their chips, that's all positive."

What may help Volstad is the lack of thunder coming out of the A's lineup this season. The A's have scored 281 runs (3.4 runs per game), which ranks second to last in the American League, and have hit the fewest home runs (41). Bob Melvin's

club has scored just 10 runs in its last seven games, but the new skipper remains confident that the bats can dig their way out.

"We have some guys who are struggling, and they're not going to continue struggling like that," Melvin said. "I feel like we're going to break out and score multiple runs. It'll happen, just have to stay with it and understand, too, that your pitching is going to keep you in games."

Trevor Cahill will be responsible for keeping the A's in the game. The right-hander has rebounded nicely over his last two starts, earning victories in both by allowing two earned runs over 15 2/3 innings with 13 strikeouts. Before that, Cahill had dropped five consecutive decisions (seven starts) and recorded just two quality starts between May 15 and June 14.

### **Marlins: Morrison breaks out of cold spell**

Logan Morrison had been mired in a very cold stretch before he smacked his 10th home run of the season on Wednesday. Morrison had recorded just four hits in his previous 32 at-bats between June 16-28. Morrison's only RBI during that stretch came on June 18. His home run on Wednesday was his first home run since June 15.

### **Athletics: Ross nearing his return**

Tyson Ross is getting closer to returning to the A's roster. The right-hander, who has been sidelined since May 20 with a strained left oblique, will take the mound for Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday for the first of what is expected to be at least two rehab starts. Ross is expected to pitch about four or five innings but may go longer. The 24-year-old had become a reliable asset in the A's rotation prior to the injury. Ross (3-3, 2.75 ERA) gave up just five earned runs in 26 2/3 innings in the four starts before going down with the injury on May 19.

### **Worth noting**

The Marlins have endured 13 one-run losses in June -- one short of the Major League record for most one-run losses in a single month held by the 1945 Philadelphia Athletics.

### **A's blanked by Marlins**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Bob Melvin thinks his club is on the verge of coming out of its offensive slumber. Just the same, Oakland's manager plans to shake things up a little.

After the Athletics were shut out for the second time in four games and ninth time this season, losing to Florida's Ricky Nolasco 3-0 on Wednesday night, Melvin announced a few changes in his team's lineup.

Rookie Michael Carter, a power hitter in the minors, will make his first start of the season as Oakland's designated hitter for today's season finale against the Marlins while Hideki Matsui will go back to left field.

"I don't know if we consider that a mad scientist move but we have to look to try to do something, get some production in the middle," Melvin said. "It's a good day for him to DH."

At this point, Melvin is willing to try anything.

The A's have gone 32 consecutive days without hitting more than one home run, their longest streak in Oakland history.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki is 4 for 43 over his last 12 games. David DeJesus is in an 0-for-13 slide, while Cliff Pennington snapped an 0-for-23 rut with a single in the first inning Wednesday.

"It is frustrating," said Suzuki, who was hitless in three at-bats. "When you're not getting the results you want, it can wear on you."

The closest the A's came to touching Nolasco came early.

Pennington and Coco Crisp had consecutive one-out singles in the first, moving to second and third on Matsui's flyout. After Conor Jackson walked to load the bases, Ryan Sweeney flied out to center.

Oakland never mounted another serious threat.

A's starter Guillermo Moscoso struck out a season-high eight and gave up four hits in six innings. But his otherwise solid performance was hurt by two pitches hammered by Hanley Ramirez and Logan Morrison.

"Other than two pitches he pitched well again," Melvin said of Moscoso. "The numbers are a little skewed when, one, we don't do anything offensively and two, when two of the hits he gives up are home runs."

Nolasco (4-5) struck out three and walked two for his fifth career complete game. The homers by Ramirez and Morrison off Moscoso (2-4) were the first by Florida in eight days. The Marlins improved to 4-23 in June, by far the worst month in franchise history.

The offensive power came after an unusual team meeting led by interim manager Jack McKeon.

The 80-year-old turned the clubhouse into a classroom for about 15 minutes before batting practice, even using a bat as a prop while he delivered his speech to hitters. He made his players chuckle with tales about former A's owner Charles Finley when McKeon managed Oakland in 1977 and '78 and gave more instruction than motivation.

"We had an educational meeting," McKeon said. "It wasn't one of my usual, 'Go get 'em, babies.' It was educational, how we've got to go about it."

Whatever the reason, the Marlins finally started to swing the bats.

Ramirez's drive in the first inning landed over the 400-foot sign in straightaway center field for his first home run since May 21 and it put Florida ahead 2-0. Morrison added a solo shot to right in the fourth to give the Marlins a three-run lead.

Florida backed Nolasco with some splendid defense.

Mike Stanton made a running catch of Cliff Pennington's soaring shot up against the wall in right field just as his glove slammed into the padding. Second baseman Omar Infante hopped over a broken bat to field a ground ball by Hideki Matsui in the third.

## NOTES

Oakland RHP Tyson Ross (strained left side) will pitch a rehab assignment for Triple-A Sacramento today.

RHP Brandon McCarthy allowed one unearned run and struck out four in six innings in a rehab start for Class-A Stockton.

### **Gutierrez: Melvin sees light, Carter to start at DH**

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - For what it's worth, he put on an awe-inspiring show in batting practice, crushing balls to parts unknown throughout the concrete jungle.

Chris Carter, the power-starved A's top power-hitting prospect, hit one ball that landed halfway up the steps in left field. Another figuratively shook the very foundation of Mount Davis.

Of course, a million times of course, BP means next to nothing when it comes to real-game situations, when you have a nano-second to decide whether to swing or check yourself.

But with the A's offense so sickly of late - again - wouldn't it make sense to at least insert the *threat* of a home run by Carter into the lineup? The A's, after all, have trouble going deep in batting practice.

And after getting shut out for an American League co-leading ninth time this season, and dropping their fifth game in seven outings, this time 3-0 to the woebegone Florida Marlins on Wednesday at the O.co Coliseum, A's interim manager Bob Melvin seemingly has seen the light.

Carter and his black 34-inch, 31.5-ounce Louisville Slugger will start at designated hitter for the A's on Thursday and Hideki Matsui will play left field against Marlins right-hander Chris Volstad. This after Melvin had said Carter would only see action as a pinch-hitter against left-handers and then start at D.H. against a southpaw. Which would not happen until Arizona lefty Joe Saunders takes the mound this weekend.

Something had to give, and at least Melvin has shown some flexibility.

The danger here, though, is thinking Carter is some sort of savior for a last-place team nine games under .500 (36-45) and seven games out of first place at the A's true halfway point of the season.

Rather, he offers something different. Which is something the bland-yet-irritating Oakland offense could use.

"The anticipation's been building," Carter said after the game, his left wrist, which he sprained and caused him to be on the disabled list from April 22 to June 4, heavily wrapped in ice.

"I've been working all week in the cage and staying on top of things."

The more level-headed among you will simmer down and remember Carter's heart-breaking Oakland-era record 0-for-33 start to his major league career last September.

The more excitable will point to his finishing with a .342 average (13 for 38) over his final 13 games.

All of you wonder why Carter was called up in the first place on Thursday if he was just going to marinate in the big league scene and not even be afforded the opportunity to contribute offensively.

Was he that much of a butcher at first base?

He last played on Thursday, entering the game at New York's CitiField in the sixth inning as part of a double-switch and, after making his major league debut at first base, promptly dropped a foul pop up for an error. He also went 0-for-1 against the Mets that day and has not played since.

It's obvious he will be sent back to Triple-A Sacramento when Josh Willingham, who has 10 of Oakland's 41 home runs, comes off the DL on Sunday.

And still, it's time to give Carter some run. If for no other reason than just, well, because.

"I don't know if we consider that a mad scientist move," Melvin said, in explaining Carter's impending start, "but we have to look to try to do something, get some production in the middle. It's a good day for him to DH"

Especially after the way Marlins starter Ricky Nolasco cruised, at one point sitting down 14 straight A's hitters and 17 of 18.

The A's have scored a woeful nine runs in their last seven games.

They have hit one or fewer home runs in an Oakland-record 32 straight games now.

Before the game, I asked Carter about the risk of rust on his powerful, compact swing. He smiled. He's been asked this question *ad nauseum* since being called up.

"It's definitely different," he said, "I've been playing everyday my entire career. But I'm just happy to be here, so I'll just take it as it comes."

The A's and their homer-starved fans would just as easily take a long ball or two.

### **A's pitchers Ross, McCarthy, Harden healing**

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - A's starter Tyson Ross, who has been on the disabled list since May 20 with a strained left oblique, will make a rehab start at Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday against Tucson. Ross will then make another rehab start for the River Cats on Tuesday at Fresno, he said.

"We're getting close to the All-Star break and me, Mac (Brandon McCarthy) and Rich (Harden) are getting close to coming back," Ross said before the A's interleague game against Florida on Wednesday. "It feels good."

Before straining his side mid-game against Minnesota, Ross had been 3-3 with a 2.75 ERA in nine appearances, six starts, after replacing Dallas Braden in the A's rotation.

McCarthy, meanwhile, pitched a rehab game for Class A Stockton on Wednesday night. The right-hander, on the D.L. since May 19 with a stress reaction in his right scapula, went six innings and gave up one unearned run and four hits. He struck out four and did not walk a batter against Bakersfield in facing 21 hitters.

Harden will make his season debut for the A's on Friday against Arizona.

### **Marlins shutout the A's to even the series**

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post

Oakland, CA – The Florida Marlins ended their twenty-four game losing streak. Their bats came alive behind a pair of home runs and superb pitching from Ricky Nolasco who pitched his second career shutout. The club knew that things would turn around at some point but not this quickly, at least for the Oakland A's who lost 3-0 due to their lack of offense.

Marlins interim manager Jack McKeon had a meeting with his ball club this afternoon with just the hitters only. His focus was to reiterate having fun and letting the game come to them instead of working hard to find the missing offense.

"An educational meeting today to figure out what we need to do better offensively," McKeon said. "Our pitching is fine but this was geared more toward the hitters. They're trying, the effort is there but no runs. This is not a home run hitting team so we have to find a way to have fun out there."

A few errors early by A's shortstop Cliff Pennington proved costly as Emilio Bonifacio hit a ground ball to Pennington who hesitated on the throw to first but was late for the out. Bonifacio stole second after Kurt Suzuki's throw to Cliff for the out but he didn't have control of the ball. Hanley Ramirez followed with a two-run homer on a fly ball to center field and the Marlins took a 2-0 lead top of the first frame.

Nolasco held Oakland to five hits and retired 24 of the last 28 batters he faced behind stellar defense from Florida. In nine innings he gave up no runs, walked two and struck out three. Ricky hadn't won since facing the San Francisco Giants on May 24 when he allowed just one run in 8 1/3 innings for a 5-1 victory.

"I threw a lot of fastballs," said Nolasco. "I just tried to stay hard and was able to locate fastballs in and out. Just tried to challenge them and stay aggressive. They swung early, I was just trying to use that to my advantage and keep getting ground balls."

The A's had a good pace going when both Pennington and Coco Crisp singled back-to-back. Hideki Matsui flew out to right field which advanced Cliff to third. While Conor Jackson was at bat Crisp stole second for his 24th steal this season. Ricky walked Jackson to load the bases but Ryan Sweeney hit a line drive to center field and that ended the inning.

Oakland got hits in the last three innings but could not capitalize them into scoring runs. Sweeney singled in the seventh but Suzuki grounded into a double play to end the inning. Jemile Weeks doubled with two outs remaining and Cliff followed flying out to left fielder Logan Morrison to end the eighth. Jackson hit a single in the ninth and that was another lost opportunity when Ryan flew out to center fielder Dewayne Wise to end the game.

"We didn't have to much to show for some pretty good at-bats," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We did hit some balls hard which adds to the frustration but you just work through it, you have no choice."

Guillermo Moscoso pitched six innings, gave up two home runs, four hits, three runs (1 earned), no walks and struck out eight. He dropped his fourth straight decision and had no help from the A's offense. A continuing battle to find hits at the plate remains the biggest challenge for the new manager. But he maintains a positive outlook that the struggle for more runs will pass, if it can happen for the Marlins, Oakland is bound to get on the right track.

"It was a mistake," said Moscoso. "'I was making the right pitches tonight and was commanding my zone pretty well. The first homer, it was a curveball I left back door. It was was a homer, I don't really care, I tried to be focused on the game and go deep into the game."

Notes – Making their first appearance since the College World Series, the University of California's cinderella baseball team was honored at the Coliseum tonight by the Oakland A's prior to the team's interleague game.

Head coach Dave Esquer was recently named the 2011 National Collegiate Baseball Writers Coach of the Year. He was joined by his players for on field introductions as he threw out the first pitch. In one of the remarkable seasons in college baseball history, the Bears battled back from a potential final season due to budget cuts and six elimination games in the postseason to qualify for the school's first College World Series appearance since 1992.

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### **Bats and gloves leave Moscoso hanging out to dry as A's lose to Marlins**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

Almost halfway through the 2011 major-league baseball season, and the Oakland Athletics still have a lot of the problems they had at the beginning of the year.

No offense and no defense.

The A's pitching staff is the only reason they still have a slight chance at making the postseason in 2011, but the organization's inability to fix the glaring weaknesses on this roster continue to plague Oakland, and this was pretty evident in tonight's 3-0 loss to the Florida Marlins.

Once again, the A's bats were silent as the team was shutout for the ninth time this year. Marlins starter Ricky Nolasco -- a decent pitcher, but hardly a great one with his career 4.45 ERA -- held the Oakland hitters to five hits on the night. He wasn't overpowering, either, striking out only three batters while walking two.

But the A's can't hit: they haven't scored an earned run themselves in these two games against the Marlins this week, totalling only nine hits in two games while going 0-for-9 with runners in scoring position.

Yet the team can pitch, and their American League-best team ERA of 3.13 coming into the night will drop, as Oakland starter Guillermo Moscoso took the loss despite walking no one and striking out eight batters in six innings.

However, he gave up three runs -- two unearned -- as the A's defense made two errors behind him, pushing their AL-worst defensive metrics even deeper into the sewer: Oakland has now given up a whopping 44 unearned runs this year.

Think about that for a second.

When you can't score runs yourself and you keep giving away free runs to the opponents, how do you expect to actually win ball games?

Even the worst teams in baseball win one out of three games. And an average team wins half the time.

The A's have been somewhere in between for five years now, with no end in sight to their boring, unsuccessful product. They have tried some new things this year, and that's a credit to the organization.

But the "plan" -- whatever it may be -- isn't working, and it's time to accept that truth.

### **Padres already looking to sell but no decision by A's, Twins, Mets**

Jon Heyman, SI, 6/29/2011

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In a tight, wait-and-see trade market, the San Diego Padres are one of the few potential sellers already engaging in early and serious trade discussions. The Padres have several valuable pieces, and executives who have spoken to them say they are being very aggressive. San Diego has even shown a willingness to at least engage in trade talk even about a star young reliever such as Mike Adams, whose 0.65 WHIP, \$2.5-million salary and inability to become a free agent until after the 2012 season would bring a haul.

Padres people may ultimately decide to keep Adams, but they appear to be taking a very realistic approach to their team and season. People who have spoken to Padres people surmise that they may be concluding that their small-revenue team shouldn't have the bullpen as its focal point and needs more offense (to that end, they recently promoted Anthony Rizzo, the top first-base prospect who came in the trade with the Red Sox for superstar Adrian Gonzalez, and spent their first draft choice on Cory Spangenberg, who has a .566 on-base percentage and .405 batting average for Class-A Eugene (Ore.) after signing for a reasonable \$1.8 million as the No. 10 pick overall in this month's draft).



Even if the Padres trade their top two relievers, they still have Luke Gregerson, their shutdown seventh-inning man whose arbitration eligibility doesn't begin until next season. There are other young stars coming, such as pitchers Casey Kelly, Corey Luebke and Simon Castro, outfielders Jaff Dacker, Reymond Fuentes and Donavan Tate and third baseman James Darnell. "They have a lot of good prospects," one executive who noted their aggressiveness in talks said. "Maybe they think it's time to give them a shot."

The Yankees are one team said to prefer Adams over All-Star closer Heath Bell, and it wouldn't shock anyone if there are several others who feel the same way. As an impending free agent who's likely going to be out of the Padres' price range, Bell is a star who's very likely to go somewhere in trade, and one person familiar with the Padres' talks said they also have a couple surprise entries in the Bell sweepstakes. But one executive with an American League team questioned how much they could get for Bell, saying "He won't bring as much as you think. With a closer, we could be talking about 22 innings." Teams love Adams' arm, and the Yankees favor him over Bell in part because they are also reluctant to try to take another closer with the intention of turning him into a set-up man following the early disastrous returns on the Rafael Soriano signing. The White Sox, Phillies, Cardinals, Rangers and Brewers are among contenders thought to be considering adding relief help, with the Yankees, Rangers and Brewers set at closer and mostly seeking set-up men (the Phillies will be too, once Ryan Madson returns from the disabled list).

The Padres also could trade veteran righthanded starter Aaron Harang, who has a reasonable \$5 million option for 2012, plus reliever Chad Qualls and outfielder Ryan Ludwick, who's drawn interest from the Phillies and the Reds, whose GM, Walt Jocketty, employed him in St. Louis.

Meanwhile, several more teams appear to be in limbo about whether to sell. Here are updates on a few that will have decisions to make:

#### **Oakland A's**

They have been hurt by injuries to a quartet of starting pitchers, and while Dallas Braden is out for the year after shoulder surgery, the team expects Brandon McCarthy, Tyson Ross and Rich Harden back soon, which is delaying any decision on whether to sell, according to people familiar with their thinking. If the A's do sell, they have a trio of outfielders (Josh Willingham, David DeJesus and Coco Crisp) and several relievers (Grant Balfour, Michael Wuertz, Craig Breslow and Brian Fuentes) they could shop.

#### **New York Mets**

Teams seem convinced Carlos Beltran and Francisco Rodriguez will go. But one rival executive said he believes they will keep superstar shortstop Jose Reyes "unless someone bowls them over." The Mets are willing to pay some of the remainder of Beltran's \$18.5 million salary but would expect a decent prospect back for the productive and rejuvenated outfielder. Possibilities for Beltran could include the Tigers, White Sox, Red Sox, Yankees and Rangers (though club president Nolan Ryan downplayed their interest, pointing to Beltran's past knee issue). K-Rod's case could be very intriguing because of his \$17.5 million vesting option for 2012 that kicks in with 55 games finished. That clause will presumably limit Rodriguez's market to teams that would employ him as a set-up man. "Nobody wants to touch that option," one competing executive said.

#### **Minnesota Twins**

After getting hot for a couple weeks after their rough, injury-wracked start, they are back to struggling again in what's shaping up as a confounding season for the perennial contender. However, there is no evidence they will start shopping soon. A competing exec said, "I don't think the Twins will do anything. They have a lot invested economically in this season." If they do, the exec said Michael Cuddyer, a free agent after the year, would be coveted. But as that exec also said he's heard Cuddyer's "the glue" to the clubhouse, and thus even less likely to be dealt.

#### **Around the Majors**

- Four deserving players are running second right now in All-Star balloting. Prince Fielder is second among NL first basemen (to Albert Pujols), Reyes is second among NL shortstops (to Troy Tulowitzki), Asdrubal Cabrera is second among AL shortstops (to Derek Jeter), and Alex Avila is second among AL catchers (to Russell Martin).
- Some are amazed that Frank McCourt continues to try to hold on to the Dodgers in the face of severe financial troubles. One lawyer familiar with the case said, "The guy's desperation and arrogance is going to kill him. Financially, he's desperate. And emotionally, he's desperate." Another person, pointing out McCourt is several hundred million dollars in debt, said that even if McCourt agreed to sell the Dodgers, he might not leave with any money. McCourt bought the franchise for only \$431 million, so he has a substantial IRS bill for capital gains when he does sell.
- The Dodgers have not received one phone call on MVP candidate Matt Kemp, nor do they have any intention whatsoever to trade the multitalented outfielder. The suggestion they might sell star players to help them financially has hit the Internet.

But there is said to be no truth to it. For one, Kemp is making \$7.1 million and thus is not close to one of the bigger creditors listed on McCourt's bankruptcy filing. Manny Ramirez leads among that group at \$22 million with Andruw Jones second, but McCourt even owes millions to Marquis Grissom and Kaz Ishii, all of them Dodgers of yesteryear. The White Sox are also listed as a creditor, with \$3.5 million owed by the Dodgers for the Juan Pierre trade.

- Jonathan Broxton's arm issue could keep him out several more weeks, to the point where some Dodgers people are wondering whether he'll be back this year.
- Johan Santana is doing long toss with no real timetable yet for a return to the Mets. It remains a possibility that he will miss the season.
- The Giants could use help in the middle infield, but one person familiar with their thinking said there wasn't much interest in the Indians' Orlando Cabrera.
- The Reds seem reluctant to trade starting catcher Ramon Hernandez, who's having another fine year with the bat and combining with backup Ryan Hanigan to form one of the best combos in the game. Devin Mesoraco is a big-time catching prospect who's a great hitter. But it would be a stretch to think the Reds would trade a productive starter to make room for an unproven prospect.
- The Rockies seek a starting pitcher and would consider a second baseman or corner outfielder but are in something of a wait-and-see mode. If they wind up as sellers, they would look to move veteran closer Huston Street.

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Eyre, Sogard, Recker named PCL All-Stars**

Sacramento River Cats

River Cats relief pitcher Willie Eyre, catcher Anthony Recker and shortstop Eric Sogard have been selected to represent Sacramento at the 2011 Triple-A All-Star Game on Wednesday, July 13, at Spring Mobile Ballpark (Salt Lake City, Utah), Team and League officials announced today. Thirteen players were elected to the squad by the balloting of the club's field managers and general managers, members of the media, and online fan voting, while 17 were selected by the Pacific Coast League (PCL) office. Full roster is attached.

The Triple-A All-Star Game pits the top prospects of the PCL against the best young stars of the International League (IL). This year's game is the 24th year of the Triple-A tradition. First pitch is set for 6:00 p.m. PDT with the game televised live on MLB Network.

Eyre, who signed as a free agent with Oakland in the fall of 2010, is in his 13th professional season. He ranks fourth in the PCL both in lowest opponent batting average (.203) and walks per innings pitched (12 walks over 43.2 IP) among PCL relievers and ranks first in fewest base runners per innings pitched (45 base runners over 43.2 IP) for PCL relievers. Eyre has also taken his turn in the starting rotation for the River Cats this season; with two starts he currently leads the team's starting rotation with a 3.08 ERA.

Recker, who was selected by the Oakland organization in the 18th round of the 2005 First-Year Player Draft, is currently in his seventh professional season. He is batting .310 with 75 hits (20 doubles, one triple and 12 home runs) and 33 RBI for the River Cats.

Sogard, who was acquired by Oakland in a 2010 trade, is currently in his fifth professional season. He is batting .294 with 83 hits (15 doubles, two triples and four home runs) and 31 RBI for the River Cats.

### **MVP Darnell lofts South to victory**

By Pat Turner / Special to MLB.com

SAN ANTONIO -- Wolff's Stadium's reputation as a pitcher's park remained intact for the most part during Wednesday night's 75th Texas League All-Star Game.

Despite the lack of offense, San Antonio third baseman James Darnell provided enough punch to complement the South pitchers' seven-hit outing by belting a two-run homer en route to a 3-2 victory over the North before a crowd of 6,121.

For Darnell, who also showed his defensive heroics with a clutch snag from left field in the ninth, being part of the All-Star contest on his home field was enough of an honor. Being named Most Valuable Player added a little something extra for the Padres prospect.

"This definitely was better than I thought it would be," Darnell said. "Sometimes you wonder if you're going to be in the Minor Leagues forever. But I have a lot of faith and take it one day at a time. To get this award with all these great players is a big honor. I want to keep working as hard as I can and move up as soon as possible."

The South got on the board in the second when Michael Spina (Midland) opened with a double off Christian Freidrich (Tulsa). He went to third on a single by Corpus Christi's J.D. Martinez to shallow left and scored on a fielder's choice.

The big blow followed an inning later. Jermaine Mitchell (Midland), who went 2-for-2 with a walk, led off with a triple. Darnell lined his two-run homer over the left-field fence one out later.

He came close to ripping a three-run shot in fourth, but the ball sailed foul.

"The home run was great," Darnell said. "I was trying to make contact. I couldn't really tell what kind of pitch it was. I was just trying to do something.

"I really thought I had that second one too. But I lost it, because it was pretty high and I couldn't tell if it carried foul."

Casey Kelly (San Antonio) set the tone with a perfect inning in the first. Martin Perez (Frisco) followed suit in the second, but Jorge Reyes (San Antonio) and Dallas Keuchel (Corpus Christi) had to work out of jams.

Keuchel had the tougher obstacle in the fifth. After a perfect fourth, he gave up a leadoff double to Anthony Seratelli (Northwest Arkansas) and allowed Ben Paulsen (Tulsa) to reach first with a wild pitch on a strikeout. After a walk to Darwin Perez (Arkansas) loaded the bases, the Corpus Christi lefty fanned the next two batters to end the North threat.

"I didn't want to be our first pitcher to give up a run," Keuchel said. "I just tried to bear down and make better pitches. I found my locations with my change-up and curve. It was good to see I'm throwing my curveball for strikes now."

The North finally broke through in the sixth when Matt Adams (Springfield) unloaded a one-out solo home run. And the squad had a chance to do even more damage in the seventh.

With one out, Ryan Jackson (Springfield) doubled and scored on a single by Mike Trout (Arkansas). Scott Beerer (Tulsa) singled, but the runners were stranded as San Antonio reliever Erik Hamren escaped further trouble with a flyout and strikeout.

"My arm felt great, but sometimes things don't go your way," Hamren said. "You can't let it hurt you when you give up hits. You have to keep focusing on what you are doing. After I got the second out, I was pretty confident I would get the next guy."

Darnell's defensive work came in handy in the ninth. After moving from third to left field, Darnell chased down a line drive by Paulsen, making the grab at the wall. Frisco reliever Justin Miller and San Antonio's Brad Brach got the final two outs to seal the victory.

"Plays like that are always fun," Darnell said. "The guy stuck it pretty well, but I was able to get to it. I've been getting some playing time there this year. I still have a lot of work to do out there. Making plays like that definitely make me feel more comfortable there."

### **Ports Keep Streak Alive**

Stockton Ports

Win number 15 came on a warm Wednesday night for the Ports at Banner Island Ballpark, as they faced the Bakersfield Blaze in the third game of a four-game series. With a solid rehab start by Brandon McCarthy, strong defense despite a few errors, and big hits, Stockton secured a close 4-3 victory.

The Ports took an early lead in the top of the first. Second baseman Conner Crumbliss drew a one-out walk and advanced to third on a single to right field by center fielder Michael Choice. A sacrifice fly by catcher Ryan Ortiz would bring Crumbliss in for the first Ports run of the afternoon.

The Blaze got the run back in the top of the second. Third baseman Alex Buchholz led off with a single to center field. Designated hitter Chris Richburg reached on a fielding error by third baseman Leonardo Gil. Center fielder Ryan LaMarre would fly out to right for the first out of the inning before catcher Mark Fleury singled, bringing Buchholz in to score. First baseman Carlos Mendez singled to right, but right fielder Rashun Dixon would throw Richburg out at the plate as he attempted to score.

In the bottom of the second, the Ports would come out ahead again when left fielder Mitch LeVier hit a solo home run to left field; his ninth of the year.

LeVier would not be the only Ports player to hit a solo homer in this game. It would be Choice's turn in the bottom of the fifth, hitting his 17th home run of the season.

In the sixth, it would be shortstop Dusty Coleman trotting around the bases on a solo home run to right field - his tenth of the year - putting the Ports up 4-1.

McCarthy would go six full innings, facing and retiring just three batters in each except for the second. He gave up four hits and just the one unearned run to the Blaze, with no walks and four strike outs. Murphy Smith, who had originally been scheduled to start, would take over in the seventh inning.

Bakersfield got their bats going in the seventh, as Buchholz and Richburg both singled to open the inning, gaining an extra base each on a throwing error by Dixon. LaMarre would single as well on a ball deflected by Coleman. Buchholz would score, and Richburg would try to score as well, but Crumbliss threw him out at the plate. Fleury would also single, but Mendez would ground into an inning-ending double play.

Scott Gaffney would come in to replace Blaze starter Curtis Partch in the eighth, Partch having gone seven innings, giving up four runs on nine hits. Gaffney would give up a hit to Dixon, but then caught him stealing second before retiring LeVier and Coleman to get to the ninth.

In Bakersfield's final at-bats, Buchholz reached with one out on a fielding error by Coleman. Richburg and LaMarre both singled, the second of which brought in Buchholz, making it a 4-3 ballgame. Fleury would come to the plate and make contact, but the Ports would turn their third double play of the night to end the game and continue their streak. McCarthy got the win, Smith the save, and Partch took the loss.

The Ports look to sweep Bakersfield and extend their streak to sixteen tomorrow at 7:05 p.m.

### **Bees Snap Three-Game Skid With Victory**

By Matthew Wheaton

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (2-4) defeated the Kane County Cougars (5-1) by a score of 9-5 in front of 549 fans at Community Field Wednesday night.

Burlington started the scoring in the bottom of the first inning after 3B Tony Thompson (1-3) hit a two-out single. Thompson advanced to second base on a wild pitch and scored on a RBI double from 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-1). RF Douglas Landaeta (2-3) hit a RBI single to right field to put Burlington up 2-0.

After a single to right field by Kane County 3B Cheslor Cuthbert (2-4) to lead off the top of the second inning, CF Brett Eibner (3-4) hit a two-run home run to center field. 2B Angel Franco (2-5) hit a single to left field to drive in RF Geulin Beltre (2-4) to give the Cougars a 3-2 lead.

In the bottom of the fourth inning, the first three hitters walked to load the bases. DH Yordy Cabrera (3-4), SS Wade Kirkland (1-4), C Beau Taylor (1-4) and CF Tyreece House (1-4) all had RBI singles to combine for a 6-3 Burlington lead.

Franco started off the top of the fifth inning with a solo home run to right field to make the score 6-4.

Eibner hit a solo home run in the top of the sixth inning to get the Cougars within one run at 6-5.

Bees 2B Ryan Pineda (2-4) hit a single to lead off the bottom of the seventh inning. Pineda moved to second base after Kirby-Jones drew a walk. Landaeta smacked a three-run home run over the left field wall for a 9-5 Burlington advantage.

Burlington RHP Sean Murphy allowed four runs on nine hits, walked one and struck two in 4.1 innings of work. RHP Zack Thornton (3-3) pitched 2.2 innings, allowed one run on two hits to earn the win. RHP Daniel Tenholder finished the game by throwing the final two innings, striking out four and allowing a hit.

The Bees and the Peoria Chiefs begin a three-game series on Thursday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "Thirsty Thursday" where fans can enjoy 2-for-\$3 specials on Pepsi products and a 2-for-\$4.50 offer on select beer. The fun is sponsored by the Mark Warth Agency and The New Mix 107.3. LHP Eric Jokish (7-2, 3.92) gets the start for Peoria against RHP Nate Long (5-1, 2.13) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at [www.gobees.com](http://www.gobees.com).

### **Vermont 8th Inning Rally For 8-7 Win**

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

NORWICH, CT --- Jordan Tripp's RBI single in the eighth tied the game and he scored later in the inning on a two-out wild pitch as the Vermont Lake Monsters rallied for an 8-7 New York-Penn League victory over the Connecticut Tigers Wednesday night at Dodd Stadium.

Chih-Fang Pan led off the eighth with a walk, stole second base and tied the game 7-7 on Tripp's RBI single to leftfield. A walk and sacrifice bunt put Tripp on third and Xavier Macklin on second with one out, but Macklin was picked off second base for the second out before Tripp scored the go ahead run on a wild pitch from Kevan Hess.

Vermont took a 3-0 lead in the first inning on a Chad Lewis RBI single and Diomedes Lopez two-run single, but the Tigers scored a run in the bottom of the first before a five-run third inning to take a 6-3 lead. The Lake Monsters fought back to tie the game 6-6 with two runs in the fifth and another run in the sixth. Lopez had an RBI double and Sean Jamieson an RBI single in the fifth, while Lewis tied the game in the sixth with an RBI single.

The Lake Monsters, who had made a league-low six errors in the first 10 games, made two crucial errors on Wednesday that led to four unearned runs. Starting pitcher Argenis Paez made a fielding error in the third that led to three of the five runs in the inning being unearned, then first baseman Lewis made an error on a pickoff attempt that led to Jeff Holm scoring from second on a Zach Maggard RBI double to give Connecticut a 7-6 lead in the seventh.

Pan went 3-for-4 with two runs, while Lopez was 2-for-5 with three RBI in a 13-hit attack for the Lake Monster. Macklin added two hits and two runs scored, while Lewis two hits and two RBI for Vermont (7-4). Reliever Nathan Kilcrease (1-0) allowed one unearned run in 1 2/3 innings for the win, while Tanner Peters tossed two scoreless innings for his second save.

Jason King was 2-for-5 with one run and two RBI for Connecticut (5-6), while Fernando Celis (0-1) was charged with the two runs in the eighth inning to take the loss for the Tigers.

The Lake Monsters and Tigers continue the three-game series at Connecticut on Thursday at 7:00 pm before Vermont wraps up its six-game roadtrip with the Tigers on Friday. The Lake Monsters return home to historic Centennial Field for a quick two-game homestand against the Tri-City ValleyCats Saturday at 6:05 pm and Sunday at 1:05 pm.