

A's News Clips, Friday July 1, 2011

A's rally against Marlins falls short

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's rallied in the ninth inning but fell 5-4 to the Florida Marlins on Thursday afternoon at O.co Coliseum.

Coco Crisp homered in the eighth and Kurt Suzuki lined a two-run shot in the ninth that pulled the A's to within a run. But Leo Nunez struck out both Adam Rosales and Jemile Weeks to end the game.

It was too little, too late offensively for the A's, who were blanked over the first six innings and watched the Marlins take a 5-0 lead.

After two straight strong starts, right-hander Trevor Cahill (8-6) gave up five runs and nine hits in just 4 2/3 innings. A four-run fifth did him in.

With the homers from Crisp and Suzuki, the A's did snap an Oakland record of 32 straight games with one homer or less.

A's trade 2B Mark Ellis to Rockies

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's traded second baseman Mark Ellis to the Colorado Rockies on Thursday, parting ways with their longest tenured player in exchange for right-handed reliever Bruce Billings and a player to be named.

Ellis took the podium alongside A's general manager Billy Beane at a hastily called news conference, about 30 minutes before the first pitch of the series finale against Florida at O.co Coliseum. Ellis' eyes were red and watery as he had just received the news from Beane shortly before.

"It's a tough day for me, being here as long as I have," said Ellis, who has been with the A's since 2002. "I had a good relationship with Billy, and everybody. It's a great organization that I've been proud to be a part of for 10 years. It's going to be tough. But there's a time in everybody's life where this stuff happens, you know. This just happens to be my time to move on and go help another organization."

It wasn't a shock that the A's pulled the trigger. Rookie Jemile Weeks made an immediate impact at second base upon being called up June 7, when Ellis was placed on the disabled list with a strained hamstring.

When Ellis was activated from the DL on June 22, the A's stuck with Weeks as the starter and shifted Ellis into a utility role. He made two starts at first base - his first starts there in his career.

With Adam Rosales also on the roster as a capable utility infielder, and the fact Ellis is only signed through this season, it was assumed the A's might seek out a deal for him.

"It's obviously kind of mixed emotions on this, given what Mark has meant to this franchise over the years, not just on the field but off the field," Beane said. "In the same sense, I'm also happy that Mark is going to be going to a place where there's a chance to play every day. A place that's close to his family in Arizona, and to a team with a chance to win."

Colorado began the day 39-41, 6½ games behind the Giants in the National League West. Ellis talked to a Rockies official over the phone and was told he would be their new everyday second baseman.

Billings, 25, has made just one appearance with the Rockies this season. He made 29 appearances with Triple-A Colorado Springs, going 6-2 with a 4.47 ERA.

Beane did not indicate what role Billings would have with Oakland.

Beane declined to comment when asked if a deal with the Giants involving Ellis ever was in the cards.

A's trade displaced 2B Mark Ellis to Rockies

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- Mark Ellis was traded from a team that's 36-46 (seven games out of first place) to a 39-42 team (6 1/2 back) but optimistically spoke of a playoff run.

"For me, it's about helping that ballclub win and winning the NL West," Ellis said Thursday of the deal that sent him from Oakland to Colorado, where he'll play second base and bat second.

He wasn't doing any of that for the A's, which prompted general manager Billy Beane to move his longest-tenured player before the A's fell to the Marlins 5-4. The trade fetched minor-league reliever Bruce Billings and a player to be named later - nobody who would help a possible second-half playoff push.

The deal was more about placing the respected Ellis in a good environment, saving \$1 million (the A's will pay \$2 million of Ellis' remaining \$3 million salary, it was confirmed) and certifying rookie Jemile Weeks as the permanent second baseman.

"It was more about Mark not getting at-bats here, and I think Billy also did him a favor," manager Bob Melvin said. "He wasn't looking for the best deal for Mark; he was looking for a good landing spot for Mark. We'll see what we get in the players we got back."

Beane confirmed the intent, calling the transaction a "unique opportunity for us to put Mark in a great place while that chance existed," adding that Ellis' willingness to play a lesser role to Weeks was a "real testament to the type of person he is and has been here for a decade. You don't really find that too often. He was very selfless."

As Ellis packed his bags and looked forward to a division race with the Rockies, a perennial second-half team, the A's dropped 10 games below .500. Trevor Cahill succumbed to poor command, and the A's trailed 5-0 before hitting two homers - Coco Crisp in the eighth, Kurt Suzuki in the ninth - for the first time since May 24.

Crisp's homer provided Oakland with its first earned run since Sunday.

Are the post-Ellis A's looking to make a playoff run like Ellis believes his new employers are? For now, Melvin simply anticipates the return of left fielder Josh Willingham (Sunday) and pitchers Rich Harden (tonight) and Brandon McCarthy (possibly Monday) will make a difference.

"We're really not looking at the standings right now. We just want to play better first," Melvin said. "The A's have been a second-half team as well, and hopefully that's the case here. That's certainly what we're striving for."

Ellis, 34, is a career .265 hitter who was batting .217 this year and started twice in seven games since coming off the disabled list, both at first base. While shelved, he lost his job to Weeks, who has handled second base adeptly while providing a lift atop the lineup.

"It's hard," said Ellis, who was recommended by Colorado's Jason Giambi, an ex-teammate. "I've had so many good memories at this ballpark with this organization. I had three children here. At the same time, I still see myself an everyday second baseman. Hopefully, Jemile does a great job for this organization for a long time. I hope he has the same opportunity I had."

Weeks and shortstop Cliff Pennington expressed appreciation for Ellis' mentorship, and Weeks called the changing of the guard "a big statement. I feel fortunate to be able to have this job. At the same time, it's got to be business as usual. The team's still trying to get some wins. I've got to help out, and everybody's going to try to fight to make us the No. 1 team out here in the AL West."

Pennington called Ellis "one of the best teammates any of us could have." Suzuki, now the longest-tenured Athletic, said, "It was bound to happen with the way Weeks was playing, but Ellis needs to play every day. It's kind of a tough day. We're losing a friend, teammate and leader."

Billings, 25, was 6-2 with a 4.47 ERA for Triple-A Colorado Springs and appeared in his only big-league game on May 25.

Cold June for Bay Area offenses

Neither team hit the ball very well in June, but the Giants made the most of their runs to produce a winning month. A look at some stats for both teams:

A's

Record 9-17

Runs scored 85

Runs per game 3.3

Home runs 12

Batting avg .222

Strikeouts 162

Walks 81

Times shut out 3

Scored 2 or fewer runs 13

Team ERA 3.47

Giants

Record 17-11

Runs scored 100

Runs per game 3.6

Home runs 14

Batting avg .237

Strikeouts 175

Walks 86

Times shut out 1

Scored 2 or fewer runs 14

Team ERA 3.03

-- The A's had 10 home runs before hitting two Thursday. Three players (Paul Konerko, Carlos Peña and Prince Fielder) hit 10 in June.

-- The Giants were 3-11 when scoring two or fewer runs; 14-0 when scoring three or more.

Where have they gone?

The A's of 2006 were the last to reach the playoffs, and Mark Ellis was the last continuous A's player from that team. Now only one '06 player is with Oakland: Rich Harden. Here are the main 2006 players and their current team or final team.

Batters

250 or more ABs

Player	Now
C Jason Kendall	Royals, '10
1B Nick Swisher	Yankees
1B Dan Johnson	Rays minors
2B Mark Ellis	Rockies
3B Eric Chavez	Yankees DL
SS Bobby Crosby	Pirates, '10
IF Marco Scutaro	Red Sox
OF Mark Kotsay	Brewers
OF Milton Bradley	Mariners, '11
OF Jay Payton	Rockies, '10
OF Bobby Kielty	Red Sox, '07
DH Frank Thomas	A's, '08

Pitchers

45 or more IP

Player	Now
SP Dan Haren	Angels
SP Barry Zito	Giants
SP Joe Blanton	Phillies DL
SP Esteban Loaiza	White Sox, '08

SP Rich Harden A's
SP/RP Kirk Saarloos A's, '08
RP Huston Street Rockies
RP Brad Halsey A's, '06
RP Chad Gaudin Nationals DL
RP Kiko Calero Marlins, '09
RP Justin Duchscherer Orioles DL

Ellis stats

Year	G	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	BA
2002	98	345	58	94	6	35	.272
2003	154	553	78	137	9	52	.248
2004	DNP						
2005	122	434	76	137	13	52	.316
2006	124	441	64	110	11	52	.249
2007	150	583	84	161	19	76	.276
2008	117	442	55	103	12	41	.233
2009	105	377	52	99	10	61	.263
2010	124	436	45	127	5	49	.291
2011	62	217	21	47	1	16	.217
Tot	1056	3828	533	1015	86	434	.265

A's Chris Carter gets bat on track more quickly

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- **Chris Carter** didn't wait 33 at-bats before getting his first hit of 2011.

"Only two at-bats this time," beamed Carter, who set an Oakland record last year for consecutive hitless at-bats to start a career. Thursday, in his second A's game of the season, and first start, he singled in the second inning.

"I'm not trying to hit home runs or doubles," said Carter, who homered three times in his final eight games for Triple-A Sacramento. "I'm trying to hit it through the middle, and whatever happens, happens."

Manager **Bob Melvin** called Carter's at-bats as the designated hitter "encouraging," saying there's a chance he'll be in tonight's lineup, though **Hideki Matsui** will be the DH. Matsui played left Thursday, the first time he played the field in an A's home game.

Clubhouse blaze: Before the game, a fire broke out near **Brian Fuentes'** locker, the result of an overcharged battery for the reliever's remote-control airplane. Several players rushed to put it out, as did **Isao Hirooka** (Matsui's PR guy), equipped with a five-gallon container of drinking water.

In a smoky clubhouse, managing general partner **Lew Wolff** sat at a table, sipped on a root beer float and cracked a couple of jokes about how this could have been his ticket to a new ballpark, playfully chiding his players for extinguishing the flames.

Clubhouse manager **Steve Vucinich** approached Wolff and whispered, "Nobody saw you set that, did they?"

Briefly: Wolff expects to meet with Oakland mayor **Jean Quan**, who has thoughts for a new Oakland ballpark, in the next month but said, "Don't read too much into it." ... Without the departing **Mark Ellis**, the A's had a 24-man roster. Pitcher **Rich Harden** will be activated tonight and make his first start for the A's since July 6, 2008. ... The A's next face the Diamondbacks, meaning Melvin will oppose his old bench coach, **Kirk Gibson**. ... At 9-17, the A's had their worst June since 1986.

A'S LEADING OFF

Worthy: Manager Bob Melvin participated in the annual Root Beer Float Day, which raised more than \$29,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. "It's dear to us," said Melvin, whose 22-year-old daughter, Alexi, has Type 1 diabetes.

Drumbeat: Mark Ellis traded to Rockies

John Shea from the Coliseum, 6/30/2011 12:45pm

Mark Ellis is a Colorado Rockie, and he said his goal is to help the Rockies win the NL West title.

The second baseman is the new double-play partner of Troy Tulowitzki and Rockies' No. 2 hitter after the A's dealt him for reliever Bruce Billings and a player to be named later. The A's are eating most of the remaining \$3 million of Ellis' salary.

Moments after the A's announced the trade, Ellis said his opportunity in Denver isn't about improving his numbers but helping the Rockies win their division.

"It's all about winning ballgames. That's what it's all about. Anyone who knows anything about baseball knows it's a good hitters' ballpark," Ellis said. "For me, it's about helping that ballclub win and winning the NL West. Helping your team win whether you get a hit or score a run or two or go 0-for-4 but make a diving play, that's what it's all about."

Ellis' Oakland career dates to 2002. His lifetime average is .265, but he's hitting just .217 with one homer and 16 RBIs. With Jemile Weeks the everyday second baseman, Ellis was relegated to a utility role after coming off the disabled list, starting just twice in seven games, both at first.

"Looking at Mark's situation going forward, this is a unique opportunity for us to put Mark in a great place while that chance existed," said GM Billy Beane, adding he escalated trade talks once Ellis came off the DL. "To say that Jemile's play hasn't created this to some extent would be disingenuous."

Billings, 25, began the season at Triple-A Colorado Springs and got promoted to the Rockies on May 25. He made his big-league debut two days later and was optioned back to Triple-A the next day. He was 6-2 with a 4.47 ERA at Colorado Springs.

Reflecting on his time in Oakland, Ellis said, "It's hard. I've had so many good memories at this ballpark with this organization. I had three children here. At the same time, I still see myself an everyday second baseman. Hopefully (Weeks) does a great job for this organization for a long time. I hope he has the same opportunity I had in the organization."

A's can't find winning spark against Fish

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- After a small electrical fire broke out in a corner of the A's clubhouse on Thursday morning, there was thought that possibly a greater spark could emerge on the field, where an anemic offense has greatly struggled.

The notion was brought to life, but not until the seventh inning, proving to ultimately be too little too late in a 5-4 defeat to the Marlins that left Oakland staring down its third straight series loss and sixth loss in its last eight games.

It marked the end to a rather tumultuous day for an A's club that said goodbye to veteran Mark Ellis, who was dealt to the Rockies Thursday morning following 10 seasons in Oakland.

"Tough day," Kurt Suzuki said. "Losing doesn't help it. You lose a friend, a teammate, always tough."

Ellis' departure signals what initially surfaced a week ago when he was lifted off the disabled list: Jemile Weeks has gained permanent residency at second base.

"Management's taken care of what they think needs to be taken care of," Weeks said. "I'm just going to go out there and continue doing what I have been and help out in any way possible."

The A's rookie continued his productive ways at the plate on Thursday, collecting two of the club's 10 hits. Joining him in the lineup was fellow prospect Chris Carter, who went 1-for-4 as designated hitter while making his first start of the season.

Though the youngsters fared well, it was the familiar faces that made the most noise, as Coco Crisp and Suzuki each tallied home runs in the late innings to add some life to what was previously a five-run deficit entering the seventh.

Starter Trevor Cahill, though, labored all day and was tagged for all five runs -- four earned -- along with nine hits and three walks with three strikeouts in just 4 2/3 innings.

The righty breezed through the first frame before quickly finding trouble in the second, when he gave up back-to-back doubles to Hanley Ramirez and Logan Morrison. Right fielder David DeJesus fielded Morrison's ball and was charged with a throwing error to second on the play, allowing Ramirez to score.

It was DeJesus' first miscue in 301 games, which represented the longest active streak among all Major League outfielders.

The damage extended greatly in the fifth in the form of four more runs. With two out, Cahill surrendered RBI singles to Ramirez and Morrison and a run-scoring double to John Buck, whose two-bagger culminated in the righty's early departure.

"Any time you come out of the game is tough," Cahill said. "I just try to go out there and at least throw a quality start every time, and so it's frustrating to not even make it through five. I think it's just one of those days I didn't have my best stuff and wasn't able to battle through it."

The shaky showing didn't necessarily defend a theory created just five days prior that his old self had returned. Cahill entered the contest 2-0 with a 1.17 ERA over his past two starts following a five-game losing streak that brought about a 5.67 ERA and .302 opponents' batting average.

"I just wasn't as crisp as I was the last two games," he said.

"We made him throw strikes, and when he threw strikes we hit them," Marlins manager Jack McKeon said. "In the past he's used to getting people chasing his pitches. A few guys did, but most of the guys were being selective and making him throw strikes."

Suzuki, though downplaying Cahill's struggles, seemingly agreed.

"His ball moves way too much, and his fastball was moving a lot, which is sometimes a good thing and sometimes a bad thing," the A's catcher said. "If they swing the bats and are chasing those pitches, it's a good thing, but they were really zoning in and making him throw the ball where they wanted, and it worked out well for them."

The A's, meanwhile, managed seven hits but no earned runs off Florida starter Chris Volstad, who went seven innings. Oakland's first run came in his last frame, as a fielding error by third baseman Jose Lopez paved the way for a run-scoring base hit off the bat of Adam Rosales.

Crisp's solo shot in the seventh narrowed Florida's lead to three, and Suzuki's two-run homer in the ninth further closed the gap before closer Leo Nunez shut the door on a loss that dropped the A's to 10 games below the .500 mark.

"Hopefully some of the runs today and some of the good at-bats will carry over," manager Bob Melvin said. "Obviously, it would have been a great win for us today to get the series, but we're going to start to play a lot better. We're really not looking at the standings right now. We just want to play better first and once we get deeper into the second half -- the A's have been a second-half team, and hopefully that's the case. That's certainly what we're striving for.

A's deal Ellis to Rockies for righty Billings

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The class with which Mark Ellis has exuded during 10 years with the A's was reciprocated by the organization in a bittersweet way on Thursday, when the club traded him to the Rockies to afford him the opportunity at an everyday job at second base.

In parting ways with their longest-tenured player, along with cash considerations to help offset the remaining \$3 million of Ellis' 2011 salary, the A's received right-hander Bruce Billings and a player to be named.

The move was announced less than an hour before Thursday's scheduled contest with the Marlins. Ellis, who spent a chunk of the morning serving Root Beer floats as part of an A's annual charity event, learned of the news just shortly before and was forced to hold back tears behind the podium alongside general manager Billy Beane at a press conference.

"It's a tough day for me, being here as long as I have," an emotional Ellis said. "I had a good relationship with Billy, and everybody. It's a great organization that I've been proud to be a part of for 10 years. It's going to be tough. But there's a time in everybody's life where this stuff happens, you know. This just happens to be my time to move on and go help another organization."

Ellis, 34, was recently relegated to a utility role following a 15-day stint on the disabled list with a hamstring strain -- a time during which rookie Jemile Weeks made his mark in the A's infield and supplanted the notion that the future is now. Ellis made just two starts in seven games thereafter, both at first base.

It was before Ellis was reinstated from the DL when Beane entered conversations with agent Jamie Murphy. All the while, Beane was insistent on not so much acting on his own club's benefit, but rather that of Ellis.

"We think very highly of Mark as a player," Beane said. "I think in looking at Mark's situation going forward, I think this was a unique opportunity for us to put Mark in a great place while that chance existed."

Ellis, who sported No. 14 with class and grace since his arrival from Kansas City in 2001, leaves as Oakland's career leader in games played by a second baseman with 1,021. He was hitting just .217 with one home run and 16 RBIs, but owns a .265 lifetime average and most recently finished the 2010 campaign with a .291 mark.

Ellis is now Troy Tulowitzki's new double-play partner and is expected to slide into the second slot of Colorado's lineup beginning on Friday when the Rockies host the Royals. Colorado entered Thursday with a 39-41 mark and 6 1/2 games behind the Giants in the National League West.

"They want me in there every day to play second base," said Ellis, who spoke to a Colorado executive briefly in the morning. "I'll go in there and just be me and go play, go do something to help the team win every day. That's the way I've looked at my career as a whole -- just do something every day to help the ballclub win."

Rockies general manager Dan O'Dowd called Ellis "a winning player" and noted his interest in him surfaced over the winter. Ellis will join a handful of familiar faces in Colorado, including former A's players Jason Giambi and Huston Street, and will be near his hometown of Rapid City, S.D., along with his current home in Scottsdale, Ariz., he shares with wife, Sarah, and young children Briggs, Adelaide and Dylan.

"Obviously kind of mixed emotions on this, given what Mark has meant to the franchise over the years, not just on the field, but off the field," Beane said. "He's probably been as good of a representative as we've had since I've been here.

"But in the same sense, I'm also happy Mark's going to be going to a place that he's got a chance to play every day, a place that's close to his family in Arizona, and to a team that has a chance to win. At the end of the day, I think this is a great situation for Mark."

Ellis wouldn't rule out a return to the organization he's called home for a decade, be it later in his playing days or after his career has ended, saying that the club is "something that's special to me."

For now, though, the A's move forward with a struggling club that now includes just one member (Cliff Pennington) of the original starting infield on Opening Day three months ago. Moreover, Ellis represented the only player aside from Rich Harden to take part in postseason play with the A's, who last made the playoffs in 2006.

Thus, all of the focus deservedly remained on Ellis during the hastily called presser that lasted not more than 10 minutes. As a result, Beane did not indicate any kind of roll for Billings, who made just one appearance with the Rockies this season. The 25-year-old was 6-2 with a 4.47 ERA at Triple-A Colorado Springs.

A's saddened by Ellis' sudden departure

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Kurt Suzuki learned of the move just minutes before game time. Trevor Cahill wasn't aware of it until the seventh inning, and Jemile Weeks found out sometime in between.

But it didn't matter the time of day. News of Mark Ellis' departure on Thursday -- via a trade to the Rockies -- had a similar effect on each of his teammates, who now look toward the second half of the season without their stalwart veteran that graced the right side of Oakland's infield for a decade.

"I saw him for a brief minute before the game and told him good luck," Suzuki said. "He's definitely going to be missed around here. His leadership qualities, the way he plays the game, and just as a friend. It's a sad day, but good for him. He gets the opportunity to go to Colorado and do his thing and hopefully win."

The transaction came just eight days after Ellis was supplanted at second base by Weeks, whose quick adjustment to the big leagues left Ellis in a utility role that brought about just two starts thereafter, both at first base.

"It was a tough situation the last couple of weeks with Weeks, but he handled it as good as anybody," Cliff Pennington said. "It's sad to see a guy like that leave, because he's a clubhouse leader and one of the best teammates anybody could have."

Even manager Bob Melvin, hired less than a month ago, spent much of his postgame media session following a loss expressing nothing but gratitude and respect for Ellis.

"Today was a difficult day for everybody in the A's organization," the skipper said. "I haven't been here that long, but it was difficult for me. My respect for Mark Ellis came before I even showed up here, let alone when I got to know him here."

"I'm glad Billy sent him to a team where he's going to get a chance to play. I hope they do well and he gets to play for something with the Rockies. We just felt, at this time, it's Weeks' time, and we weren't going to have the at-bats for Mark he deserves."

Ellis' immediate exit leaves Suzuki as the longest-tenured A's player. In the midst of his fifth Major League season, the A's catcher hardly recognizes himself as a player of such status. Neither does Pennington, who assumes the role of Weeks' mentor now and represents the lone member of Oakland's Opening Day infield group.

"That's definitely something that's weird because we thought we had a good infield going into the season, but I like what we have out there right now," he said. "We're playing good, but it can definitely be better. It's a younger infield, so we're going to have to go through our ups and downs, but everyone's working. The ability is there, so we'll keep going."

Weeks' is hardly ignorant to the statement the A's made by dealing away Ellis, whom he deemed "a class act."

"I feel fortunate to be able to have this job," he said. "At the same time, it's gotta be business as usual. The team's still trying to get some wins and I gotta do what I can to help out."

The youngster is a work in progress, much like Pennington was upon his arrival in 2008 when he simply observed Ellis as a way of fostering improvement.

"The biggest thing was watching his routine and learning how he went about his business every day to prepare himself for games," he said. "There's a reason he's as good as he is, especially on defense, cause of how he prepared every day."

"He was one of those guys who led by example, just did everything the right way," Cahill said. "It's sad to see him go, but I think it's a good opportunity for him, so I wish him all the best."

Worth noting

- A small fire broke out in the corner of the A's clubhouse by lefty Brian Fuentes' locker before Thursday's game, and a remote-controlled airplane battery was thought to be the cause. The fire was quickly extinguished.
- By trading mark Ellis on Thursday, the A's opened up a spot on their 25-man roster. Righty Rich Harden, who will make his season debut on Friday, will take that slot, manager Bob Melvin confirmed. In order to make room on the 40-man roster, the A's are likely to transfer Brett Anderson (elbow) to the 60-day disabled list.
- Right fielder David DeJesus committed an error on Logan Morrison's double that allowed Hanley Ramirez to score the game's first run on Thursday. It was DeJesus' first miscue in 301 games, which represented the longest active streak among all Major League outfielders.
- Josh Willingham (Achilles) is expected to start at designated hitter for Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday and Friday before returning to Oakland on Saturday. Barring any setbacks, the A's outfielder will be reinstated from the disabled list when eligible on Sunday.
- Rehabbing hurler Brandon McCarthy, who gave up just one unearned run with four strikeouts in six innings of work for Class A Stockton on Wednesday night, could potentially return to the A's for his next start, scheduled for Monday. Melvin said a decision would likely be made on Friday.
- The A's raised more than \$29,000 at Thursday's 12th annual MUG Root Beer Float Day, with all proceeds benefiting the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Since 2003, the organization has raised nearly \$330,000 through the event.

Melvin set to welcome a familiar foe

By Jesse Sanchez and Adam Berry

Friday will be a reunion of sorts for Oakland manager Bob Melvin, as he will take the field opposite his former club, the D-backs. But more important to Melvin than who he will see in the visitor's dugout is who he will send to the mound for his team: Rich Harden.

Harden will make his first appearance of the season, returning from a strained right lat muscle that has sidelined him all season. The right-hander made two starts with Triple-A Sacramento, striking out 12 over 7 2/3 innings while surrendering three runs.

Given the number of injuries Oakland's pitching staff has suffered this season, getting Harden back on the hill will provide a huge morale boost. And if he can return to the same form he showed when striking out a combined 352 batters from 2008-09, Harden will bolster Oakland's staff even more.

"He has a track record of success when he's healthy. Our job, my job, is to keep him healthy," Melvin said. "So, I won't overextend him on Friday, but whether it's 90 pitches or something along those lines, it'll be nice to have him out there again. For us, it's like making a trade, getting some of these guys back."

Melvin managed the D-backs from 2005-09 and served as the team's bench coach from 2001-02 under then-manager Bob Brenly. As D-backs skipper, Melvin pushed for the hiring of Kirk Gibson as his bench coach in 2007. Last month, Arizona hired him again, this time as a special baseball advisor reporting to team president and CEO Derrick Hall.

Less than a month later, he took over the helm for the Athletics.

"That's who I came up playing for, and the relationship is there. But at the same time, he wants to win, and so do we," D-backs right fielder Justin Upton said. "We are going to go in there and battle, and win every game that we can."

The D-backs will counter Harden with Josh Collmenter, who is looking to get back in the win column after three consecutive losses. The Michigan-born right-hander gave up six runs on 10 hits to the Tigers in a 6-0 loss in his last start. Collmenter's hometown of Homer, Mich., threw him a parade the day before his start.

"It was exciting, seeing all the people lining the walls of the bullpen when I was down there, hearing them from all angles," Collmenter said. "I tried to make sure I kept my routine the same, did everything the same, got on the mound and calmed myself. I felt good out there, it was just a matter of executing some pitches I didn't."

D-backs: Parra swinging a hot bat

- Left fielder Gerardo Parra went 2-for-3 on Wednesday, and has hit safely in 14 of his last 17 games. However, the club believes he is not quite ready to move from his spot at No. 8 in the batting order to the two-hole on a regular basis.

"Obviously, his defense has been outstanding," Gibson said. "'G' is a guy that has a lot of ability, he just needs to learn how to consistently use his skills. He's getting better at adjusting to what they do to him. He's a very talented kid."

- Upton is on a roll at the plate, hitting .412 with 10 doubles, four home runs and 19 RBIs in 30 games since May 29.
- Reliever Aaron Heilman has not allowed a run in seven of his last nine outings.

Athletics: Ellis dealt to Rockies

- A's second baseman Mark Ellis, the club's longest-tenured player, was traded to Colorado on Thursday for right-hander Bruce Billings and a player to be named. The 34-year-old Ellis had been supplanted by the younger Jemile Weeks at second base, and this deal will give Ellis an opportunity to regain an everyday role. That didn't make the move any less emotional for Ellis and the rest of the A's organization, however.

"It's a tough day for me, being here as long as I have," he said. "It's a great organization I've been proud to be a part of for 10 years. It's going to be tough, but it's my time to move on and with another organization."

"Obviously kind of mixed emotions on this, given what Mark has meant to the franchise over the years, not just on the field but off the field," A's general manager Billy Beane added. "He's probably been as good of a representative as we've had since I've been here.

"But in the same sense, I'm also happy Mark's going to be going to a place that he's got a chance to play every day, a place that's close to his family in Arizona, and to a team that has a chance to win. At the end of the day, I think this is a great situation for Mark."

Worth noting

- Arizona starters went 8-8 with a 3.71 ERA in June. The starters are 3-6 with a 3.68 ERA in 14 games at Chase Field in June.
- The A's are 11-18 in one-run games this season, the worst mark in the Majors.
- The D-backs are 9-6 in Interleague Play this season and 99-118 overall. Meanwhile, the A's are 6-9 against the National League in 2011 and 142-121 overall.

A's trade Ellis to Rockies, then lose to Marlins

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — A day that began with the Oakland Athletics saying goodbye to a familiar face ended with an all-too-familiar result.

The A's traded veteran second baseman Mark Ellis shortly before losing for the sixth time in eight games, a 5-4 defeat to Florida on Thursday when Oakland once again failed to score an earned run off a Marlins starter.

Ellis, who came up in 2002, was the longest-tenured player on the A's and the only man on the 25-man roster who was part of the division-winning teams last decade. But with the emergence of rookie Jemile Weeks in recent weeks, general manager Billy Beane dealt him to Colorado for two minor leaguers.

"It was a difficult day for everybody," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's a guy everybody respects. I'm glad Billy sent him to a team who might be playing for something. It would have been hard getting him at-bats here. Billy wasn't necessarily looking for the best deal. He was looking for a good landing spot for Mark."

It was a difficult day on the field as well, with Trevor Cahill (8-6) getting knocked out in the fifth inning and the A's managing just one unearned run in seven innings against Chris Volstad (4-7). Oakland did not score an earned run all series.

The strong start by Volstad helped Florida end a miserable month with consecutive wins for the first time in more than a month. The Marlins had won three of their first 26 games in June before the strong starts by Ricky Nolasco and Volstad gave them their first consecutive victories and first series win since sweeping the Giants across the bay in San Francisco on May 24-26.

"It was a rough one," Volstad said. "Hopefully this is a step forward and we can keep building off of this and go into Texas and keep playing the way we played these last two games."

Nothing went right for the Marlins in between their two trips to the Bay Area as they fell from second place to last, fired hitting coach John Mallee, had manager Edwin Rodriguez resign and had lost 14 straight losses in one-run games before this victory.

That turned around for Jack McKeon's team during the three games against the offensively challenged Athletics.

"There's a little momentum," McKeon said. "They have a good feeling about themselves. All we need to do is win three or four in a row and who knows, maybe it will snowball."

Volstad allowed seven hits and an unearned run after an error by third baseman Jose Lopez in the seventh inning to win his second straight start after a career-long six-game losing streak.

Coco Crisp added a solo homer off Edward Mujica in the eighth inning and Kurt Suzuki hit a two-run shot off Leo Nunez in the ninth to give the A's their first multihomer game since May 24 against Anaheim. Nunez recovered for his 22nd save in 25 chances.

The Marlins struck first with consecutive doubles by Hanley Ramirez and Logan Morrison to open the second inning against Trevor Cahill (8-6). Ramirez held up initially on Morrison's drive to right, but scored when David DeJesus' relay throw to Weeks was low for an error.

There was an odd play in the top of the third inning when Florida had runners on first and third with one out. Omar Infante ran from first on a 3-2 pitch that Gaby Sanchez took for a walk. Suzuki threw to second base anyway, but Weeks cut off the throw and threw out Emilio Bonifacio at home.

Florida then chased Cahill with four runs in a fifth inning that started with a couple of infield hits. Bonifacio led off with a bunt single, stole second and went to third on a sacrifice. With two outs, Ramirez reached on a swinging bunt down the third-base line that Adam Rosales didn't pick up in hopes it would roll foul. The ball died inches from the foul line, giving Ramirez an RBI single.

That started a run of four straight hits with Morrison knocking in a run with an RBI single and Buck ending Cahill's day with his two-run double to center field.

Cahill allowed five runs — four earned — and nine hits in 4 2-3 innings, marking the third time in five starts that he has failed to make it through five innings.

"My stuff wasn't as sharp," Cahill said. "The first two times through the lineup I was able to keep the damage to a minimum but the third time around was tough. I didn't have anything to show them. Everything was not as sharp."

NOTES: The error by DeJesus ended a streak of 301 straight games without an error, the longest active streak for an outfielder. ... Hideki Matsui started in LF for his first appearance in the outfield in an AL park this season. ... The A's raised more than \$29,000 for juvenile diabetes research through their annual root beer float day.

Gutierrez: Ellis trade to Colorado is a win-win

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - They both sat at the dais with red, watery eyes, taking deep, measured breaths before answering questions, and you would have sworn you heard Boyz II Men crooning in the background.

It's so hard, to say goodbye, to yesterday?

Billy Beane and Mark Ellis were taking about Thursday morning's trade that sent the best second baseman in the American League to have never won a Gold Glove to Colorado with cash considerations for right-hander Bruce Billings and the ubiquitous player to be named later.

It was emotional, and it should have been. And when the tears dry, it should be seen as a celebration, of sorts. Because while it is obvious Jemile Weeks is no longer Ellis' heir apparent - he is the A's now and their future - the A's did right by Ellis, the consummate professional, by sending him to a relative contender to be an everyday second baseman again. His .994 fielding percentage this season ranked second in the American League.

He will be reinvigorated by the change of scenery - he was hitting a career-low .217, 48 points below his career average - and Weeks does not have to look over his shoulder and can concentrate on being the most electric and dynamic position-playing A's rookie since Nick Swisher.

The A's also cleared about \$1 million in the transaction as they basically sent Ellis and \$2 million of the approximate remaining \$3 million of his \$6 million contract to Colorado, which has former A's teammates in Huston Street, Jason Giambi and Carlos Gonzalez waiting with open arms to greet the second baseman with the second-best fielding percentage (.990) in Major League history.

But perhaps the best part - the A's basically thumbed their nose at the cross-Bay Giants in sending Ellis to Denver to pair with shortstop Troy Tulowitzki up the middle and threaten the defending World Series champs.

Really, the trade is a win-win for all involved.

"This is a unique opportunity for us to put Mark in a great place while that chance existed," Beane said.

The A's general manager also said it would be "disingenuous" to say the arrival of Weeks did not play a part in hastening the trade while acknowledging that trade talks began to heat up as Ellis, on the disabled list with a strained right hamstring, prepared to come off the D.L. on June 22. He had only started two games since, both at first base.

The future was clearing. But where would the 34-year-old Ellis land?

Beane, though, would not say if the Giants, purportedly in need of a second baseman with Freddy Sanchez injured, were involved in any discussions. Instead, he invited the media to do some "investigative reporting."

Better yet, it saves Oakland fans from the stomach-turning unthinkable - seeing Ellis, the heretofore longest-tenured A's player, in orange and black.

"I've had three children here, so many great memories here," said a choked-up Ellis. "It's hard (to leave). It's definitely hard, but I have to look at this as an opportunity.

"I still see myself as an everyday second baseman, and this is an opportunity to go and do that."

From the moment he arrived as a minor leaguer in the Johnny Damon trade of 2001 and took the big league job away from Frank Menechino a year later, Ellis has bled green and gold. He was the voice of reason in the oft-frat boy clubhouse and while Ellis did not necessarily shy away from the spotlight, he never sought it, either.

Now, Rich Harden is the lone A's player remaining from the team that appeared in the 2006 American League Championship Series. And even he comes with a caveat as he was traded away in 2008 and returned this offseason as a free agent.

Ellis' last act in the A's uniform? Scooping up root beer floats for charity *after* being told he was traded and no longer with the club.

"I love this organization," he said, "and it's something that's special for me."

The feeling from long-suffering A's fans is, no doubt, mutual.

Marlins rough up Cahill as offense can't come back in A's ugly loss to Florida

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- Well, when the Oakland Athletics can't pitch, they're not going to win.

Because they can't hit or field much, either, let alone win one-run ball games.

The [A's lost 5-4 to the Florida Marlins today](#), as they made two more errors in the field and finished this three-game series with five runs scored total -- two of them unearned gifts from the Florida defense, including their first run today, and three of them in the last two innings as a comeback fell just short in the ninth inning against Marlins closer Leo Nunez.

Oakland starter Trevor Cahill gave up four, two-out runs in the fifth inning to bury his teammates in this one, and the A's hitters couldn't do anything against Marlins starter Chris Volstad -- who came into the game with a 5.42 ERA but looked like Cy Young against Oakland nonetheless.

And for the second year in a row, a terrible June (9-17) has buried the A's in the American League West standings. They fought back last year from a ten-win June to finish at .500 for the year, but that'll be a tough task this year with this team's tremendous problems at the plate and in the field.

With their vanishing bat act for most of the past week-plus, the A's have now scored just 13 runs total in their last eight games, losing six of them. And with their slippery gloves, Oakland has made an AL-worst 66 errors this year and surrendered another AL-worst 45 unearned runs in the process.

So when Cahill felt he needed to be perfect today to win, the pressure got to him. Despite winning his last three interleague starts with relative ease (only two earned runs in those three starts), the A's top starter for the past year imploded today.

The Marlins ripped him for nine hits in only 4 2/3 innings, as their four-run burst in the fifth chased Cahill from the game.

And Volstad held Oakland's hitters in check easily, although hardly in dominant fashion: he didn't walk or strikeout a single batter through the first five innings, for example. Volstad scattered seven hits throughout the afternoon and induced three double plays to get out jams. The unearned run scored by the A's came on his watch, while Coco Crisp's eighth-inning home run was off Marlins reliever Edward Mujica.

Kurt Suzuki's two-run shot in the ninth got the A's to within a run, but Jemile Weeks struck out to end the game.

So the A's fall to 36-46 after 82 games, just over half the season -- including a crippling 11-18 record in one-run games.

We all know what the team is and what it is not. The question now becomes what is general manager Billy Beane going to do about it.

[Oakland traded veteran Mark Ellis before the game](#), and other veterans with perceived value could follow if the A's want to be sellers. Yet if the team wants to buy some offense, they could make a run in the weak AL West with their pitching staff.

But the team needs to decide now which direction they're heading (and that is not a "leaving town" pun, either).

That seems to be a reach considering the organization's seemingly rudderless leadership over the past five seasons since Lew Wolff bought the team.

Additional note: The A's raised over \$29,000 at today's 12th Annual A's MUG Root Beer Float Day with all proceeds benefiting the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Since 2003, the organization has raised over \$329,000 for Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation through MUG Root Beer Float Day.

A's players, coaches and broadcasters, along with Bay Area radio and television personalities and local newspaper reporters served MUG Root Beer and Orange Crush floats in the Eastside Club this morning. Proceeds were raised through the sale of floats, tips given in exchange for autographs and pictures with the celebrity scoopers, the sale of autographed mugs and a silent auction of sports memorabilia.

Oakland trades Ellis to Colorado for minor-league pitcher and player to be named

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- The Oakland Athletics have traded second baseman Mark Ellis and cash considerations to the Colorado Rockies for minor-league pitcher Bruce Billings and a player to be named later.

The team made the announcement at 11:50 am today as the A's prepare to take on the Florida Marlins in the third game of a three-game series.

Ellis has played his entire major-league career with Oakland, starting in 2002. He hit .265 with 86 home runs and 434 RBI in 1056 games for the A's. This year, however, he's been injured and struggled to post only a .217 batting average in 62 games.

Recently, he lost his starting job at second base to rookie Jemile Weeks.

Billings has posted a 36-31 record for the Colorado organization in five minor-league seasons. His 3.80 ERA in 499 1/3 innings also includes 503 strikeouts and 161 walks.

He made his MLB debut for the Rockies in May and was sent back down to Triple-A Colorado Springs after one appearance against the St. Louis Cardinals.

As for the A's and Ellis, he departs the organization as the Oakland career leader in games played by a second baseman (1021). He is also eighth on the Oakland career lists with 204 doubles and 22 triples, respectively.

Also, Ellis' .990 career fielding percentage at second base is the second-highest in major-league history.

There was recent speculation the A's could trade Ellis to the San Francisco Giants, but the two Bay Area teams haven't made a trade in years -- and that remains the case still, obviously.

For the Rockies, Ellis fills a major hole in their infield, and it enables Colorado to keep Ty Wigginton at third base as well, solidifying their lineup.

A's need to own the daytime like they did in 2010

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- The Oakland Athletics certainly have been a better team in day games in 2011 than they have been in night games.

But they're still not as good under the sun as they were in 2010, when they led the American League in daytime winning percentage (.625).

The A's currently are playing .500 ball in day games this season (15-15), and they have a chance to move higher in that category today when they take on the Florida Marlins in the rubber match of the three-game, interleague series at the Overstock.com Coliseum.

The Marlins haven't won consecutive games since May 25-26, so after Florida's 3-0 win last night over Oakland, the A's have to like their chances today -- especially since the Marlins are only 6-14 in games played in the daylight.

The pitching matchup also favors the A's, as Trevor Cahill (8-5, 3.09) takes the mound for Oakland against Florida's Chris Volstad (3-7, 5.42).

For Cahill to win his third straight, though, the A's hitters need to show up against Volstad. Oakland has scored a single run -- unearned -- in two games against the Marlins this week. Totaling just nine hits, the A's batting order needs to wake up in the sunshine to earn the win today.

Chris Carter gets his first start of the season as the designated hitter Thursday, which might spark Oakland's lineup a bit. Carter led the minor leagues in total bases in both 2008 and 2009, and he probably possesses the most pure power on the A's major-league roster right now.

To make room for Carter as the DH, Hideki Matsui will play in left field today. Matsui played in the field for five games last week on the road in New York and Philadelphia, his first fielding action this year. He went 4-for-18 in those NL road games.

A's lose a player and the series

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post

Oakland, CA – An emotional day for the A's as they lost a player that has been a staple to the organization for the past ten years. Mark Ellis was not only a veteran amongst the team but a friend who will be truly missed, he was traded to the Colorado Rockies.

"It's not something I expected especially since I've never been traded," Ellis said. "You see it happen to other players but never did I think it would happen to me, maybe just a thought."

Oakland suffered another 5-4 loss to the Florida Marlins who took the series. They rallied back in the ninth inning but failed again in overcoming the odds against an offense that dominated the game early.

Both Hanley Ramirez and Logan Morrison led with back-to-back doubles in the second. David DeJesus fielded Morrison's ball and was charged with a throwing error to second on the play allowing Ramirez to score which gave the Marlins a 1-0 lead.

"Any time you come out of the game is tough," said Trevor Cahill. "I just try to go out there and at least throw a quality start every time. It's frustrating to not make it through five innings. I think it's just one of those days I didn't have my best stuff and wasn't able to battle through it."

Cahill entered the contest 2-0 with an ERA 1.17 over the past two starts following a five-game losing streak. But today he lacked control and command on the mound. Trevor allowed nine hits, five runs (four earned), three walks and struck out three in 4 2/3 innings.

"We made him throw strikes and when he threw strikes we hit them," Marlins interim manager Jack McKeon said. "In the past he's used to getting people chasing his pitches, a few guys did but most of the guys were being selective and making him throw strikes."

Florida surged in the fifth frame when they scored four runs off the A's righty. Emilio Bonifacio led off the inning with a bunt single before stealing second base. That play left both Adam Rosales and Trevor confused as they both assumed the ball was a foul. Morrison's RBI single brought in Ramirez. John Buck's 2-RBI double added two more runs from Logan and Mike Stanton who notched his first hit of the series.

A's manager Bob Melvin had no choice to pull Cahill after a poor start. The bullpen took over and did their best to slow down Florida but needed the offense to get them back into the game.

"Obviously, it would have been a great win for us to get the series," said Melvin. "We're really not looking at the standing now, we're going to start playing better. The A's have been a second-half team and hopefully that's the case, that's certainly what we're striving for."

Oakland's offense came alive in the eighth when Coco Crisp hit a solo shot to right field. Kurt Suzuki's two-run homer in the ninth cut the lead to one but closer Leo Nunez ended all hope when he struck out Rosales to end the game.

"Tough day," said Suzuki. "Losing doesn't help it, you lose a friend, a teammate, always tough."

The A's fall 10 games below the .500 mark and continue to seek ways to turn things around. They are 1-1 on this nine-game homestand against the Marlins with upcoming games facing Arizona and Seattle. Their season-high six-game home winning streak was snapped last night.

Notes – The Oakland A's raised over \$29,000 at today's Mug Root Beer Float Day. All proceeds benefit the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund. Since 2003, the A's have raised over \$329,000 for this event.

A's players, coaches, broadcasters, along with Bay Area radio and television personalities and local newspaper reporters serve MUG Root Beer floats in the Eastside Club prior to the game. Proceeds were raised through the sale of the floats, tips given in exchange for autographs and pictures with the celebrity scoopers, the sale of the autograph mugs and a silent auction of sports memorabilia.

MUG Root Beer float is sponsored by Pepsi. The ice cream for the event is donated by Dreyer's.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Tucson strikes early as Sacramento falls

By Mike Morris / Sacramento River Cats

With two Oakland A's added to the Sacramento roster Thursday, it may be getting hard for River Cats' fans to recognize their team. Even with the influx of talent, however, it was Tucson who came away with the 12-7 win.

It's not every day that you see a Triple-A lineup with eight of 10 starters having Major League experience.

Tyson Ross and Josh Willingham, both on Major League rehab assignments, were added to the crop of A's players Thursday night, playing beside recent A's players Daric Barton, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Andy LaRoche.

Ross struggled in his first rehabilitation start, allowing four runs and six hits over 2.0 innings. The start was his first since May 19 with Oakland when he injured his right oblique against Minnesota. Ross pitched well in Oakland before the injury, having a 3-3 record and 2.75 ERA.

Although he struck out two in the first inning, Ross walked one and allowed four hits in the inning. A lead-off single by Everth Cabrera got things going for Tucson. His single was followed by three hits in a row, including a Matt Clark double that gave Tucson the early 3-0 lead.

Seven River Cats crossed the plate Thursday, but it wouldn't be enough as four of those runs came after Tucson posted a 12-3 lead through six innings.

Former River Cat Steve Tolleson stood out for Tucson with three hits and three RBIs. The third baseman has been a bright spot in the Tucson lineup, batting .353 since being dealt to the Padres on May 29. Tucson second baseman Logan Forsythe went 4-for-5 with four runs and a walk.

The loss is Sacramento's third in a row, the team's third three-game losing streak this season. The two previous times Sacramento lost three in a row, they bounced back the following week winning five straight from April 14-18 and five of six games from May 21-26.

Sacramento holds a 7.5-game lead in the PCL South Division, and looks to add onto it going into the All-Star break. River Cats left-hander Carlos Hernandez (4-2, 5.22) will face fellow lefty Wade LeBlanc (6-1, 4.93) on Friday night.

The River Cats looking to start the month in a similar fashion to how they started June -- with six straight wins.

Mitchell Bounces Back In A Big Way

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The last time the RockHounds had played at Citibank Ballpark, the Texas League season was still in its first half pennant race ... it was still spring ... and the NFL was locked out (oops ... they're still working on that one).

After a 12-game road trip, and two days for the Texas League All-Star break, the 'Hounds returned home to face the league's hottest team, the Arkansas Travelers. The Travs won the North Division title on the last day of the first half, and went on to win their first six games of the second half, bringing a 7-game streak to "Rocky Town."

The 'Hounds broke a 4-4 tie in the seventh inning, then added two insurance runs in the eighth, snapping the Travelers' win streak and extending a modest, 3-game streak of their own (the RockHounds won the last two games of their series at San Antonio, handing the Missions just their seventh and eighth home losses in 40 games)..

Jermaine Mitchell went 4-for-4 with a walk, stole two bases, and scored what would be the winning run, coming home on Shane Peterson's single in the seventh.

BATS - Adam Heether had a game-tying, 2-run single in the fifth, and has now hit in 13-of-14 games. He also had the game-winning RBI in Monday's 2-1 win at San Antonio.

Jermaine Mitchell had entered Monday's game at San Antonio mired in an 8-for-48 slump, but busted out with a 3-hit game, then went 2-for-2 in the Texas league All-Star game and 4-for-4 Thursday night at Citibank Ballpark. While the All-Star Game stats don't count, Jermaine is 7-for-his-last-9 in regular season play.

ARMS - Paul Smyth, Trey Barham and Jared Lansford combined to pitch the last 3.0 innings without allowing a run, backing a solid start by former Major Leaguer Jason Bergmann. Bergmann, in just his sixth start since last August, went 6.0 innings, allowing five hits and three walks, four runs (three earned) with three strikeouts,

PERSONNEL - Catcher Petey Paramore has been re-assigned to (A+ Stockton) and Anthony Capra has been assigned to extended spring training at the A's Arizona facility.

Mickey Storey has been traded from the A's to the Houston Astros ... he will report to (AAA) Oklahoma (managed by former RockHounds manager Tony DeFrancesco). Our very best wishes to Mickey!

Catcher Ryan Ortiz and pitcher A.J. Griffin have been promoted from (A+) Stockton and joined the club Thursday night, Griffin will be Friday night's starting pitcher for the RockHounds.

ROCKY TOWN - The RockHounds are home through Independence Day Weekend, hosting the Arkansas Travelers (Friday and Saturday) and the Springfield Cardinals (Sunday through Tuesday the 5th). The home stand includes Cap Night (Friday, July 1) and three fireworks shows. Check out all the details at www.midlandrockhounds.org.

Streak to Sixteen with 4-3 Win

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports gave their fans a bit of a scare late in the evening, but were able to pull out their sixteenth consecutive win, sweeping the Blaze out of Stockton by a final score of 4-3. New Ports starter James Simmons pitched a strong debut in Stockton to help the Boys of Banner Island keep the streak alive.

The Ports got on the board first in the third, thanks to a long ball off the end of Anthony Aliotti's bat. With Conner Crumbliss on first, courtesy of the 56th walk of the season, and two outs already recorded in the inning, Aliotti stepped up to the plate. Aliotti promptly drilled a shot over the left field wall into the Ports bullpen to put Stockton up 2-0.

The next inning, Michael Gilmartin added to the Ports lead. With two outs recorded in the inning, the Ports pulled out a two-out, two-run rally. Dusty Coleman started the rally off with a single to right center field. Leonardo Gil kept the rally alive by drawing a walk. The Ports were once again the beneficiaries of a Blaze error, as both Coleman and Gil advanced 90 feet on a wild pitch by JC Sulbaran. Gilmartin made Sulbaran, and the Blaze, pay, knocking a two-RBI double to right field. That marked the end of the game for Sulbaran, as Tzu-Kai Chu came in to pitch for the Blaze, getting them out of the inning.

Ports starter James Simmons pitched 3.1 shutout innings for the Ports, giving up just one hit to Chris Richburg in the second inning. Simmons, who was a first round draft pick of the A's in 2007, had missed the entire 2010 season after an injury sidelined him in 2009. While Simmons did not earn the win in his debut, he made a strong first impression with the Stockton fans, helping propel them to the win.

The Ports ran into some trouble after Simmons left the game. Reliever Scott Deal pitched two solid innings, working out of a jam in the fifth, and shutting the Blaze down in the sixth. Unfortunately for Deal, the Blaze would not be shut out, thanks to a solo shot by Ryan La Marre off Deal in the seventh. That would end the evening for Deal, who, despite giving up the homer, earned the win for the Ports.

Mike Benacka came in to attempt to get out of the inning without any more damage. Unfortunately, this would not be the case as he gave up another solo shot to the very first batter he faced. The Chris Richburg blast would pull the Blaze within two, before Benacka got a strikeout and a groundout to end the inning.

The Blaze would give the fans a scare in the eighth, with Jose Guzman on the mound for the Ports. A strange hit by Jose Gualdrón and a fielding error by Gilmartin spelled trouble for the Ports early in the inning, which was only made worse by a Josh Fellhauer double, bringing in the final run of the evening. Guzman quickly worked out of the jam, getting Brodie Greene to ground out and Alex Buchholz to fly out to end the inning.

Andrew Carignan came in to close out the game for the Ports, making quick work of the side. Carignan got La Marre to line out to Aliotti before getting both Richburg and Carlos Mendez to ground out for a 1-2-3 inning, marking Carignan's fifth save for the Ports.

The Ports look to extend their win streak to 17 as the San Jose Giants come to town for a three game win streak on Friday with Rob Gilliam taking the mound for Stockton at 7:05 p.m.

Kirby-Jones 7th Inning Homer Leads Bees Past Chiefs

By Matthew Wheaton, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (3-4) used a three-run seventh inning to defeat the Peoria Chiefs (2-5) by a score of 4-2 before 565 fans at Community Field Thursday night.

Peoria started the scoring in the top of the second inning after DH Richard Jones (0-2) drew a lead-off walk. Jones advanced to second base on a single to left field from C Micah Gibbs (1-4). A single by 1B Ryan Cuneo (1-2) moved Jones over to third base. An RBI single from LF Anthony Giansanti (2-4) plated Jones. Cuneo scored from second base on an RBI single from SS Arismendy Alcantara (2-3) to put the Chiefs up 2-0.

In the bottom of the seventh inning, Bees 3B Tony Thompson (0-3) drew a lead-off walk and 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (2-3) hit a two-run home run to left field. RF Douglas Landaeta (0-3) reached third base on a throwing error by Alcantara. With CF Jose Rivero (0-3) at the plate, Peoria RHP Daniel Berlind (0-1) threw a wild pitch and Landaeta scored for a 3-2 Burlington lead.

Burlington C Beau Taylor (1-3) hit a triple to lead off the bottom of the eighth inning and later scored on a sacrifice fly from 2B Ryan Pineda (0-3) to make the score 4-2.

Bees RHP Nate Long allowed two runs on five hits, walked three and struck out four in six innings of work in a no decision. LHP Max Peterson earned the win by throwing the final three innings, striking out five and allowing two hits.

BEES BUZZINGS: OF Jose Rivero came off the disabled list and OF Tyreece House was transferred to the disabled list before Thursday night's game.

The Bees and the Chiefs play game two of their three-game series Friday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "Big Fun Friday" Fans can enjoy 16 oz. cans of Bud Light and Busch Light for just \$3.25 sponsored by Budweiser, Today's Hit Music Hot 97.3, and Your Hometown Station, Big Country 103.1. Fans can also enjoy a fireworks show after the game sponsored by Catfish Bend Casino and J&M Displays. RHP Hayden Simpson (1-5, 4.98) gets the start for Peoria against RHP Josh Bowman (5-2, 3.06) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

Lake Monsters Win Third Straight Game

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

NORWICH, CT --- Jordan Tripp hit a three-run homer to give Vermont an early lead as the Lake Monsters won their third straight game with a 6-3 victory over the Connecticut Tigers on Thursday night in New York-Penn League action at Dodd Stadium.

With Vermont trailing by a run in the third, Tripp hit a line drive homer to left field to score Aaron Shipman and Chad Oberacker for a 4-2 Lake Monsters lead. It was Tripp's team-leading third home run of the year and his second in the last three games.

P.J. Polk got one the Tigers back within a run with a solo homer off Vermont starter J.C. Menna (2-0), who allowed three runs (two earned) on six hits with two walks and six strikeouts over five-plus innings for the victory.

The Lake Monsters added a pair of insurance runs in the sixth on an RBI triple from Oberacker, who then scored on a Chih-Fang Pan RBI single for a three-run lead. Ryan Hughes tossed two scoreless innings of relief, while Jeff Urlaub picked up his first save of the season with four strikeouts in two hitless innings.

Oberacker, Chad Lewis and Xavier Macklin each had two hits for Vermont, while Shipman walked three times, scored twice and had three stolen bases. Chad Wright and Dean Green both had two hits for Connecticut (5-7), which has now lost all four game completed against the Lake Monsters.

Tiger starter Brennan Smith (1-1), who gave up one hit in four scoreless innings at Vermont on June 25th in a game that was suspended in the fifth inning, took the loss on Thursday allowing six runs (five earned) on seven hits over 5 2/3 innings.

The win improved Vermont's record to 8-4 on the season and was the 599th victory all-time for the Lake Monsters in the franchise's 18-year history. Vermont will go for win 600 on Friday as they wrap up a six-game roadtrip at Connecticut starting at 7:05 pm. 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.