

Oakland A's beat Arizona Diamondbacks as Rich Harden wins his season debut

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The tease began Friday night for A's fans.

Rich Harden showed in his 2011 debut what he is capable of in a 5-4 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks.

His fastball had zip. His breaking pitches fell through a trap door.

And while a breakout night from A's hitters tickled the 12,216 fans on hand, Harden's showing left one wondering what impact the right-hander might make if only he can stay healthy.

Activated from the 60-day disabled list earlier in the day, Harden limited the Diamondbacks to four hits over six innings, striking out six and walking none.

He bagged the victory in his first start as an Athletic since July 6, 2008.

"It was good to get back out there," he said. "I had been looking forward to this for a while."

The win came despite another troubling outing from reliever Brian Fuentes, who served up Kelly Johnson's two-run homer in the eighth that cut Oakland's lead to a run.

But Joey Devine got the final two outs of the eighth, and Andrew Bailey shut the door in the ninth as the A's won the opener of a three-game series.

Harden -- who pitched five-plus seasons with the A's before being traded to the Chicago Cubs on July 8, 2008 -- was signed to a one-year, \$1.5 million contract in December.

In acquiring him, the A's brought back a player whose immense talent has been trumped by numerous injuries throughout his career.

Harden suffered a strained muscle underneath his right arm on the day pitchers and catchers reported to spring camp. He had been sidelined ever since.

But he came out sharp Friday, striking out Johnson and Stephen Drew to start a 1-2-3 first inning. Harden's fastball touched 94 mph, and he used his change-up and split-finger fastball effectively.

"I thought he was really good," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He had discrepancies on his fastball, which made him tough to track."

Harden gave up Wily Mo Pena's homer in the second and allowed his other run in the sixth, with Oakland already leading 5-1.

The A's entered the night having scored just 13 runs in their previous eight games, their fewest over an eight-game span since they scored 12 from June 23-July 1, 1980.

Their offense began in unlikely fashion as Hideki Matsui walked in the fourth and stole second, his first stolen base since Sept. 12, 2007.

"The first baseman wasn't at the bag," Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon. "I was watching the pitcher. He was taking his time to the plate, and I felt I had a chance."

Matsui scored on Ryan Sweeney's two-out bloop single to right.

The A's scored four more off Arizona starter Josh Collmenter (4-5) in the fifth to take control. The rally featured three consecutive two-out, run-scoring hits, including Matsui's two-run double for a 5-1 lead.

Harden was aided by his defense, particularly Coco Crisp's leaping catch at the center-field wall to rob Gerardo Parra in the sixth.

Melvin knew he wouldn't push Harden too hard, so the A's optioned Trystan Magnuson to the minors and recalled Fautino De Los Santos to add a fresh arm to the bullpen.

Harden took the traded Mark Ellis' spot on the 25-man roster. To clear room on the 40-man roster, pitcher Bobby Cramer was designated for assignment.

Melvin got a win in his first game managing against the team he managed from 2005 until his firing in May 2009.

A's update: Kirk Gibson recalls special greetings from A's fans

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Kirk Gibson may have been managing his first game in Oakland on Friday, but the Arizona Diamondbacks skipper obviously has fond memories of the Coliseum.

That's where his Los Angeles Dodgers clinched the 1988 World Series title, a run that Gibson ignited with his legendary homer off Dennis Eckersley to win Game 1 at Dodger Stadium.

Gibson reminisced about the abuse he took from fans in the outfield bleachers at the Coliseum.

"(A's) fans have always been very honest with opponents," Gibson said. "In the end, I kinda got them back."

But he added that as his playing career drew to a close with the Detroit Tigers in 1995, he actually chatted pleasantly with a few of those fans who had heckled him through the years at the Coliseum.

He recalled his favorite chant he heard from A's fans.

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A's manager Bob Melvin, who was playing for the Giants in 1988, was asked his memories of Gibson's homer off Eckersley.

"I think everybody remembers where they were when it happened," Melvin said.

And where was he?

"A bachelor party "... but everybody stopped to watch it."

Melvin said Brandon McCarthy will come off the disabled list and start Monday against Seattle. Guillermo Moscoso, on turn to pitch then, will slide to Wednesday, and the A's will go with a six-man rotation until a starter absolutely has to be sent down, Melvin said.

Their current rotation would be as follows beginning Saturday -- Josh Outman, Gio Gonzalez, McCarthy, Trevor Cahill, Moscoso, Rich Harden.

"We'll make the decisions when we need to make them," Melvin said.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki, now the longest tenured Athletic after Mark Ellis was traded Thursday, moved into Ellis' locker, which is sectioned off by a wall on one side and provides some privacy.

Equipment manager Steve Vucinich approached Suzuki to ask about the switch.

"I consider that the best locker," Vucinich said. "You can avoid the press if you want."

Right fielder David DeJesus' throwing error Thursday snapped his 301-game errorless streak, which was the longest among active major league outfielders.

Chin Music: Harden, Matsui and more from A's 5-4 win over Arizona Diamondbacks

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 7/1/2011 11:32pm

Since I didn't blog pre-game, here's a look at the A's notebook for tomorrow's paper. And a few postgame notes following the A's 5-4 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks ...

-A's manager Bob Melvin thought Rich Harden's effectiveness came from him changing speeds on his fastball, which complemented his changeup and split-fingered fastball. Indeed, Harden wasn't blowing up the radar gun (he topped out at 94 mph), but he was in control during six innings of two-run ball. Hideki Matsui said he remembered Harden dominating with his fastball when facing him in the past. "His command really stood out (Friday)," Matsui said.

-Speaking of Matsui, Melvin credited the veteran with knowing when he had an opportunity to swipe a bag. Arizona first baseman Juan Miranda was playing behind Matsui in the fourth, and Matsui easily stole second base, putting him in position to score on Ryan Sweeney's bloop single. That was Matsui's first steal since Sept. 12, 2007. "That was big for us," Melvin said. "It got us on the board and got momentum back in our dugout."

-Melvin said Chris Carter would draw another start at first base Saturday.

Here's tomorrow's notebook ...

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"We'll make the decisions when we need to make them," Melvin said. "Certainly, with the way guys have pitched, it makes for difficult decisions."

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Cam Inman: Nine headlines for the second half of the baseball season

By Cam Inman, Bay Area News Group

Baseball's midseason offers a time to bestow mythical awards and reflect on an ever-zany first half. But enough about that. Let's scout out the coming months and envision nine headlines, some more realistic than others:

Headline No. 1: Brian Wilson wins National League MVP honors

The pitching-fueled champs wouldn't be in first place without their bearded closer's 24 saves, most in the majors. OK, so he coughed up a game-tying home run Wednesday to set up the Giants' 5-2, 13-inning loss at Chicago. But it doesn't ruin his reputation.

Let's even take Wilson's stature up a notch: Manager Bruce Bochy should select him as the National League's starting pitcher for the All-Star Game. A closer to close out the first inning in the Midsummer Classic? It's unorthodox but not absurd. Three of the past seven National League starters worked only one inning. This way, Bochy won't have to single out a trio of Phillies pitchers worth starting, and he can honor his own bullpen that dominated the Phillies in the 2010 NLCS.

Headline No. 2: Aubrey Huff's homer sends Giants into playoffs

The Giants are poised to defend their National League West title. But they'll need an offensive catalyst. Barring another midseason find from general manager Brian Sabean, they'll need a savvy bat like Huff's to come through for them.

Entering Friday, Huff hadn't hit a home run since belting three on June 2 at St. Louis. But he has five game-winning RBI among their signature, one-run victories. Add a skimpy red thong to the mix again and voila.

Headline No. 3: A's channel 2010 Giants' spirit

The A's posted a 36-45 record through the season's first half. They've fired their manager, Bob Geren, and traded away the franchise's best second baseman ever, Mark Ellis. That doesn't sound like the 2010 Giants. A year ago, however, the Giants were a fourth-place team and 7 1/2 games behind the San Diego Padres' pace. If the A's can reel off, say, 20 consecutive wins, they should make a movie about it. Or we can just wait for Hollywood's release of "Moneyball" in a couple months.

Headline No. 4: Weeks wins Rookie of Year

Playing off Headline No. 3, what if A's call-up Jemile Weeks is the offensive phenom needed to reverse the A's course? What if he isn't distracted by comparisons to Buster Posey's emergence for the 2010 Giants? And what if the A's keep him for nearly a decade like his predecessor at second base, Ellis? What if? What if? What if? The A's should put that moniker on their upper-deck tarps.

Headline No. 5: Baseball allows A's to move

They can go to Dublin, Fremont, Sacramento or even Las Vegas, just not San Jose. Oh, who are we kidding? Baseball commissioner Bud Selig needs another year or two, at least, to review his blue-ribbon panel's report. Or, more bluntly, the A's need to slip an oversized envelope with cash to the Giants to clear that territorial-rights hurdle.

Headline No. 6: Showtime exposes Giants as bad boys

Oh, who are we kidding? The Giants clubhouse isn't a roost filled with egotistical, money-grubbing, philandering knuckleheads. Or is it? The first half of this season certainly has provided enough compelling storylines for the upcoming docu-drama series.

Headline No. 7: Buster Posey walks without limp

Assuming the Giants fail to repeat as champs, May 25 will be the flashpoint of that demise. Posey, their second-year catcher and clean-up hitter, was lost for the season when he sustained a broken fibula in a home-plate collision with the Florida Marlins' Scott Cousins, who hasn't scored a run since then. The Giants' future could very much coincide with Posey's, so his healing process is worth watching as closely as any pennant race.

Headline No. 8: Mark Cuban buys into baseball fraternity

What would be worse for Giants' fans: Seeing Mark Cuban buy the rival Dodgers or nearby A's? He has to be taken more seriously now that his Dallas Mavericks are reigning NBA champs. The Dodgers, A's and a few other clubs need ownerships more committed to winning and spending money to achieve that goal. While A's co-owner Lew Wolff claims his team is not for sale, the Dodgers have filed for bankruptcy. Cuban's cash quickly could turn either last-place club into a contender in those wide-open divisions.

Headline No. 9: Bochy, Sabean pull a Riggelman

It's utterly ridiculous that the Giants merely picked up the 2012 options for Bochy and Sabean rather than award them with long-term contracts after a monumental championship. Then again, Tim Lincecum and Matt Cain are still awaiting (more) financial security, too. Too bad none of them are as peeved at their bosses as Jim Riggelman, who quit June 23 as the Washington Nationals' manager when he couldn't muster a contract extension.

Rich Harden makes victorious return to A's

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Rich Harden made his first start for the A's in nearly three years Friday night at the Coliseum. It only had seemed that long since Oakland's offense clicked as well as it did against Arizona.

Harden limited the Diamondbacks to two runs on four hits in six innings as the A's prevailed 5-4.

"It felt good to get back out there," Harden said. "I've been looking forward to this for a while."

Harden spent the second half of 2008 and all of the '09 season with the Cubs and 2010 with the Rangers. He did not pitch in spring training, going on the disabled list with a strained right shoulder. It was his 10th career trip to the DL, his seventh with Oakland.

After making two rehab starts for Triple-A Sacramento in which he worked a combined 7 2/3 innings, allowed three hits and struck out 12, Harden returned to make his first start for Oakland since July 6, 2008.

Against Arizona, he struck out six and walked none.

"I think it's a good start to build on," Harden said, "and I'd like to take that feeling into my next start and be able to go another inning or two."

He picked up his first win since Aug. 23 and his first for the A's since June 26, 2008.

Meanwhile, Oakland - which had scored a grand total of 13 runs in its previous eight games and had a .222 batting average in June - collected 11 hits.

The A's trailed 1-0 with two outs in the fourth before tying the game on Ryan Sweeney's bloop single to score Hideki Matsui, who had gotten into scoring position by stealing second base. It was Matsui's first stolen base since Sept. 12, 2007, when he was with the Yankees.

An inning later, the A's had two on with two outs. Cliff Pennington, in a 2-for-32 slug at that point, got to rookie Josh Collmenter (4-5) for an RBI single to give Oakland the lead.

Coco Crisp followed Pennington with another run-scoring single. Matsui then brought home Pennington and Crisp with a double that landed just fair down the right-field line. That made it 5-1, A's, and ended Collmenter's night.

Crisp took away what probably would have been a homer for Gerardo Parra leading off the sixth. Crisp hustled to the wall in center, a few feet to the right-field side of the 400-foot marker. He grabbed Parra's drive near the top of the wall.

Kelly Johnson tagged Brian Fuentes in the eighth for a two-run homer to make it 5-4. Joey Devine and Andrew Bailey combined for the final five outs, with Bailey recording his seventh save.

David DeJesus went 2-for-2 with two walks. Before Thursday's game against Florida, he was in a 1-for-25 slide. Over the past two games, he's 4-for-5 and has reached base seven times in eight plate appearances.

New view: Bob Melvin vs. Arizona but in A's dugout

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- When you've spent three stints in one organization, as **Bob Melvin** has with the Diamondbacks, you're bound to have some extra motivation when you face that team.

Before Friday's game against Arizona, the A's manager said he was motivated to keep his emotions in check.

"There always is some sentiment," Melvin said, "to the extent where you try to put it away because you don't want to do anything just to try to go against the grain because it's your former team."

Melvin was the Diamondbacks' bench coach for two seasons (2001-02), manager for four-plus seasons (2005-09) and had returned to the team as a special adviser in mid-May, less than a month before the A's hired him to replace **Bob Geren** on June 9.

"The pleasantries and so forth will be done beforehand," Melvin said, "and then it's all business during the game because their manager's the same way."

Arizona manager **Kirk Gibson** and Melvin were teammates on the 1985 Detroit Tigers. Gibson was Melvin's bench coach with Arizona for two-plus seasons.

After the game, Melvin admitted, "It was weird looking over there at first. A couple of times, (I) looked over at Gibby and I just didn't want to get caught up in that. (I) tried to stay out of their dugout. I've got a lot of good friends over there.

"Once we got a few innings into the game, it was just more about playing the game."

Friday was also an Arizona reunion for **Conor Jackson**, the Diamondbacks' No. 1 pick from Cal in 2003. He had been with the Diamondbacks' organization his entire professional career until the A's acquired him in June of last year.

Jackson entered the games as a defensive replacement for first baseman **Chris Carter** in the seventh inning. Jackson lined out in his only at-bat.

Six-man rotation: **Brandon McCarthy** (right scapula) will come off the disabled list to start Monday against Seattle. Through Wednesday, Melvin will have a six-man rotation, with **Trevor Cahill** Tuesday night and **Guillermo Moscoso** Wednesday afternoon.

Leading off

Pitching moves: The A's recalled right-hander Fautino De Los Santos from Triple-A Sacramento. Going back to the River Cats was righty Trystan Magnuson. And to make room for Rich Harden on the 40-man roster, the A's designated lefty Bobby Cramer for assignment.

Drumbeat: Melvin, Jackson face Diamondbacks

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle, July 1, 2011, 5:59pm

Bob Melvin spent three stints in the Diamondbacks' organization, so much of his pregame news conference this afternoon centered on the A's manager facing his former team. "I know quite a few people over...Melvin, Jackson face Diamondbacks

Bob Melvin spent three stints in the Diamondbacks' organization, so much of his pregame news conference this afternoon centered on the A's manager facing his former team.

"I know quite a few people over there," Melvin said, "not just the players, obviously Kirk Gibson, the manager, the support staff, the clubhouse guys, the radio announcers, the TV announcers, all those guys. You get that out of the way before the game and then once the game starts, it's all business. Trying to run my team the way I think it should be run, and he'll do the same over there. So, the pleasantries will be from now until game time and then when the game starts, it's all business."

Jackson, the Diamondbacks' No. 1 pick out of Cal in 2003, isn't in Oakland's starting lineup tonight. The A's acquired him from Arizona in June of last year.</P

"My whole career was played over there until last year," Jackson said. "When you're in a clubhouse and you're with a team for such a long period of time, the club becomes your family. It becomes your home away from home. Obviously, I still keep in touch with most of those guys over there. It'll be fun and, obviously, extremely competitive."

The A's lineup against Arizona right-hander Josh Collmenter: Weeks, 2B; Pennington, SS; Crisp, CF; Matsui, DH; Carter, 1B; Sweeney, LF; Suzuki, C; DeJesus, RF; Sizemore, 3B.

Pitching note: Brandon McCarthy will come off the disabled list to start Monday's game against Seattle. The A's will go with a six-man rotation through Wednesday, with Trevor Cahill pitching Tuesday and Guillermo Moscoso starting Wednesday.

Drumbeat: Roster moves -- pitchers

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle, 7/1/2011 2:295pm

The A's have made a few roster moves today involving pitchers:

As expected,they've reinstated Rich Harden from the 60-day disabled list; he'll start tonight against Arizona.

Oakland also recalled right-hander Fautino De Los Santos from Triple-A Sacramento.

Going back to the River Cats is right-hander Trystan Magnuson. And to make room for Harden on the 40-man roster, the A's designated lefty Bobby Cramer for assignment.

2B Mark Ellis has stellar debut with Rockies

Pat Graham, Associated Press

For nearly a decade, Mark Ellis dutifully followed the rules in Oakland by donning white shoes.

Now with the Colorado Rockies, the 9-year veteran second baseman got a little more colorful with his cleat selection, borrowing a black-and-purple pair from Troy Tulowitzki.

The shoes, maybe even more than the purple pinstripe uniform, will take some getting used to as the longtime Oakland infielder settles into his new life in the Mile High City.

The Rockies acquired Ellis, along with cash, from the A's on Thursday for minor-league pitcher Bruce Billings and a player to be named later.

Ellis made his debut with the Rockies on Friday night and finished a triple shy of the cycle against the Kansas City Royals. He was playing second base and batting second in the order.

And looking snazzy in those colorful cleats.

"It's funny not seeing white shoes. You look down and you're always used to white shoes," Ellis said. "But it's nice."

He's hoping a change of scenery can break him out of a season-long slump. Ellis hit .217 with one homer and 16 RBIs in 62 games with the A's.

He's off to a solid start, driving in three runs Friday.

"It's been a whirlwind couple of days," said Ellis, who hit a two-run homer in the fifth. "Just see the ball and hit the ball. That's what I try to do. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

The Rockies are counting on Ellis to bring stability at second base, something the team has lacked all season. They've trotted out Chris Nelson, Jonathan Herrera, Eric Young Jr. and Jose Lopez, who's since been let go.

On Friday, Colorado sent both Nelson and Young back to Triple-A Colorado Springs.

The job belongs to Ellis.

"This is a proven major league player with a proven resume - a very, very capable guy," Rockies manager Jim Tracy said. "I don't know how this is going to play out, but I do know this: For us to go out and make an acquisition like this as early as it has been done, I've seen situations like this play themselves out where it ends up being an incredible shot in the arm for a ballclub."

Colorado definitely needs a boost. The Rockies trail San Francisco by 6 1/2 games. Ellis already has this in common with his teammates: Both share a passion to beat the Giants.

"That's my goal," Ellis said. "That's definitely a good team, and it will be fun to compete against them."

Venturing around the clubhouse Friday, Ellis ran into familiar faces everywhere he turned. He once was teammates in Oakland with closer Huston Street and first baseman Jason Giambi.

Any secrets he can reveal?

"I could give you a lot of dirt on Street, but Jason would probably tell you dirt on himself," Ellis chuckled.

Ellis had plenty of mixed emotions departing Oakland. But given all the stars who have left town in recent years, he wasn't completely surprised by the move.

"I kind of figured something was going to happen in Oakland. Somebody asked me yesterday if I expected to get traded, and when you don't get traded for 10 years, you don't really expect to get traded, but I kind of anticipated it a little bit," Ellis said. "It was a tough day. It was sad. You spend all that time with people and it's tough.

"I wanted to get here as soon as possible and start this new chapter. I was excited when I heard it was Colorado. If I had to leave Oakland, this was one of the spots, if not the spot, that I wanted to go."

Harden, Matsui lead A's back to win column

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Rich Harden has waited for this moment for a long time -- since Sept. 29 of last year, to be exact.

Sidelined all season with a strained right lat muscle after signing a one-year, \$1.5 million deal to come back to the A's, Harden made his long-awaited return to the place where he spent his first five and a half seasons.

The righty made his return to the mound Friday night, and the A's made their return to the win column after a 5-4 series-opening win against the D-backs.

"Good to get back out there," Harden said. "I've been looking forward to this for a while. It's frustrating. Just when I thought I was close to getting back out there, I was set back. I was happy to get out there."

Harden worked six solid innings, holding the D-backs to two runs on four hits. The righty fanned six and didn't surrender any walks, as he helped the A's snap a two-game skid.

"Today was important in many ways," designated hitter Hideki Matsui said through his translator, Roger Kahlon. "I think everyone wanted to get one in and stop this losing streak and get a win on the board. Being that it was Rich's first start as well, I think the sense in the dugout was that it was a must-win situation."

While his teammates treated it as a big game, Harden downplayed the magnitude of it compared to some other big starts in his career. Still, the righty pitched like it was one, retiring the first five batters he faced -- three of them on strikeouts -- before Wily Mo Pena launched his fourth home run of the year.

Harden didn't let the round-tripper faze him, and he retired 11 of the next 12 batters he faced, the last of whom, Gerardo Parra, was robbed of a home run when Coco Crisp made a leaping grab at the wall.

"He's unbelievable out there," Harden said. "It really helped me out. Sitting here and watching him the whole season, you see him make plays like that -- he does it consistently. But to be out there on the mound and have it happen, too, it's a relief."

After Crisp's run-saving grab, Harden surrendered back-to-back hits to Kelly Johnson and Stephen Drew in the sixth, the latter resulting in the D-backs' second run off the righty.

"Lot of strikes," Johnson said of Harden. "He's got a reputation for a lot of high pitch counts early, and I think in the beginning it was kind of wanting to see how he was going to come in and pitch. And it was a lot of strike ones and a lot of strikes, and he threw his changeup or split for a strike. We put some decent swings on him, but lined out a few times."

While Harden was solid through six innings, so was the A's offense, which plated five runs on 11 hits. Although they came up empty in the first three frames, the A's knotted the game at 1-1 in the fourth on a Ryan Sweeney RBI single. The base hit scored Matsui -- who had singled and then stolen his first base in nearly four years earlier in the frame.

"[Matsui] did it on his own, but I was hoping he would," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's proved to be a very smart player. ... That was big for us because it got us on the board and got momentum back into our dugout. It was a big play in the game."

Once they regained the momentum, the A's bats came to life the following inning, when the club did something it had not done since the season's opening week.

With two down and runners on first and second, the A's strung together three straight two-out hits en route to a four-run frame. Cliff Pennington and Crisp each knocked an RBI single and Matsui picked up a two-run double. The three straight two-out hits with runners in scoring position were the most since April 5 in Toronto.

The run support was enough to narrowly give Harden a welcome debut. Holding on to a 5-2 lead in the eighth, Brian Fuentes gave up a two-run home run to Johnson, before Joey Devine got out of the frame. Andrew Bailey pitched the ninth and notched his seventh save of the year to give Harden his first win in an A's uniform since June 26, 2008.

Not only did the game mark a successful return for Harden, who was one of five A's starters on the disabled list this season, it showed what the A's may be able to do when healthy. And with the returns of Brandon McCarthy and Tyson Ross on the horizon, combined with the return of a healthy Josh Willingham on Sunday, the A's are close to being 100 percent again.

"I think when everyone comes back there is that kind of potential in this team," Matsui said. "It's something definitely to look forward to the second half of the season, you know, what this team may be capable of doing."

Weeks the second baseman of the present

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When the A's traded Mark Ellis -- the longest-tenured player on the team -- to the Rockies on Thursday, they made it clear that rookie Jemile Weeks is not only the future at second base, but the present, too.

With Weeks' development coming along quicker than many expected, his performance on the field has come as a pleasant surprise to manager Bob Melvin.

"He's been very consistent, which to an extent has surprised me," Melvin said. "Younger players have a tough time staying consistent. They'll go through hot streaks, cold streaks and then they'll have to deal with the fact that the first time in their career they're struggling some."

But that hasn't been the case with Weeks through his first 21 Major League games. The rookie, who has worked his way into the A's leadoff role as of late, was hitting .309 and reaching base at a .349 clip entering Friday's series opener against the D-backs. He has also swiped as many bags (six) as he has RBIs, and has seven multiple-hit games through his first three and a half weeks in the big leagues.

He has also flashed his glove countless times on defense, sporting a .973 fielding percentage while helping turn 15 double plays.

And Melvin believes Weeks is just scratching the surface of his capabilities, saying the switch-hitting rookie will only continue to grow as he learns pitchers and gets more reps.

"Certainly the numbers he's putting up right now and what he's doing for us energy-wise and so forth, he's certainly forecast that throughout his whole career," Melvin said. "He's only going to get better."

Melvin to experiment with six-man rotation

OAKLAND -- A's skipper Bob Melvin has never implemented a six-man starting rotation in his managerial career. But it's something he's experimenting with -- at least for one turn before the All-Star break.

Righty Rich Harden, who has been sidelined with a strained right lat muscle all season after signing a one-year, \$1.5 million contract in the offseason, is making his Oakland debut in Friday's series opener with the D-backs, and right-hander Brandon McCarthy (stress reaction in right shoulder) will return from the disabled list on Monday.

That leaves the A's rotation with an unconventional six arms for the time being. For the next week the starters will go: Harden on Friday, Josh Outman on Saturday, Gio Gonzalez on Sunday, McCarthy on Monday, Trevor Cahill on Tuesday and Guillermo Moscoso on Wednesday.

Whether that rotation sticks or not will depend on a few factors, one of those being how well Harden, who will be limited in his pitch count, performs in his first start of the season.

"Certainly the outing is going to be a little shorter, but you look for sharpness right away," Melvin said of Harden. "You look for that in rehab too. He's pitched well in rehab. He's another new guy for me that I've never managed before, so as far as the intricacies of what he does, I need to learn as well as everyone else I have."

"I'm just looking for a look in his eye, and he's always been a guy that likes to compete, and I'm looking forward to watching him compete."

Another factor that will play into Melvin's decision is the performance of Moscoso, who has filled in amply in the A's rotation. With the way Moscoso (2-4, 2.51 ERA) has performed to date, Melvin is in no rush to bump the righty from the rotation.

"He's still got another start, and until that changes he's still on my board a couple times more," Melvin said. "I don't go too much farther out than that."

Worth noting

- Since righty Rich Harden's pitch count will be limited in his debut Friday, the A's recalled Fautino De Los Santos from Triple-A Sacramento to give the team added depth in the bullpen.

To make room for De Los Santos, who arrived at the A's clubhouse at 5:50 p.m., the team sent down Trystan Magnuson, who pitched 3 1/3 innings of relief on Thursday. The A's also designated southpaw Bobby Cramer for assignment.

- Rookie Chris Carter was in the starting lineup for the second straight day, this time getting the nod at first while Hideki Matsui reclaimed his designated hitter role. The start at first is Carter's first of the season, though he saw time there while the team was in New York.

- Melvin, who grew up in the Bay Area, is good friends with D-backs manager Kirk Gibson, and fondly remembers Gibson's storied home run for the Dodgers during the 1988 World Series.

"There are certain things in the game that you always remember where you were, and that was one of them," said Melvin, who recalls being at a bachelor party when an injured Gibson hit the walk-off shot against A's closer Dennis Eckersley in Game 1.

"Watching the at-bat unfold, I was thinking he had no chance. But knowing him, and knowing he's going to fight through that thing, the deeper the count went the better chance he had," Melvin said. "Pretty special moment in all of baseball."

D-backs, A's look to pick up steam heading to break

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The A's and the D-backs are both determined to enter the All-Star break on a winning note.

"These games leading up to the break are important for us, but we still have a half of season after that to play," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "We'd like to play on a more consistent basis. We want to get a little more consistent with our play, and if we do that, we'll look up in the standings and see where we are."

The A's, who topped the D-backs, 5-4, have reasons to be optimistic. Injured pitcher Rich Harden returned to the mound Friday and allowed two runs in six innings. Brandon McCarthy, who has also been on the disabled list, will return Monday. Josh Willingham (Achilles tendon strain) is expected back in the lineup Sunday.

"There's still a lot of time left, and we got some guys coming back," Melvin said. "Willingham will be back Sunday, and we have some of our starting pitchers coming back, too. That will really work for us as far as trades go. We don't want to get too far behind, though."

The D-backs are 1-5 in their last six games. They trail the first-place Giants by three games in the National League West standings, but the club is not panicking. Joe Saunders will take the hill for the D-backs on Saturday.

"You're going to go through times where people are struggling and you do the other things well to give yourself a chance," Gibson said. "That's what we want to start doing."

The road will not get any easier before the All-Star break for Gibson's club. Following the series against the A's, the D-backs will travel to Milwaukee and St. Louis to square off against the two teams fighting for supremacy in the NL Central.

"You could almost look at it and see at the beginning of the year that this would be a real test," Gibson said.

Oakland starter Josh Outman has quality starts in six of his seven outings this season, including his last four starts.

D-backs: Putz lands on disabled list

The D-backs placed closer J.J. Putz on the 15-day disabled list on Friday with tendinitis in his right elbow. Reliever Sam Demel, who had been on the DL with right shoulder tendinitis, was activated to take Putz's place on the roster.

The club also selected the contract of infielder Sean Burroughs from Triple-A Reno to take the place of infielder Melvin Mora, who was released Wednesday.

- The D-backs have been .500 or better through the past 36 games. The club's win on June 24 against the Tigers gave them a 43-34 record, a season-high nine games over .500. It marked the first time the club was nine games over .500 since it compiled a 30-21 mark on May 26, 2008.

A's: Fuentes on verge of 200th save

- Brian Fuentes has 199 career saves and needs one more save to become the sixth left-handed reliever in Major League history to reach the 200-saves mark.

- Ryan Sweeney has not committed an error this season, and has now played in 158 consecutive games without a miscue.

Worth noting

- D-backs outfielder Justin Upton shined last month. He ranked second in the NL with 39 hits, tied for second with nine doubles, third with a .382 batting average and .467 on-base-percentage and sixth with a 1.016 OPS for the month. He went 0-for-4 Friday.

- The A's went 9-17 last month, the second-worst record in the American League and fourth-worst in the Majors. It was the fourth lowest winning percentage in June in club history, and worst since going 7-22 in the month in 1986.

- The D-backs are now 9-7 this season in Interleague Play, and 99-119 overall. The club has had a winning record against the AL in only three of the last 13 seasons.

Healthy return for Harden

Oft-injured starter sizzles in his long-awaited return to Oakland mound

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Rich Harden pitched six strong innings in his season debut, Hideki Matsui had two RBIs and the A's beat the Arizona Diamondbacks 5-4 on Friday night.

Ryan Sweeney, Coco Crisp and Cliff Pennington each drove in a run for Oakland, which won for the third time in 10 games following a four-game winning streak. Crisp also robbed Gerardo Parra of a homer and Matsui picked up his first steal since Sept. 12, 2007, for the New York Yankees at Toronto.

Kelly Johnson and Wily Mo Pena homered for the Diamondbacks, who have dropped five of six to fall three games back of NL West-leading San Francisco.

Arizona starter Josh Collmenter (4-5) lasted just 4 2/3 innings, yielding five runs and seven hits. The rookie right-hander is 0-4 with a 7.54 ERA in his last four outings and hasn't won since he beat Washington on June 3.

Harden, who was reinstated from the 60-day disabled list earlier in the day, allowed two runs and four hits in his first start for Oakland in three years. The oft-injured right-hander struck out six and walked none.

Andrew Bailey worked the ninth for his seventh save in eight chances.

Pena's two-out homer in the second gave the Diamondbacks a 1-0 lead. It was his fourth of the season in a span of 10 games. He hit two in 64 games for the Washington Nationals in 2008, the last time he was in the majors.

Matsui walked, stole second and scored on Sweeney's two-out single in the fourth, and Oakland chased Collmenter with three consecutive two-out RBI hits in the fifth. David DeJesus and Scott Sizemore each singled with one out. After Jemile Weeks flew out, Pennington and Crisp each singled home a run and Matsui doubled home two more.

Stephen Drew singled in a run in the sixth for Arizona, and Johnson's two-run shot cut it to 5-4 in the eighth. But the Diamondbacks' rally fizzled.

Crisp took a home run away from Parra leading off the sixth. He reached over the fence to pull in the 400-foot fly, and Parra responded by tipping his helmet toward the center fielder.

Harden retired 16 of his first 18 hitters before Johnson doubled and scored on Drew's hit.

Harden has had trouble staying healthy for most of his career. He just finished his 10th visit to the disabled list, and hasn't pitched a full season since 2004.

NOTES

* The A's also recalled RHP Fautino De Los Santos from Triple-A Sacramento, optioned RHP Trystan Magnuson to Sacramento and designated LHP Bobby Cramer for assignment.

* A's manager Bob Melvin announced a one-time six-man rotation to protect Harden. Josh Outman, Gio Gonzalez, Brandon McCarthy (currently on the DL with a stress reaction), Trevor Cahill and Guillermo Moscoso will follow the righty.

Gutierrez: Gibson's return picks at A's old scab

[Paul Gutierrez](http://Paul.Gutierrez.com), CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - It was about the third inning on Oct. 15, 1988 when Steve Vucinich made his way to the Dodgers clubhouse, deep in the bowels of Chavez Ravine.

The A's had a 4-2 lead in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series after Jose Canseco's second-inning grand slam that dented the center-field camera and Vucinich, then Oakland's visiting clubhouse manager, needed some logistics for the Dodgers' impending trip to the East Bay for Games 3, 4 and 5.

That's when he saw him. A battle-worn Kirk Gibson hobbling and lounging about in little more than a cut-off T-shirt and his underwear.

"He couldn't move," Vucinich, now the A's equipment manager, recalled Friday. "He couldn't hardly walk. There was no way he was playing."

In his role running the visiting clubhouse at the Coliseum, Vucinich had gotten chummy with Gibson, who had been with Detroit until 1988. They chatted briefly about Gibson's free agency the previous winter, and how he believed collusion had kept him from a better free-agent deal before signing with the Dodgers. And, of course, they talked about living in LaLa Land.

Then, Vucinich left. There was still a World Series game going on, after all, and nothing in his clubhouse encounter with Gibson had changed his opinion. There was no way, no way at all, Gibson was playing.

Then came the fateful ninth inning.

You all know what happened next -- Dennis Eckersley quickly retired Mike Scioscia and Jeff Hamilton before former A's outfielder Mike Davis stepped into the box.

Mike Thalburn, the A's current visiting clubhouse manager, was then an A's bat boy who would shave down Jose Canseco's bat handle to his liking in the dugout.

"I just remember someone, before he even walked Mike Davis, saying, 'Eckersley doesn't have it tonight,'" Thalburn said. "I was like, 'Don't say that.' Then, sure enough ..."

Thalburn's voice trailed off.

"Why did we walk Mike Davis?" Vucinich wondered aloud. "Eck never walked anybody."

Gibson strode to the plate as a pinch hitter and now Vucinich nearly had to pinch himself.

"I can't believe he's in the game," Vucinich said. "I don't know what kind of pain killers they gave him, or what they shot him up with."

After falling behind 0-and-2, Gibson worked a full count, and the rest was, well, history, as immortalized on television by Vin Scully and on the radio by Jack Buck.

"I didn't think he could put enough in it to hit a home run," Vucinich said. "I knew all about his other big home runs -- the 1984 World Series. I didn't believe it. It was just, Ugh. The worst."

Wait, the worst?

"Worst moment of my life," Vucinich said with a Cheshire cat grin. "I was happier when my first wife left me."

Yes, nearly 23 years after the fact, the Gibson home run still cuts deep on the A's and their fans. With Gibson in Oakland this weekend as manager of the Arizona Diamondbacks for an interleague series, the Green and Gold scar gets picked at like some decades-old scab.

Even on those not at Dodger Stadium that night.

A's interim manager Bob Melvin had just finished his third and final season with the Giants and said the Gibson home run was one of those moments in sports history when you know exactly where you were when it happened.

In fact, Melvin said he still gets goosebumps watching Gibson step out of the box with the count full to remind himself of the impending back-door slider.

Good stuff, but I had to ask Melvin where *he* was when Gibson made dozens of departing cars' brake lights in the Dodger Stadium parking lot suddenly burn to life on the walk-off job.

"I was at a bachelor party," Melvin admitted while laughing and blushing, even 20-plus years later. "But everybody stopped to watch."

A clubhouse away, the Diamondbacks manager and A's arch-villain smiled.

"I'm sure he didn't give you all the details," Gibson chuckled.

After the laughter died down, Gibson grew nostalgic. Memories came flooding back. Of course, a million times of course, he knew the questions would come with Arizona's visit to Oakland.

"I won a championship in this room," he said, reminding anyone within ear shot of the Dodgers winning the Fall Classic in five games and, picking at the scab some more, on the Coliseum grass.

Any time he came back to face the A's, he heard about it.

"The fans here have always been *honest* with opponents," he said.

But in his last season as a player, in 1995, peace was brokered.

"It's part of what it all is," Gibson said. "It was fantastic to beat the A's in 1988. It was a dream come true that just proves that anything is possible. Which is why teams should push through."

Try telling that to A's fans who still feel the sting of 1988.

All these years later, Vucinich still plays that World Series over in his head. What if the A's had capitalized after Canseco's grand slam? What if they had won Game 4 to tie the Series? Who would the Dodgers throw at them outside of Orel Hershiser in Games 6 and 7 in Los Angeles? What if Eckersley had walked Gibson? Steve Sax, who was on deck, recently told me he would have had no chance against Eckersley.

"A couple of key hits, score some runs, that turns the series around," Vucinich said. "I still don't believe Gibby played. And that was his only at-bat of the series."

But one that still resonates and breaks hearts.

A's to use six-man rotation for at least one turn

[Paul Gutierrez](#), CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND – A's right-hander Brandon McCarthy will come off the disabled list to start Monday and Oakland will go to an unconventional six-man pitching rotation, beginning tonight and at least for one turn through the rotation, interim manager Bob Melvin told reporters in his pregame meeting Friday.

With Rich Harden making his 2011 season debut against Arizona in an interleague series opener tonight at the O.co Coliseum, Josh Outman will start Saturday against the Diamondbacks and seeming All-Star Gio Gonzalez gets the ball for the series finale on Sunday.

Brandon McCarthy will then come off the disabled list to start Monday against Seattle before Trevor Cahill goes on regular rest to start Tuesday against the Mariners and Guillermo Moscoso will get the ball Wednesday against the Mariners to finish the A's nine-game homestead.

That's when things get interesting as the A's then travel to Texas for a four-game series to close out the first half of the season and send the team into the All-Star break.

Melvin said the A's would then make a decision on whether to stick with a six-man rotation or cut it down.

Because presumably, if Harden is ineffective tonight or is unable to make another start, which would be on Thursday in Arlington, the A's would then be able to throw Outman, Gonzalez, McCarthy and Cahill at the Rangers on regular rest.

Oakland hangs on to beat Arizona, 5-4, behind Harden and offensive display

[Sam McPherson](#), examiner.com

This was one of those games where the 2011 Oakland Athletics did what they were supposed to do.

Arizona Diamondbacks starting pitcher Josh Collmenter came into the game in a funk, with a 7.00 ERA in his last three starts, and the A's moribund offense took advantage, scoring four times in the fifth inning to lead Oakland to a 5-4 win tonight at the Overstock.com Coliseum.

A's batters strung together three, two-out hits in the fifth inning -- capped by Hideki Matsui's two-run double down the right field line -- to stake Oakland starting pitcher Rich Harden to a 5-1 lead.

And despite A's reliever Brian Fuentes' best efforts to lose the game, the Oakland bullpen protected the lead for Harden -- Andrew Bailey picked up his seventh save of the season in the process -- and helped him to his first win of the season after the 29-year old spent three months on the disabled list.

Cliff Pennington, Coco Crisp and Ryan Sweeney also had run-scoring singles for the A's, and Matsui even stole his first base since 2007 as the Oakland offense combined for 11 hits on the night. After scoring only nine runs in seven games against National League opponents New York, Philadelphia and Florida, the A's now have scored nine runs in their last two games.

But Harden may have stolen the night with his six-inning, six-strikeout effort.

A long time ago, it seems, Harden was Oakland's prize gem in a rotation that featured Mark Mulder, Tim Hudson and Barry Zito. The Canadian righty made his major-league debut with the A's in 2003, and along with the Big Three in 2004, he was going to be the torch bearer for the next generation of Oakland starters.

But after throwing a career-high 189 2/3 innings in 2004, Harden never was able to stay healthy for long. He teased A's fans with his greatness, but eventually, the organization traded him in 2008 to the Chicago Cubs for spare parts -- Harden was a broken-down, frustrating enigma, it seemed.

The Cubs eventually learned the same thing, and Harden scuffled through a tough 2010 season with the Texas Rangers -- his worst season as a major-leaguer. The A's took a chance on him in the offseason, signing him in hopes of being the No. 5 starter this year.

But again, his health got in the way.

Tonight, the A's finally got a look at their investment, and Harden offered a pretty good initial return: he allowed no walks in six innings and only four hits, including a solo home run to Wily Mo Pena in the second inning. His efficient outing included only 76 pitches in those six innings, as Oakland will keep a close eye on his health.

"I was excited to get back out there," Harden told reporters after the game. "It's something to build on. I knew I had a limit but I never thought about it."

No one in their right mind should get too excited about this, however, as his injury history is plentiful. But Harden's statistical line is full of some pretty great half-seasons, and perhaps that's what the A's will get out of him in 2011.

If he can replicate this effort a few times more, Oakland will be quite happy with their decision to bring him back to his original MLB home.

Harden gets the nod for the A's tonight in opener against Diamondbacks

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

It's been awhile, but Rich Harden will once again take the mound for the Oakland Athletics.

Harden gets his first start of the year for the A's against the Arizona Diamondbacks tonight, as he pitches for Oakland for the first time since the team traded him to the Chicago Cubs in July 2008.

The Canadian righty posted a 36-19 record with a 3.48 ERA in 89 starts while spending his first five-plus seasons in Oakland, but he's missed the first 82 games this year on the disabled list -- as his weakness has always been staying healthy.

Lefty Bobby Cramer was designated for assignment to make room for Harden on the A's 40-man roster.

Josh Collmenter (4-4, 2.71) gets the nod for Arizona, but he has struggled in his last three starts (7.00 ERA).

The A's need a win, of course, to right the ship after struggling in their last eight games (2-6). However, they couldn't dent Chris Volstad and his 5.42 ERA on Thursday in a loss to the Florida Marlins, so it will be interesting to see how Oakland's lineup attacks -- or cowers -- against Collmeter tonight at the Overstock.com Coliseum.

At 36-46, the A's are seven games behind in the American League West, and they must soon decide if they are contenders, pretenders or "wait 'til next year" club members. While the team's trade of veteran second baseman Mark Ellis to the Colorado Rockies yesterday might have hinted to some what their plan may be, the Oakland organization might wait a few more weeks before deciding what's what in 2011.

If they decide to trade away their commodities, the A's might get some good value in return for centerfielder Coco Crisp, currently second in the AL in stolen bases. And if and when Josh Willingham returns from his Achilles injury, he could fetch a decent price for his potent power.

Otherwise, Oakland doesn't have much to trade at this point, as the team is that devoid of hitting prowess. And they certainly won't be trading any of their top-flight pitching.

If the A's can get to within three games of first place by mid-July, you'd have to think they'd be interested in acquiring some offense for this punchless lineup, but getting to that point will require a near-Herculean effort from the existing roster.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

First-place Sacramento's losing streak reaches 4

By Max Lush / Sacramento River Cats

The River Cats offense had no answer for Tucson starter Wade LeBlanc on Friday night at Raley Field, falling 7-3 to their divisional rivals.

Sacramento mustered two hits and one walk off the left-hander, who threw 8.0 scoreless innings and struck out six. LeBlanc (7-1, 4.46) showed complete control, no-hitting the Pacific Coast League's best team through 4.1 innings. The left-hander only had to face 28 River Cats to fire off 24 outs in the ball game.

Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff was the only River Cat to reach second base off LeBlanc, reaching in the seventh on a throwing error that went into the stands.

The loss is the River Cats' fourth in a row, their longest of the season.

Second baseman Andy LaRoche broke up LeBlanc's no-hit bid in the fifth inning. LaRoche laced a single off the left field wall, but Tucson left fielder Kyle Banks played the carom perfectly and gunned down the second baseman attempting to turn the hit into a double.

Sacramento scratched some runs in the ninth inning against Tucson reliever Luke Gregersen when the first five batters all produced something positive.

Shortstop Eric Sogard lined a single to left, first baseman Daric Barton walked, and pinch hitter Wes Timmons hit an infield single to load the bases with Kouzmanoff coming to the plate.

The third baseman bounced a double to the wall in center, scoring Sogard and Barton. Timmons scored on right fielder Michael Taylor's ground out to third.

The Tucson batters, however, were able to square up River Cats pitchers all night, ripping 10 hits, including three doubles and two home runs.

River Cat starter Carlos Hernandez (4-3, 5.24) pitched 5.0 innings, giving up three runs (all earned) on four hits and two walks. The left-hander struck out seven Padres.

The outing was Hernandez's worst at Raley Field this season. Entering Friday, Hernandez had posted a 2-1 with a 2.25 ERA at home. He also gave up three runs June 18 at home against Fresno, but that was while throwing a River Cat season-high 8.0 innings.

Former River Cat Eric Patterson hit his first home run of the season off reliever Justin Souza in the sixth inning with one on.

Tucson third baseman Logan Forsythe hit his seventh home run of the season in the ninth inning off reliever Fernando Cabrera.

Souza entered for Hernandez in the sixth. Souza pitched 3.0 innings, allowing three runs on five hits and striking out two. Souza also allowed three runs in his last outing, throwing 2.0 innings against Reno.

Cabrera entered in the ninth, allowing one run on a Forsythe home run and striking out a batter.

The loss drops Sacramento to 8-6 on the season on Friday games, and to just 4-4 at home.

Sacramento looks to avoid losing their fifth straight game and just their fourth series of the season Saturday night at 7:05 p.m. The River Cats will send left-hander Lenny DiNardo (2-4, 8.49) against Padres right-hander Jon Leicester (3-3, 6.65).

Sulentic Leads Hounds To Fourth Straight

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The RockHounds used a 16-hit attack and a solid Double-A pitching debut to defeat the Arkansas Travelers, 8-6, Friday night at Citibank Ballpark. The win was the 'Hounds' fourth-in-a-row.

A.J. Griffin, a second-year pro out of the University of San Diego, earned the win in his first start for the 'Hounds, going 5.2 solid innings. The right-hander allowed just four hits, walking just one batter and striking out five, but two of the hits were home runs. Griffin was probably victimized (at least to an extent) by the West Texas wind, which helped both home run balls get "out of the yard," but both were hard hit. Griffin joins the RockHounds after dominating the Single-A level and making six outstanding starts at the Advanced-A level with the Stockton Ports.

Matt Sulentic, Stephen Parker and Jermaine Mitchell fueled the offense, combing for 10 of the club's 16 hits.

The save went to Andrew Carignan (pronounced as in "Kerrigan"), who was one of minor league baseball's top closers in 2008, when he earned 24 saves for the RockHounds. Injuries derailed what appeared to be a certain path to the Major Leagues, but Andrew appears to be "back." After pitching Thursday night for Stockton, and arriving on a late afternoon flight here Friday, he did allow a run on three hits, but also recorded two strikeouts, including a called third strike to end the game. His 24th and 25th saves as a RockHound came nearly three years apart.

With the win, the 'Hounds (5-3) stay one game back of San Antonio (6-2) in the Texas League South second half pennant race.

BATS - Sulentic went 3-for-4 and drove in half of the RockHounds' runs with a 2-run home run and a 2-run double. Mitchell, rebounding from a sore shoulder which has limited his play, went 3-for-5 and is 10-for-14 the week (not including a 2-for-2 performance at the Texas League All-Star Game). Parker had a 4-hit game and is now 7-for-his-last-11. Grant Green and Jeremy Barfield each had two hits.

ARMS - Brett Hunter, promoted late last week from (Advanced-A) Stockton, was outstanding in a "set-up" role, facing and retiring five batters, the last three by strikeout.

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 Saturday night, followed by the first of three, post-game fireworks shows. The Springfield Cardinals then come to town Sunday through Tuesday, with post-game fireworks scheduled for both July 3rd and 4th. Check out all the details at www.midlandrockhounds.org.

Stockton Still Streaking

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports picked up win number 17 tonight in the opener of a three-game series at Banner Island Ballpark against the San Jose Giants. The Ports secured the 3-1 victory with smart defense and pitching, and just enough offense to put them up and over San Jose.

The Giants' first run came very early when, in the top of the first with two outs, third baseman Alex Burg hit a solo home run to right field.

The Ports got that run back in the third on back-to-back-to-back one-out singles by designated hitter Leonardo Gil, second baseman Conner Crumbliss, and left fielder Myrio Richard. Richard's hit brought Gil in to tie things up at one a piece.

But the bats would really get going for the Ports in the fourth. In an unconventional play, right fielder Rashun Dixon reached when a pop-up fell in in right field. Dixon started to go for second and stopped, giving the Giants enough time to throw him out, but the throw from the outfield went over the head of pitcher Kelvin Marte at first, allowing Dixon time to get back to first. Shortstop Dusty Coleman would make sure the base runner didn't go to waste, bringing Dixon in on a double to left field. First baseman Anthony Aliotti kept things going with a single to right, scoring Coleman and putting the Ports ahead 3-1.

Both teams would hold each other on excellent defense in the fifth. The Giants would get runners on first and third with two outs, but Ports starter Rob Gilliam would throw his seventh strike out of the night to end the threat. In the bottom half, Tom Vessella replaced Giants starter Marte, who allowed all three Ports runs on seven hits in his four innings of work. The Ports would load the bases on two walks and a single for Dixon, but Vessella would get San Jose out of the inning with no damage done.

Defense would hold strong in the sixth, Gilliam giving up a walk to designated hitter Ryan Cavan only to have catcher Tommy Joseph ground into a double play. Vessella would respond by striking out three in a row in the bottom half.

A.J. Huttenlocker would take over for Gilliam in the seventh, Gilliam having gone a solid six innings allowing just the one run on five hits. After pitching a perfect inning, Huttenlocker gave way to Chris Mederos on the hill in the eighth. Mederos would strike out three with a single for left fielder Nike Liles mixed in.

Jake Dunning would replace took over pitching duties for the Giants in the eighth, retiring three in a row to bring San Jose up to the plate in the ninth.

Jose Guzman would come in to finish out the game for the Ports and ultimately get his 13th save of the season. Guzman struck out Cavan and first baseman Luke Anders, allowing a single to Joseph in between. Joseph took off to second on a pitch to second baseman Jose Flores that nearly got away, but was gunned down by catcher Ryan Lipkin for the final out of the game.

The Ports look to extend their streak to eighteen tomorrow as lefty Jacob Brown takes the mound at 7:05 p.m.

Bees Offense Breaks Out For 18-4 Win

By Matthew Wheaton, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (4-4) recorded a season-high in runs and hits (18) to defeat the Peoria Chiefs (2-6) by a score of 18-4 at Community Field Friday night.

Peoria started the scoring in the top of the first inning after RF Matt Szczur (0-4) was hit by a pitch. Szczur advanced to second base on a bunt single from CF Rubi Silva (2-5). A pop fly from 3B Greg Rohan (0-4) moved Szczur to third base. A double to center field by 1B Richard Jones (3-4) plated Szczur and Silva. Jones advanced to third base on a ground out from LF Anthony Giansanti (0-4). DH Ryan Cuneo (1-4) hit a RBI single to center field to make the score 3-0 Chiefs.

After a one out single from Bees 1B Josh Whitaker (4-4) in the bottom of the second inning, SS Yordy Cabrera (1-2) drew a walk. C Juan Nunez(2-3) reached first base on a throwing error by Peoria 2B Arismendy Alcantara, which plated Whitaker and Cabrera. A single from LF Royce Consigli (2-5) moved Nunez to second base. 2B Nino Leyja (1-4) walked. Nunez and

Consigli scored on a single from 3B Tony Thompson (2-6). Leyja moved to third base and Thompson to second base on the throw from Rohan. A two-run home run from DH A.J.Kirby-Jones (2-5) put Burlington up 7-3.

Whitaker hit a broken bat single to lead off the bottom of the third inning. A wild pitch by Chiefs RHP Su-Min Jung with Cabrera at the plate moved Whitaker to second base. Cabrera walked. A single from CF Jose Crisotomo (2-5) loaded the bases. Nunez walked and Whitaker scored. A sacrifice fly to center field from Consigli plated Cabrera. Crisotomo scored on a ground out to Peoria SS Elliot Soto from Thompson to make the score 10-3.

A RBI single from Nunez in the bottom of the fourth inning gave Burlington an 11-3 lead. Jones hit a solo home run to center field to make the score 11-4.

In the bottom of the fifth inning, Whitaker smacked a three-run home run to right field and Cabrera followed with a solo home run to left field to put the Bees up 15-4.

An RBI single from Kirby-Jones and a two-run double from Whitaker gave Burlington an 18-4 advantage. Whitaker finished with five RBIs which ties a career-high set last August 5 against Tri-Cities while a member of the Vancouver Canadians.

Bees RHP Josh Bowman (6-3) allowed four runs on seven hits, walked two and struck out three in six innings of work to earn the win. RHP Jonathan Joseph finished the game by throwing the final three innings, striking out five and earning the save.

The Bees and the Chiefs wrap up their three-game series Saturday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "Friends and Family Night" at Community Field. Bring your family and friends, and everyone gets to run the bases after the game sponsored by KCPS AM 1150. Fans can also enjoy a fireworks show after the game sponsored by Catfish Bend Casino and J&M Displays. RHP Matt Loosen (1-0, 2.25) gets the start for Peoria against RHP Blake Hassebrock (4-3, 1.69) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

2011 Bees tickets are on sale now! To purchase season tickets, bonus books or single game tickets, please give the Bees a call at (319) 754-5705 (319) 754-5705, go online to www.gobees.com, or stop by the box office at Community Field during normal business hours.

Tigers Hold Off Vermont Rally Friday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

NORWICH, CT --- The Connecticut Tigers scored twice in the first and four in the seventh for a 6-0 lead, but then had to hold on for a 6-5 victory after the Vermont Lake Monsters scored five runs in the top of the eighth inning in New York-Penn League action Friday night at Dodd Stadium.

The Tigers struck for the two runs in the bottom of the first on three straight one-out hits off Lake Monsters starter Jose Macias. P.J. Polk got the rally started with a single and scored on a line drive triple to center from Jason King, who then scored on a RBI double from Dean Green. Macias (1-2) would settle down after the first to allow just four more hits with two walks and five strikeouts over six innings.

Connecticut added the four runs in the seventh off reliever Drew Bailey, including RBI singles from Polk and King. A throwing error by shortstop Sean Jamieson to first base trying to turn an inning-ending double play allowed King to score gave the Tigers their fourth run of the inning and sixth of the game.

That run would prove important as the Lake Monsters were able to cut the deficit to 6-5 with five runs on four hits and the help of three Connecticut errors. Michael Fabiaschi had an RBI single to second base to score Diomedes Lopez that also scored Aaron Shipman on a throwing error. Later in the inning, Xavier Macklin doubled home Fabiaschi with Jordan Tripp also scoring on a fielding error by leftfielder Polk. The error also allowed Macklin to advance to third, where he then scored on a Chad Lewis sacrifice fly.

Macklin went 2-for-4 with the RBI double to extend his hitting streak to six games and is now hitting .400 (16-for-40) for the Lake Monsters, which had their three-game winning streak snapped with the loss. Five different Tigers had two hits, including both Polk and King who also both scored two runs.

Tiger starter Matt Crouse (1-1) tossed 5 1/3 scoreless innings on five hits with one walk and four strikeouts for the win, while Daniel Bennett worked around a two-out error in the ninth inning for his second save of the season for Connecticut (6-7).

With the loss Vermont will again try for the franchise's 600th victory all-time as the Lake Monsters open a quick two-game homestand against the Tri-City ValleyCats, whose roster includes former University of Vermont standout third baseman Matt Duffy, on Saturday at historic Centennial Field beginning at 6:05 pm.