

Brandon McCarthy strong in return, but Oakland A's lose 2-1 to Seattle Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's once again received a pitching performance good enough to win Monday.

They have yet to master how to take advantage of it.

Beginning a crucial 11-game stretch against American League West teams, the A's lost 2-1 to the Seattle Mariners in the kind of pitchers' duel that has been the hallmark of their season.

They had no answer for hard-throwing Seattle rookie Michael Pineda, who held them to two hits over six innings and nullified a commendable outing from A's starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy.

Oakland managed just three hits and dropped to a major-league-worst 12-19 in one-run games.

"I can't speak about all 19 of them," said A's manager Bob Melvin, who took over the team June 9. "But I feel like we're going to win every one of them, I really do. And I want my team to. Morale is good in those games. We really feel like we're going to come back."

If ever there was a time to reverse their fortunes in such games, it's now.

The A's follow up this three-game series with a four-game road set against the Texas Rangers, and then four at home against the Los Angeles Angels coming out of the All-Star break.

All three teams are ahead of Oakland in the A.L. West, and the A's trail division co-leaders Los Angeles and Texas by seven games.

Melvin doesn't want his team getting caught up in division matchups and what impact they have on the standings.

"I'm staying consistent with the fact that we're trying to play for each day and get on a better roll, more consistent roll than we've been on," he said.

The A's couldn't build on Sunday's 7-2 win over Arizona, one of their better offensive showings this season. Not that anyone expected them to duplicate that effort against Pineda (8-5), a 6-foot-7 right-hander who has proved an effective complement to Seattle ace Felix Hernandez, whom the A's face Tuesday.

Oakland scored its only run in the second, when Hideki Matsui led off with a single and later scored on Kurt Suzuki's single to left. Third-base coach Mike Gallego made an aggressive call to wave Matsui around third as the ball reached left fielder Carlos Peguero quickly. Matsui made a nifty slide to avoid the tag.

The A's meager offense left little margin of error for McCarthy (1-5), making his first start after being sidelined 6 1/2 weeks by a stress reaction in his right shoulder. He allowed Josh Bard's two-out homer in the sixth that made it 1-1. Then the Mariners took the lead in the seventh.

Brendan Ryan led off with a single, and McCarthy caught too much of the plate with a cutter to Justin Smoak, who doubled to right field for the go-ahead run.

McCarthy allowed four hits over 6 2/3 innings, striking out five and walking two in 85 pitches.

"After the fifth, I started to get a little tired," he said.

The A's put the potential tying run on in the ninth as Coco Crisp drew a one-out walk against closer Brandon League. Crisp stole second on Matsui's strikeout, but League struck out Chris Carter on three pitches to end it. It was Carter's third strikeout of the game.

Suzuki, the A's catcher, is pleased with his pitchers. He just wants to reward them more.

"It sucks that they pitch their butts off and we can't get them a win."

A's update: Landon Powell works to benefit South Carolina charity

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Landon Powell had a Philadelphia Phillies jersey hanging in his locker Monday.

No, the A's backup catcher isn't looking for a trade.

It was a signed jersey from pitcher Cliff Lee, to be auctioned off at Powell's Donors on the Diamond fundraising dinner. The event will be held Oct. 23 in Greenville, S.C., where Powell makes his offseason home.

Powell and his wife, Allyson, began Donors on the Diamond last year to raise awareness for organ and tissue donation. In 2009, Powell was diagnosed with autoimmune hepatitis, a chronic liver disease.

"I'm probably going to need a transplant someday, so organ donation is very important to me," he said.

Powell collects an item or two for the auction every time the A's hit the road. New York Mets third baseman David Wright signed a bat during Oakland's last road trip.

Last year's inaugural dinner and auction -- held at Fluor Field, home of the Single-A Greenville Drive -- raised approximately \$40,000.

A marquee item this year will be a ball signed by the White Sox's Mark Buehrle and Phillies' Roy Halladay. Powell will get teammate Dallas Braden to autograph it, too.

"Then it will be all three active pitchers with perfect games," he said.

All proceeds from Donors on the Diamond go to Donate Life South Carolina, a nonprofit agency that promotes organ and tissue donation.

Reliever Grant Balfour (strained right oblique) will throw an inning for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday. He's eligible to come off the disabled list Thursday, and Balfour and A's manager Bob Melvin are confident he'll be ready then.

Melvin looks forward to getting Balfour back as his eighth-inning setup man.

"If you know who your 7-8-9 (inning) guys are, that can shorten the game a little bit," Melvin said.

Melvin isn't sure if left fielder Josh Willingham (strained left Achilles) will return before or after the All-Star break. When Willingham does come back, Melvin plans to alternate him and Hideki Matsui between left field and D.H.

Left-hander Gio Gonzalez has stars stitched to the back of all his game jerseys, which he will wear to promote the July 12 All-Star game. For the game itself, Gonzalez has to wear his gray road jersey since the game is in a National League park. "I wanted to wear gold," Gonzalez said.

Chin Music: A's begin important AL West stretch vs. Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/4/2011 12:57pm

Here's the lineups for the opener of the A's three-game series against the Mariners:

Oak – Weeks 2B, Sizemore 3B, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Carter 1B, DeJesus RF, Jackson LF, Suzuki C, Pennington SS; McCarthy RHP.

Sea – Ichiro RF, Ryan SS, Kennedy 3B, Smoak 1B, Ackley 2B, Cust DH, Halman CF, Peguero LF, Bard C; Pineda RHP.

–Lost in the hoopla of Gio Gonzalez's All-Star selection Sunday: The A's are beginning a block of 11 straight games against the rest of the AL West – three against Seattle, four at Texas, and four against the Angels coming out of the All-Star break. If they're going to jump back in the division race, the opportunity presents itself over this stretch. And it's safe to say these 11 games will largely dictate how the A's operate regarding the trade deadline. If they're in second or third place and 4-5 games out of first, maybe they keep their team intact. If they lose ground from where they're at right now (6 games out), I'd expect to see some veterans shipped out.

Typically, we would say the Mariners offer the softest test of the three division opponents. But Seattle has played better than people expected, and the A's don't catch a break, facing a 1-2 pitching combo of Michael Pineda and Felix Hernandez in the first two games. Can the A's, who swung the bats so well Sunday, find a way to break through against these guys?

—Left fielder Josh Willingham (strained Achilles) had a “good day” yesterday, according to manager Bob Melvin. Still no word on when Willingham might come off the DL, but when he does come back, Melvin said he plans to alternate Willingham and Hideki Matsui at the left field/DH spots. It makes sense to limit Willingham's activity early on, and Matsui has proven a very capable outfielder.

—Reliever Grant Balfour (strained right oblique) is confident he'll be ready to return from the DL on Thursday when he's eligible. He threw 38 pitches off the mound Sunday and he's slated to throw one inning for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday at Fresno. “I'm ready to go,” Balfour said. “I hate being out and I tried to get ready as quick as I could.” Melvin said he's eager to get Balfour back in his eighth-inning role. He likes Joey Devine and Brian Fuentes for the seventh, and Balfour in the eighth setting up for Andrew Bailey.

—I saw Gio Gonzalez trying on his All-Star hat – basically the A's hat (gold bill) with the All-Star emblem on it. He'll start Friday against Texas and then would be available on three days' rest for the July 12 All-Star Game. “I think an inning would be all right on three days' rest,” Melvin said.

Diabetes hits close to home for A's players

Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

Rich or poor, few people have not been touched in some way by diabetes, a potentially deadly disease growing so rapidly it is considered an epidemic in the United States.

In Alameda County, the percentage of people suffering from diabetes -- 7.8 percent -- outstrips the state average of 6 percent.

That is why several Oakland A's players spent part of Thursday afternoon raising \$29,000 for diabetes research and treatment during the team's Root Beer Float Day.

The annual event has raised more than \$300,000 in the past eight years for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

The cause hits home for A's infielders Jemile Weeks and Adam Rosales, whose mothers suffer from diabetes. As a child, former A's second baseman Mark Ellis watched diabetes claim the vision, and ultimately the life of his grandmother. His grandfather and father also suffered from the disease, which was the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States in 2007.

“It's coming on strong,” Ellis said by telephone Wednesday, a day before the A's traded him to the Colorado Rockies.

“A lot of people are coming down with diabetes,” he said.

The A's hometown of Oakland has reported the highest number of diabetes-related deaths in Alameda County: 293 between 2006 and 2008, according to the county's public health department. The number of deaths countywide was 917.

But Cherryland, San Lorenzo and Hayward had the highest rate. That means, for example, nearly 32 in every 100,000 Hayward residents died of complications related to diabetes.

Alameda, Berkeley and Pleasanton had the lowest rates.

“Diabetes has been around for hundreds of years, and we're still trying to figure out how it works,” said Brenda Yamashita with the health department.

The agency describes diabetes as a chronic disease in which the body does not properly use insulin. This, in turn, can lead to blood glucose (sugar) levels that are too high. The rarer form of diabetes, Type 1, develops when the body's immune system destroys the only cells in the body that make insulin, which regulates blood glucose.

A far more common variation is Type 2 diabetes. It usually begins when cells stop using insulin properly. As the need for insulin rises, the pancreas gradually loses its ability to produce insulin. This is the form of diabetes that claimed the life of Ellis' grandmother and usually affects adults.

But doctors are diagnosing a startling number of children and adolescents because of a rise in juvenile obesity.

"Managing obesity is going to be huge," Yamashita said.

Age and weight gain often trigger diabetes, "but not in every case," Yamashita said. "There are a lot of variables."

One of them is genetic. Diabetes "runs in the family," Yamashita said.

African-Americans, according to county health department figures, are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to suffer from diabetes. And black men have the county's highest death rates for diabetes, according to the study "His Health: Alameda County Male Health Status Report."

A diet high in salt, sugar and fat is another variable. Education is also a key factor.

Adults with a high school education or less were nearly twice as likely to have diabetes as those with a high school degree or higher -- 6.1 percent compared to 11.1 percent, respectively.

Yamashita said education determines access to health insurance, health care, medication and healthy food. It also affects access to exercise, one of the key factors in preventing and managing diabetes, Yamashita said.

"You have to attack the disease from so many avenues."

Ellis said he had his glucose levels tested several years ago during a visit to the Washington Hospital diabetes program.

His levels were normal, but he said he watches his diet and exercises a lot as a professional athlete. "I'm aware of it. And my kids when they get older will be aware of it, too."

McCarthy's return can't help offense; A's fall 2-1

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Tuesday, July 5, 2011

No matter how many good pitchers Oakland has, and the A's have plenty, it's not enough to upend the trend of one-run losses.

On Monday, Brandon McCarthy, just off the disabled list, worked into the seventh inning and turned in a nice outing for Oakland, but Seattle rookie Michael Pineda was even better in the Mariners' 2-1 victory at the Coliseum.

The A's collected just three hits off Pineda and three relievers, leading to a lot of "tip your cap" type comments, an increasingly familiar postgame phrase for a team that is now 12-19 in one-run games, worst in the majors.

"I haven't been here for all 19 of them, but I feel like we're this close to winning," said Oakland manager Bob Melvin, making the teeny-tiny gesture. "We have the tying, winning runs at the plate, we come back in some games. We don't feel like we can't win 'em - we do. I feel like we're going to win every one of them."

McCarthy, who was back after missing six-plus weeks with a stress reaction in his right shoulder, went 6 2/3 innings and allowed four hits, two walks and two runs. He struck out five, and his career-high losing streak was extended to five decisions.

For just the second time this season, McCarthy gave up a home run. Catcher Josh Bard, the Mariners' No. 9 hitter, hit a two-out solo shot in the sixth to tie the game. The next inning, Brendan Ryan led off with a single and Justin Smoak sent him in with a one-out double.

"It's good to get out there," McCarthy said, "but I'm disappointed at the way I finished."

Through five, McCarthy had faced the minimum, getting two double plays - including a nifty one to end the fifth when Conor Jackson hopped slightly at the wall in left center to catch a drive by Jack Cust, then threw to second baseman Jemile Weeks, who threw to first base to double up Smoak.

"I thought Conor gave it a courtesy jump, because I thought it was going out," McCarthy said.

Pineda, a leading Rookie of the Year candidate, worked six innings. In 12 innings against the A's this year, he has given up one run and has struck out 12.

"He's got a great arm; his fastball jumps on you," Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "He's 6-foot-7 and he kept the ball down in the zone."

The A's only run came in the second. Hideki Matsui, getting a second shot after Adam Kennedy lost his foul popup in the sun near third base, singled to lead off the inning. Chris Carter walked, and with two outs, Suzuki singled to left.

Third-base coach Mike Gallego didn't hesitate to send Matsui home, and Matsui charged around third and came in slightly behind the throw from Carlos Peguero, which was off line by a few feet. Matsui slid toward the opposite side of the plate, and Bard couldn't lunge to make the tag in time.

The A's didn't get another man in scoring position until there were two outs in the ninth.

Monday's game was the start of 11 in a row against AL West teams. The last-place A's are seven games behind tied division leaders Texas and Los Angeles, and 4 1/2 behind Seattle. Oakland plays the Mariners two more times and the Rangers and Angels four games each.

Close calls

The A's are 11-12 under manager Bob Melvin, who has seen plenty of close games in his short time with Oakland.

Run diff.	W	L
1	4	6
2	2	2
3	2	3
4 and up	3	1

A's reliever Balfour says he's ready to return

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Tuesday, July 5, 2011

The A's are about to get yet another pitcher back from the disabled list, with **Grant Balfour** pitching in a rehab game with Triple-A Sacramento tonight and then set to return Thursday, the first day he's eligible.

Balfour, out since June 22 with a right oblique strain, said he has made such good progress that he could have pitched for the A's already were it not for those pesky DL rules.

Manager **Bob Melvin** said it's big for Oakland to get its primary setup man back. "If you know who your seventh-, eighth-, ninth-inning guys are, you can shorten the game," he said.

Graham Godfrey is a possibility to come off the roster to make room for Balfour on Thursday.

The team is likely to stick with 13 pitchers for a while, especially with four games at Texas before the All-Star break and a doubleheader the first weekend after the break.

Tyson Ross, who is likely to return from a left oblique strain shortly after the break, also is scheduled to pitch for Sacramento tonight.

Good day: Outfielder **Josh Willingham**, still on the DL with Achilles tendinitis, felt good after treatment Sunday, Melvin said, but there is not a firm date for him to return to the roster.

"If we get him back any point before the break, that will be a plus," Melvin said.

When Willingham does come off the DL, Melvin plans to alternate him with **Hideki Matsui** between designated hitter and left field.

Briefly: **Fautino De Los Santos** came in with two on and two outs in the ninth and got **Greg Halman** to fly out. ... Seattle's **Brandon League** converted his 14th consecutive save opportunity; he hasn't allowed an earned run in his past 20 appearances.

Leading off

Mariner misery: When the A's won the West in 2006, they went 17-2 against Seattle. Since then, they are 36-48 against the Mariners, the lowest winning percentage by any AL team against Seattle in that span.

Drumbeat: Grant Balfour on target for Thursday return to A's

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 7/4/2011, 12:21pm

Grant Balfour will throw an inning in a rehab appearance for Triple-A Sacramento at Fresno tomorrow night, and the reliever says he'll be more than ready when he's eligible to come off the DL on Thursday at Texas. In fact, Balfour said, he could have pitched for Oakland yesterday, that's how well his bullpen session went.

Balfour was disappointed that a right oblique strain knocked him out of action for more than two weeks, probably costing him any serious All-Star consideration, but even if he'd been active that entire time, I believe Gio Gonzalez would have been the A's All-Star pick. They weren't going to get more than one representative, and Gonzalez has been among the league's top starters essentially all season.

The best bet to come off the roster when Balfour returns: Graham Godfrey, if the A's believe they no longer have a major need for a long man. If they do want to keep someone who can go long, considering that Brandon McCarthy and Rich Harden are just coming off the DL, Fautino De Los Santos is a possibility to get sent out, but he was so impressive in his two innings on Saturday night that you'd think everyone would like to see more of him.

Here's the lineup behind McCarthy today: Weeks 2B, Sizemore 3B, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Carter 1B, DeJesus RF, Jackson LF, Suzuki C, Pennington SS.

It's the third game in a row for Scott Sizemore in the second spot in the order. He's looked good there, with five hits, including a homer and a double, in the past two games. What a nice pickup he's turned out to be.

The A's still don't really have a true defensive third baseman, but Sizemore has been more than OK there. His offensive contributions, for a team that has such struggles hitting, offset any risk of having such limited experience at third.

Manager Bob Melvin said that Josh Willingham had a good day yesterday as he comes back from Achilles tendinitis, but it still would be a "plus," Melvin said, if Willingham is able to return before the break. Considering the A's four days off after Sunday, it might make more sense just to give Willingham the solid chunk of time to try to get the issue resolved.

I asked Melvin if he still might use Hideki Matsui in left field occasionally when Willingham comes off the DL, and Melvin said his plan is actually to alternate the two players between left field and DH. So Matsui will be spending half his time in the outfield - a far cry from what was expected to start the season.

It's Michael Pineda, the top AL Rookie of the Year candidate, on the mound for the Mariners, who also have an impressive rookie at second in Dustin Ackley.

Ackley came up the week after Jemile Weeks was promoted to Oakland, and I believe we'll be seeing these two second basemen playing against each other in the AL West for many years to come. Ackley is batting .302 and Weeks .312.

A's offense can't back McCarthy

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's are feeling increasingly better about their ability to find a home in the win column as the crowd in their training room disperses.

Bitten by the injury bug yet again this season, they're gradually regaining proven starters that they've been without for more than a month -- guys they feel will hasten the journey back to the .500 mark.

On Monday, it was right-hander Brandon McCarthy's turn to rejoin the club, three days after Rich Harden did so. And in fine fashion, making his first start since May 18 following nearly six weeks of shoulder rehab, McCarthy limited the Mariners to just two runs over an effective 6 2/3 innings of work -- an impressive effort given the circumstances.

But the hurler's presence didn't prove to be a quick solution for an automatic win. Oakland's offense must be a contributor, too, and on Monday it proved otherwise against Seattle rookie sensation Michael Pineda in a 2-1 loss, despite reaching double figures in hits in each of the previous four games.

"We had a good feeling going into the game today," manager Bob Melvin said. "We all felt that we were going to win today, even though we had a tough customer on the mound against us."

But the A's garnered just three hits total this time around and were left staring down their eighth loss in the last 12 games since winning a season-high six straight. On a greater scale, it marked an unfavorable start to a stretch of seven consecutive contests against division opponents before the onset of the All-Star break.

"Any time you play your division it's always huge, but at the same time now we want to go into the break feeling pretty good about ourselves," Kurt Suzuki said.

Moreover, the A's dropped to a Major League-worst 12-19 (.387) in one-run games. The club has played 10 of those under Melvin, and six have resulted in losses.

"We're in position to win these games," he said. "It's not like we get these one-run games and don't feel like we can win them. We do. I can't speak about all 19, but I feel like we're going to win every one of them. I really do. Sometimes it doesn't happen, but I do and I want my team to, and the morale is good in those games. We really feel like we're going to come back."

McCarthy gave his teammates an opportunity to win, as he didn't surrender his first hit until the fourth, when Ichiro Suzuki led off with a base hit before quickly exiting the basepaths on a double-play ball. The righty again got help from his defense in the fifth with Justin Smoak on first, courtesy of Conor Jackson's leaping grab of Jack Cust's fly ball at the wall in left-center. Jemile Weeks then fired a relay throw to first before Smoak could get back to the bag, completing the inning-ending double play.

"It was a nice play," McCarthy said. "I couldn't believe the ball went that far. I thought it was a good pitch that jammed him, and it just kept going. I thought Conor was giving it a courtesy jump because it was going to be a home run, then I saw him catch it and I saw Smoak standing right in front of me. I thought we had a pretty good shot at it."

Having faced the minimum number of hitters through five, McCarthy allowed a runner past first base for the first time in the sixth, when a solo shot from Josh Bard knotted the game at 1. It marked just the second home run allowed by McCarthy all year -- the first coming from another Mariner, Adam Kennedy, on April 21.

"It was a fastball," he said. "I thought it was kind of where we wanted it. On 2-1 we threw a sinker there, and kind of looking back on it, we talked about throwing a cutter there if we could do it again. He went out and did a good job of getting all of that pitch."

The righty proceeded to give up another run in the seventh on Smoak's RBI double before being pulled with two outs in favor of reliever Brad Ziegler. Working on a limit of 90 pitches, he finished the day at 85 and admittedly felt tired, albeit physically good, after his first outing in more than a month.

"I thought he pitched well," Suzuki said. "Going six innings and two runs, that's pretty good for your first time back. It was just like how he pitched before he got injured."

"He's kind of re-invented himself," Mariners manager Eric Wedge said. "A lot of movement on the ball. Good arm action. The ball has a lot of life in the zone. He had a good breaking ball, too, which he's always had. It's a different type of breaking ball now and it looks like he has better command on the plate. He threw the ball well today."

Though impressive in his return, McCarthy's effort wasn't matched by that of Pineda, who fanned seven in six solid innings.

Oakland's lone run came in the second, when Hideki Matsui took advantage of a missed popup in foul territory by Mariners third baseman Adam Kennedy, who lost the ball in the sun before Matsui singled on the ensuing pitch. Two outs and four batters later, with Matsui on second base thanks to Chris Carter's walk, a base hit by Suzuki brought Matsui around third and saw him slide into home, where he beat out the tag from Bard.

"I hit it and I thought I hit it too hard because they said that [left fielder Carlos Peguero] has a pretty good arm," Suzuki said. "So I was like, 'Come on, Matsui!' Then I saw the throw was off-line and I was like, 'Yes!.' We always say 'Asian speed.' Inside joke."

But that was the last of any life at the plate for the A's, as just three hitters reached base after that inning.

"Every time we have these one-run games, we always have the opportunity in the last inning to come through," Suzuki said. "We've just been on the bottom end, but the positive thing is that the pitching is great. As an offensive player, the offensive side of me says that it stinks because they pitched their butts off and we can't get them a win."

Felix, Cahill square off in duel of 8-game winners

By Avi Zaleon / MLB.com | 7/4/2011 8:42 PM ET

An 8-7 record is not what you would expect from an All-Star.

But that's just what Mariners right-hander Felix Hernandez is, coming off an uncharacteristic outing in which the 2010 Cy Young Award winner gave up five runs on 10 hits in 7 2/3 innings.

"I'm close, but I'm inconsistent right now," Hernandez said. "I throw one game good and the next one is OK. I need to be more consistent and just try to do what I did last year."

The two-time All-Star still maintains a 3.35 ERA heading into Tuesday's divisional matchup against Oakland, and manager Eric Wedge said he's not worried about his star starter's up-and-down beginning to the year.

"He's an impressive young man," Wedge said of Hernandez. "I recognized that over the course of the winter just doing some different functions with him. He's got a great personality, he's a good teammate, a hard worker. He doesn't let his ego get in the way and he's grounded. He handles the good and the bad like you like to see anybody handle it."

Hernandez's opponent, Trevor Cahill -- another eight-game winner -- looks to be more consistent after going 0-5 following a 6-0 start to the season. In his last outing, the right-hander lasted just 4 2/3 innings, giving up four earned runs on nine hits against the Marlins.

"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."

Cahill, who was not selected to the All-Star team, has one less loss than Hernandez, as well as a slightly better ERA, with the A's starter owning a 3.28 ERA compared to Hernandez's 3.35.

Mariners: Olivo sits out for fifth straight day

- Catcher Miguel Olivo (right hamstring muscle) was out of the lineup for the fifth straight day on Monday against the A's. To test his leg, Olivo did some drills with trainer Rick Griffin prior to Monday's afternoon game and ran the bases, but the starting nod still went to replacement Josh Bard. "It's not 100 percent, but it's closer," Olivo said on Monday. "I don't want to mess it up more though." His situation remains day-to-day.

- Rookie Blake Beavan joined rare company with his win on Sunday against the Padres. The right-hander became only the second starting pitcher in Mariners history to win his first Major League game while allowing one run or less. Beavan, who was called up from Triple-A Tacoma to fill in for the injured Erik Bedard, allowed the lone run on three hits in seven innings in a 3-1 victory. The last time that feat occurred from a Mariners pitcher was on May 18, 1991, when Pat Rice won his MLB debut after tossing 5 2/3 shutout innings against the Yankees.

A's: Balfour expected to return on Thursday

- Oakland right-hander Grant Balfour (strained right oblique) is scheduled to make a Minor League rehab appearance with Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday. Barring any setbacks, he will be activated from the disabled list on Thursday, the first day that he will be eligible to do so.

- The A's top power hitter, Josh Willingham, could potentially return to the lineup before the All-Star break, manager Bob Melvin said on Monday. The outfielder, who has been out since June 18 with a nagging Achilles injury, is still facing an

indefinite return date. If the A's take a more cautious route, Willingham could rest through the break despite a key series against Texas this weekend.

Worth Noting

- Seattle center fielder Franklin Gutierrez, who has gone 4-for-32 over the last ten games, was given the day off on Monday, but will be back in the lineup on Tuesday.
- Tuesday's pitching matchup will be a rematch of the Opening Day contest between these two clubs.

Balfour expected to return on Thursday

By Jane Lee and Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's right-hander Grant Balfour is scheduled to make a Minor League rehab appearance with Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday and, barring any setbacks with his strained right oblique, will be activated from the disabled list when eligible on Thursday.

The timing seemingly couldn't be better for the A's, who are slated to begin a pivotal four-game road set that day in Texas before the All-Star break ensues.

The A's entered Monday nine games under the .500 mark but just six games behind the Rangers in the close-knit American League West.

"I want to be ready now," Balfour said. "You don't want to miss any games, but knowing how big of a series that is, knowing they're in front of us, it'd be nice to help take as many games as we can."

"He was our eighth-inning guy," manager Bob Melvin said, "so it's big for us."

Balfour has held opponents to a .198 batting average, including a .136 mark with runners in scoring position, and was tied for second among American League relievers in wins (4) at the time of his injury. Stationed on the DL since June 28, retroactive six days prior, he threw a successful 38-pitch bullpen session on Sunday and will throw an inning for the River Cats in Fresno on Tuesday.

"I'd pitch in a game today, but I can't get activated until Thursday," he said. "I think the injury was in a good spot. We caught it early and we were able to treat it the right way."

Willingham may return before All-Star break

OAKLAND -- Josh Willingham is still facing an indefinite return date, but the A's top power hitter could potentially return before the All-Star break, manager Bob Melvin said on Monday.

"He had a good day yesterday," Melvin said. "What that means, I'm not sure. I feel like if I get him back before the break at any time, that will be a plus."

The A's could play the cautious route by resting Willingham through the break to assure that his nagging Achilles injury is fully healed, but there's no denying his needed presence for the weekend series in Texas. Either way, Melvin is encouraged by the outfielder's progress.

"When he came back from rehab," he said, "he wasn't thrilled with where he was, but yesterday was the first day he actually said, 'I feel like I had a good day today.'"

Willingham has been out since June 18 but is still leading the team in home runs (10) and RBIs (42). Upon his return, he is likely to alternate playing the outfield and batting in the designated hitter's slot with Hideki Matsui.

"That's what I'm forecasting," Melvin said.

Sizemore making most of opportunity

OAKLAND -- When the A's acquired Scott Sizemore from the Tigers in May, the one-time promising Detroit prospect was left questioning his future.

"Where does my career go from here?" Sizemore recalls asking himself at the time. "I didn't know what to expect going to another organization. You think, 'What did you do wrong for the Tigers not to want you anymore?'"

Not much was made of the trade for a middle infielder who was hitting .222, but the A's had a plan for Sizemore. They moved him to third base, where he only played 11 games in the Minors.

And the move has paid off.

"It's coming to fruition," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Not only that he's becoming comfortable at third as an everyday third baseman, but he swings the bat well. He takes pitches, uses the whole field and he's been a productive hitter for us."

Since arriving in Oakland after a short stint with Triple-A Sacramento, Sizemore was hitting .343 in the green and gold entering Monday, raising his season batting average to .286.

While Sizemore said he has made a few minor mechanical adjustments at the plate, he credited part of his success to being in the lineup every day, which has allowed him to make quick adjustments when he has struggled. Since June 10, shortly after the A's optioned Kevin Kouzmanoff to Triple-A Sacramento, Sizemore has started all but two games at the hot corner for Oakland.

Another factor has been the confidence that the A's have showed in him, which he feels is a stark contrast to when he was in Detroit.

"It doesn't seem like every out I make is one less chance that I'm going to get," Sizemore said. "At times in Detroit, I felt like if I wasn't getting two hits a game or something, it was like they weren't exactly happy with me. That was tough at times.

"Whether or not that was the case, I don't know, but that's the way I felt, like they would give up on me when I wasn't performing as well as I should have been. Here it feels like they give me more of a chance to play and go through some ups and downs."

And Sizemore has made the most of that chance, moving up to second in the order while playing what he described as the best extended stretch of baseball in his young career. Aside from his success in the batter's box, Sizemore has become acclimated to playing third in the Majors, where he has committed only three errors in 20 starts with the A's while dealing with a learning curve at the position.

Whether or not Sizemore can parlay his early success with the club into a long-term endeavor remains to be seen, though.

"For me, it's a good thought, but really I'm just worried about today and playing one day at a time," Sizemore said. "All the other stuff, if I keep playing well, hopefully it will take care of itself."

A's lose to Mariners, 2-1

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Michael Pineda and three relievers combined on a three-hitter and Josh Bard hit his first home run of the season to lead the Seattle Mariners to a 2-1 victory over the Athletics on Monday.

Justin Smoak added a tiebreaking RBI double in the seventh inning for the Mariners, who opened a key seven-game road trip against division rivals with their third win in four games.

The strong start by Pineda (8-5) helped spoil the return of Brandon McCarthy (1-5) from the disabled list for Oakland. McCarthy faced the minimum batters through 5 2-3 innings but ended up losing his fifth straight decision. He gave up two runs and four hits in 6 2-3 innings and is 0-5 in his last eight starts despite having six quality starts in that span.

This matchup between the two lowest scoring teams in the American League figured to be dominated by the pitching and that was the case.

He gave up one run that was aided by a popup lost in the sun, allowed just two hits and struck out seven in six innings. He allowed just one baserunner in his final four innings, retiring 12 of the final 13 batters he faced, to win for just the second time in his last eight starts.

Aaron Laffey, David Pauley and Brandon League each pitched one scoreless inning of relief with League getting his 23rd save in 26 chances.

McCarthy, who had been out since May 19 with a right shoulder injury, was sharp from the start. He struck out two batters in a 10-pitch first inning, whiffed four of the first six hitters overall and retired the first nine batters on 34 pitches.

The Mariners managed to put the leadoff man on the next two innings with an opposite field single by Ichiro Suzuki in the fourth and a walk by Smoak in the fifth. But both runners were erased on double plays. Brendan Ryan hit into a conventional 5-4-3 double play in the fourth, while Jack Cust was robbed on a leaping grab at the fence by left fielder Conor Jackson in the fifth. Smoak rounded second on the play and was doubled off on a strong relay throw by second baseman Jemile Weeks.

Bard's two-out solo homer to right-center tied the game at 1 in the sixth inning. It was only the second homer McCarthy has allowed all season with Seattle's Adam Kennedy getting the other in April.

Ryan then opened the seventh with a single and scored on Smoak's double into the right-field corner. McCarthy was replaced after walking Cust with two outs. Brad Ziegler kept it a one-run game by striking out Greg Halman.

The A's did even less offensively against Pineda, sending up three batters in five of his six innings. Oakland got some help from the sun to score its only run in two games this season against Pineda.

Kennedy lost Hideki Matsui's foul pop near third base in the sun to open the second inning, giving Matsui a reprieve. He followed with a sharp single to right field on the next pitch and later scored on Kurt Suzuki's two-out single to left.

The A's didn't get another hit until Suzuki's one-out single in the eighth inning off David Pauley.

NOTES: Seattle has 20 come-from-behind wins, one behind Toronto for most in the AL. ... Mariners starters have allowed three runs in their past 31 innings. ... Seattle C Miguel Olivo sat out a fifth straight game with a hamstring injury but is expected back in the lineup during this series. ... A's reliever Grant Balfour will throw a one-inning rehab assignment for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday and is expected back from the DL this weekend in Texas. ... Oakland is a major league worst 12-19 in one-run games.

McCarthy runs out of gas in A's 2-1 loss to Mariners

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

It's tough to pitch so well and end up losing a ball game.

Brandon McCarthy came off the disabled list and faced the minimum number of batters today at the Overstock.com Coliseum through the first 5 2/3 innings, but then the wheels got wobbly.

The A's starter gave up two runs in the space of five batters to lose the 1-0 lead his Oakland teammates gave him early, and that was the game as the Seattle Mariners held on to beat the A's, 2-1.

McCarthy's record doesn't reflect how well he has pitched this year, as his 3.33 ERA is very good -- as is his 42:12 strikeout-to-walk ratio.

But he gave up a home run in the top of the sixth to Seattle catcher Josh Bard -- his first of the year -- that tied the game, and then a one-out double with a runner on first in the seventh inning did McCarthy in.

He threw 85 pitches, including 58 for strikes, and he fanned five Mariners hitters -- including the final out of the sixth inning when McCarthy froze Ichiro Suzuki with a called third strike.

Of course, the A's hitters got very little going against Seattle starter Michael Pineda, totaling three hits on the day to go along with three walks. Oakland just isn't going to win a lot of games when they score only one run -- the A's are only 2-9 this year when scoring one run, even with their good pitching staff.

In fact, Oakland is just 10-38 this year when scoring three runs or less, so while McCarthy may have run out of gas suddenly today, the offense still needs to show up in support of that kind of stellar pitching for the team to win consistently.

This isn't news, nor is it surprising, nor is it a novel concept.

The A's are merely mediocre on offense, at best.

That's just the way it is, and so McCarthy's start joins a long list of Oakland starts this year that were good enough to win a game but ended up taking the loss anyway.

With a 12-19 record in one-run ball games and a 6.5-game deficit in the American League West division, it's easy to see why the A's are where they are.

And while the team is to be commended for starting the movement forward with the additions of Jemile Weeks and Chris Carter to the roster, it's going to take a lot more than two rookies to make this offense even average -- or competitive enough to win the AL West and a playoff spot in 2011.

Bud Selig deserves blame for Dodgers mess

Glenn Dickey, San Francisco Examiner

Because Bud Selig ignored his professed guidelines, he and the sport he administers are in deep trouble over the Los Angeles Dodgers.

In 2005, when the A's were for sale, I championed the cause of the group that had Andy Dolich as its front man.

That group couldn't get Major League Baseball's approval. When I phoned Selig to ask him why, he repeatedly used the phrase "due diligence," as in "baseball has to do its due diligence in making certain the prospective buyer has the money to run the club."

The cynical might think Selig just wanted to get his good friend, Lew Wolff, in with the A's — and how has that worked out for you, Bud?

A year earlier, though, there had been no sign of "due diligence" when MLB approved the sale of the Dodgers to Frank McCourt. Selig was apparently warned that McCourt's finances were a house of cards. That house collapsed with a combination of the bitter divorce suit between McCourt and his wife, Jamie, and the collapse of the national economy.

Now, the franchise is in deep financial trouble. McCourt has tried to make independent TV deals to pay costs and salaries, but Selig has blocked them and has appointed an administrator to run the Dodgers.

The next step? I wouldn't be surprised if McCourt sues MLB. Of course, there are rules prohibiting that in the league constitution, but those rules are like any in a private organization — good only until one member challenges them. The NFL had a rule that stipulated a franchise had to have the approval of the other teams to move, but Al Davis didn't even bother to ask for a vote before he moved the Raiders from Oakland to Los Angeles. The league challenged him in court and lost.

McCourt probably wouldn't prevail in court if he files a case but, at best, there would be an exposure of how MLB operates, which the owners would hate. In any of these sports, teams don't want to reveal what's really going on; NFL teams refused to open their books in the current labor dispute because they don't want anybody knowing how well they're doing.

The Dodgers aren't just another franchise. They have a rich history, which includes breaking the color line with Jackie Robinson. They have had great players, great managers — and they still have the best broadcaster in baseball history, Vin Scully.

When Dodger Stadium first opened in 1962, it was a marvel. Everything was so clean; it seemed hot dog wrappers were swept up before they even hit the ground. It was like baseball's Disneyland.

Now, it attracts a new type of "fan" — the type that beats up on others, such as Giants fan Bryan Stow, to the point that the LAPD took over security at the park.

Hypocrisy defines Selig's term. He belatedly took an anti-steroids position, but it didn't bother him that sluggers Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were on steroids when they waged a home run race in 1998 that boosted baseball attendance.

Now, he's embroiled in a mess with the Dodgers that could have been avoided. Selig is retiring after the 2012 season. You won't be missed, Bud.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento losing streak reaches 7

By Zeke Fine / Sacramento River Cats

After scoring the first five runs, the River Cats were not able to take home a win on America's 235th birthday, giving up the final six runs of the game to the Fresno Grizzlies in a 6-5 loss.

Edgar Gonzalez hit a bases-loaded single in the bottom of the 10th inning to seal the victory for Fresno, pushing the River Cats' losing streak to seven games.

The River Cats started the top of the first with a run after two batters. Jermaine Mitchell led off by beating out an infield single, then stealing second and advancing to third on a passed ball. Josh Donaldson then hit a ground ball to drive in the River Cats' first run.

Sacramento scored again in the top of the second inning. After Andy Laroche was hit by a pitch and Anthony Recker singled to right, Matt Carson came up with a clutch single to drive in Laroche, giving the River Cats a 2-0 lead.

The River Cats then scored again in the top of the third inning. Josh Donaldson singled to center field and went to third base after two wild pitches from Fresno starter Andrew Kown. Michael Taylor then hit a sacrifice fly to drive in Donaldson, pushing the lead to 3-0.

The River Cats came back in the top of the fourth inning to put two more runs on the board. Matt Carson started off the inning by reaching on an error to right field, followed by single from Jai Miller. Adrian Cardenas then hit a double to deep center field, driving in both Miller and Carson.

The lead seemed comfortable after the top of the fourth, with the River Cats up 5-0. However, the Fresno Grizzlies went on to score the next five runs. They came back with two of their own in the bottom of the fourth inning, when Conor Gillaspie hit a two-run triple to make the score 5-2. The Grizzlies struck back again in the bottom of the sixth inning. After Mike Fontenot singled, he later advanced on a throwing error by Daric Barton, enabling him to get to third base. Fontenot scored on a ground out from Gillaspie, narrowing the River Cats' lead to 5-3. After holding the lead in the seventh inning, it looked like the River Cats bullpen would be able to hold off the Grizzlies for two more innings, but Fresno struck back in the eighth with back-to-back home runs from Fontenot and Edgar Gonzalez, both off River Cats reliever Trystan Magnuson, tying the game at 5.

The River Cats looked like they would recapture the lead in the 10th inning after neither team scored in the ninth. After Jai Miller reached on a fielding error by Gillaspie at third, Adrian Cardenas popped out to the catcher on a bunt attempt. Jermaine Mitchell then drove a single to left and moved Miller to second. Josh Donaldson then hit a grounder to short that forced Mitchell out, but was able to beat out the throw to first, giving the River Cats runners on the corners with two out. Kevin Kouzmanoff then came to the plate and hit a line drive up the middle, but Fresno reliever Dan Otero reacted just in time to snag the line drive for the third out of the inning.

Grizzlies catcher Hector Sanchez started off the top of the tenth with a single to center. River Cats reliever Fernando Cabrera then walked the next to batters, setting the stage for Gonzalez's game winning single.

Doug Mathis (0-5, 4.04), who had pitched for Fresno earlier in the season, got the start for the River Cats and was in line for the win after throwing 6.0 innings and allowing three runs (two earned) on five hits and one walk while striking out two. PCL All-Star Andrew Kown (8-6, 4.22) started for the Grizzlies, throwing 5.0 innings and allowing five runs (three earned) on eight hits and two walks while striking out five.

Dan Otero (1-1, 1.13) took the win for the Grizzlies after narrowly escaping the top of the tenth without a run.

The two teams will play again Tuesday night at 7:05 P.M. at Chuckchansi Park.

RockHounds trounce Cardinals

Jordan Mason, Midland Reporter-Telegram

Fireworks followed Monday night's game at Citibank Ballpark, but the Midland RockHounds put on a show of their own, lighting up the scoreboard at Citibank Ballpark for 15 runs in the first four innings en route to a 15-5 Independence Day win against the Springfield Cardinals.

A packed crowd of 8,031, the second largest in regular season park history, saw the team respond to a two-game skid with 11 runs on 10 hits in the first two innings to put the game away early.

"It feels good to get things going," RockHounds first baseman Michael Spina said. "Especially this late in the season, we want to get on a tear here soon and make a playoff berth."

The RockHounds entered the first inning down a run thanks to a RBI single by Cardinal first baseman Matt Adams, but didn't need long to answer.

Spina, who went 5-for-5 on the day, got his first hit on an RBI single into left that tied the game at one.

Left fielder Adam Heether went down 0-2 in the next at-bat, but turned on the next pitch and slapped it into left for a two-run double that made it 3-1.

Two batters later, Jeremy Barfield busted open the game open when he launched a full-count pitch to left for a two-run shot and a 5-1 lead.

"It's been a while since I hit a home run, so I wasn't really thinking about that," Barfield said. "I just worked the count, got some good pitches to hit."

The good pitches didn't stop there for Midland even though it didn't score any more runs in the first.

With the score 5-2 and one man down in the bottom of the second, Cardinals pitcher Kevin Thomas walked two straight batters then gave up his second single to Spina to load the bases.

After Thomas hit Adam Heether to drive in a run, Stephen Parker added to the lead when he chopped one into right for an RBI single.

Then Cardinals shortstop Ryan Jackson lost a softly hit ball by Barfield in the sun, giving Barfield his third RBI of the night and Midland a 9-2 lead.

That ended the night for Thomas, who eventually gave up 11 runs, all earned, on nine hits in just 1 1/3 innings of work.

The RockHounds added four in the fourth and led most of the game 15-2 before Springfield scored three meaningless runs in the ninth to reach the final score of 15-5.

The run support was a huge boost for RockHounds starter Gary Daley, who gave up a run in the first and second innings but settled down to halt the Springfield scoring at two while fanning eight in six innings.

"Daley did a great job even though he wasn't necessarily as sharp as he's been in the past," RockHound manager Steve Scarsone said. "He was able to keep away from any big innings and make the pitches when he need to and shut them down."

The RockHounds will now look to take the series with a win today in the final game of the homestand.

Jordan Mason can be reached at jmason@mrt.com

'HOUND BITES: Springfield pitcher Kevin Thomas had given up 18 earned runs in his last three starts entering Monday and nearly gave that up in less than two innings Monday when he allowed 11 to the RockHounds. ... RockHounds pitcher Gary Daley, who entered Monday having gone 2-0 with a 1.04 ERA in his previous five starts, got off to a slow start but still finished with an ERA of 2.72 in six innings of work ... Midland pitcher Paul Smyth was sent to the disabled list Monday. Pitcher Joe Bateman was assigned to Midland from Triple-A Sacramento Monday and made his RockHound debut in the seventh inning, replacing starter Daley.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: RockHounds pitcher Jason Bergmann (0-4, 8.78) is expected to make his second start of the homestand today while Springfield is expected to start lefty John Gast (0-0, 7.50).

Late Homers Lift Ports To 7-5 Win In 10

Stockton Ports

ADELANTO, Calif. - It seems not much can stop the Stockton Ports these days; not rain, not smoke from fireworks, and not two late-inning deficits. On Monday night at Mavericks Stadium, the Ports overcame all those obstacles and scored seven runs over the final three innings to beat the High Desert Mavericks in front of a capacity crowd by a final of 7-5. For the Ports, it's their 19th win in their last 20 games and their 10th straight win over a South Division opponent.

The game began with a 22-minute rain delay as showers made their way into the desert. The teams played the first inning-and-a-half before play was suspended again for another 20 minutes going into the bottom of the 2nd due to a downpour.

When play resumed, it was done so in humid conditions with fireworks being shot off beyond the outfield wall by fans, creating a thick, smoky haze that hung over the ballpark the entire game. It was a rare instance where the wind was a non-factor at Mavericks Stadium.

Ports starter Murphy Smith was perfect through the first three innings. Mavericks leadoff man Daniel Carroll opened the 4th inning with a bunt single to third and then stole second. He scored on an RBI single two batters later from Angel Salome to give High Desert a 1-0 lead.

High Desert extended its lead in the 5th. After back-to-back one out singles, Gabriel Noriega tripled down the line in right, scoring both baserunners and making it a 3-0 ballgame. The Mavs made it 4-0 in the 6th on a leadoff triple from James Jones and an ensuing single from Salome.

Smith would receive a no-decision, going six innings and allowing four runs on seven hits while striking out five and walking one.

Stockton, meanwhile, couldn't make anything of four hits over the first three innings off Mavericks starter Chris Sorce. Having been kept off the board over the first five innings, the Ports squandered a golden opportunity to score their first run in the 6th. With one out, Michael Gilmartin tripled to right, but was left stranded as Michael Choice popped to second and Anthony Aliotti grounded out to end the inning.

Trailing 4-0 in the last of the 8th, Conner Crumbliss singled to right to start a game-tying rally. Sorce would then hit Myrio Richard and walk Gilmartin to load the bases and be lifted in favor of Stephen Pryor, who came on to face Choice with the sacks full. Choice, who had been hitless on the year with the bases loaded, delivered in the biggest way possible—a grand slam to left to tie the game at 4-4.

Three of the four runs were charged to Sorce, who received a no-decision after going a season-high 7.1 innings while allowing seven hits and striking out three.

High Desert snatched the lead back in the last of the 8th. Jones singled off Scott Deal (5-1) to start the inning and scored two batters later on a double from Matt Cerrione to put the Mavericks back in front 5-4.

The Ports, however, would not be denied. Rashun Dixon led off the top of the 9th with an opposite-field home run to right off Pryor to tie the game at 5-5.

Pryor would allow two runs on three hits in 1.2 innings of relief.

In the top of the 10th, the Ports used the home run ball yet again to take their first lead of the night. With Jose Jimenez (2-1) on the hill and two down, Aliotti was hit by a pitch, extending the inning for Dusty Coleman. Coleman, who to that point had been 1-for-4, hit a two-run homer to left to put the Ports in front 7-5.

Jimenez would take the loss after allowing the two runs in the 10th inning.

The Ports were prepared to send Chris Mederos to the mound to try for the save in the bottom of the 10th. Mederos, while throwing his warm-up pitches, would grab his right arm and fall to the ground in pain. Mederos was helped off the field and Josh Lansford (SV, 3) was summoned from the Ports bullpen.

Lansford would toss a perfect 10th and strike out two batters, including Cerrione to end the ballgame.

Stockton and High Desert will play the second game of their three-game set on Tuesday night at Mavericks Stadium. Right-hander James Simmons (0-0, 0.00 ERA) will make his second start for the Ports, opposed by Mavericks right-hander Forrest Snow (1-2, 10.43 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Kernels Take Game Two

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

CEDAR RAPIDS, IA-The Cedar Rapids Kernels (3-7) scored two runs in both the seventh and eighth innings to earn a 6-2 win over the Burlington Bees (5-6) before 4,401 fans at Perfect Game Field on the 4th of July.

The Kernels scored two runs in the first inning against Burlington RHP Sean Murphy (0-2). SS Rolando Gomez (1-4) hit a one-out single and moved to third base on a double by 3B Ricky Alvarez (1-4). LF Justin Bass (1-3) lined a two-run single to right field for a 2-0 lead.

The Burlington Bees scored a single run in the sixth inning to cut the Cedar Rapids lead to 2-1. 2B Nino Leyja (3-5) singled and moved to second base on a single by 2B Ryan Pineda (2-3). DH Josh Whitaker (1-3) lifted a single to right field to score Leyja.

Murphy pitched six innings and allowed two runs on four hits to suffer the loss.

In the seventh inning 2B Jean Almanzar (1-3) lined a two-run single against RHP Blake Treinen to give the Kernels a 4-1 lead. Treinen made his first appearance for Burlington and allowed four runs on five hits over two innings.

The Bees scored a single run in the eighth inning to cut the lead down to 4-2. Leyja singled and moved to second base on a single by Pineda. Kirby-Jones walked to load the bases and Whitaker earned a bases-loaded walk.

The Kernels added two runs in the eighth inning to make it 6-2.

The Bees and Kernels wrap up their series on Tuesday night at 6:35 p.m. RHP Nate Long (5-1, 2.25) gets the start for Burlington against RHP A.J. Schugel (2-2, 2.77) for Cedar Rapids. Pre-game coverage begins tomorrow at 6:15 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

Vermont Shutout 4-0 At Tri-City Monday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

TROY, NY --- Tri-City scored a pair of runs in the bottom of the first and seventh inning and starter Jonas Dufek scattered six hits over six scoreless innings as the ValleyCats shutout the Vermont Lake Monsters 4-0 in New York-Penn League action Monday night at Bruno Stadium.

The Lake Monsters outhit Tri-City 8-5 for the game and had the leadoff batter in each of the nine innings reach base safely. Vermont had six leadoff singles, a walk, hit batter and a batter reach on a fielding error to start each innings, but the Lake Monsters went 6-for-9 with the bases empty and just 2-for-25 with runners on base (hit into three double plays).

The ValleyCats scored their two first-inning runs on just one hit as Vermont starter Argenis Paez walked two batters with one out and also threw two wild pitches, including a run-scoring one for Tri-City's first run. John Hinson added a two-out RBI single to score Miles Hamblin for a 2-0 lead.

Both Tri-City runs in the seventh were unearned after a Chad Lewis two-out error prolonged the inning. Justin Gominsky scored on a Drew Bailey wild pitch and then on a groundball with runners on second and third, third baseman Michael Fabiaschi tried to get Matt Duffy coming from second but Duffy headed back to second and wasn't tagged out until after Hamblin had scored from third.

Lewis and Chad Oberacker each had two hits for Vermont, while Jeff Urlaub gave up one hit with four strikeouts over 3 1/3 scoreless innings in relief of Paez (0-2) who went just 1 1/3 innings with three walk and three strikeouts. Dufek (1-0) walked one and struckout three in his six scoreless innings for his first win, while Adam Champion two scoreless innings and Ryan Cole one strikeout in ninth inning to clinch the shutout.

Vermont and Tri-City wrap up the series on Tuesday at 7:00 pm at Bruno Stadium before the Lake Monsters head to Brooklyn for a three-game series with the Cyclones through Friday. Vermont (10-6) returns to Centennial Field on Saturday for a three-game series against the Staten Island Yankees.